

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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DRAFT MEETING NOTES

October 27, 2016

Members present: Stacy Corless, Mono Supervisors; Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo; Brent Green & Ryan Dermody, Caltrans; Adrienne Thatcher, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Cleland Hoff, Mammoth Town Council; Alisa Ellsworth, CDFW; Erin Nordin, USFWS; Doug Power, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center

Members absent: Justin Nalder, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Rana Saulque, Benton Paiutes; Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park; Steve Nelson, BLM; Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile National Monument

Staff present: Wendy Sugimura, CD Ritter

Guests present: Wendi Grasseschi, Mammoth Times; Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy;

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ATTENDEE INTRODUCTIONS: Acting Chair Stacy Corless called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. at the Town/County Conference Room at Minaret Village Mall in Mammoth Lakes. Attendees recited the pledge of allegiance and introduced themselves.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

3. MEETING NOTES

MOTION: Approve draft meeting notes from Aug. 25, 2016, as submitted. (*Hoff/Regelbrugge. Ayes: All but one abstention.*)

4. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE: Agency planning issues & pending projects were presented.

5. EASTERN SIERRA WILDLIFE COLLISION REDUCTION STUDY (Tim Taylor, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Cory Freeman, Caltrans)

Tim Taylor: Wildlife road ecology: habitat loss, reduced habitat quality, improved habitat quality, impacts to landscape connectivity, barrier effects, direct mortality and higher animal death rates, raptors feed on road kill, hit as well. Road kill can create other road kill.

Mule deer population = 10,000, with six herds that show strong fidelity to migration routes from one generation to the next, same crossings year after year. Well-defined spring and fall holding areas bisect US 395. From 2002-15 1,667 road kill deer. Alarming, as it's a minimum number. Hot spots exist along 395. Annual migrations occur, need to facilitate better. Hundreds of Round Valley deer congregate in holding area to regain body condition from winter, boosting nutrition. Mammoth Lakes holding area overlaps US 395/SR 203. Summer resident deer become road kills too, with deer living along highway more likely to get hit. Ineffective measures include ultrasonic devices, reflectors and rumble strips. Try to influence animal behavior: deer fencing, reducing roadside forages, and cutting back larger vegetation. People don't slow down, drive too fast. Visitors do not understand deer behavior. People get injured in wildlife collisions, hence insurance claims, vehicle repairs.

At Wells, NV, overcrossing reduced road kill considerably. Species do not function in isolation; e.g., sage grouse would react to 8' fence. Crossings should serve widest possible cross-section of wildlife. Disadvantages: highway fully developed, so more expensive; and lack of natural drainage features, hence long distance between crossings. Needs in focus area: CDFW would take lead on wildlife studies, detail tracking like camera tracks, radio collars. Airport fence will be long stretch to negotiate, maybe trap animals in right of way. Challenges: Effective

communication/collaboration among stakeholders; balance between project costs/maintaining highest possible level of wildlife species diversity; and lack of topographic features. Work with existing design constraints.

Hoff commended CMS signs as effective. Taylor thought signs wake people up. Also it lets them know Caltrans is thinking about the problem. It's a start.

Where is fencing going? Around whole airport. Increase aircraft safety, decrease motorist safety. No aircraft collisions with deer, but deer in northbound highway lane will get hit. Freeman noted fence going up next summer. Post signage to start thinking about it.

Solve one problem, create another?

Corless has observed herd around Mammoth Lakes year round. Taylor indicated migration patterns change with decreased snow, and does will have to teach new migration pattern to young.

Bucks in Mammoth meadow? Taylor indicated deer living along road, not just migrating. Dermody noted 387 in focus area. Taylor identified them as migratory herd. Dermody foresaw struggle in grant application.

Cory Freeman has worked with Tim Taylor on public info campaigns re deer hazard. Caltrans has done numerous efforts, such as Mammoth Creek undercrossing, wide separating median. Deer kill study was conducted in 1970s. Wildlife carcass numbers greater than CHP data. Mono has highest collision with deer over Inyo and Kern, with 395 having highest collision rate.

Correspond to snow? Taylor cited no consistency in reporting by different maintenance stations. Cannot correlate with precipitation, lot of variables. Hot spot analysis showed six spots. Found few more within focus area. Airport forage is limited, infrastructure deters wildlife. Crossing structures, over and under, fencing. Six concepts range in costs and complexity. Concept I: \$53.3 million. Maybe Convict Creek crossing. Concept II: Nothing on 203. \$41.6 million. Concept III: \$33.6 million. Concept IV: North only option. \$16.9 million, fencing, crossing structures. 1.7 miles of airport fencing. Barriers make wildlife have to walk distance, negotiate. Concept V: South only. \$18.5 million, airport fence, undercrossing north of McGee maintenance station. Concept VI: \$20,000/yr, CMS signs, maybe fixed sign with flashing LEDs during migratory period. Tools not effective: reflectors/mirrors. Doppler and infrared are used.

Taylor cited pervasive problem up/down US 395. Start trying to rectify problem areas with long-term plan.

CPT involvement? Burns suggested formalizing subcommittees at next meeting.

Doug Power commented that Sonora Junction Caltrans yard deer-crossing structure didn't go in. Dermody stated project no longer exists at that location. Materials went to Olancho/Cartago project.

--- Break: 11:00 - 11:10 ---

6. MONO BASIN EDISON FACILITY UPGRADES. Rudy Gonzales will attend next meeting, reduce fire danger. Seeing cooperation. Cal Fire will report cause of Marina fire.

7. FROG & TOAD FINAL CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION. USFWS (*Erin Nordin*), CDFW (*Jim Erdman*), Mono County (*Wendy Sugimura*)

Erin Nordin, who works out of Reno office, distributed handouts. Sacramento is lead office for some species. Rule to list critical habitat in 2013 followed by several comment periods, peer review, revised rule. Final rule in 2014. Critical habitat rule took effect in 2016. Critical habitat has features essential to survive/reproduce, minimize threats. Subunit levels identified. Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog and Yosemite toad. Aquatic habitat for breeding, nonbreeding areas, upland areas. Some areas excluded by text (in area, but not included).

If critical habitat is designated, no further development? Not necessarily. Reminder to federal agencies to protect important characteristics in these areas. Reasonable and prudent alternatives can reduce impact levels.

Does critical habitat affect all activities? *No*. Large areas included in mapped area boundaries considered critical habitat? *No*.

Jim Erdman, environmental scientist in aquatic biology and fisheries stocking, has worked extensively on frog project, monitoring all populations healthy/undiseased. Monitoring population trends with diseased population. Lots of tadpoles, fewer adults. Three large die-offs due to disease. Marginal habitat, like one lake with no inlet/outlet. Need network of habitats. Fish removal process for stocked waters. Designated species: frog, toad, cutthroat, pupfish, etc. Saddlebag previously included, now excluded, so stocked. High mountain lakes in Mono: 18 populations of Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, mostly Rock Creek drainage, Rush Creek, Island Pass (fishless for decades), 30-40 ponds, diseased population.

Recreation impact on frogs? Erdman noted target areas off trail , less impacted by people. Can suggest USFS close areas, but comes down to personal ethics of obeying signage about not camping. Pursue education on frog. Removed fish from 19 lakes, all mechanical removal (gill netting). Frog iconic species in Sierra. Smaller mammals back to lakes with expanded frog populations (weasels, etc.). See Eastern Sierra Backcountry Fishing Guide. Not release frog locations. West Walker on sister lakes off Pacific Crest Trail. Eliminate down to falls/barrier. No more fish at upper Horton Lake in Inyo County. Frogs could move in. Fish eat frogs.

Leavitt Lake? On stocking list, but truck can't make it up road. Aerial stocking occurs. Golden are native at 7,000-11,000 feet, but do best in upper wilderness lakes. Rainbows (interact), brookies (outcompete). Frogs and fish need deep waters in winter so don't freeze to death. Fish stocking is not affected by critical habitat.

High Mountain Lakes statewide: Remove fish, monitor frog populations not diseased. Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco do captive rearing of tadpoles, raise, clear of disease, reinfect, clear again, reintroduce back into wild. Successful captive rearing. Disease is fungus that attacks skin of frogs, where they breathe. Field treatments, release into same lake. Disease can persist without the host.

Wendy Sugimura stated Mono critical habitat removed with final rule (front-country lakes). Recovery plan? Nordin noted conservation strategy to roll into recovery process. If recovery plan is issued, open to public comment.

8. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: 1) Edison; 2) recovery plan update; 3) stewardship on 395

9. ADJOURN at 12:13 p.m. to next quarterly meeting: Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, at 9 a.m.

Prepared by CD Ritter, CPT secretary