

3/17/08

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 12 Summary

Mtg. Date: March 12, 2008

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

Alex Hull – Inwood

Mandy Rankin – Inwood

Tom Roberts – EMS

Carrie Sekerak – USFS

Jim Thorsen - USFS

Sandy Jacobson – USFS

Walt McCown – FWC

Brian Sheick – FWC

Dennis David – FWC

Mickey Thomason – DEP/OGT

Todd Mecklenborg - USFWS

Terry Gilbert – URS

Tony Miller - SJRWMD

Keith Schue – The Nature Conservancy

Guy Marwick – Smart Growth Coalition

Dan Smith – UCF

Greg Slay – Ocala – Marion County TPO

Bill Walsh, with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), welcomed the group and gave opening statements. He stated that they are winding down to the end of the wildlife crossings committee meetings. He indicated that the project is at a place where there is a general consensus on the preferred wildlife crossing alternatives.

Next, the meeting was turned over to Alex Hull, with Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc. He gave a brief summary of the last wildlife crossings committee meeting. He stated that at the last meeting the group “gisted” the alternatives. After the meeting they looked at the alternatives again and met with the different agencies to discuss concepts. Alex mentioned that they also met in the field and walked location F with a group of biologists. He explained that based on the field visit, Tom Roberts, with EMS, was able to come up with a plan. He stated that they met with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and gained concurrence. He also mentioned that he met with the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and gained concurrence after a few modifications. He stated that they increased the structure length in Area F and added larger box culverts in Areas A and B.

Alex passed out large graphics of the wildlife crossing alternatives in the build section of the project. He indicated that the goal of the meeting is to walk out in agreement on the preferred wildlife crossing alternatives.

Keith Schue, with TNC, stated that on behalf of the agency he wanted to thank the consultants and FDOT on meeting and discussing the alternatives with them. He stated that he feels there is some good consensus happening.

Next, the group focused their attention on the alternative for Area A. There was discussion on the design of the box culverts. Bill stated that they could bury the bottom of the culvert. Carrie Sekerak, with USFS, stated that shifts with the dirt could require additional maintenance. Bill stated that they may be able to bury them deep enough to help with that issue. Carrie suggested that they explore the option with soil scientists to find out what is most cost efficient. Sandy Jacobson, with USFS, stated that a lot of times soil will replenish itself. Carrie commented that corrugated pipes may help retain soil. Terry Gilbert, with URS, asked if the pipes will be vented. Alex indicated that they will be in some places. Steve Tonjes, with FDOT, stated that there will be a lot to look at in the design phase.

There was a discussion on the fence length and escape structure. There was a comment that the topography would lend itself well to using a pile of dirt for the escape structure.

Keith commented that the church located in Area A has two entrances. He asked if it is possible to acquire the entrance along S.R. 40 in order to extend the fencing. Alex stated that they will talk to the church. He mentioned that there is also potential to run the fence behind the church. Sandy commented that Alex's

suggestion may be preferable because the church may not want to give up their entrance. Mickey indicated that the church may be open to working with FDOT. He stated that FDEP has done a land swap with them before.

Terry asked Alex for an estimated cost of the different types of wildlife crossing structures.

Alex stated that the cost in Area A is 9.8 million dollars without the trail. He passed out cost matrix handouts showing the cost of the crossings with and without the trails.

Next, Alex gave an overview of the crossings in Area B. He mentioned that the crossings are strategically spaced. Sandy indicated that the spacing should be dependent on the microhabitat. Alex stated that the topography in Area B is consistent.

There was a group discussion on the location of the fence. A decision was made to move the fence further to the east.

Alex summarized that Areas A and B have combinations of box culverts, larger structures and small culverts. Alex asked the committee members who are in agreement with the alternatives presented for A and B to raise their hands. The alternatives gained 100% consensus from the group.

Next the group briefly discussed Area C, the Ocklawaha River Bridge. Alex indicated that the bridge will maintain the existing span. Sandy asked about the height of the new bridge. Alex stated that the western portion of the bridge starts at 8 feet and ramps up to 28 feet. Carrie expressed concerns for the bridge moving into the flyway of birds.

The group voted and gained 100% consensus on the alternative for Area C.

Mickey asked about the crossing alternative for Area A1. Bill stated that they are identifying the location in the report and will look into it further when they study SR 326.

Area D was the next topic of discussion. Alex indicated that they moved the 50 foot structures slightly to the east. He explained that there is an existing hydraulic cross drain where the proposed middle culvert is shown. He stated that the culvert will be a design issue. He stated that they will have to complete hydraulic analysis to be sure they can combine culverts. He indicated that if they cannot combine the structures, they will have to have two separate structures close together.

Sandy asked if there is a possibility to flip the locations in the design phase. Alex stated that the location was chosen because of the ecotone.

Dan Smith, with UCF, mentioned that they may want to consider a ledge type structure.

It was commented that the Florida Trail impacts where the crossings are located in Area D. There was group discussion on the trail and where it goes. Jim Thorsen, consultant with USFS, stated that the trail near Sharpes Ferry goes north. Carrie asked if EMS or Inwood could get the GIS coverage of the area.

The group voted and gave 100% consensus on the alternative presented for Area D. Alex mentioned that the cost is 3.4 million dollars.

Next, the group discussed location E. Alex stated that area E is a problematic crossing area. He stated that the alternative proposes to use an enhanced, combined box culvert with shelves in order to provide equalization between the wetland on the north and the lake on the south.

Keith stated that he understands the difficulties with the topography. He commented that they could provide an opportunity for movement with an enhanced box culvert.

Mickey asked if there would be any fencing. Alex stated that there wouldn't be any fencing because of the private land ownership.

Tom stated that, if all of Lake Shore is developed, putting money into an enhanced culvert may be a waste. This led to a discussion on the possibility of acquiring a conservation easement in the area.

Walt McCown, with FWC, commented that they have found, through their observation of collared bears in Area E, that bears tend to cross SR 40 at Area F and not at Area E.

Sandy stated that the area lends itself to smaller structures.

Carrie expressed concerns for the flow of aquatic movement. There was a discussion on the location of the retention pond in the area. Carrie stated that amphibians will want to move to Church Lake. Keith commented that an enhanced culvert with a hydraulic notch would accommodate the large animals as well as support the hydraulic connection.

The group gained 100% consensus on the enhanced culvert with a hydraulic notch alternative with the caveat that the design needs additional thought. Alex mentioned that this section of the project has no funding for design, right-of-way or construction. He indicated that the area will go into reevaluation.

Area F was the next topic of discussion.

After some discussion, the group gained 100% consensus on the alternative presented for Area F.

The group broke for lunch at 12:15 p.m. and reconvened at 12:45 p.m.

After lunch, the group reconvened to discuss the wildlife crossings proposed in the no build section of the project. Alex reminded the group that these crossings are not being funded as part of the PD&E Study. He indicated that they are working to have the crossings documented and approved through the NEPA process so that they can be funded by other agencies through other funding sources such as enhancement funds. There was discussion on funding options for these crossings.

Alex mentioned that there are people who are apprehensive and concerned about the structures in the no build section. He stated that some people think that the value of the crossings is limited. In addition, he explained that there are concerns that if the road is four-laned in the future, the crossings will be construed as what is sufficient.

Carrie stated that the crossings that they have selected in the no build section are initial steps and the hope is to continue to increase permeability.

Keith stated that the stretch of land from Mill Dam to Lake County is largely homogeneous. He commented that a set of crossings that are sporadic and with limited fencing do not seem to be cost efficient. He mentioned that there are some areas, in the eastern portion of the project, where crossings would be beneficial due to pinch points. He suggested that the area near Lake George be at the top of the prioritization list

Sandy stated that priority should be in areas where the higher traffic volume is and there are less homogeneous habitat types.

There was a group discussion on the effectiveness of the crossings proposed in the middle of the forest. Sandy commented that it is important to look at the objectives of each area.

Brian Scheick, with FWC, stated that they picked areas that were hotspots of road kill. There was discussion on safety being a reason for some of the crossings. Keith stated that if safety is a concern, they could fence off the curve and save some money. Carrie commented that for some species, the two-lane road is already a barrier. Walt stated that the bears cross everywhere and they focused on areas where there were unsuccessful crossings.

Dan commented that there is promising research on roadway animal detection systems (RADS) which could be a cheaper option.

Carrie stated that it is important to get the little species across as well as reduce road kill. She mentioned that they may be able to lower the fence and use small culverts for the small, low mobility species.

Sandy stated that there seems to be a mix of objectives. She indicated that there is a lot that needs to be done.

Todd Mecklenborg, with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), commented that they cannot do conceptual concurrences for twenty to thirty years out.

Alex concluded that there are many issues that need to be resolved in regards to the crossings in the no build section. Alex asked USFS to relook at the areas and identify objectives, priorities and preferred alternatives. He asked that they provide this information within two weeks. He added that the agencies can prioritize the crossings when they apply for the funding.

Keith stated that the prioritization at this stage is important to support the crossings that are needed in the eastern portion of the project. Sandy and Carrie agreed with Keith. Carrie stated that prioritization helps with the application for funding. She asked if there was a way to specify the areas of priority in the report. Sandy commented that there are three priorities, the build section, the Lake George Area and then everywhere else. Keith added that after the Lake George area, the Astor and Astor Park areas are important.

Terry asked if they could recommend additional research in the no build section. Bill stated that FDOT is currently committed to providing funds for research, primarily in Area F.

It was suggested that the report state that in the no build section of the project there are existing biological concerns that need to be addressed and funded for additional research. Steve Tonjes, with FDOT, stated that they can set priorities in the document and state that research is important.

Alex summarized that USFS will work on the objectives, priorities and preferred alternatives and have them back in two weeks. He explained that they need a footprint and reasonable cost estimate for the report. Alex also commented that they will be sure to state that the crossings suggested in the no build section are only for a two-lane roadway.

Next, Steve gave an overview of the purpose of the next day's meeting on additional research. He stated that FDOT has made a commitment to research Area F over the next several years. Steve explained that they need to figure out how to allocate the funding. In addition, they need to determine who should be developing the ecosystem model for Area F. Lastly, he indicated that they will

discuss how to document the research. He stressed that the need to establish continuity in the research.

There was a comment to put a commitment in the PD&E documentation to conduct effectiveness monitoring of mitigation to ensure the mitigation is successful. Sandy stated that the monitoring needs to be done with a good design study plan and rigorous scientific method.

Alex thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

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