



MEETING SUMMARY

Date: October 17, 2007 - 9:00 AM
Re: SR 40 PD&E Study
Fire Management Meeting No. 2
US Forest Service Ranger Station

Attendees: See sign-in sheet

Bill Walsh, with Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), began the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Bill gave an overview of the purpose of the meeting. He explained that they have developed a third draft of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to deal with the smoke management of prescribed burns in the vicinity of SR 40, SR 19 and SR 15. Bill gave a brief explanation of the 20 year history of the PD&E Study. He explained that the MOU was recommended by the SR 40 Task Force

Next, Bill Walsh turned over the meeting to Alex Hull, consultant project manager with Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc. Everyone in the group went around the room and introduced themselves.

Alex Hull explained that the MOU outlines the procedures for managing traffic during a smoke emergency. He stated that he has been working with Jim Thorsen, consultant to the United States Forest Service (USFS), Cathy Lowenstein with the Florida Department of Forestry (FDOF) and Jeff Castor with FDOT to develop and formalize the procedures for the MOU. He stressed that no decisions have been made and nothing has been set in stone.

Next, Alex Hull asked for input from the group on the draft of the MOU and an open discussion began.

Richard Carpenter, with Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), asked why the Fire Department is not on the list of agencies involved in the MOU.

Jim Brenner, with FDOF, commented that the MOU states that the person who conducts the prescribed burn must be certified. He stated that the state of Florida does not require all people who conduct burns to be certified. Walt Thomson, with the Nature Conservancy, stated that most agencies require prescribed burn managers to be certified, however, there are private land owners who will not have the certification. He suggested that they tailor the language to meet the requirements for each agency and also leave it open for private land owners. Alex Hull asked the group to consider whether or not they want to raise the requirement of certification in the MOU. Jim Thorsen suggested that the language state that the person who is conducting the burn must be an agency trained burn manger.

Cathy Lowenstein commented that Volusia County is left off of page two. Rocky Norris, with the Volusia County Sheriff's Office, stated that any agency connected with Volusia County should be lumped into one group because the County Council will ultimately approve and sign the MOU. The officers from Marion County stated that they would need to have approval from their County Commission.

Jim Brenner stated that the representatives of FDOF in Tallahassee just recently learned about the MOU. He explained that there was little in the MOU that FDOF would approve and it is not likely to be signed by FDOF. He mentioned that the only section of the document that was of interest was the signage agreement.

Walt Thomson mentioned that the private land owners will want to be involved in the MOU. He stated that the objective is to create a better way to manage smoke.

Jeff Caster commented that in section C they should strike the word public from public lands in the last sentence.

Alex Hull directed the group's attention to section D, the statement of roles and responsibilities for prescribed burns. He asked if there is an appropriate need for outlining the procedures to notify FHP and the local sheriff's offices. Jim Brenner stated that from FDOF's perspective there is no need because what is being suggested is what is being done already.

Dennis Joiner, with Marion County Sheriff's Office, commented that the statement in section D.5, in regards to dispatching 1 or more deputy sheriffs to the burn area, needs modification. He stated that in a smoke emergency situation 10 to 15 deputy sheriffs are needed.

Richard Carpenter stated that from a law enforcement perspective, there is a strong need to be notified of prescribed burns in advance in order to be prepared for a potential emergency as well as keep the public notified. He stated that the current time frame they are notified is not enough time to get the needed number of sheriffs out to a smoke emergency. Moreover, he stated that when the public sees a forest fire they often dial 911 or *FHP to report it. He stated that without proper notification of a prescribed burn, they have to send someone to be sure everything is ok. He stated that the waste of resources and time can be prevented by timely notification of the burns.

Jim Brenner asked how far in advance FHP and the sheriff's offices would like to be notified. Richard Carpenter stated that notification one day in advance would be enough to prepare for a potential emergency as well as prepare for the phone calls from the public.

Jim Brenner explained that the system that is currently in place involves a GIS program that predicts weather and wind conditions. He explained that they only send notification of the burns to law enforcement if poor conditions are anticipated.

Richard Carpenter stated that it would be nice to be notified of the burns even if there is no anticipated danger because weather conditions can change quickly and also because people flood the 911 and *FHP phones with calls.

Michael Drayton, with USFS, stated that his agency sends an e-mail notification of prescribed burns to law enforcement.

Jim Brenner stated that there is a system on the internet that shows when and where a burn is authorized. He explained that they can pull up the list for each county. Jeffrey Succi, with FHP, stated that they would prefer to not have to sort through a large master list of all of the burns in Florida. He suggested that a mass e-mail list on area specific burns be created.

Jeffrey Succi stated that it is not necessary for FHP's responsibilities to be included in the MOU. He stated that the only thing they ask for is proper notification of the prescribed burns in order to better prepare for an emergency and notify the public. The Marion County Office representatives and Volusia County Sheriff Office representative concurred with Jeffrey Succi's statement.

Jim Brenner mentioned that they do not always know a prescribed burn is going to happen 24 hours in advance. He explained the process of authorization and stated that a person who wants to conduct a burn may call the morning they want to burn and have it authorized the same day.

Jeffrey Succi commented that the small burns are not as much of a concern as the larger ones. He indicated that it would be best if they could be notified of the large burns.

Walt Thomson stated that he agreed with the law enforcement's comment on not needing to be in the MOU. He asked the group to think about a better process to deal with and minimize smoke impingement.

Jim Brenner stated that the lines of communication need to be improved. He also mentioned that he would like to be sure that the law enforcement agencies know where to access the information online.

Next, Jim Brenner expressed his concerns with the MOU. He indicated that sections G, H and I will not get approval from FDOF. He stated that there is already a memorandum for the procedures for wildfires.

Mike McCammon, with FDOT, mentioned that there is already a mutual agreement on signage and notification that was signed in 2001 by FDOT, FDOF and FHP.

Jim Brenner stated that the 2001 agreement with FDOT, FDOF and FHP was only for state and federal roads. He asked what could be done to work out a similar agreement with the counties. Dennis Joiner stated that they may want to take it up with the Florida Sheriff's Association.

Tony Miller, with St. John's River Water Management District, suggested that the agencies work together share computer files and information in order to better communicate with each other.

Jim Brenner stated that they can filter the size of the prescribed burns and send the information to the law enforcement and fire agencies. Richard Carpenter stated that he would be the point of contact for communication between FHP and FDOF.

Jeff Castor mentioned the existing state-wide fire and smoke management agreement is currently being revised.

Next, Alex Hull recapped what had been discussed by the group. He stated that his impression is that FDOF does not want to sign the MOU. Gary Beauchamp, with FDOF, stated that a MOU is not necessary.

Jim Brenner mentioned that the signs were of interest to FDOF. He stated that they looked into variable message signs and that they were expensive. He stated that FDOF would be interested in learning more about the possibility of FDOT purchasing the signs for FDOF's use.

Before exiting the meeting early, the representatives from FHP and the county sheriff's offices reinstated their request to open the communication lines through a blast fax or e-mail notification system. In addition, they emphasized that there will not be a need for them to be a part of the MOU because they have a system already in place. The issue is communication.

Jim Brenner stated that the meeting was helpful because the group learned that the MOU is not necessary and pointed out the need to look at the structure of communication. He directed the discussion back to the signage discussed in the MOU. There was a group discussion on the availability of the signs and where they would be stored. Jim Brenner asked if the language of the

signs discussed in the MOU has been approved by FDOT. Bill Walsh stated that he would check into whether or not FDOT will commit to purchasing the signs as well as approval of the language. He stated that everything is in draft format.

Tony Miller commented that the group needs to address the effect the widening of SR 40 has on the liability of land managers, from the PD&E Study perspective. Jim Brenner stated that the State of Florida passed a statute to limit the liability of the land manager as long as they follow the guidelines. He added that a few insurance agencies are issuing insurance to cover land managers. He indicated that there is not much more that can be done for the land owners. He stated that widening the road does not have an impact on the prescribed burns. He stated that the land manager will treat it the same way as a two lane road.

Tony Miller stated that a four lane road will have more cars and thus impact the risk of the prescribed burn. Walt Thomson agreed with Tony Miller and commented that four lanes provide a higher risk. Bill Walsh stated that the traffic studies indicate that the traffic on SR 40 will increase the same amount whether the road is two or four lanes because there is not an alternative route. He also stated that 4-lane roads are inherently safer than 2 lane roads due to the 40 foot wide median separation between the opposing travel lanes and that travel on SR 40 will therefore be safer under all conditions after construction of the improvements.

Bill Walsh suggested that instead of a MOU, the agencies revisit the current policies, improve them where needed and work on communicating better. He stated that he will look into more information on the variable message signs.

Cathy Lowenstein suggested that a fire and smoke management committee be formed with representatives from the agencies. She explained that the committee could be a communication tool to keep everyone up to date on the latest technology and information. Jim Brenner agreed with Cathy Lowenstein's suggestion. He stated that they are coming out with a new three dimensional smoke modeling program. Alex Hull suggested that FDOF take the lead on setting up the committee.

Walt Thomson raised a concern for the effect of higher expense associated with an enhanced roadway on the land managers. Mike McCammon stated that FDOT has to look at the big picture and balance the safety of the roadway.

Alex Hull recapped the two action items, the local committee and the variable message signs provided by FDOT.

Tony Miller stated that a third action item is that the PD&E study should address secondary impacts to the project from not conducting prescribed burns. Jim Brenner stated that the addition of two more lanes will not impact the ability or willingness to conduct prescribed burns because the traffic along the roadway is already at the point that they take maximum precautions. Mike Drayton with USFS concurred with that statement.

The meeting concluded at 11:20 am.

*Note: The above reflects the writer understands of the contents of the meeting. If any misinterpretations or inaccuracies are included, please contact **Mandy Rankin (407) 971-8850** as soon as possible for resolution and revisions if necessary.*