

8/04/06

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 1 Summary

Mtg. Date: August 3, 2006
Time: 3:00 pm
Location: Inwood Office - Oviedo
Project: SR 40 PD&E Study
From Silver Springs to US 17 in Marion, Lake and Volusia Counties

Attendees:

Bill Walsh – FDOT	David Dangel – Inwood
Steve Tonjes – FDOT (via phone)	Tom Roberts – EMS
Alex Hull – Inwood	Ray Emmett – EMS
David Graeber – Inwood	Carrie Sekerak - USFS

A meeting was held with the attendees listed above to begin discussions on how to determine the location, type, length, etc. for potential wildlife crossing/connectivity structures along SR 40 through the project limits.

Alex began the meeting by discussing how he would like to deal with the wildlife crossings out in the open and to determine what is best for SR 40. The question of who is responsible for and who pays for all of the different type of mitigation will be determined also.

Carrie asked whether the FHWA PD&E process addressed NEPA in the same manner that USFS does. In order to answer that, Alex provided an overview of the PD&E Study process, project need, the alternatives that will be looked at and how the alternatives will be evaluated in order to determine the recommended improvements. After this discussion, it was agreed that the FHWA and USFS service follow the same NEPA process, however, there may be some differences in terminology.

Carrie asked that FDOT consider the long-term economics of the decisions on whether to construct/buy mitigation features now versus trying to retrofit later at a much higher cost. She indicated that Sandy Jacobson (707-822-3693) has done this kind of analysis on other projects and can provide information to the SR 40 study team.

Alex once again reiterated that the purpose of this meeting and others to follow is to determine a mitigation plan for SR 40 and then determine the phasing/funding plan to implement it.

Tom Roberts gave an overview of the field survey work to date and the schedule for future field work. EMS should have all their field survey work done by the end of Spring 2007. Tom also indicated that EMS has cross referenced both State and Federal plants and species to ensure proper documentation.

Carrie indicated that the construction of SR 40 created berms that block the historic flow ways. One area in particular that she identified is adjacent to Mill Dam Lake. Tom mentioned that an improvement to re-establish this natural flow way with some kind of culvert, could actually serve additional purposes such as wetland mitigation and wildlife connectivity. Carrie indicated that the USFS has historic photography that has been scanned dating back to the 1940's that are either available at their Umatilla office or on-line.

Land acquisition for mitigation was also discussed and Carrie stated that Harold Schenk at the local level and Kyle Jones in Tallahassee can provide information on environmentally sensitive lands that have been targeted for acquisition.

Next, Alex asked the group to focus on how to determine the location, type, length, etc. for potential wildlife crossings. The initial letter from FFWCC (6 crossings identified) used bear mortality information to determine these locations. The second FFWCC letter (14 crossings), used both bear mortality and also considered habitat connectivity to determine these locations based on SR 40 being widened to 4-lanes through the entire corridor. Carrie and Tom agreed that in addition to roadkill information and habitat connectivity information, areas where SR 40 acts as a barrier need to be determined. For small species, this is everywhere.

Mitigation types, implementation schedule and funding were discussed again. Tom mentioned that funding needs to be included to evaluate how mitigation types function with the first phase of implementation to see if any changes need to be made for future mitigation types/locations in following phases. The Paynes Prairie improvements were discussed and it was determined that Kristee Booth might have some information on how that project was funded.

Fencing was discussed next. Carrie expressed a concern with the USFS ability to deal with fires, both planned and naturally occurring and how fencing could hinder their efforts. It was agreed that there needs to be something to direct animals to wildlife crossings that is both aesthetically pleasing and safe. Carrie explained how quickly wildfires can spread in the forest and that USFS has to be able to get in and cut fire lines and fencing could create an obstacle. Steve Tonjes added that FDOT has begun a research project to look at different types of methods to direct wildlife to crossings. He mentioned electrified rope and zoo fencing. The funding for this study is limited and the results may not be available in time to be useful for the SR 40 Study. Carrie asked Steve to talk to Sandy Jacobson about his study in order to try to acquire some federal funding.

Tom then briefly described the wildlife crossing evaluation matrix tool that he has developed. Tom will evaluate the 14 locations identified by FFWCC as well as other locations that EMS has identified. The second meeting to discuss the results of this analysis will be scheduled for the week of August 28, 2006.

Carrie brought up an issue that the physical roadway, whether it is 2 or 4 lanes can be a barrier, but traffic volumes on any type of road become a barrier for certain species at certain levels. Matt Aresco has done research on this issue.

Carrie also discussed funding issues and that other sources of funding need to be identified to help pay for some of the mitigation that will be identified. These could include funding that becomes available with the Scenic Byway designation. She also mentioned that there are people who specialize in grant writing and in finding funding for projects that could help. Carrie also mentioned that the Preliminary Engineering Report that is prepared needs to consider non-typical readers such as those who may be asked for funding. It should include discussion on the importance and uniqueness of the Ocala National Forest. Carrie did state that Sandy Jacobson has stated that the SR 40 PD&E Study is one of the top four most important transportation studies, from an ecological standpoint, in the country.

Action items:

1. The study team needs to receive and review the FFWCC input that is being prepared in response to the ETDM and Advance Notification processes.
2. EMS will use his wildlife crossing evaluation tool to evaluate the FFWCC crossing locations, as well as others that EMS has identified.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 5:00 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 David Dangel at (407) 971-8850 as soon as possible for resolution and revisions if necessary.