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## **Wildlife Linkages Working Group**

### **Minutes of February 13, 2009, Meeting**

#### **Committee Members**

Carolyn Campbell, Coalition for Sonoran  
Desert Protection  
Rafael Cancino, Town of Sahuarita  
Jennifer Christelman, Town of Marana  
Rick Ellis, PCDOT, Chair  
Christina McVie, Tucson Audubon Society  
David Parker, Town of Oro Valley  
Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance  
John Windes, AZGFD

#### **Public/Agencies**

Tommy Garcia, Town of Sahuarita  
David Grandmaison, AZGFD  
Shawn Lowery, AZGFD  
Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD

#### **Staff**

Jim DeGrood  
Steve Matthews  
Joan Reedy

#### **1. Call to Order and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order by Rick Ellis at 9:03 a.m. Introductions were made.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes of Jan. 16, 2009**

**Motion was made by Jennifer Christelman, seconded by John Windes, to approve the minutes of Jan. 16, 2009. Approved unanimously.**

#### **3. In-Kind Contribution Form**

Jim DeGrood passed around the in-kind form for member participation.

#### **4. RTA Board Update**

Jim DeGrood, Director of Transportation Services, provided an update on developments regarding the RTA projects at this point:

New express bus service is due to start between the Town of Oro Valley and both the downtown area and Raytheon. Mr. DeGrood said they are also looking at new service to and from the Tech Park and Rita Ranch area. There will be a reverse route out in the morning as well as the commute in.

The Board looked at how the RTA was performing with respect to the projects approved this past summer. Jurisdictions were requested to produce projects that they could deliver during fiscal year 2009. Of these projects, 34 were approved at the May/June Board meeting and almost all of them are under way. There are only six projects not yet out for bid or under construction. The RTA has entered into contracts with retired engineers due to lack of staff resources and hiring freezes.

The Board also talked about the suspension of the Highway Expansion Loan program that the State treasury has funded and ADOT administered in past years. The Board looked at whether it would make sense to institute something like that locally using RTA funds. There was concern that loaning monies in this manner might leave them short and delay RTA projects. There was also concern about using funds for projects that aren't RTA projects, even though they may be regional transportation projects.

The RTA Board also approved 16 IGAs.

## **5. Working Group Subcommittee**

The Subcommittee includes: Ann Audrey, Carolyn Campbell and Jim DeGrood.

Jim DeGrood said he will set up a meeting between the Subcommittee and Mayor Ed Honea, Town of Marana, hopefully before the March meeting.

## **7. Proposal Review**

Jennifer Christelman, Town of Marana, and David Parker, Town of Oro Valley, presented a review of their joint Tangerine Road and La Cholla Boulevard Proposal and asked for approval of the proposal as presented to the working group. The proposal's purpose is to conduct a survey to determine placement and type of wildlife linkages to complete the design concept report for roadway construction improvements that are currently planned for these roadways. A survey will be conducted using three different survey methods in order to identify wildlife crossing areas: walking road kill surveys, driving road kill surveys, and track counts. The work is expected to start winter of 2009. IGAs have been ordered through Pima County and the Town of Oro Valley as an RTA project, and have been placed in Phase 2/3.

**Motion by John Windes to approve the Tangerine Road and LaCholla Boulevard Wildlife Linkages proposal as presented, seconded by Christina Mc Vie. Approved unanimously.**

Jim DeGrood said he expects the proposal to go before the PAG TIP meeting probably this month as well as TPC and then on to Regional Council in March. Because this has a La Cholla Boulevard component on it the common lead agency between the two would be the Town of Oro Valley and a single lead is needed for the RTA IGA.

Rafael Cancino, Town of Sahuarita, presented a letter, scope of work and cost estimate for wildlife linkage monitoring for the 2.5-mile portion of Sahuarita Road from La Villita Road to Country Club Road. According to the letter from Sound Science Creative Solutions (SWCA) Environmental Consultants, "this project will require: 1) baseline monitoring of this stretch of Sahuarita Road, based on SWCA's recommendations from the Phase 1 wildlife linkage study; and 2) post-construction monitoring of road improvements along this same portion of roadway." The cost estimate total is \$134,524.00.

The Working Group noted that proposal materials must be received by members for review two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting.

Mr. Cancino was allowed to present an overview of this proposal and will return next month with SWCA for questions. The Working Group also asked Mr. Cancino to provide at the March meeting:

- The study phase being requested for Pima Mine and the Quail Creek extension needs to be separated out for another proposal
- A Land Development Plan from Planning and Zoning
- A General Plan for the Town of Sahuarita with updates, maps indicating where the developments are going to go and density levels, notation of upgrades for wildlife movement reflected in the land use plan
- An overlay of where culvert locations are going to go
- Costs for fencing to guide animals
- Address baseline data for monitoring
- Include baseline data from phase I study in this package
- Explanation of costs of post monitoring five culverts
- Indicate the town plans for wildlife corridors through the town

Christina McVie had questions about the request for post monitoring dollars (\$245,000) scheduled to take place for one year after construction. The concern was that if you don't have a baseline for monitoring, how will you show what is being increased or decreased? This request seeks funding for monitoring with no baseline, with no idea if these structures are getting the wildlife to somewhere safe. We don't know where they are moving because we don't have a baseline so we can't measure if things are improving or not. It is inferred that there was some data from the Phase I study but it's not included in this package.

Ms. McVie said it was her impression that as part of the Phase I study with SWCA that part of their baseline data was going to be looking at the types of species and wildlife that were using that area. SWCA should make recommendations not just

for the existing culverts but to indicate if they identify an over-the-road route that is widely used and recommend a structure.

Ms. McVie said that as the RTA and this Working Group moves forward it would be a great idea for Game and Fish, which is the agency that is constitutionally mandated to manage wildlife in the state, to provide standardization of the methodology so the data that is generated can be utilized. Ms. McVie asked the chairman that for future consideration we ask Game and Fish what form of data is most useful and that we try to accommodate that.

John Windes said that AZ Game and Fish does not have a current working database to receive information.

Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD, asked if he could make a few observations: Mr. Schweinsburg pointed out that he didn't see any cost for fencing. Mr. Schweinsburg said that they have found that building an expensive crossing without fencing is practically useless. Animals prefer to go over-grade rather than go through. Mr. Schweinsburg's second observation is that he doesn't see baseline data addressed and they are in the construction phase. This is a serious flaw. The third observation has already been mentioned, we don't have a good baseline, Mr. Schweinsburg said. If culverts aren't located correctly they may lead animals into areas they cannot use. You don't want to spend a million dollars on something that isn't going to be useful. The last one, Mr. Schweinsburg said, is if the cost for post monitoring is only for five culverts, the cost seems excessive.

Jim DeGroot, said the study phase being requested for Pima Mine and the Quail Creek extension should be separated from this proposal. They are two separate projects. It was agreed that singling them out to track and distinguish them separately would be more effective.

John Windes and Jim DeGroot requested that Mr. Cancino send out the maps indicating where the developments are going to go and the density levels. Mr. DeGroot said if we are going to be making major capital investments and some upgrades for wildlife movement and if that's not also reflected in the land use plan for the area, we are wasting our money. Carolyn Campbell said if it isn't reflected in the land use plan now she would like to get a commitment from the Town. It would be good at some level to address the commitment of connecting future land use with what we are doing and the money we are spending. Christina McVie asked if the Town has a plan for wildlife corridors through the Town and, if so, what are those? Mr. Cancino said no.

Carolyn Campbell, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, requested that due to another commitment if she could report on the RTA Bike-Pedestrian meeting Jan. 28. Ms. Campbell said it was a good meeting and she reported the feedback that was presented from this group and the experts from around the country concerning co-location with wildlife and pedestrians. Ms. Campbell said Game and Fish representatives and Sky Island Alliance were present. The same concerns

about co-locating wildlife corridors and bike/pedestrian paths together were discussed. A task force was formed. Ms. Campbell asked if anyone from this group would like to volunteer. The task force will be called the Wildlife Linkages Bike-Ped Access Task Force. Jim DeGrood said Gabe Thum will be the point person from PAG. The following people volunteered: Carolyn Campbell, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance, John Windes, AZ Game & Fish Department (will come to a meeting or two), Christina McVie and Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD. It was recommended this task force include members from jurisdictional planners and the county trail planner.

PowerPoint: RTA Wildlife Linkages, Construction Funding Proposal: Sahuarita Road La Villita to Country Club, Town of Sahuarita, February 13, 2009.

Sound Science Creative Solutions (SWCA) Environmental Consultants, Proposal for Phase 2 Wildlife Linkage Monitoring at Sahuarita Road between La Villita Road and Country Club Road, Pima County, Arizona, Geoffrey Soroka, Biologist/Project Manager.

Maps: Town Limits Map, Town of Sahuarita (As of February 2008) and Town Limits Map, Town of Sahuarita (As of February 2008).

#### **6/8. Presentation on ADOT Projects/Remarks from the Chair**

Rick Ellis invited Ray Schweinsburg to provide regional updates. The regional proposal is being reviewed internally in Game and Fish. When that's done Mr. Schweinsburg said he wants to get it to people like Ann Audrey who had concerns before. Mr. Schweinsburg said hopefully it will be ready by the next meeting. Game and Fish is also looking at doing this statewide. They will base the next iteration statewide on Dr. Paul Beir's methodology. John Windes and Mr. Schweinsburg met with the Town of Eloy and Pinal County and they are very interested in doing the same thing. It is a topic of growing interest as people realize that we do not have wildlife in all of our plans, Mr. Schweinsburg said.

Mr. Ellis has been working with Chuck Barclay and ADOT for a SR-77 presentation update, hopefully in March, but Mr. Ellis said he has been given four different dates.

Christina McVie said she went to an ADOT public meeting and a workshop on the widening of SR-77. Aztec Consultants was present and had mapping of the proposed widening and media. Many people were concerned about the wildlife issue. Equestrians and other recreationalists were there along with about 140 other people. The presentation given on Wildlife Crossings by Bruce Eilerts, Program Manager, Arizona Department of Natural Resources, ADOT - Phoenix, and Siobhan Nordhaugen, was great. The poster that Siobhan Nordhaugen did was excellent.

Ms. McVie said she also attended another public meeting in Catalina where they handed out information and showed Paul Beir's Wildlife Linkages report. The Western Governors Conference adopted this report and the Western Governors Association used the Arizona Wildlife Linkages Map, as an example. Ms. McVie said Carolyn Campbell has formed a petition drive. People understand that this area is the most constrained in the region, but that there are others like Avra Valley and I-10. Ms. McVie said Siobhan Nordhaugen learned that there is a local company that has created span bridges so she went online and found a Design Your Own Bridge program. According to Ms. McVie, using this program resulted in cost estimates under those identified by ADOT.

Ms. McVie said whenever there is cost sharing the Federal Highway Administration now mandates that environmental concerns be considered. The Federal Highway Administration was present at the open house. Because there are federal dollars involved the Federal Highway Administration is watching this as a test case for the inclusion of environmental design concerns and the rules and regulations regarding that. They were very supportive as well. Ms. McVie said she can appreciate the concern ADOT has about having no spoil, no waste and using everything within the context of the project, so that it saves money. Ms. McVie said their only concern was that they cannot actually construct the bridge or the culvert without additional funds from the RTA.

Janice Przybyl said Sky Island Alliance has an e-mail reporting system for road kill. Residents are being invited to send road kill data to [critters@skyislandalliance.org](mailto:critters@skyislandalliance.org). The reporting is specifically within milepost 84 and 86, Oracle Road between the County Line and Tangerine Road, as well as the surrounding area. The data has been collected for this site for about six months. Ms. McVie said there are reasons for road kill in this area and that is because wildlife is going around the developed areas. This two-mile area has permeability that exists within it now and there is nothing else all the way to the county line. Ms. McVie encouraged other jurisdictions to use the e-mail reporting system tool. Ms. Przybyl said they have some funding to make this a Web-based reporting system so this area in northwest Tucson is a pilot project. Ms. Przybyl said she is willing to share the protocol with any jurisdiction.

Carolyn Campbell and Christina McVie met with a planner from Pinal County, Kent Taylor, and a member of Pinal County Planning and Zoning Commission, Mary Aguirre-Vogler, to discuss a proposal for State Trust Land Reform. Ms. McVie said she told them that Pinal missed a couple of Beir's linkages which would better refine their view of that area in connecting the southern part of Pinal with the work that's going on here in the northwestern part of Pima County in particular. Those additions, Ms. McVie said, have been incorporated into the draft State Trust Land Reform Map that would preserve those State Trust Lands for conservation purposes. These linkages connect two large blocks of protected areas.

## **9. Future Agenda Items**

Town of Sahuarita – Sahuarita Road/LaVillita to Country Club  
Ray Schweinsburg, Arizona Game and Fish Department - Regional  
Update on SR-77  
Siobhan Nordhaugen Proposal

#### **10. Call to the Audience**

Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance, announced that Melanie Emerson is the new Executive Director replacing Matt Skroch who is going back to college. Ms. Przybyl asked that Mr. Skroch be removed as alternate.

John Windes, Arizona Game and Fish Department, said that Aninna Thornburg has left the department for another job. Ms. Thornburg is to be removed as alternate.

#### **11. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Rick Ellis at 10:29 a.m.