

**HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
Stakeholder Advisory Committee
December 7, 2005, 3:00 – 5:00pm
Water Resources Research Center Conference Room
350 North Campbell Avenue
Tucson, Arizona 85719**

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Carolyn Campbell, Sherry Barrett, Emily Brott (Sonoran Institute), Brooks Keenan, Lori Lustig, Karen LaMartina, Dennis Rule (City of Tucson – Tucson Water), Claire Zucker (Pima Association of Governments), Michael Bends (Tohono O’odham Nation San Xavier District), Michael Wyneken (City of Tucson – Planning), Leslie Liberti (City of Tucson – City Manager’s Office), Jessica Lee (SWCA), James Feldmann (SWCA)

1) Update on Recent TAC Meetings/Upcoming Meetings

- a. *Scheduled TAC Meetings:*
 - **January 25**, 3-5 pm, @ Game and Fish. Tentative Topics: Identifying critical questions and approaches to Phase 2 of the HCP process.
- b. *Scheduled SAC Meetings*
 - **February 2**, 3-5 pm, @ Game and Fish. Tentative Topics: Identifying critical questions and approaches to Phase 2 of the HCP process.

Leslie said that the TAC has started scheduling meetings for Phase 2 of the HCP. She said that the TAC feels they would like to maintain the frequency of meetings and have decided to meet twice a month on Wednesdays, from 3-5pm. She said they are not meeting again until January 25 so there is time for the City to gather together information they will need for that meeting.

2) Old Business

- a. *Meeting Minutes – August 17, September 6 and 21, October 19 Minutes*

The SAC approved all the listed meeting minutes, pending any comments committee members suggest by December 14. Leslie noted that there is three additional sets of meeting summaries pending approval, including October 5, November 2, and today’s meeting. These summaries would be sent out over the SAC listserv soon.

3) New Business

- a. *Technical Advisory Committee’s Conservation Recommendations*
 - *Southlands*
 - *Avra Valley*
 - *Santa Cruz River*

Leslie said that at the last TAC meeting, the committee finalized their preliminary conservation recommendations for the Southlands and Avra Valley planning areas. Leslie said that these recommendations would be included in the preliminary draft HCP that is not only part of the grant requirements, but will also be presented to Mayor and Council early next year. Leslie said these recommendations were based on the TAC's conservation summary matrix that was reviewed at a previous SAC.

Leslie explained that at this time the TAC has only prepared conservation programs for five of the eight covered species: cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (CFPO), Pima pineapple cactus (PPC), burrowing owl (BUOW), pale Townsend's big-eared bat (PTBB), and yellow-billed cuckoo. She noted that a conservation program has not been drafted yet for needle-spined pineapple cactus (NSPC). She said that, based on current information, there are only a few known individuals and approximately five acres of known habitat in the Southlands. Since the planning area is going to be expanded resulting in more investigation, the take decided to not spend too much time on this species at this time. Leslie said that the two snakes, the Tucson shovel-nose and ground snake, do not have a conservation strategy either. She said that TAC is concerned about including the snakes in the City HCP because the feeling is that the City alone cannot do much to help the snakes. Rather, there would need to be a multi-jurisdictional effort between the City, Pima County, and Marana. She said that Phil Rosen (University of Arizona) has been out conducting snake-related surveys on lands in Avra Valley and said that due to the conditions of the land could not make constructive conservation recommendations for the snakes. She said that the City is considering not dealing with the snakes at this point. Leslie noted that both snakes are in the Marana plan. Carolyn noted that it might be wise to keep the snakes in the City HCP if there are ongoing multi-jurisdictional conversations about the snakes. Leslie said that she has raised the idea of coordinating with Pima County on the snakes, but that no one at the County has taken up the issue. Sherry said that at this point, she thinks that the STAT feels there is very little impact on the snakes by the County. Leslie said that the City is waiting to see if the County shows interest in jointly covering the snakes in their conservation planning efforts. Carolyn asked if there is an Avra Valley coordination committee. Leslie said there is a coordination committee that has been dealing with the PPC, and that she has raised the issue to that committee. Sherry suggested scheduling a snake-specific meeting that would include the City, County, and Phil Rosen. Sherry volunteered to organize this meeting.

Leslie explained to the SAC how the conservation plans were organized and where the information came from. She noted that the data and information was derived from each species' goals and objectives that were developed based on identified stressors and threats to each species. She said that the objectives are similar for the species, including protecting in the long-term habitat and habitat elements, reducing barriers to movement, minimize potential for mortality, and preserving breeding and dispersal opportunities. Leslie outlined the CFPO conservation strategy to the SAC as an example of the conservation programs. She noted that the conservation programs were broken into the three planning areas, since each area has species-specific characteristics and different proposed covered activities. She noted that, there are no listed conservation measures for the Santa Cruz River planning area. She said that the TAC focused on Avra Valley and the Southlands first because there is so little definitive information about the three

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) river restoration projects. She noted that the El Paso de las Iglesias project was recently approved to move into the planning and design phase. She said that the Army Corps is working on a draft feasibility report for the Tres Rios restoration project. She said that El Rio Medio restoration plan began in 2005 and that the Army Corps will be starting plan formulation soon.

Leslie said that due to the lack of detail for the Santa Cruz River restoration projects and the complexity of the Southlands planning area, there has been a discussion of breaking this HCP into two HCPs, one for the Santa Cruz River and Southlands, and the other for Avra Valley. She said that the development of a conservation program for the Avra Valley planning area has moved along well, and due to the timing of the water projects, the City feels it is important to have a completed HCP in order to apply for a permit to meet Tucson Water's needs. She said that due to the difference in conservation needs of the planning areas, that it also makes sense to complete two separate HCPs.

Leslie discussed in detail the CFPO conservation program. Lori asked how many acres were involved in the watershed reserve strategy in the Southlands. Leslie said that approximately 11,000 acres were mapped. Leslie said there would be room for variation because of the coordination required with ASLD in their conceptual land use process. She said that by working through the process, it would enable the City to know what the impacts will be, how much land could be protected, and thus what the additional mitigation might be needed. Leslie said that there is a good chance that 100 percent of the CFPO modeled habitat can be captured in the reserve. Leslie noted that habitat enhancement would require coordination with Pima County and involve the results of the Lee Moore Watershed Management Basin study. Brooks asked Leslie how much vegetation could be removed in the creation of future regional retention and detention basins. Leslie said clearing would happen, but that revegetation could provide opportunities for habitat enhancement. Leslie said that habitat enhancement is important for maintaining southwest to northeast corridor across the Southlands, because the various washes provide east-west corridors. Leslie said revegetation could create stop-over patches for dispersing CFPO. Leslie said that these basins could be multi-beneficial for species and recreation. Leslie said that in the Southlands, the development of conservation strategies would be part of a long-term process. Leslie said that the TAC is planning to use the Native Plant Preservation Ordinance (NPPO) to achieve some conservation goals, but it is possible the TAC may make suggestions to revise the NPPO. Leslie said it is difficult for TAC to finalize conservation goals without knowing what the exact covered activities and reserve configuration would be. Leslie discussed how the NPPO could be used to create and maintain dispersal corridors from the southwest to the northeast. Michael said that typically for developments that have washes along them, they usually chose to set aside a piece of land in the wash, rather than conducting a 100 percent native plant inventory under NPPO.

Leslie noted that certain types of fencing that inhibit or prohibit movement of CFPO is a concern in those areas identified as stop over points or dispersal corridors. Leslie said specifics on fencing will not be outlined until the configuration of the reserves are known. Leslie discussed the measures that would minimize and prevent take from development and urbanization. Leslie said that because Scott Richardson (USFWS) does not anticipate there to be breeding habitat in any of the planning areas, he recommended

using a revised version of the Fall protocol for CFPO surveys. Leslie said the HCP would also require developers to check with AGFD and USFWS to obtain current information on the location of known owls. Leslie said that developers must document how they are complying with the HCP. Sherry asked if digital submittals would be permitted. Leslie said she thinks that would be possible. Lori asked if this type of documentation is also required in the Marana and County HCPs. Lori expressed concern about the level of quality in the mapped Harris riparian models because some developers said that ground truthing on their sites found inconsistencies with the model. Leslie mentioned the flood plain and erosion hazard management plan. The group discussed whether Pima County was working to revise their riparian models. Leslie said that the City plans to revisit the wash ordinance and Environmental Resource Zone (ERZ) ordinance, and would likely integrate the two ordinances into a single code in the future. Sherry said that Sherry Ruther at Pima County said the County is going to revise their NPPO in the near future. She said the County is interested in making the two revised NPPOs consistent, especially to clear up any annexation issues. Carolyn suggested the City and County having a joint committee to work on NPPO revisions. Carolyn asked what City department manages NPPO issues. Michael said planning is responsible for the language, but that it is enforced in another department. Carolyn mentioned that PAG might head up an Environmentally Sensitive Road Design (ESRD) project soon. Carolyn said it would be a good time to start up a joint jurisdictional process to work on this. Leslie noted that there are rough alignments on roads already planned in the Southlands, thus it might be good to start planning for the design of these roads in biological sensitive areas. Carolyn noted that environmentally friendly design features are planned from the beginning there often are not additional costs to the project. Brooks said that the County's standards are good, and that the City should not spend much time re inventing the wheel. Brooks argued that these design features do add extra costs, and that these features should be focused on only the biologically sensitive areas, rather than be a widespread feature on all roads. Carolyn said that Pima County's ESRD road guidelines could be better. Sherry suggested the HCP provide a map showing what roads will be in environmentally sensitive areas, so the transportation departments know before time. Leslie said that the City might need to develop their own guidelines to meet the goals of the City. Carolyn noted that since 2002 when this manual was written, a lot more information on road ecology has been published. Leslie went over the HCP guidelines for utilities. Sherry said that USFWS would likely review plans once a year. Leslie noted that another conservation measure is to prohibit ORVs in washes, and that the City currently has a code (11-70.1) that deals with this in some capacity. Sherry mentioned that the County is going to revisit the use of ORVs due to air quality issues. Leslie said that the measure regulating domestic dogs and cats would be addressed in detail in the adaptive management monitoring section of the HCP. Leslie noted that regional coordination would be important to achieving the conservation goals.

Leslie moved on to PPC, noting that much of its' conservation program is vague. Leslie explained that it is vague at this point because the TAC felt they did not have the expertise to develop this conservation program on their own. Thus, the TAC delegated work on the conservation program to a subcommittee of experts. She said that the County, City, USFWS, AGFD, and University of Arizona (UA) are all currently involved in this committee. Leslie said that Mima Falk (USFWS) would report to the TAC the decisions of this subcommittee. Leslie pointed out, specifically, the measure that

discusses the City encouraging the planting of PPC in residential and commercial areas. She stressed this strategy is not a primary mitigation measure. She said that the watershed reserve strategy is part of the core mitigation strategy. Rather, this measure discusses what can be done in the future urban core instead of writing off the northern area of the Southlands completely. She said that Mima is working with Dr. Michael Rosenzweig, a researcher at the UA, to come up with a way to replant displaced cacti in the urban area to help provide connectivity for PPC pollinators. She said that the pollinators only move a maximum of 600-800 meters, thus the spacing between individual PPC, and other cacti species, is extremely important in order to provide connectivity between the preserved PPC populations. Lori asked why this cannot be part of the mitigation strategy. Leslie said because it does not involve the protection of PPC habitat. Lori suggested that this likely means having specific common areas in the development where much of these cacti could be replanted. Lori said that she has some information that PPC has a high success of transplantability. Leslie said that this plan would have to be carried out thoughtfully and carefully. Leslie said that Rosenzweig is interested in urban conservation and adaptive management. She said that he feels that it is possible to encourage stewardship in communities from the new residents.

Leslie continued the discussion by noting points about the burrowing owl conservation strategy. She said that the TAC is considering developing burrowing owl management areas (BOMAs) in the planning areas. Leslie said that size, number, and location of these BOMAs have not been discussed yet. Leslie said that the Santa Cruz River planning area has not been discussed, but that the HCP conservation strategy would likely be to protect habitat and current populations of burrowing owls. She said that BOMAs usually deal with habitat enhancement in degraded areas to attract new burrowing owls into the area.

Leslie felt there was not enough time to go through each conservation strategy, but encouraged the SAC to look over them and provide any feedback they have. Leslie asked the SAC to provide comments by January 18, 2006 before the next TAC meeting.

Leslie briefly discussed the TAC's general conservation strategy for the Southlands. She said that in addition to the species-specific strategies, the TAC recommends reserving the Fagan and Petty Ranch watersheds, in the Southern portion of the Southlands, as an open space reserve. She said that the TAC agreed to advocate the watershed reserve approach, and that the Harris riparian conservation strategy would be the back up plan. Leslie said that the TAC suggested having a conservation program based on one reserve strategy in order to better coordinate with other planning efforts.

Leslie said that the Avra Valley conservation strategy map would be sent out to the SAC. She explained the process of developing the Avra Valley reserve strategy and the map. She said that the process involved several weeks of map revisions based on comments from the TAC. She said that the first map of Avra Valley showed land ownership, washes, and present development. Leslie said the first step the TAC took was identifying the riparian areas. She said that then the TAC looked at the specific City-owned parcels and evaluated them based on function, including providing connectivity for YBCU and CFPO. They noted that the Brawley and Blanco Washes provided dispersal corridors in the north-south direction. She said that the TAC was concerned about having an east-

west corridor that would connect the Ironwood Forest National Monument with Saguaro National Park West. She said the east-west connection was identified on a parcel-by-parcel basis in order to identify possible areas where the City would help enhance or preserve that corridor. She said the Simpson Farm site was included in the protected area because of the on-going restoration work. Leslie noted that the next step for the Avra Valley conservation strategy is to define what the corridors look like in terms of width, types of trees, and configuration. She noted that if Tucson Water decides to build in an area the TAC identified as a valuable piece of the corridor, that mitigation would happen with similar types of vegetation and configuration. She said the strategy is to avoid those areas first, and then to mitigate for those impacts second. Leslie noted that the environmentally sensitive areas tend to be in the washes, which is where Tucson Water would prefer not to develop in anyway.

Dennis said that Tucson Water is trying to work with Travis Bean (UA Desert Lab) on the buffelgrass issue because some City-owned parcels in Avra Valley are at a high risk of fire due to buffelgrass. Carolyn asked if there was follow-up with the TAC after Ann Phillips introduced her efforts on the buffelgrass resolution. Leslie said that the TAC feels strongly about buffelgrass, and that the issue would be highlighted in great length in upcoming HCP drafts. She said the TAC agrees that buffelgrass is the single greatest ecological threat. Leslie said that the City has looked at experimenting with eradication in Avra Valley. She said they are trying to set up an experiment in February. She said that mowing, burning, and large-scale weeding does not work. She said that herbicides are the only way to deal with such an infestation of buffelgrass. She said an experiment would be to evaluate the impact of herbicide application to invertebrates, small mammals, and native plants. She said that AGFD and Phil Rosen are out in Avra Valley now conducting a baseline surveys. She said that Ann is pulling together a buffelgrass task force, which will hopefully start working in January. Leslie stressed that buffelgrass eradication must be a region-wide effort. She said that the buffelgrass committee would work on developing a regional strategy. Leslie said that amphibians are sensitive to Roundup, thus Rodeo might be used in areas where there is standing water. Leslie said that Roundup has to be applied for three straight years to have an effect on buffelgrass.

Leslie passed out maps showing the new boundaries of the Southlands planning area. She said that the TAC is starting with two objectives in the HCP Phase 2. She said that the first is to finalize the Avra Valley planning area, so a permit application could be submitted within two years. The second objective is to take a step back and evaluate the new planning area. This process will involve reevaluating the new target species list; habitat, occurrence and distribution of the new and original species; and land use and anticipated impacts within the expanded area. This information would be used to revise current, and develop new, conservation recommendations. Leslie noted that the area outside of the municipal planning area east of Sahuarita is an area where the City hopes to collaborate with Sahuarita's open space planning effort. Leslie said additional lands to the north include UA, Davis Monthan Air Force Base, and the Tucson Airport Authority. She said that due to difference in the status of those lands, the City could not get any mitigation credit for conservation efforts in those areas, but she said these partners are open to coordinating with the City's conservation efforts. She noted that the other responsibility of the TAC in Phase 2 is to follow the Santa Cruz River restoration process, and perhaps getting involved in developing a local restoration plan.

b. Next steps – Beginning Phase 2 of the HCP Process Discussion

- Role of the SAC
- Committee Composition

Leslie asked the committee members what they would like the role of the SAC to take in Phase 2. She said that Avra Valley implementation issues would come about soon, but not for the other planning areas. She noted that at the last SAC meeting, committee members discussed several ideas including the SAC continuing to hold their own meetings, the SAC not having regular meetings but rather attending the TAC meetings, or discontinuing the meetings until there are decisions to be made. Sherry proposed the SAC take up the tasks of revising the NPPO and environmentally sensitive road design (ESRD) issues while the TAC works on their objectives. The group agreed that would be a good option. They also decided to postpone figuring out how to track regional planning efforts to the next meeting.

4) Call to the Public

No members of the public spoke.

5) Next Steps/Future Meetings

- Schedule
- Day, time, location

The SAC decided to meet in February to decide how to proceed and split up tasks of tracking other regional efforts. The SAC will meet February 2, from 3-5 pm. Carolyn asked to see the pros and cons of doing a jurisdictional wide HCP verses doing separate HCPs for small planning areas.