

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (TAC) Notes – May 8, 2007

Chair – Ajay Singh

Ajay Singh opened the meeting with self introductions. The following were in attendance: Tom McCubbins, Aric Lester, John Merz, Shirley Lewis, Kelly Moroney, Craig Isola, Lady Bug Doherty, Don Anderson, David Martasian, Gregg Werner, Woody Elliott, Helen Swagerty, Michael Rogner, Basia Trout, Bruce Ross, Allison Groom, Tricia Parker, Burt Bundy, and Ellen Gentry.

Announcements

The “Wild and Scenic” Environmental Film Festival will be held at the Paradise Performing Arts Center, May 11 from 4:30-10:30. For ticket information, visit www.buttecreek.org.

International Migratory Bird Day Celebration will be held May 12, 2007, 9 AM to 1 PM at the Pine Creek Unit, Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge.

A canoe float, launching at Butte City and taking out near Princeton, will be scheduled around June 23. This three hour tour will visit River Partners’ restoration sites within the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge

The SRCAF Board meeting for May has been cancelled.

The June 28, Annual Meeting/BBQ will include a boat trip from Bend to the Sacramento River Discovery Center in Red Bluff. A tour across the diversion dam will also be provided for guests who will not be attending the Board meeting. Detailed information will follow.

Tricia Bratcher, DFG, offered to give a progress report for the Shasta Dam Enlargement EIS/EIR at the June or July TAC meeting.

Activity Reports

David Martasian, DWR Critical Repairs Office, gave an emergency levee repair update regarding bank swallow mitigation compensation. Two meetings have been held to quantify bank swallow loss at RM182 and available options. The first meeting included discussions about mitigation level using linear foot measures to determine loss and artificial habitat creation, which was determined to be ineffective. Rock removal was discussed and a list of potential sites was proposed. Also included were possible conservation easements and land purchases where colonies could be expanded. At the second meeting, rock removal as the optimal compensation for RM182 was revisited and, due to GIS overlays presented by DWR Northern district, aggressive protection of remaining swallow habitat became the preferred option. No timeline for the 1600 permit has been issued.

Data compiled by Ron Schlorff, DFG Biologist, shows a preference by bank swallows for east facing slopes with less heavily vegetated grassland, rather than riparian overstory, raising questions about whether rock removal at riparian sites would be effective mitigation. Concern was also expressed regarding single species management as opposed to ecosystem management. David noted that site visits will be made to determine bank swallow potentials. Aric Lester suggested discussions to get additional criteria included in the site list including erosion rate. At RM182 there would have been 2-5 years of habitat. The mitigation sites should have better longevity than that. A site at RM171.5 with a landowner interested in conservation was discussed as a possible easement. This site currently has high longevity based on erosion rates.

David pointed out that mitigating loss of meander is not a high priority because there are no specific regulations. Although there have been few questions about meander process, it is being addressed on a broader scale; long term solutions incorporate meander by providing grants for restoration work to preserve ag and wildlife, but allow river processes.

Biological Opinions (BO) addressing the mitigation and monitoring plans will be available. The final BO from USFWS was available Monday; it is anticipated from NOAA Fisheries in the next couple of weeks. There will be no opportunity to comment. David will check to see if RM182 is included. Bank swallows are a state listed species and therefore addressed under the 1600 permit. They will not be included in the Federal BO.

A revised copy of the mitigation plans for Sacramento RM182, RM99.5, and Bear RM1.2, will be posted on the SRCAF website. Burt offered to coordinate the pooling of comments.

Next steps include evaluating potential sites for compensation and coordinating site visits in the near future. A proposal will go to DFG from DWR suggesting an approach to the negotiated process. SRCAF offered to assist in any way possible.

Trees and vegetation on levees were discussed. It was suggested that this would be a good workshop subject, and could include Corps information, levee set up, the role of local levee districts and other entities, etc. Ajay offered SRCAF to disseminate information.

Gregg reported on Kopta Slough. A meeting and field trip was held three weeks ago, to look at solutions for dealing with erosion at the west bridge abutment, erosion occurring in the State Recreation Area on the east side, and potential for rock removal north of Woodson Bridge. Tehama County has expressed strong support for protection of the bridge. Allowing the river to reestablish a channel through Kopta Slough would change the angle it hits the west bank and reduce the pressure at the bridge. This project may qualify for Prop 1E funds.

Current Projects/Updates

The CSP Pest and Regulatory Effects Study update by TNC is postponed until the June TAC. There will be a meeting in Colusa, Friday, May 11 for discussion and comments on the preliminary conclusions regarding regulations and pest species. Feedback from farmers, ag groups, etc., will be available at the next TAC meeting.

New Projects or Proposal Review

Craig Isola, USFWS, gave a review of the CA Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) Proposal. Copies of the proposal are available regarding funding for habitat restoration on private lands. He reviewed the history of the proposal submitted last May, which was not funded for lack of non-federal matching funds. The proposal was rewritten last month to provide economic incentive to landowners to restore habitat. Comments are due to DFG by May 15. The 10 year program allows landowners, with marginal cropland, to restore to riparian habitat for incentive payment of \$400/acre/year. This would allow the creation of riparian corridors between existing riparian areas along 14 miles of river. Cost share restoration monies are available. WCB has committed to pay for restoration practices and there is an agreement with DFG for incentive monies each year.

This program gives an economic incentive to take areas out of production that are too expensive to plant. Planting riparian strips has the potential to slow erosion and increase longevity of orchards, protect water quality from pesticide drips, and screen debris. After the sign up period and evaluation by the ranking team, the agreements would go into effect for selected properties.

Language will be applied to the Biological Opinion to allow land to be returned to baseline, or for a landowner to sign on to a Safe Harbor in order to return property back to farming after the 10 year period.

This program may also help with native grass planting for bank swallows, and dovetail with the SRCAF Safe Harbor. SRCAF offered to help coordinate to get the work done and will put the proposal on their website when it has been received.

Programmatic Safe Harbor discussion

Beverley gave a review of the Safe Harbor Agreement. Safe harbor elements include: baseline conditions/methods to determine baseline, net conservation benefit, management actions and/or conservation measures, anticipated incidental take levels from management actions, agreement/permit duration, notification requirements and monitoring plan (compliance, biological).

The goal is to provide net conservation benefit for two federally listed species and six state listed species. The baseline can be set 18 months prior to restoration. NRCS is also available for partnership. Input and comments were requested. A draft has previously been emailed.

Next Meeting Date and Location

The next TAC meeting was set for June 5, at Willows City Hall.