

5/9/08

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 13 Summary

Mtg. Date: May 7, 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
Kristee Booth – EMS
Carrie Sekerak – USFS
Jim Thorsen - USFS
Cathy Lowenstein - FDOF
Walt McCown – FWC
Brian Sheick – FWC
Dennis David – FWC
Terry Gilbert – URS
Tony Miller - SJRWMD
Keith Schue – The Nature Conservancy
Charles Lee – Audubon Society
Dan Smith – UCF
Sandy Jacobson – via conference call – USFS

Bill Walsh, with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), welcomed the group and gave opening statements. He stated that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the wildlife crossings proposed in the no-build section of the project. He mentioned that the crossings would not be funded through the PD&E Study; however, the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Florida Department of Forestry (FDOF) would like the crossings to be identified in the report and approved through the NEPA process.

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 explained that USFS and FDOF have evaluated their prospective areas and developed goals and objectives for each. He stated that a group went into the field, walked each area and identified characteristics of each location. He indicated that they compiled the information they collected in the field and plotted it onto large aerial maps. He explained that a group met with FDOT on May 6th to look at the data and aerials. He stated that they marked the aerials up with alternatives for each area. Alex passed out large graphics of the wildlife



crossing alternatives in the no-build section of the project. Charles Lee, with Audubon Society, asked if the designs that are proposed for the no-build section of the project would be considered adequate for a four-laned road in the future. Alex stated that the proposed alternatives are not intended to be representative of what would be sufficient for a potential four-laned road in the future. Bill indicated that if four-lanes were considered for the area, another study would be conducted to evaluate what is needed. Carrie Sekerak, with USFS, stated that the road is already a barrier for some species. She indicated that the agency's hope is to correct the past and create a better condition for wildlife connectivity and movement.

Keith Schue, with the Nature Conservancy (TNC), requested that graphics with a larger scale context be provided at the meetings. He passed out copies of a map that shows a larger portion of the area around project.

Charles asked for the cost range of the proposed alternatives in the no-build section of the project. Alex stated that they have not costed out the alternatives. He explained that once they have finalized the alternatives, they will go back and get the cost estimates.

Charles made a proposal to take the money that would be spent on the crossings in the no-build section and put it in a trust fund. He suggested lowering the speed limit to 45 mph and using the money from the trust fund to acquire police to patrol the road segment through the forest.

Carrie commented that for some species, the traffic on the road is a barrier and for other species, the road itself is a barrier.

Walt McCown indicated that for highly mobile species it is the volume of traffic that creates a barrier rather than speed of traffic.

Charles stated that there are other things that can be done to make the road less of a barrier. He commented that it would be good if FDOT could take the trucks off the road. Bill explained that during the Task Force meetings, FDOT was asked to conduct a study to determine if S.R. 40 could be taken off the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS). He stated that the conclusions of the study indicated that the lack of alternative roads makes S.R. 40 an important road on SIS. Therefore, S.R. 40 will remain on the list. Bill explained that the road's SIS status does not allow a reduced speed or to prevent trucks from using it.

Keith expressed concern for the 50 ft. structures proposed in the no-build section. He commented that there are areas in the no-build section where structures are needed; however, the structures suggested in the large span of the forest do not make sense. He indicated support for the Remote Animal Detection System (RADS).

Alex commented that the points that have been brought up are valid. He stated that they will be sure to document that the crossings in the no-build section are only for a two-lane road. He also mentioned that funding for the no-build section is different from the rest of the project. He explained that the funding in the no-build section is tied to enhancement and scenic highway funds; therefore, putting the money in a trust fund is not an option.

Alex stated that the alternatives for each area are site specific for the species and issues with the area. He suggested that the group look at the objectives and the proposed alternatives in each area and prioritize.

Keith commented that due to the current constraints of the road and right-of-way, the bulk of what should be done is in Volusia County.

Next, the group focused their attention on the proposed alternatives for Area L. Cathy Lowenstein, with FDOF, gave an overview of the goals and objectives of the area.

Charles asked why the fence is truncated on the west side. Carrie indicated that there are private land ownership issues with the area. Charles asked if the landowner has been contacted. He stated that they may be ok with a fence or an easement may be possible.

Bill stated that they can put language in the PD&E report to look at the fencing further in the design phase. Charles suggested that they show the ideal place for the fence to go with a notation that there is a property issue. The group agreed to draw a second fence, with a different color, on the map. Tom Roberts, with EMS, stated that all language in the report will be written to suggest that the fences need to be looked at further.

Keith commented that over time there is a possibility that area L will be four-laned. He suggested that the box culvert be larger. Carrie stated that this is not mitigation for a four-laned road and it will be easier to acquire funding for something cheaper. Keith expressed concern for mitigation going smaller than it was discussed before. Carrie stated that they need to demonstrate the bang for the buck when competing for funding.

There was a group discussion on why area L was chosen. Keith stated that providing additional connectivity on the east side could be beneficial.

There was discussion on expanding area L by connecting L1 and L2. Carrie suggested that they put in a second alternative to look at what was recommended in area L by FWC during the task force.

Cathy asked if she needs to update the goals and objectives for this area. It was suggested that she tweak the wording to say that the enhancements will help the

mitigation bank. It was commented that adding this language may enable funding. It was also suggested to get point data from FWC.

In summary, it was decided that the first alternative in area L is to combine the proposed crossing with the original shown on the graphic and add enhanced box culverts, fencing and small culverts. The second alternative is to carry over FWC's Task Force recommendation of the bridging of the area to the east. Carrie indicated that there is good data associated with FWC's recommendation.

Keith expressed concern for the legacy data sending a confused message. Carrie stated that they will only use the data from area L and not the rest of the project.

There was much continued discussion. It was decided that the ESBA and the EA will include an excerpt from the FWC memo for the eastern end of area L. Walt and Terry agreed to write a new memo and clarify that it is not related to the four-laning of S.R. 40.

There was a discussion on the importance of public and private land partnership, in areas K and L, for the mitigation to work.

The group broke for lunch at 12:15 p.m. and reconvened at 12:55 p.m.

Next, the group discussed the alternatives in area J1. There was a group discussion on the fencing. Carrie indicated that the area is still permeable. It was decided that they will have the same caveat that says the fence needs further evaluation in the design phase. There was also a comment on the need to consider hydraulic restoration.

The group discussed area J. It was commented that there are a tremendous amount of bear kills in the area. The private landownership around the area creates limitations on fencing. Sandy Jacobson, with USFS, suggested that a public and private partnership is needed along with innovative incentives.

There was a comment on this area being a hotspot for issues with human and animal safety.

The proposed alternative allows for a 50-foot bridge structure crossing near the creek, fencing from road to road and the purchase of a limited access easement. The group also agreed that there should be a recommendation for the traffic to be evaluated further.

Next, the group discussed area I. This recommendation includes the RADS along with culverts.

Keith asked if the culverts work without fencing. Carrie stated that the culvert typically needs something to work as a barrier in order to funnel the animals to the crossing.

Sandy commented that they usually need a mixture of structures to help target species behavior. Sandy asked if it is known how deep the sand skinks go into the sand. Carrie stated that they typically move on the surface and will also go as deep as 15 centimeters.

Alex summarized that in area I, there are two alternatives, RADS or the crossing structures.

There was a group discussion on how RADS works. Walt commented that the black bears are hard to see at night. Sandy brought up the issue concerning the habituation of drivers. She stated that it is good to consider it as an alternative; however, the effectiveness needs to be vigorously monitored. Charles commented that there are varieties of psychological ways to help RADS work. He suggested that there be flashing lights and a reduced speed within area with higher speeding fines and increased law enforcement. There was a group discussion on looking at traffic calming devices. Dan Smith, with UCF, indicated that they want to test RADS to see if it is functional with bears. He explained that it has proven to be effective in other areas; however, they will need to conduct effectiveness monitoring to find out if it is applicable in this area. The group discussed the importance of public education. Charles asked if speed reduction could be evaluated in the experimental phase. Bill stated that he would talk with FDOT traffic operations representatives to find out if it is an option.

The group agreed that location I is a lower priority area.

Next, there was discussion on area H.

Sandy asked if it is possible to test RADS in the build section of the project. Alex stated that they will have to discuss that at another time.

Alex summarized that they will carry both the RADS and crossing structure alternatives forward for further evaluation in the design phase. He explained that by the time the area is ready for design, the research on RADS should be available and will help determine what should be implemented. Sandy asked if there are transportation enhancement funds that would allow RADS to be tested sooner. It was stated that Dan is already working on it.

Carrie commented that this area does not have to be a high priority.

Keith suggested that the preferred alternative only address the small, low mobile species in this area.

The group discussed the structural alternative. It was decided to move the 20'x8' box culvert closer to the 8'x8' culvert.

Area G was the next topic of discussion. This area was mentioned as a higher priority area due to the mosaic of habitat type.

The group decided on an alternative that included a 50 ft structure along with fencing and a series of smaller culverts in proximity to the trail.

Next, the group discussed area G2. Carrie indicated that this is an important area for sand skinks. She mentioned that she is proposing to the agency to create a sand skink management zone in this area.

The group discussed the design of the culvert. It was suggested that there are no bottoms to the culverts in order to allow for a natural flow of sand. The 24"x36" culverts are interspersed with larger culverts. It was decided that the larger structures will be located near 180th Avenue and the power lines.

Carrie indicated that areas G and G2 are of high priority.

Area G1 was the next topic of conversation. Walt and Carrie commented that this location is of low priority. Carrie indicated that this is a permeable section of the road. Dan suggested that they shorten the fence.

After going over each of the areas, Alex asked the group to prioritize the areas by county and then overall. The rankings are as follows:

In Marion County, G and G2 are tied for first priorities. Area H is the third priority and G1 is the fourth.

In Lake County, area J is the first priority. Area J1 is the second priority and area I is the third priority.

In Volusia County, area K is the first priority and area L is the second priority.

Overall, area K is ranked as the first priority. Area G and G2 are the second priorities with a slight preference for Area G. Area J is the fourth priority and area L is the fifth priority. Area J1 comes in sixth, area I is seventh, area H is eighth and area G1 is ninth.

Alex thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:45 p.m.

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.