

**Science and Technical Advisory Team
Meeting Minutes of September 24, 2008**

Attendees: Bob Steidl, Cecil Schwalbe, Julia Fonseca, Frances W. Werner, Doug Duncan, Brian Powell, Sam Drake, Andrea Litt, George Ruyle, Bill Shaw, Kathleen Kennedy, Trevor Hare, Michael Ingraldi, Mead Mier, Sherry Mann, Joanna Bate, Dale Turner, Lori Woods, Diana Durazo, Natasha Kline, Tom Van Devender, Neva Connolly.
Absent: Sherry Ruther

Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Chairman Shaw called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m.

Approval of February 15, 2007 STAT Minutes

The minutes were approved as written.

MSCP Update

Julia Fonseca presented an update of MSCP and SDCP activities. Staff continue to work behind the scenes implementing the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. The Pima County Board of Supervisors have passed a water policy that takes into account the impact of any groundwater pumping on the surrounding areas when deciding whether to grant a rezoning or comprehensive plan amendment. The City of Tucson and Pima County are working on a program for the transfer of development rights for conservation purposes. The Pima County MapGuide site is continually updating and adding layers. One of the new data layers highlight subdivisions that have gone through the Conservation Lands System. The Flood Control District is improving its riparian habitat mitigation tracking process.

Under the 2004 Open Space Conservation Acquisition Bond Program, the county has purchased 40 properties for conservation, totaling 26,100 acres along with an additional 116,800 acres of State and Federal grazing leases. The types of properties purchased include large working ranches, as well as properties that expand existing mountain parks, and provide for recreational opportunities for the community. In response to a question, Diana Durazo noted that planning is still ongoing for a 2009 bond election.

In September, the Office of Conservation, Science and Environmental Policy was established by the County Administrator. The office, directed by Maeveen Behan, has the initial task of completing the MSCP.

Update and Discussion on the Monitoring Plan

Brian Powell presented an update on the development of the monitoring plan and requested STAT's input on single-species monitoring approach (part of a two-pronged monitoring approach for permit compliance). Brian's presentation was based on a report he had released in August, Recommended Monitoring Approach for Pima County's

Multiple-Species Conservation Plan. Many, if not all MSCP efforts, have struggled with their monitoring efforts, which often lacked clear goals and measurable objectives and are focused on monitoring a large number of vertebrate species. The report addresses issues of species variability and sampling error that make trends detection of many vertebrates difficult. The report asserts that species monitoring be only one component of a monitoring program that seeks to detect change to a host of ecological features affecting a broader suite of biodiversity.

The approach recommended single-species monitoring for a subset of species that meet a set of criterion: those that are spatially restricted and whose loss from those areas would result in extirpation from Pima County; where habitat monitoring is 'too coarse;' and where cost is feasible.

Future work will identify other monitoring parameters that would best inform the broader ecological goals of the MSCP and SDCP.

Habitat features were identified for 111 vertebrate species and 31 covered species that represent a full range of biodiversity in Pima County. Species selected represent a wide variety of trophic levels, body size, use of vegetation communities, and taxonomy. Threats to habitat are also identified. Using matrices, a framework is created that can be transferred to other monitoring programs.

A concern was voiced over the use of the species' habitat models and the possibility of undermining the relevancy of the Conservation Lands System. The species' models are not spatially explicit, and will not have an effect on the CLS. They are called conceptual models but they really represent relationships between environmental features, species and threats.

It was suggested that the monitoring approach be presented to the USFWS to ensure full support for the process. In a similar line of thought, a suggestion was made to ensure the public understands and accepts the monitoring approach and principles. Another suggestion was to check habitat occasionally to make sure the species is persisting. Brian Powell requested additional STAT's comments after the meeting. Dr. Shaw requested that staff consider single species monitoring again after it is clearer what habitat parameters will be recommended.

STAT Charter

The original STAT charter, drafted in 1999, is no longer adequate if STAT is to continue advising on the implementation of the monitoring plan. STAT members received a copy of the original charter. Dr. Shaw requested that, charter amendments be brought to them in future meetings.

Next STAT Meeting

The date for the next STAT meeting was not set. The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.