

3/20/07

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 6 Summary

Mtg. Date: March 22, 2007

Time: 9:30 am

Location: US Forest Service Lake George Ranger Station Conference Room

Project: SR 40 PD&E Study

From Silver Springs to US 17 in Marion, Lake and Volusia Counties

Attendees:

Brian Stanger – FDOT

Steve Tonjes – FDOT

George Borchik – FDOT

Letitia Neal – FDOT

Alex Hull – Inwood

Tom Roberts – EMS

Vicki Sharpe – FDOT/CEMO

Sandy Jacobson – USFS Pacific Southwest
Research Station

Walt McCown – FWC

Terry Gilbert – URS/FWC

Rick Lint – USFS

Brian Scheick – FWC

Jim Thorsen – USFS Consultant

Keith Schue – The Nature Conservancy

Dave Bowman – Greenways/Trails

Dennis David – FWC

Meg Roessing USFS

Jim Thorsen representing the United States Forest Service (USFS) opened the meeting with welcoming statements and introductions.

Sandy Jacobson, with the USFS, gave an overview of the field visit conducted the previous day. Sandy stressed the importance of identifying the overall objective of the wildlife connectivity program and the objectives of each of the wildlife crossing locations. She stated that each of the wildlife structures alternatives for each location should be evaluated in comparison with the objectives.

Points that Sandy made in her discussion were:

- Two major impacts of the road project are loss of habitat connectivity and loss of life due to vehicular collisions.
- Fencing is a critical component of wildlife connectivity structures.
- Identify the species of concern and target the structure for the identified species.
- USFS has a mandate to protect all species.

She stated that with respect to meeting the objectives, there are generally three alternatives plus the do nothing alternative. These are:

- Fewer, smaller structures distributed along the area of concern.
- A mixture of smaller structures and some larger/longer structures.

- Long spans of bridging.

The project team will evaluate these alternatives with respect to meeting these objectives.

Sandy gave a general assessment of the wildlife crossings previously discussed by the wildlife committee.

Site A: She felt that the addition of smaller structures would be helpful along with a longer structure would be helpful.

Site B – C: The length of the bridge over the Ocklawaha River is great. We may be able to get by without an additional bear structure because of the large home range of the bear/deer.

Site D: This site is hindered by the private lands to the south. The alternatives being considered include a 50-foot bear structure.

Site E: This site has problems due to roads and private lands. Alternatives will still be developed and evaluated.

Site F: This is a major and important area. Several alternatives will be developed and evaluated at this location. These include spanning essentially the entire length of the site; utilizing a 1,000-foot span in the western portion and two 200-foot spans in the eastern portion; and utilizing two 200-foot spans in the western portion and two 50-foot spans in the eastern portion along with smaller, culvert type structures. There was discussion by the group on the alternatives and lengths of structures. Sandy stated that more work needed to be done for this location.

Site AA (Powerline): Sandy suggested that we look at some alternative structures that simulate tortoise burrows. This site is still being considered and the alternatives include a longer structure as previously identified (300 feet) and a series of smaller structures. Sandy stated that for genetic interchange, we need a small number of animals introduced over multiple generations to achieve the goal. However, if seasonal or daily interchange of animals is the goal, then more structures are needed. We need to look at the biology of the species and see what is needed to meet the objectives of the species.

Site G: It is good to bridge more than one habitat. One alternative being considered includes multiple, smaller structures.

Site H: An overpass is a good option at this location because it addresses species that like light and heat.

Site I: Sandy discussed two options being considered at this location. These include a 50-foot structure with fencing and smaller structures with fencing.

Site J: This site is very good but has issues associated with private lands and road access. Alternatives will be developed and evaluated.

Site K: This site is a choke point for the Lake George State Forest. The scale of the area makes this site important.

Alex Hull then talked about the process to move forward from here. He stated that a draft report will be prepared giving the wildlife connectivity objectives and alternatives to meet those alternatives will be developed. This report then will be distributed for comment and input.

Keith Schue, with The Nature Conservancy, expressed his appreciation for Sandy's input and valued her contribution. He further stated that he doesn't think that we have the end solution for the middle area (Site F). He stated that there are more defined crossing locations in the build section. For the most part, the crossings that are provided will be the only way animals can get across. In the future, as the area in the forest gets widened, it will be the same thing. Also, there is awareness by the public to take care of the environment as roads are widened. The Wekiva Parkway is an example. He stated that The Nature Conservancy is focusing on the west (Build) section of the project. Keith expressed support of the collaborative process. In the forest, having a good distribution is important. Fencing is essential. The nature Conservancy is not in support of the project as it is currently but believes that there will be ongoing dialogue that will help that.

Keith expressed concerns about the width verses length for 50-foot bear crossings within a 200-foot right-of-way. Sandy stated that the "openness" index is way over used. It was developed for mule deer. More importantly, we need to look at the species and its biology. For bears, the openness is not that important. Sandy said that in general, more bridging is better but that the reality is that cost is a factor.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 12:00 pm.

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.