

DRAFT WORKSHOP NOTES

Habitat Conservation Plan Public Workshop
April 19, 2005, 6:00 – 9:30 p.m.
Embassy Suites Hotel
333 Madonna Rd.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

John Jostes, workshop facilitator opened the meeting and welcomed those present, thanking them for their show of interest in the Habitat Conservation Plan process. He provided a general overview of the evening's agenda and reviewed the ground rules and terms of engagement for the meeting. He then turned the meeting over to Paula Hartman Project Manager with Thomas Reid Associates, State Park's HCP Consultant.

2. Overview of the HCP Planning and Development Process

Paula Hartman provided a 30 minute overview of the HCP process, the overall plan being developed and the technical components of the plan itself. These topics included

- What is an HCP and How does it Work
- Covered Park Units
- Covered Species
- Covered Activities
- Proposed Management Strategies
- Plan Implementation and Timeline

3. Brief Question and Answer Session

John Jostes, Paula Hartman and State Parks staff fielded a series of questions from the audience regarding the HCP. Questions raised included the following:

- Does the HCP need to undergo review and approval by the State Park and Recreation Commission?
- What is meant by the term 'incidental' as in "incidental take permit"?
- How does an HCP (which has to be responsive to critical habitat issues) integrate with State Park's land use and park planning process, specifically, the General Plans for each of the Park units?
- In that the HCP is a response to federal legislation (i.e. ESA), are there also efforts to purchase additional land to replace access opportunities that are lost due to the HCP?
- Is the HCP mandated by the Fish and Wildlife Service? If so, what did State Parks do to trigger the preparation of an HCP?
- What other HCP efforts are being undertaken by other State Parks throughout the state? Why are we doing an HCP here and now?
- Why hasn't State Parks chosen to update its General Plans instead of preparing an HCP?
- How does an HCP integrate with parallel efforts by the State of California (i.e., the Calif. ESA, and Natural Communities Conservation Plans)?
- Why isn't Pismo State Beach covered by the HCP?
- Why hasn't State Parks prepared a separate HCP for each of the individual park units?

4. Interactive Round-Table Discussion

Following the question and answer session, those present broke into separate discussions at each of the tables in the room. Approximately 45-50 attendees broke into a total of five groups, and discussed the following four questions:

- What, if any aspects of the HCP are unclear or confusing? What additional information or data would be helpful to you and why?
- Given the HCP's intended purpose to avoid, minimize, and mitigate specified visitor and park operations impacts to several listed species, what additional measures or strategies should be considered?
- What assurances or refinements would minimize hardship to existing and potential users of the park properties and still address the habitat conservation needs of the species of concern?
- Is there something we missed?

5. Presentations from Each Round-Table Discussion.

The following key points were provided by each group to the assembly of participants at the meeting:

Group #1

1. Process is generally unclear or confusing:
 - A. No example/model
 - B. What is the interaction with other State and Federal agencies and programs?
 - C. How will the HCP effect current use?
2. How are trail closures going to be decided and implemented?
 - A. Will the HCP impact the amount of use that we will have?
 - B. If the restricted areas are expanded, will the parks expand with equal quality park property?
 - C. If the habitat of an endangered species increases in size, will the restricted areas continue to increase?
 - D. Will seasonal access be allowed or allowable in the HCP?
3. Assurances/Refinements
 - A. Education/kiosk/Information maps with designated areas indicated information on the endangered species
 - B. Can volunteers be utilized in mitigation (tree planting, erosion control, trail repair and re-routing)?
 - C. Provisions for alternate safe routes through vehicle recreation areas, Coastal Trail and Anza Trail
 - D. Trails should meet some minimum safety requirements for intended use
 - E. Will all forms of recreation use get equal consideration?
 - F. How can we be assured that use/access will be balanced between recreation and preservation?
4. As a prey animal, an equine will not step on a live animal.
 - A. How will the loss of recreational use be mitigated?
 - B. If there is inadequate funding to support HCP, will users be denied access?
 - C. Will the standards for VRA users be equivalent to those of non-VRA users?
 - D. Revisit the distribution of tax monies collected from gasoline sales

Group #2

1. Clarification
 - A. Glossary of terms needed
 - ✓ Nature preserve
 - ✓ Responsibility of agencies
 - ✓ Conservation vs. preservation
 - B. Where does Powell property fit in?
 - C. How do preserves, parks fit together?
 - D. Implementing “adaptive management”
 - ✓ Who decides?
 - ✓ How are changes made?
 - E. Funds for contingencies
 - ✓ How much?
 - ✓ What source?
 - ✓ How certain does source need to be?
 - ✓ What happens if no money?
 - F. Activities not covered – what about herbicides?
 - G. Where do conservation easements fit in?
 - H. Source(s) of data on success/failure of management practices, and who monitors?
 - I. Where does data come from to support proposed changes?
 - J. Are all new projects covered by HCP?
 - K. What review for changes that mean less use?
 - L. Prioritization when protected and/or native species are using non-native flora
 - ✓ Who decides which goes and on what data?
 - ✓ Mechanism to prioritize protection of listed species over exotics removal.
 - M. Why are terms in HCP, since not possible to issue ITP for them?
 - N. Ten years is too long – maximum of five with full review

DISTRUST is a very big issue that needs to be addressed

2. Measures to minimize impacts to users
 - A. Existing trails stay open to existing, historic uses
 - B. Public input in review of end of HCP
 - C. Recognize public expertise and give respect to public input. Have a technical review team with chair guaranteed to be a member of the public.
 - D. Do not use HCP as a shield for arbitrary changes that lessen public use. Anything affecting public use needs public review.
 - E. Much of area under multiple jurisdictions. All entities need inclusion.

Group #3

1. “Education” is lacking. People have questions and there is no information to give them. Need handouts to give people. Why is it closed off?
2. “Pieces of pie” reserve different areas for different activities, i.e., mountain biking designated for certain trails, hikers different trails, equestrians different trails, endangered species for a different area (closed to people), etc.
3. Natural Predator relationships – how to manage? (Predator/prey relationship) (Skunks don’t read HCP’s)
4. State Parks is a giant water balloon – squeeze one end and bloop! – it will sploosh out somewhere else. Plan for that “bloop”, because it’s going to happen.

Group #4

1. Unclear/Confusing
 - How will the yet-to-be-determined classification of the Estero Bluffs impact or be impacted by the HCP?
2. Assurances or Refinements
 - All mitigation within each unit and not applied to other units.
 - Closure only after education, communication and restoration have failed.
 - Process for resolving management issues between public and parks
 - ✓ Identify problem (two-way communication)
 - ✓ Communicate the problem
 - ✓ Develop resolutions
 - ✓ Implementation
 - Mitigation for access lost for recreation (no loss of trails)
 - Cayucos Land Conservancy has the legal right of concurrence on management issues (Estero Bluffs) and specifically a HCP. How will that legal right be accommodated?
3. Steelhead
 - Will trail access on existing trails (i.e., Coon Creek) be impacted at horse crossings?
 - Will conflict between A.G. creek vehicle crossing and proposed alternative entrances to OHV areas be discussed?
4. Missing Components
 - In-field public education
 - Well delineated and signed trail network
 - How will non-covered species such as K-Rat be dealt with in managing for covered species?
 - No General Plan update to reflect HCP's impacted agreement
 - How will take of designated critical habitat be addressed?
 - Some parks have massive eco-system threats, such as veldt grass that affect all species. HCP should address these.
5. Other
 - General discomfort with not having HCP's for each park unit.
 - Will there be third party science review?
 - What are geographic scale limitations on "Special Projects", such as creating southern entrance to SVRA as a "trail re-route"?

Group #5

1. Unclear, Confusing, Additional Information
 - How were specific areas chosen?
 - Why are elephant seals not covered, given the possibility of movement to area?
 - Does HCP consider the degree of impact by each defined use? Are some areas affected more because of "take" in other areas? Is there a balance?
 - Is OHV impact being "pawned off" on Morro Strand? Will HCP address equity?
 - Is HCP part of the Sierra Club lawsuit? What else is part of the settlement?
 - Is HCP driving limited use by users lawfully participating in park activities?
 - What kinds of data will be collected to determine harm to listed species relative to specific uses?

2. Additional Measures and Strategies
 - Prevent vehicles from crossing Arroyo Grande Creek to protect steelhead and Tidewater Goby
 - Coordination among authorities for informing users of closures due to HCP protection measures.
 - Will there be ways to mitigate loss of use due to closures at specific locations?
3. Assurances
 - Coordinated effort to inform users of closure prior to arrival at that location, i.e., web site, call in line like CalTrans road closures
 - Keep trails open for equestrians, hikers, bicyclists, etc.

6. Initial Responses to Questions and Feedback – State Parks Staff and Consultants

Both Andrew Zilke Superintendent of Oceano Dunes SVRA and Nick Franco, Superintendent of the San Luis Obispo Coast District thanked the participants for their insights and comments and noted that some of the issues raised were being addressed within the HCP while others deserved consideration and thought in terms of refining the HCP. They indicated that a number of very good questions were raised and that they would work with their consultants to address each one and provide additional feedback and clarification at the follow-up workshop in May or June. Both Nick (nfran@parks.ca.gov) and Andy (azilk@parks.ca.gov) provided their e-mail addresses and invited participants to contact them with any questions that arise following the meeting.

7. Next Steps and Follow-up

John Jostes thanked the participants for their good work and indicated that the follow-up workshop would likely take place during the first or second week of June. He noted that everyone who had signed in and provided an e-mail address would get copies of the notes and that they would be posted on the Park Districts' web site.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.