

11/6/07

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 10 Summary

Mtg. Date: November 6, 2007
Time: 9:00 am
Location: Sharpes Ferry Office Conference Room
Project: SR 40 PD&E Study
From Silver Springs to US 17 in Marion, Lake and Volusia Counties

Attendees:

Bill Walsh – FDOT
Steve Tonjes – FDOT
Vicki Sharpe – FDOT
Alex Hull – Inwood
Mandy Rankin – Inwood
Ray Emmett – EMS
Carrie Sekerak – USFS
Jim Thorsen - USFS
Sandy Jacobson – USFS

Lauren Stull – USFS
Margaret Griep – USFS
Louise Kirn – USFS
Dave Bowman – DEP/OGT
Walt McCown – FWC
Walt Thomson – The Nature Conservancy
Keith Schue – The Nature Conservancy
Guy Marwick – Smart Growth Coalition
Karen Lichtenstein – UNCA - NEMAC

Bill Walsh, with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), welcomed the group and gave opening statements. He gave an overview of the Value Engineering (VE) meetings that were held on the week of October 22nd. He stated that out of the recommendations, no major changes are being made. He also gave a recap of the Prescribed Burns and Smoke Management meeting that was held on October 17th. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the development of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on how to deal with the issue of smoke management on SR 40. He stated that the discussion in the meeting revealed that there are already policies and procedures in place and a MOU is not needed. Bill mentioned that they did find out that there is a need for improved communication with law enforcement on when prescribed burns are going to happen. He also stated that there is a possibility that FDOT will purchase variable message signs for the Florida Department of Forestry (FDOF). However, no commitments have been made by the FDOT regarding the signs.

Next, the meeting was turned over to Alex Hull, with Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc. The group went around the room and introduced themselves.

Alex introduced Karen Lichtenstein, with the University of North Carolina Asheville. Karen explained that she is with the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC) and explained that they would like to see how their research could interface with the SR 40 PD&E Study. She gave an overview of the Comparative Risk Assessment Framework Tools (CRAFT) process. She explained that the role of CRAFT is to assist with the development of the tools and technology that will aid in the team facilitated decision making process through NEPA. She stated that their goal is to improve the interaction of groups and assist with the decision making process. She stated that CRAFT is still in a development phase and they

would like to use real life cases to make the system more robust. Karen gave the group a URL address to visit in order to learn more about CRAFT, <http://72.250.240.130/craft.intro.html>.

Alex thanked Karen for the information and brought the group's focus back to the agenda and the objective of the meeting.

Alex gave a summary of the recommendations made by the VE Team. He showed the group the list of participants of the VE meetings. He stated that the purpose of VE is to find a way to add value to the project and find out ways to be more cost effective. He explained that the group focused on the areas that are highest in cost, the wildlife crossings, Ocklawaha River Bridge, right-of-way and drainage. Moreover, he gave an overview of the team mission. Next, Alex went over each of the wildlife crossing discussion points and the recommendations from the VE Team with the group. Alex stated that he is only relaying the information and that they are not required to go with the VE recommendations.

There was group discussion of the VE recommendation to replace an underpass with an overpass. It was mentioned that there are some instances where an overpass may be applicable, but overall this will not work. Tony Miller, with St. John's River Water Management District (SJWRMD), asked how much money an overpass would save. Alex stated that it would not save much more.

The group discussed the VE recommendation of using an hour glass shape to reduce the actual size of the crossing. Sandy Jacobson, with the United States Forest Service (USFS), stated that the hour glass is a commonly used shape, but there is evidence that it is not quite as successful for some species. Walt Thomson, with the Nature Conservancy, stated that the Ocala National Forest is a global and significant resource and that bigger is better.

Next, the group discussed the VE recommendation to look at using flat slab bridges rather than bridges with beams. Alex stated that the comments from the structural engineers with FDOT at the end of the VE meetings were that the flat slab bridges need to be replaced more frequently and are noisier.

There was a group discussion on the VE recommendation to build some of the crossings in the no build section in lieu of some of the more expensive crossings in the build section. There was consensus from the group that this was not a good recommendation.

Alex mentioned that FDOT is committing to conduct ongoing research to measure the effectiveness of the crossings. Steve Tonjes, with FDOT, stated that they need to make commitments in the document to ensure that research will be conducted.

Guy Marwick, with the SmartGrowth Coalition, asked how the gas pipeline affects everything. Alex stated that it can be accommodated within the project.

Sandy asked why the suburban optimized typical section wasn't chosen for segment 3. Alex stated that the rural, suburban and urban typical sections were all evaluated. Typically, in

highly urbanized areas, the right-of-way costs are more significant than the construction costs. In this case, the construction costs outweigh the right-of-way costs so the rural optimized alternative was the most cost effective alternative.

Next, the group discussed the stormwater ponds. Guy asked why the shape of the ponds always seems to be square. Alex explained that they have not gotten into the design of the ponds and they use the square ponds as placeholders. Carrie Sekerak, with USFS, stated that they have written comments on the ETDM in regards to the ponds. The group discussed the possibility of allowing stormwater to discharge in the soil rather than using a pond. Alex stated that a letter is being prepared by SJRWMD on the issue and will be sent to Inwood and FDOT shortly. Keith stated that ponds closer to the road would be less intrusive to the forest habitat than putting the ponds out further into the forest. It was decided that a separate meeting would be held to discuss the stormwater pond issues.

Alex directed everyone's attention to the handout with EMS's matrix evaluation of the effectiveness of each of the alternatives at each crossing location. He explained that they broke it up by species and mobility and evaluated each alternative in comparison with the objectives of each species. He stated that they focused on the more sensitive species. Keith stated that value should be added to each of the species. He questioned how the rating was decided and the scientific merit of the matrix. Ray stated that the ratings were comparative. Alex stated that they applied professional judgment. He stated that Ray did not consider cost when he was conducting the evaluation. Walt Thomson suggested that the local experts on the different species and habitat be involved in the process. Carrie indicated that there are several people on staff with USFS who could be helpful. She suggested that they have a brainstorming session with local experts.

Alex explained to the group what he would like to achieve by the end of the meeting. He stated that EMS's work will give guidance and can be used as a tool but does not ultimately decide which alternative is best. He stated that he would like to get a general sense of what the group thinks without being forced to make a decision. He asked the group to go through each of the alternatives and give a gist of which one they prefer. Alex indicated that after this meeting Bill will meet with upper management at FDOT to let them know the direction the group is going.

The group focused their attention on the alternatives in location A. Alternative 8 gained consensus from the group. Keith suggested that the location of the crossings be looked at again and possibly adjusted.

In location B, alternative 8 gained group consensus. Again, the exact location of the structures should be looked at and adjusted as appropriate.

Alternative 1 in location C gained consensus from the group with the understanding that they would take a further look at it.

The group broke for lunch at 12:15 p.m. and reconvened at 1:15 p.m.

Location D was the next topic of discussion. Alternative 3 gained consensus from the group. There was a discussion on the topography of the area and the location of the culvert. It was noted that the structure would serve multiple purposes including providing a crossing for the Florida Trail, a creek crossing and a wildlife crossing. Sandy stated that it is common for structures to also be water conveyance structures.

The group next discussed location E. Alex mentioned that EMS did not rank this location high. Ray stated that the success of a crossing in this location would not be high because, due to private land ownership, there is no fencing to the south in alternative 2 and in alternative 4 there is no fencing to the north. Keith stated that connectivity in this area relies upon a conservation easement to improve the ecological network of lands. Guy stated that he doesn't see the connectivity in alternative 4.

Carrie asked if the enhanced box culvert is contingent on the other crossings being put in. She stated that an enhanced box culvert could fix the problems with the old pipe. Alex stated that there should be an enhanced culvert to serve dual purposes.

Guy questioned the stormwater pond in the middle of the wetlands. Carrie stated that they do not want to contaminate the wetlands and that the ponds need to be addressed as a separate issue.

Sandy stated that the lack of fencing in the area may be better because of the housing and private land ownership in the area. She stated that a fence may keep the bears from the conservation easement. She stated that it may be better to skip the fence and go for long term learning.

Alex stated that location E is a problematic area because of the privately owned piece of land between SR 40 and old SR 40.

Keith stated that the crossings in E should be contingent on acquiring the conservation easement. Ray agreed that there would be a great opportunity for connectivity, however, he didn't see any of the alternatives being effective. He stated that the crossings are few and sparsely spaced and there is a lack of fencing.

Carrie asked Walt McCown, with FWC, about the bear's attraction to the garbage in the area. Walt agreed there is bear activity in the area but that from his research he found that even though there were a lot of bears in the area, they were not crossing around location E. He indicated that the bears were crossing at location F. He also mentioned that the female bears do not tend to cross as much.

Ray mentioned that in their evaluation, there were other species besides bears considered.

Carrie asked if option 2 has to be funded as a wildlife crossing structure rather than a hydrology improvement structure.

Keith stated that because of the retaining wall, the crossing will look different than other

structures.

Alex stated that there are pros and cons to the effectiveness and utilization of location E. He suggested that the group not give a gist consensus on this location at this time. He stated that Inwood will look at the location again and see if there are ways to raise the effectiveness. Carrie proposed that the group agree that they will at least keep the enhanced culvert and add more crossings if it is found they will be effective.

Next, the group discussed location F. Keith stated that alternative 13 was most desirable because it puts spans in each of the ecosystem types in the area to provide a more permeable flow.

Sandy stated that if providing an ecosystem process is an objective, an overpass may be good in this location. There was a discussion on the topography and the cost effectiveness of putting in an overpass.

Sandy asked for a list of the ecosystems being represented in the area. Keith stated that the spans are in each of the ecosystems in the area. Walt McCown stated that he likes more crossings rather than longer spans. He stated that the bears cross in the area towards the ponds. Carrie stated that alternative 13 would capture more ecotones. Steve stated that alternative 12 is considerably cheaper and there is research to show that bears will use 50 ft structures.

After much discussion, the group's consensus was in favor of alternative 13 for location F.

Bill posed the question of whether alternative 13 could be modified. Carrie stated that they could look at modification of span lengths. Sandy stated that they may be able to provide an alternative to fences by using the retaining walls.

Sandy stated that they need to use performance based measures in order to achieve the objective. She stated that to maintain the ecosystem processes they could measure whether or not plants grow from one end of the crossing to the other. The group discussed the potential of designing structures that are taller to provide more light and help with ecosystem processes.

Alex thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and stated that he would like to schedule the next meeting in January.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:05 p.m.

cc: File, All Attendees (via e-mail)

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