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Wildlife Linkages Working Group

Minutes of October 10, 2008, Meeting

Committee Members

Ann Audrey, COT Office of Conservation & Sustainability
Carolyn Campbell, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
Rafael Cancino, Town of Sahuarita
Jennifer Christelman, Town of Marana
Rick Ellis, PCDOT, Chair
Chris McVie, Tucson Audubon Society
Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance
Janine Spencer, Town of Marana (alt.)
John Windes, AZGFD

Public/Agencies

Gloria Browne, PCDOT
Chris Haas, SWCA
Lisa Haynes, UA SNR
Mark Holden, PC DS
Shawn Lowery, AZGFD
Karla Reeve-Wise, PCDOT
Richard Remington, Logan Simpson Design, Inc.
Scott Richardson, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD
Geoffrey Soroka, SWCA

Staff

Dennis Dickerson
Jim DeGrood
Joan Reedy
Steve Matthews

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Rick Ellis at 9:02 a.m. and introduction were made.

2. Approval of Minutes of Sept. 12, 2008

Motion was made by John Windes, seconded by Rick Ellis, to approve the minutes of Sept. 12, 2008. Approved unanimously.

3. In-Kind Form

Dennis Dickerson passed around the in-kind form for member participation.

4. RTA Update

Jim DeGroot, Pima Association of Governments' (PAG), Director of Transportation Services, reported that to date, the RTA Board has approved 243 projects and a little over \$274 million has been programmed. We have 56 projects that are now completed, 30 projects under construction and eight transit projects that are now completed. The RTA Board at its Nov. 9 meeting discussed the amount of money it was going to make available for the fiscal year 2010 transportation improvement program. The largest figure is in the Wildlife Linkages category where we have \$8 million that we are recommending. It was felt that was too much money to put out there right now. One board member feels we need to be looking at conserving those dollars to apply them for construction projects particularly those RTA later-period projects that go through areas that have wildlife corridors. The mention of LaCholla and Tangerine was made. There also was sentiment expressed that perhaps too much money is being looked at for study work and that we really need to be doing construction.

Dennis Dickerson added that the RTA Board did not approve the allocation amounts. Mr. DeGroot said he senses that a certain amount of study is appropriate, but the Board is fearful that we are going to be going out looking at broad-based studies that are regional in nature and less targeted on wildlife crossing roadways. There is a concern that the RTA is viewed as the only game in town with funding, and that projects would be generated to take advantage of that, rather than projects generated to address a transportation and wildlife conflict.

5. Status Report on Active Projects and Proposals

Jennifer Christelman, Town of Marana, reported on the Twin Peaks and Camino de Manana projects. The study on Twin Peaks over Rattlesnake Pass is completed and we have the report. Ms. Christelman said because this project was developer driven and the market conditions indicate a prolonged delay, the construction start date is unknown at this point. There will be no expansion of the road or four-lane construction at this time.

Ms. Christelman said Marana has not spent any of the money for Camino de Manana aside from the design and the right-of-way acquisitions that were done for developing the project. Marana has not nor will we be asking for reimbursement from the RTA until construction is started, which is anticipated in January of next year. They are estimating about 12 to 18 months for construction.

Ann Audrey asked for a summary of the Twin Peaks Wildlife study. Ms. Christelman said there were a lot more avian strikes than expected. There was a lot of bird roadkill at that location and it was not expected based on the preliminary information from Game and Fish for Silverbell. Ms. Christelman indicated they were specifically looking for recommendations for an eco-bridge or some kind of overpass for wildlife linkages and that didn't stand out as a very strong recommendation. We did get some recommendations for culverts under the road.

Christina McVie and Ann Audrey requested to see the study results. Dennis Dickerson will ensure the report is posted on the RTA Web site.

Rick Ellis reported on the Pima County Culvert and Fencing Research Study. Mr. Ellis said the study was approved yesterday by the RTA Board. Pima County is now waiting for final recordation on the approved IGAs.

Rick Ellis said he spoke to Danny Granillo from ADOT three/four weeks ago and they were going through some of their final processing steps regarding the Joint Project Agreement (JPA). Jim DeGroot said he spoke to Mr. Granillo that morning and he said it's still in Phoenix and they are still working through it.

HANDOUT: RTA Funding Allocation Update for Marana Projects, Jennifer Christelman, Manager, Environmental Engineering Division

HANDOUT: Twin Peaks Road Wildlife Linkages Research Project Rattlesnake Pass, Marana, Arizona, Jennifer Christelman, prepared by Shawn F. Lowery, Research Biologist Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Scott T. Blackman, Research Biologist Arizona Game and Fish Department, November 2007.

6. Proposal Review

Karla Reeve-Wise, Environmental Specialist, Pima County Department of Transportation, presented the proposal. Ms. Reeve-Wise reminded the Working Group that Pima County already has four projects in this area and that Sunrise is a large roadkill area especially for deer.

Motion by Ann Audrey requesting approval of this proposal with the following conditions: cooperation with Game and Fish can be informal. It doesn't need to be rewritten into the proposal. Phase I & II confusion could be incorporated into a rewrite before it goes to the RTA committee so that it's a little clearer with the segregation of tasks. The concept that the consultant is going to be paid to write a proposal should be stricken from this and it should be very clear that this phase is about creating criteria for the next research, not paying for a consultant to write a proposal. Seconded by Christina McVie, withdrawn. Motion FAILED.

Discussion followed which included the audience.

Rick Ellis asked how much money was in the proposal for writing of the follow-on proposal. Response: \$8,720 for report writing, and \$6910 for related meetings. Karla said the report writing was the summary of the report. Rick Ellis asked for clarification from Ann about her motion conditions and whether SWCA should absorb the \$6,910. Ann said the portion of the money that is spent in characterizing what is needed in Phase II to create a cost effective project is a legitimate expense. Sitting down and typing up and word crafting a proposal is not a legitimate expense. It was agreed the portion of the proposal related to proposal writing needed to be modified. Ann Audrey suggested it could be changed from RTA proposal writing and related meetings to providing criteria for Phase II cost effectiveness and putting some dollar amount after that. That's what you are doing and subtracting out the proposal writing. It is a legitimate expense to have this well-informed consultant biologist tell the County how to create a cost-effective research design.

Dennis Dickerson said that as long as it states in the document: "RTA proposal writing" and has a line item for it, I don't know if that will be approvable. Ms. McVie said the document

should be revised and that the language taken out. Ms. Campbell said she doesn't feel it is appropriate for us to approve it before the document is revised.

Motion by John Windes to postpone and that Pima County revise the proposal. FAILED for lack of a second.

Jim DeGrood said this might be best incorporated with the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) approval process in January. If we could develop the IGA in conjunction with that it could be presented at the same meeting and it gives more time to further digest and tweak it.

Motion by Christina McVie that the Sunrise Road Wildlife Permeability Study by Pima County be revised as per comments and discussion, and brought back for Working Group to review at the Nov. 14, 2008, meeting. Seconded by Carolyn Campbell and APPROVED.

HANDOUT: Sunrise Road Wildlife Permeability Study Proposal, Pima County Department of Transportation, September 26, 2008.

7. Update on Oro Valley Annexation efforts and Arroyo Grande

Mr. Ellis skipped this item due to the absence of Phil Trenary.

8. Update on Preliminary Finding from Study efforts in Sahuarita

Rafael Cancino, Sr. Engineering Technician, Town of Sahuarita, said that four months ago the Town presented a proposal requesting \$10,000 to do a study on Sahuarita Road from LaVillita to Country Club. Mr. Cancino complemented SWCA Environmental Consultants for its thorough, easy to understand report. This report will be posted on the Web site for member access.

The following questions were addressed: Were there any recommendations to enlarge the box culverts? Response: yes, the length of the culverts are being extended to maintain the openness. They recommended that some of the box culverts be increased by one foot in height. The design engineering firm will look at it and increase the size of the four box culverts. (The recommendation is to increase the metal corrugated pipe from 36" to 42")

Why are you fencing only for deer? Response: that was the recommendation. There is some existing fencing there but it is basic barbed wire. Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD, said research has shown that culverts or crossing structures without fencing are pretty ineffective. SWCA recommended funneling to move the wildlife and promote the use of those structures. Monitoring would be done. Then a recommendation would be made for the placing of fencing.

What recommendations were made that you did not incorporate? Response: nothing has been done yet. It is still being reviewed by our management.

Sounds like you plan to continue to contract with SWCA but not using RTA funds?

Response: Mr. Cancino said they would like to use some more RTA funds. They have just turned in an application to do Phase II which is the remaining portion of Sahuarita Road.

Ann Audrey asked about the ongoing monitoring to fine tune crossings. Who is paying for that? Response: Mr. Cancino said that part of the application that they just turned in includes that monitoring.

PowerPoint: Final Assessment Report: Sahuarita Road La Villita to Country Club (Phase 1) by Rafael Cancino in cooperation with SWCA Environmental Consultants, Town of Sahuarita, October 9, 2008.

HANDOUT: Map of the Town of Sahuarita area

9. Update on Development efforts for Future Presentation to the RTA Board

Ann Audrey asked Jim DeGrood whether it would be helpful to go before the RTA Board and give a short PowerPoint presentation explaining the differences between the nature of the Working Group's work vs other RTA Project findings; to explain why research is important to this, the concept of the biological window, and to see if they could see how our thought process works.

Carolyn Campbell said she feels we are being singled out as not doing this in the right way. Jim DeGrood responded by saying that we are not being singled out, rather they are talking about construction projects that are behind.

Jim DeGrood said there were a couple of concerns identified by the RTA Board: (1) the level of funding, \$8 million, was too much money to be made available and that projects identified now, prior to the major road projects, may not be the best use of money. (2) Another concern is that road projects that are currently under way don't necessarily have enormous wildlife components to them, whereas projects that might be coming up in implementation periods 2, 3 and 4 might have more of a project funding need. (3) A recognized concern is that there are wildlife kill areas that are problematic and not being addressed.

Jim DeGrood suggested that perhaps the best way to approach the board would not be at an RTA Board meeting but rather to do individual meetings.

Christina McVie was concerned that there be a consistent a message so the interpretation is the same. We don't need to do a study every single time. There seems to be a very big disconnect. There are certain principals we could adopt right now today that would improve the hydro-geologic function not to mention wildlife and everything else. There are certain principles we could adopt and which could be incorporated into projects approved, but not yet built. However, we do need information on species that use upland areas as opposed to going through riparian areas.

Jim DeGrood said he hopes the jurisdictional representative at the table will go back to their jurisdiction and identify what RTA projects they have, where there are studies which identify wildlife mortality, and look at potential projects.

Motion by Christina McVie to form a Working Group Subcommittee to help interface with the larger RTA Wildlife Linkages Working Group and in the interim between this meeting and the next to develop a sense of availability for meeting times, common ground, working on Ann's list of talking points, and that the Subcommittee be

comprised of Jim DeGrood, Ann Audrey and Carolyn Campbell and that they report back to the working group at the next meeting on their conversations. Seconded by John Windes and approved.

Ms. McVie observed that the three Subcommittee members (Jim DeGrood, Ann Audrey and Carolyn Campbell) could meet together and they could meet with certain RTA Board members all before the next RTA Wildlife Linkages Working Group meeting.

10. Remarks from the Chair

None

11. Informal Technical Group Comments

None

12. Future Agenda Items

Dennis Dickerson reported the EPAC Wildlife Task Force will meet on Nov. 21 to talk about big picture wildlife issues in the entire region. The agenda will be forth-coming.

Ann Audrey would like some kind of report on the Eastern Pima County Survey.

Standing Item for Proposals

Town of Sahaurita Follow-up – Rafael Cancino
Scott Nelson Presentation on Proposal on Arroyo Grande – Phil Trenary

Review Imminent Project List

Compilation of Wildlife Hot Spots (Anticipated RTA and Other) – Jim DeGrood

Eastern Pima County Survey/ Connectivity Linkage Study – Ray Schweinsburg

Update on the Presentation to the RTA Board Members

13. Call to the Audience

None

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Rick Ellis at 11:33 a.m.