

**HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
Stakeholder Advisory Committee
March 15, 2006. 3:00 – 5:00 pm
Arizona Game and Fish Department Conference Room
555 North Greasewood Road
Tucson, Arizona 85745-3612**

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Karen LaMartina, Diana Rhoades (Sonoran Institute), Catherine Balzano (Arizona State Lands Department), Staffan Schorr (Pima Association of Governments), Brooks Keenan (City of Tucson – Department of Transportation), Lori Lustig, Sherry Barrett (USFWS), Carolyn Campbell and Lori Andersen (Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection), David Jacobs (Arizona Ag), Tina Lee (Ward 2 City Council Office), Michael Wyneken (City of Tucson – Urban Planning and Design), Leslie Liberti (City of Tucson – Manager’s Office), Jessica Lee and Geoff Soroka (SWCA)

1) Update on Recent TAC Meetings/Upcoming Meetings

a. *Recent/Scheduled Meetings:*

- **SAC: April 19, 3-5 pm @ AGFD.**
- **TAC: February 7 and 21, March 7. 9-11 am @ AGFD.**

Scheduled TAC Meetings:

- **March 21, First and third Tuesdays, 9:00 – 11:00 AM @ AGFD.**

Leslie provided the SAC members with an update of the topics discussed at the last three technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings (February 7 and 21, and March 7). Topics discussed at these meetings included:

- The buffelgrass eradication effort on City-owned lands in Avra Valley, and the development of a draft management protocol for buffelgrass.
- The presentation given by Westland Resources and Barclay regarding the proposed Parque de Santa Cruz River project; located between Interstate 19 to the east, Calle Santa Cruz to the west, Irvington Road to the north, and Drexel Road to the south. The TAC members provided several recommendations to minimize the environmental impacts of the proposed Parque de Santa Cruz River project to the City and the presenters.
- Changes to the Environmental Resource Zone (ERZ) and Watercourse Amenities, Safety and Habitat (WASH) ordinances presented to the TAC members by Frank Sousa (City of Tucson – Department of Transportation, Stormwater). Leslie said that new wash alignments have been proposed for both ordinances, and wanted to make sure the TAC was given an update. She noted that the TAC did not provide the City any specific comments to the proposed new wash alignments.

- The Santa Cruz River planning sub-area. Leslie provided a review of the three U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) river restoration projects. This included a discussion of the Final Paseo de la Iglesias Feasibility Study and the lack of detail regarding current conditions of the river. She relayed the concern that the TAC expressed about protecting certain high quality habitat areas along the river from USACE-type restoration. The TAC has decided, for now, to set aside the feasibility studies and to take a fresh look at the planning sub-area. They will begin by looking at digital orthographic quads and other maps of the river, starting with the upstream end near Los Reales Road and working north. Leslie noted that there are a lot of resources on the Santa Cruz River, and mentioned that Julia Fonseca (Pima County Flood Control District) and Phil Rosen (University of Arizona) are invited to attend a TAC meeting in the future to share what they know about the river. In addition, the TAC is hopeful that Kathryn Mauz, a graduate student at the University of Arizona who has been studying historic flora in the Tucson Basin and previously assisted with a plant inventory of the West Branch a couple years ago, can assist in identifying good habitat to preserve within the planning sub-area.

Carolyn introduced Lori Anderson, the new assistant director for the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. Diana Rhoades explained that she would sometimes be substituting for Emily at these meetings.

2) Old Business

a. Meeting Minutes – February 2, 2006

Leslie asked if the SAC had any comments or edits to the meeting minutes. The SAC did not have comments at this time, and approved the meeting minutes pending any comments provided by the end of the week.

b. Action Items from Previous Meeting

There were no topics held over from the previous meeting.

c. Topics Held Over from Previous Meeting

There were no topics held over from the previous meeting.

3) New Business

a. Buffelgrass Management Update

Leslie passed out and discussed the draft buffelgrass management protocol approved by the TAC. The TAC felt that a subcommittee would be more appropriate to put together a management plan, so a group was formed that included Ann Phillips (Tucson Audubon Society), Guy McPherson (University of Arizona), Travis Bean (University of Arizona Desert Lab), Mima Falk (USFWS), Karen LaMartina (Tucson Water Department), and Leslie. The subcommittee decided that, while they wished extensive baseline biodiversity monitoring could be done, the focus of the monitoring program would be on the western burrowing owl. More extensive baseline monitoring would be too costly and difficult.

Leslie reviewed the buffelgrass management protocol handout. She explained that the first component to the protocol involves buffelgrass eradication using a 2 percent Roundup solution, the best strategy currently available. The subcommittee decided that it would be more appropriate to design a 3-year monitoring strategy, and then have an adaptive management component. Travis feels that a 3-year herbicide spraying program is required to destroy the buffelgrass seed base, thus, the subcommittee only felt comfortable planning three years out at this time.

Leslie explained that the TAC was very concerned about how widespread herbicide spraying could impact western burrowing owls in Avra Valley. She noted that AGFD has offered to work with the City to help protect the owls when the spraying occurs. After the first year of spraying, the hope is that only spot applications would be needed. Staffan asked if people should be concerned about using herbicides near the recharge basins in Avra Valley. Karen responded that the chemicals would not reach the water if the herbicides were applied appropriately. Leslie noted that the City is also concerned about minimizing fire liability, and needs to manage buffelgrass near two homes in the Avra Valley planning sub-area. The TAC decided to minimize the fire danger by blading a 200-foot perimeter around each house. In order to protect any burrowing owls in that specific area, AGFD pre-flagged the burrow locations and monitored the blading, and then handheld weed whackers were used to cut the grass immediately around the burrows.

Leslie explained that the buffelgrass management protocol has four monitoring components. The first two components involve monitoring the burrowing owls, and checking owl burrows before and after the monsoon Roundup treatment. Second, the TAC wants soil to be monitored for pesticides, in anticipation of any public concern. The TAC members chose to use the soil data from Tucson Water for the SAVSARP and CAVSARP recharge projects as a baseline. According to Tucson Water, DDE (dichloro diphenyl ethylene), DDT (dichloro diphenyl trichloroethene), toxophene, and organochlorine pesticides were found mainly within the first three feet of soil, resulting from previous agricultural applications.

Leslie explained that there are two main concerns with regards to burrowing owl. The first concern is how the eliminated buffelgrass cover would impact the owls' prey base. The second concern is whether the pesticide would bioaccumulate in the owls and their eggs. She noted that there is no research specifically on this topic, but that Michael Ingraldi (AGFD) has volunteered to put together a research plan for monitoring contaminant levels in the owls and their eggs.

The fourth monitoring component is evaluating the seed bank and seed sources. Travis feels that herbicides must be applied for three years to eliminate the buffelgrass seed bank, but there is concern about how best to manage the land for native re-vegetation while minimizing the risk of a new invasive plant taking hold. To address this concern, the TAC suggested creating various seed traps. Leslie noted that Ann also advocates re-vegetating immediately with native plants, rather than waiting until the end of the three-year period. Leslie pointed out the three re-vegetation strategies outlined in the protocol, explaining that all three would be tried in separate 100-acre plots. The three strategies include: seeding over dead buffelgrass hulks; disking the buffelgrass back into the soil, then seeding; and creating swales with graders, then seeding. Successful strategies would be expanded the following year. Carolyn asked about Travis' experience. Leslie

said that he has experience doing buffelgrass eradication with Saguaro National Park and Tumamoc Hill. Catherine asked if the buffelgrass management areas were all previously used for agriculture, and asked if there would be a different eradication strategy for non-disturbed desert lands. Leslie noted that Roundup is currently being used in Saguaro National Park to control buffelgrass. Sherry noted that the Park tried to manage buffelgrass just by pulling, but that they could not keep up with the invasion. She added that the Park has been using herbicides for the past two years. Carolyn asked about the timeline of the buffelgrass management plan. Leslie said that it has been started already with blading around the homes in Avra Valley, and that baseline monitoring would need to be done before buffelgrass greens up this summer. She noted that re-vegetation planning would take longer, but that an entire year would be available before plots would have to be selected and the reseeding conducted. The seed mix has already been purchased by Tucson Water. Karen asked if last week's rains would cause buffelgrass to green up. Leslie responded that buffelgrass could green up within 2-3 days of rain, but that she has not heard anything from Travis about it.

Carolyn asked if there has been any update on getting help writing grants. Leslie noted that the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program grant would provide partial funding to support the buffelgrass eradication program, but that the dollar amount has not yet been set. She added that the City decided that they did not have time to help put together the regional effort for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) grant, but hopefully they could apply next year. A USFWS contamination expert would be doing the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the buffelgrass management plan, and the City would conduct the public outreach component of the EA.

b. *Preliminary Draft HCP*

- Mayor and Council Presentation
- Comments/Public Involvement

Leslie explained that the Preliminary Draft HCP was presented to Mayor and Council at their Study Session on March 7. The presentation focused more on the HCP process, and less on the science behind the plan. She said that the Council seemed very interested and that they had asked good questions. Catherine asked if the City is planning to accept public comments on the draft. Leslie said that the City's short-term goal is to set up a communication and public involvement strategy with the community. She stressed that the plan is in the very preliminary stages, and that it is likely that it would change a lot over time. The Preliminary Draft was put together to satisfy draft deliverable obligations to USFWS and AGFD this year. However, having a report out would provide a good opportunity to solicit public comment. Catherine asked when the community at large should contribute. Leslie said that the City is planning a presentation to all USFWS personnel in April, and would be setting one up for AGFD staff soon. Leslie noted that she could do presentations for any interested group. Carolyn asked how the HCP committees should be involved in the comment process. Lori noted that there were required public comment periods with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). She suggested that, at this point, perhaps the plan is too preliminary to go to the public. Leslie said that these questions have not yet been answered, and explained that this draft does not yet have public comment requirements. She stressed that the City would like the SAC members to comment on the plan. Carolyn stressed that the SAC should develop a solicitation strategy. Lori said that, from her point of view, there are still so many unanswered questions such as funding, that she hesitates to present

the HCP to SAHBA yet. Leslie noted that the HCP might be presented differently depending on the audience. For all presentations, it is important to stress the goals of the HCP and that it is a long-term process. Sherry said that she believes the public is only aware of the SDCP at this point. She said that USFWS would have a scoping meeting to kick off the Avra Valley HCP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address points of permit issuance, and suggested the scoping meeting should be planned within the next six months. She explained the formal HCP process, which from the USFWS standpoint begins once the HCP permit has been submitted, requiring USFWS to issue a Notice of Receipt in the Federal Register. A draft EIS public hearing is scheduled at this point. Leslie noted that the City has been thinking about planning a public scoping meeting for the Avra Valley HCP, but that the timeline is still unclear.

Leslie explained that in Segment 2 of the HCP, there would be changes to the SAC and TAC members. The TAC might accept new members, such as Karen Simms (Bureau of Land Management biologist working on Cienega Creek issues). The SAC would become the new Resource Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) as soon as Mayor and Council approve the ordinance to create the committee.

c. Goals for Phase 2

- Modify SAC and TAC Memberships and Duties
- Determine Whether to Develop Separate Avra Valley HCP
- Interim Guidelines for Santa Cruz River Planning Sub-area
- Expand Southlands Planning Sub-area
- Respond to Comments from AGFD, USFWS, and Planning Partners
- Opportunities for Partnerships and Coordination
- Produce Final Administrative Draft HCP for Avra Valley and Revised Draft HCP for Southlands and Santa Cruz River Planning Sub-areas

Leslie explained that the plan is to separate the Avra Valley planning sub-area into its own HCP, leaving the Southlands and Santa Cruz River planning sub-areas together for a second HCP. She said that this decision is based on the reality that Tucson Water has development projects planned for the near future, and that the development timelines for the Southlands and Santa Cruz River planning sub-areas are more uncertain. The Preliminary Draft HCP was written with this in mind, thus each section of the plan was divided by planning sub-area so Avra Valley could be easily separated from this plan.

Leslie said that the immediate goal for the HCP committees is to develop interim guidelines for the Santa Cruz River planning sub-area to guide development and restoration projects that are proposed for this area. In addition to the proposed Parque de Santa Cruz River development, there is a proposal to sell and develop the sand and gravel pit north of Los Reales Road. Pima County made an offer to purchase the property, but it was turned down. The County has suggested that they would support a compromise between development and restoration on the site.

Leslie said that the Southlands planning area would be expanded, and that it would cover future annexation lands and possibly locations of future CIP projects. Final maps have been requested to go to Mayor and Council for approval. Leslie noted that the Segment 2 IGA would not be in place until at least the end of March, thus the committee cannot discuss this topic until then.

Leslie noted that one of the deliverables required in Segment 2 involves the City responding to public comments to the Preliminary Draft HCP. She clarified that anyone could comment at this point, but that the comments would not be addressed until Segment 2. Carolyn asked if Leslie could send copies of the letter that the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection sent to Mayor and Council to all of the SAC members and Leslie agreed. Catherine asked what the formal deadline would be for submitting public comments. Leslie said that September would be a good deadline, because the deliverable is due December 2006. SAC members would all get hard copies of the Preliminary Draft HCP soon. Carolyn noted that she is impressed with the document.

Leslie said that there are many opportunities for partnerships and coordination. The City has been meeting regularly with Arizona State Lands Department (ASLD) as they begin working on their Conceptual Land Use plan for the Southlands. The Lee Moore Basin Watershed Management Study plan would be beginning soon and the Southeast Arterial Plan has been re-released for comments to revise road alignments around Sahuarita. The City also is involved in updating the Major Streets and Route Plan within the City, and there have been discussions regarding integrating an environmental component into the plan. She also noted that she would like to have Pima County, Town of Marana, and the City start meeting monthly to coordinate the HCPs on a regional level. Leslie asked the SAC to think about how to coordinate the HCP with other planning efforts; for example, the Regional Transportation Authority Plan.

Leslie mentioned that there has been renewed interest in the expansion of the Avra Valley Wastewater Facility, including additional recharge basins and restoration areas. She noted that the City is interested because, not only is the effluent City-owned, but that the effluent recharge is upstream from the SAVSARP property and therefore would flow into the area. This discussion would involve the City, USFWS, Bureau of Reclamation, and Pima County. Pima County is also considering requesting USACE to conduct a general investigation for the Brawley/Altar Wash area.

Leslie said that Segment 2 involves producing the Final Administrative Draft HCP for the Avra Valley planning sub-area, which would still be an internal draft. Then in the Segment 3 grant application, the NEPA process would be initiated with a scoping meeting, the draft HCP finalized, and the draft EIS developed. Sherry reminded the SAC that the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl delisting decision would be announced in the next couple months, and stressed that the City needs to consider what they would do if the owl is delisted because an HCP cannot be done without a federally listed animal.

Leslie noted that the other required deliverables for Segment 2 are the revised Preliminary Draft HCP for the Southlands and Santa Cruz River planning sub-areas. She noted that by expanding the Southlands, the TAC would have to revisit the baseline information, covered species list, and habitat models. The other component would be to include in the HCP all CIP projects that need ESA take coverage. Diana asked if the Southlands would expand to include the Houghton Area Master Plan (HAMP). Michael said that, based on a SWCA report, there were no endangered species issues in that area.

Brooks noted that the RTA is a use component of the Transportation Department's CIP. Carolyn asked if the HCP would include CIP projects outside the City limits. Karen said that Tucson Water's 5- and 10-year CIPs were posted onto GIS databases to see if they would fall within the HCP planning area. Leslie clarified, stressing that since the City

implements CIP projects, these projects would be included even if located outside the City limits.

d. Resource Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) Update

- Status
- Functions and Duties
- Membership Recommendations

Leslie noted that an email describing the RPAC function and proposed expertise areas was sent out over the SAC email listserv. She explained that the ordinance went before Mayor and Council on March 7, but that it was not voted on because the Council requested some changes. There was an interest to rewrite the ordinance to specify organizations as members, rather than specific individuals. In the current draft, there are three different types of seats on the committee. Six seats would be reserved for the six current non-governmental organizations represented in the SAC Charter. Four seats would be reserved for at large members with one or more of the specified expertises. And one seat would be reserved for a significant landowner. Diamond Ventures would likely fill this seat. Catherine expressed that ASLD is interested in being a voting member, since the agency is a significant landowner in the Southlands. Leslie said that she would look into it, but that according to the City Attorney's Office, agencies usually are not voting members. She also noted that the ordinance has to be approved by the Mayor and Council. Leslie said that she hopes that it would be possible to write the committee charter so that once an organization is nominated to the committee, one representative and an alternate could be listed to represent that organization.

4) Call to the Public

No members of the public spoke up.

5) Next Steps/ Future Meetings

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for April 19, 2006, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm, at AGFD. Leslie suggested that the SAC should focus their discussion on developing a public involvement strategy. She stressed that if the SAC had any ideas to let her know. She noted that the April 4 TAC meeting would be at USFWS.