

Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program
San Acacia Ad Hoc Work Group Meeting
08 January 2010 Meeting – 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

Decisions

- The December 3rd, 2009 San Acacia Reach (SAR) workgroup meeting minutes were approved with no changes.
- The SAR Work Group Charter was approved for finalization with minor changes to the membership list (i.e., removal of Lisa Croft, Susan Kelly, Matt Martinez, and David Gensler).

Recommendations

- It was suggested that “evasive vegetation encroachment on the river” be added to the bullets under A. The Natural Habitat on the Themes to Key Responses handout.

Actions

- Amy Louise will confirm with Jericho Lewis if the SA A&R report can be posted now for work group review prior to the EC presentation? The SAR work group would also like to know the process for making sure the peer review panel did address the submitted questions.
- Amy Louise will send out the most updated Objectives 2 and 3 for work group members to review and edit within the next 2 weeks.
- Work group members will submit comments, clarifications, and suggested changes to the SAR objectives (#2 and #3) to Amy Louise by January 22nd.
- Amy Louise will compile comments on work group Objectives 2 and 3 and will distribute the revised version to members as a read ahead for the February meeting.
- Amy Louise will make the suggested changes to the SAR work plan and redistribute for final approval.
- Amy Louise will correct the SAR Work Group Charter membership listing and finalize the charter.
- Gina Dello Russo will send the SAR Objective #1 summary information to Amy Louise.
- Tetra Tech will create and distribute a template agency response table (or matrix) that includes the draft responses developed today. It was suggested that there be places in the table for (1) for clarifications/definitions; (2) authorities/responsibilities; and (3) agency mission(s).
- Gina Dello Russo will arrange a meeting location for the February 2nd SAR meeting in Socorro.
- Tetra Tech will send the raw draft notes to Steve Harris.

Meeting Summary

- Gina Dello Russo called the meeting to order and introductions were made.
- The agenda was approved with the addition of a San Acacia Reach A&R peer review discussion.

- The SAR work group discussed wanting to review the San Acacia A and Recommendations (SA A&R) report to confirm that the questions they requested the external peer review address were actually considered in the report review. The work group would like to review the report before the peer review presentation (to be given by the lead reviewer) on the external peer opinion of the SA A&R is presented to the Executive Committee (EC) in February 2010. The work group also talked about having a future discussion focused on how the Habitat Restoration (HR) and SAR review is going to utilize the information in the SA A&R for future planning for projects, for future direction on scopes, document requirements, and how to incorporate information.
- The work group discussed the SAR workplan. Amy Louise updated the workplan based on last month's meeting discussions and added a review of the Program's Long-term Plan (LTP). The LTP review purpose is to make sure the work group is up to date with Program objectives and activities and to make sure the group is addressing any activities or actions that might be pertinent to the SAR work group.
 - Suggested changes included: (1) white papers deadline changed to September 30th; (2) change the LTP review dates and put NA under deliverables column; (3) omit the web-based tools activity from the work plan; (4) replace the work "brochure" with "develop outreach products" with a due date of June 2nd; (5) rephrase "matrix" to "agency responses"; (6) add "tentative" to the schedule/date on the public forum; and (7) add "finalize objectives of work group" as a specific task with a due date of March 2010 meeting for official vote to finalize.
- The work group briefly discussed and approved their charter with minor corrections to the membership listing.
- Gina Dello Russo briefly explained the purpose behind collecting the agency response to SA workshop themes – to gather different agency/entity perspectives including responses to challenges, issues, and themes in order for the work group to work toward strategies and solutions. The work group discussed how these initial discussions are a first attempt at members brainstorming agency responses. Agency responses and SAR work group discussions should be taken as initial draft and not official at this stage. These responses will be revised and refined as needed over the next several months.
 - In a working session, attendees then provided initial agency perspectives to "C: An Open, Functioning channel" as listed on the Themes of Key Responses handout and began building an agency response matrix (or table). It was agreed that the template table will distributed to work group members to begin address the other key points from the handout in preparation for the February meeting.
- Amy Louise provided a brief Program update. There will be a non-federal partners meeting with Tom Pitts on January 19th to discuss the LTP and the EC will meet with Tom Pitts at the January 21st meeting to discuss the progress on the LPT. The work group discussed the CC request for deliverables/reports recommended for external peer review. The work group would like to suggest the San Acacia Fish Passage report for consideration.

Future meeting topics

- How HR and SAR will utilize the information in the SA A&R for future planning for projects, for future direction on scopes, document requirements, and how to incorporate information.
- Dedicate one meeting to compare work group identified issues and current strategies with the LTP; use that meeting to compare the LTP and possible impacts of identified issues on

the LTP (or the recovery plan recommendations) and determine if the work group is offering solutions that would also benefit the LTP.

- Discussion on which identified strategies might have to be addressed outside of the Program. The SAR work group is tasked with identifying possible strategies and solutions first; then the group could offer recommendations on which of those strategies or solutions could be included in the Program and which might be outside.

Next SAR meeting

- February 2nd from 12:30pm to 3:30pm in Socorro; location TBA (Gina)

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MEETING MINUTES

Introductions and Agenda Approval

- Gina Dello Russo called the meeting to order and introductions were made.
- The agenda was approved with the addition of a San Acacia Reach A&R peer review discussion.

SA A&R Peer Review Discussion

- Several months ago, the SAR work group was asked to supply questions for the external peer review committee to consider during the review of the SA A&R report. It is unknown if those questions or recommendations were addressed. In addition, the SAR work group has been given unnecessary access to the FTP site.
- The lead peer review expert will be presenting their findings/opinion of the SA A&R report to the EC at the February EC meeting. While the A&R is a product of the HR work group, SAR members would like to look at the document before it goes to the EC. However, the official process is unknown.
 - There is no official work group role now other than the typical deliverable review process. But members believe it is a good idea to have the work groups look at the document before it gets presented to the EC.
- How HR and SAR will utilize the information in the SA A&R for future planning for projects, for future direction on scopes, document requirements, and how to incorporate information will need to be a future topic for the SAR work group to discuss.

Action: Amy Louise will confirm with Jericho Lewis if the SA A&R report can be posted now for work group review prior to the EC presentation? The SAR work group would also like to know the process for making sure the peer review panel did address the submitted questions.

Approval of 12/03/09 SAR Meeting Minutes

- The December 3rd, 2009 San Acacia Reach (SAR) meeting minutes were approved as is.
- At the December meeting, SAR decided that draft meeting minutes will be sent to meeting attendees for initial review before sending to the rest of the workgroup. Meeting attendees will have one week to review the notes.

Action Item Review

- Tetra Tech will re-send the straw man workgroup objectives along with the December 3, 2009 draft SAR minutes to the workgroup. – *completed;*
- All SAR members will review and edit objectives 2 and 3. Comments will be due to Amy Louise within 2 weeks of the date they are sent. – *not completed;*

Action: Amy Louise will send out the most updated Objectives 2 and 3 for work group members to review and edit within the next 2 weeks.

- All workgroup members will review the themes from the San Acacia Reach workshop and come prepared to discuss agency responses at the next SAR meeting. - *completed*;

SAR Workplan

- Amy Louise updated the workplan based on last month's meeting discussions and then added a review of the Long-term Plan (LTP) once available. The purpose of the LTP review is to make sure the SAR work group is up to date with Program objectives and activities and to make sure the work group is addressing any activities or actions pertinent to the group.
- It was suggested that the dates be changed on the LTP/recovery plans review to make the LTP the first priority in order to know where the guiding document of the Program fits with the SAR work group direction. It was clarified that the SAR work group is not going to be making recommendations for recovery plan or LTP actions to the Executive Committee (EC) or to Tom Pitts (contractor hired to revise the LTP). There will be no deliverable on this task from the SAR work group.
 - Attendees supported the idea of coalescing SAR objectives, workshop themes, and agency response/priorities to those themes, and developed strategies in relationship to the LTP.
 - The work group should incorporate anything in the LTP that is applicable and could potentially be covered before 2011.
 - It was expressed as a potential future exercise to dedicate one meeting to compare work group identified issues and current strategies with the LTP; and to use that meeting to compare the LTP and possible impacts of identified issues on the LTP (or the recovery plan recommendations) and determine if the work group is offering solutions that would also benefit the LTP.
- It was suggested that a new task of "finalizing work group objectives" be added with a due date of March 2010 in order for the group to be moving forward.

Action: Work group members will submit comments, clarifications, and suggested changes to the SAR objectives to Amy Louise within the next 2 weeks.

Action: Amy Louise will compile comments on objectives and will distribute the revised version to members as a read ahead for the February meeting.

- **Question:** How will strategies identified be distinguished between those that can be addressed within the Program and those that are outside the prevue of the Program?
 - **Response:** That is a future discussion for the work group to consider.
 - There is a SAR task under Objective 2 to identify possible strategies and solutions. A new step could be added after the strategies list has been completed to provide recommendation on which strategies could be included in the Program and which might be outside.
 - The work group could develop position papers that could be made easily available or widely distributed so that efforts are not limited to in-Program agencies.
 - Under Objective 3 Task 2 (make sure the right people are at the table) it was suggested that members consider how that might include people outside the Program as needed. This is another way to help address issues that can't be addressed through the Program itself.

- **Question:** What might the brochure contain? Who is the intended audience? And how realistic is it to be produced by April?
 - **Response:** Originally, the brochure was intended to be a summary of the white papers; but it might not be realistic to expect those to be available and the brochure produced by April. The audience is to include the public.
 - It was recommended that the date be changed to later in the year - June 2nd - when the work group feels they would have a better product to distribute.
- It was suggested that the term “matrix” be rephrased to “agency responses to SA Reach workshop themes.”
- It was suggested that the web-based tools development be omitted from the work plan.
- The work group briefly discussed the San Acacia Field trip and recommended it occur in May during the high water.
 - The field trip is to be more a tour of the issues in the valley than a presentation of the white papers. The work group needs to first identify the issues.
 - Floating the entire reach experiencing how the reach acts in places during high flow could be very informative.
 - It would also good to invite those who deal with maps and photos as an opportunity to gain ground experience.
 - The work group discussed how the white papers are not expected to inform scopes, but to instead summarize what has been developed in terms of perspectives, challenges, issues, solutions, etc. Any scopes to come out of the work aren't expected until the group has been dissolved.
- Summary of suggested changes include: (1) white papers deadline changed to September 30th; (2) change the LTP review dates and put NA under deliverables column; (3) omit the web-based tools activity from the work plan; (4) replace the work “brochure” with “develop outreach products” with a due date of June 2nd; (5) rephrase “matrix” to “agency responses”; (6) add “tentative” to the schedule/date on the public forum; and (7) add “finalize objectives of work group” as a specific task with a due date of March 2010 meeting for official vote to finalize.

Action: Amy Louise will make the suggested changes to the SAR work plan and redistribute for final approval.

SAR Charter

- The SAR Work Group Charter was approved for finalization with minor changes to the membership list (i.e., removal of Lisa Croft, Susan Kelly, Matt Martinez, and David Gensler).

Review and Edit Draft Strawman Objectives

Action: Work group members will submit comments, clarifications, and suggested changes to the SAR objectives (#2 and #3) to Amy Louise by January 22nd.

Action: Gina Dello Russo will send the SAR Objective #1 summary information to Amy Louise.

Develop Agency Response to Themes

- Gina Dello Russo briefly explained the purpose behind the request for documenting agency responses to the SA workshop themes. In order for the work group to begin developing strategies and possible solutions, members need to have a “big picture” idea of what the

different agency/entity perspectives are regarding challenges, thoughts, complexities, and responses to the workshop themes.

- The work group discussed how these initial discussions are a first attempt at members brainstorming agency responses. Agency responses and SAR work group discussions should be taken as initial, draft and not official at this stage. These responses will be revised and refined as needed over the next several months.
- At the last meeting, Gina provided an example from the FWS perspective on C. Open Functioning Channels. It was suggested that the work group continue on theme C. together today.
- It was agreed that particular agency response should be noted in the matrix instead of having responses be anonymous.
- Please see the actual discussion and dialogue that follows the table for details of the conversation.

C. Open, functioning Channel/Floodplain					
Topic	ISC	BOR	COE	MRGCD	FWS
LEVEE: define current condition is a "spoil" levee ----- Valley drainage	Water loss due to levee failure detrimental to compact requirements ----- --- Support sustaining valley drainage to drain more water into the river to meet compact requirements; efficient drainage means more water for compact;	Water delivery and effective water conveyance -----	Public safety authority; Cochiti operations; -----	Protect infrastructure, adjacent farms, and other structures; public safety and maintenance in partnership; "effective" water delivery (N of SA) ----- -- crop health w/ good drainage;	Infrastructure; land use protection; "effective" management of flows/sed; connectivity of channel/floodplain; ecosystem health/ES; ----- Drains supply ? water
Floodplain Encroachment & Development in valley/zoning	Neural - If hinders efficient flow or delivery of water or affects releases from Cochiti would be against; SA Railroad Bridge	Strongly against – if alters function of river (sediment) thus affects river maintenance; Cochiti releases river	Cochiti Operations; SA Railroad Bridge	Flood control structure impacts; Cochiti releases timing of water delivery; SA Railroad Bridge	Ecosystem Health; RGSM stranding; Cochiti Releases; SA Railroad Bridge

		working w/ maintenance (sediment); SA Railroad Bridge			
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- *C: An Open, Functioning channel that ensures effective and safe passage of river flows and sediment transport*
 - *Levees Discussion*
 - MRGCD: supports public safety with less threat to the levees but private land owners might have different opinion about channel capacity and overbank flooding (as long as flooding doesn't affect safety). Sustaining drainage is important.
 - **Question:** What is meant, exactly, by "floodplain encroachment?"
 - **Response:** Buildings and structures encroaching on the floodplain.
 - The phrasing under the first bullet of C. should be to "limit buildings in the floodplains" or to make sure permanent structures are built above the floodplain.
 - In San Acacia (SA), there isn't a levee on the east side meaning that permanent structures should not be allowed on the floodplain (ex. home or barn – no; coral that could flood - yes).
 - FEMA doesn't have updated floodplains documented down there. They have supposedly been updating their maps since 2006 when Socorro wanted to be included. In the mean time, the Bosque del Apache and Save Our Bosque Task Force use: (1) land owner cooperation (i.e., as much land as they are willing to give); (2) the edge of dense vegetation from salt cedar to mesquite; and 3) FLO2D for the conceptual restoration plan to "estimate" the floodplain.
 - The historic 100 year floods are not included in the FLO2D; only the 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, etc. year flooding categories are included.
 - Reclamation: An open and functioning channel, the water delivery between the upper and lower Rio Grande, and how water is delivered through the valley are big key issues from Reclamation's standpoint. Also, sediment needs to be managed effectively. It was clarified that Reclamation is not responsible for the levees and only has general safety liability. Reclamation does provide maintenance but the levees were not intended for flood protection.
 - ISC: Regarding the levees, ISC is concerned about levee breach from the perspective of released floodwater into the low lands with no way to return to the river in order to be transported downstream (i.e., affects compact deliveries and requirements).
 - COE: Regarding responsibility for the levees – the Corps did not build nor operates the levees. The Corps has a proposed project to construct

engineered levees (with ISC and MRGCD as local sponsors) and also has an interest in building the levees for upstream of Cochiti operations in order to be able to pass significant flows (i.e., in case of large upstream flooding). Large upstream floods could cause Cochiti spills to flood throughout the valley.

- FWS: FWS wouldn't want to see a levee breach for the following reasons: (1) loss of water and (2) loss of habitat value.
 - The work group discussed the concern that no one agency is really responsible (ownership-wise) for the existing levees. Also, the low flow is not a flood control facility by purpose so there is confusion on who is responsible in terms of public safety.
 - It was requested that a schematic map showing the levee(s) and distinguishing the diversion channels and low flow channel and other features be provided to SAR members as useful in discussions for those not as familiar with the layout.
- *Valley Drainage discussion*
 - MRGCD: MRGCD supports sustaining the floodplain – anything that could cause water to slow, back up and overbank could have ecosystem benefits but in terms of drainage in the valley, it also carries the risk of causing seepage and making drains less efficient (although this concern is more for the northern reaches where MRGCD has drainages). Also, the more water put into the low flow, the more it may affect the adjacent valley and raise the water tables in places.
 - The work group discussed how the LFCC ran bank full for nearly 30 years and that is when significant impact and water-logged lands should have been reported but members were not aware of such occurrences during that time.
 - The riverside drain is what intercepted some of the flow back then and more is known about the District's drainage function now.
 - The low flow intercepts most of MRGCD's drainage as a boundary. And remember that if there are high flows in the SA reach then there will be even higher flows in the upstream reaches and that will also affect MRGCD's infrastructure.
 - The work group briefly discussed digging out and/or dredging the channel or moving the river over to the channel (like the River Mile 83 project). Then it was clarified that as the low spot on the current floodplain.
 - FWS: In terms of drainage and water quality, salinity and loss of re-circulating water might someday be an issue for the Refuge as less water filtered so more water is coming directly from human use to the Refuge. There could be more water quality issues (ex. pharmaceuticals) expected in the future. But remember that salinity itself is a part of the ecosystem.
 - ISC: is very interested in looking at ways to control the natural salinity as water quality (with delivered water to Elephant Butte) is a part of the contract with Texas.

- *Floodplain encroachment discussion*
 - This bullet is basically about how the open channel might affect the floodplain.
 - Protecting agricultural areas is also under another bullet [on the Themes of Key Responses handout] and should be more riparian areas protected under the first bullet of C.
 - MRGCD: Zoning is being discussed because it was brought up as a particular solution proposed.
 - Even if the floodplain in SA were to be zoned, there is the potential (like has occurred in other floodplains) that the zoning would specify “to build above the 100 year high water” requirements. But the owners then build *the road* to the house above the high water resulting in “dams” that create backwater pockets. This doesn’t have the natural return drainage and ecosystem health issues addressed.
 - Permanent structures could also back up sediment.
 - Regarding the zoning, FEMA defines the flood zones but it doesn’t prevent local jurisdiction from issuing building permits and enforcing regulations.
 - FEMA has the flood insurance maps with defined floodplain, but Socorro County is not included. There are old floodplain maps that are available to land owners but you cannot, in Socorro County, get federally subsidized flood insurance.
 - **Question:** Is industry in Socorro valley also considered under the “no permanent structure” definition?
 - **Response:** An example was shared that someone in Socorro County decided that a good storage place for old gas station tanks was on the floodplain near Bosquecito – which happened to flood. Some residents wanted levees built on the other side to protect their houses so Gina shared how she went to the Corps and asked this but was told the land would be condemned before any more levees were built because there is nothing economically substantial to protect on the east side to warrant the cost of construction.
 - The Corps’ current proposal does not include a new east side, just redoing the existing levees.
 - The work group discussed Cochiti releases as affecting ecosystem health and agency ability to divert water. It was shared that the Corps will cut flows back for certain requests as deemed necessary but if there are any big flows and releases can be modified to minimize flooding.
 - The work group also briefly discussed that infrastructure and vegetation are covered under other bullets [on the Themes of Key Responses handout] then they do not have to be considered again here (like the SA railroad bridge).

- The Rio Grande is transitioning to a much narrower channel than was in SA reach. This may be in part due to vegetation being allowed to grow on the bars due to low flows and once established it can't be removed easily.
- It was suggested that under A: natural habitat "evasive vegetation encroachment on the river" is added.
- *Overbank flooding*
 - This topic is a caveat to the interest of public safety but it doesn't mean totally limiting overbank flows either.
 - The work group briefly discussed the definition of "open functioning channel" and the need for overbanking to have a healthy ecosystem.
 - In relationship to other things, overbank flooding could be covered if there were adequate levees and drainage - then the overbank flows wouldn't be such a problem.
 - The open functioning channel means having a floodplain to accommodate the higher flows.
- Having done a corporate example, attendees agreed to continue developing the agency response to workshop themes outside of meeting times. The actual responses will be discussed at subsequent meetings. This also provides members the opportunity to incorporate feedback from their agency.

Action: Tetra Tech will create and distribute a template agency response table (or matrix) that includes the draft responses developed today. It was suggested that there be places in the table for (1) for clarifications/definitions; (2) authorities/responsibilities; and (3) agency mission(s).

Program update

- *EC update*
 - There will be a non-federal meeting with Tom Pitts on January 19th to discuss the LTP.
 - The EC will be meeting on January 21st with Tom Pitts to discuss the LTP.
 - There will be no changes to the Program structure at this time. The EC agreed at the Taos retreat that any structure changes should come out of the revised LTP as necessary.
- *CC Update*
 - The CC will be discussing the deliverable review process and peer review process.
 - The CC made FY10 activities recommendations that the EC has approved. The Program budget is in place at around \$3.89 million; however, there are unexpended funds that could be returned and would be applied to other activities.
 - The CC has requested that each work group recommend up to 2 deliverables or reports for external peer review in FY10.
 - The external peer review consists of a panel of experts outside the Program who will be paid by the Program to provide sound, objective

feedback on the quality and content of the submitted deliverable/report. It could be considered a quality review.

- The work group discussed submitting the SA Fish passage report for peer review consideration.
 - There is a preferred design and alternative, but it is unknown if there is a draft report that could be submitted for peer review.
 - Other suggestions should be submitted to Amy Louise before February 3rd.
- There is a Habitat Restoration (HR) field trip to the Pueblo of Sandia scheduled for January 19th.

Next meeting

- February 2nd from 12:30pm to 3:30pm in Socorro; location TBA (Gina)
- NOTE: the SAR work group usually meets on the first Thursday of each month, unless otherwise scheduled.

Action: Tetra Tech will send the raw draft notes to Steve Harris.

San Acacia Reach Ad Hoc Work group 08 January 2010 Meeting Attendees

NAME	AFFILIATION	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Robert Padialla	USBR	505-462-3626	rpadialla@usbr.gov
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