

**Tri-County F.I.S.H. Team Public Meeting
(Funding for Improved Salmonid Habitat)**

**City of Ventura, City Hall,
501 Poli St., Ventura
Santa Cruz Conference Room, 2nd floor in the West Wing
Thursday, July 21, 2005
1:00 to 3:00**

Minutes

Participants

Rob Almy, Santa Barbara County Water Agency
Benjamin Boer, Cambria Community Services District
Dennis Harper, Matilija Fly Fishers
Ben Livsey, Questa Consulting
Debi McAlpine, Ventura County WPD
Steve Offerman, Ventura County Supervisor Bennett's Office
Jeff Peters, Questa Consulting
Derek Poultney, Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
Kate Rees, Cachuma Conservation and Release Board
Lew Riffle, Santa Barbara Flyfishers
Margaret Roper, California Department of Fish and Game
Matt Stoecker, Stoecker Ecological
Karen Waln, City of Ventura
Eric Weir, San Luis Obispo County Public Works
Helena Wiley, Santa Barbara County Water Agency

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Almy called the meeting to order and welcomed the group to the meeting. All participants introduced themselves. No additions to the agenda were made.

Administrative Changes, Grants

Mr. Almy reported that a transfer of administrative responsibility from the Santa Barbara County Water Agency, the current administrator, would be needed by the end of the calendar year 2005, due to the request by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors that such a transfer be made. Mr. Almy noted that discussions with the Cambria Land Trust had been initiated, and that this organization may be a good candidate for taking on the administrative duties for the TCFT project. Mr. Almy noted that the current grant allows for administrative

costs to be covered, so the new administrator would not incur costs for taking on these duties. Ms. Roper announced then announced that after conversations with other DFG staff, the department decided that the new administrator should be at the County level if at all possible. This would ensure accessibility and reinforce county level ties. The grant proposal that was submitted in the Spring of 2005 (3rd grant request to DFG for this program) was applied for by the Santa Barbara County Water Agency.

Ms. Roper indicated that DFG will need to know by August 15, 2005, who will be taking on the role of administrator of the proposed grant, so that DFG can review that grant with the new administrator in mind. Ms. Rees agreed that her agency would also prefer a county body to administer the grant, and hoped that there was still a chance the Santa Barbara County could continue to administer the grant. Ms. Roper noted that the grant contract currently unsigned (2nd grant to DFG for this program) would pay for the program for fiscal year 05/06, and the grant under review would pay for fiscal year 06/07. The unsigned grant contract, the 2nd grant, needs to be signed by Santa Barbara County Water Agency, because this is the agency to which the funds have been awarded (encumbered). Ms. Waln stated that for the 2nd grant, in the 05-06 fiscal year, the group will also need an agency to take over administration, and that for the sake of consistency, it should be the same agency that takes the 3rd grant. Mr. Almy asked whether the unsigned contract can be signed by an agency other than SBCWA.

Ms. Roper answered that this is not possible. If the money is not taken by the agency that was awarded the funds (SBCWA), the money goes back into the funding pot, at which point it can either go to the next project in line or is retained for the following year. Ms. Rees commented that, based on information from another DFG staff person, the current contract is being spent more slowly than anticipated, and may be extended past the current contract end-date, in order to continue the flow of funds for the program. One option would be for the new administrator to re-apply for the funds currently requested (3rd grant) in December. This would mean the program would go without funding for several months, but could be re-started shortly thereafter with the new administrator.

Mr. Almy noted that he can ask the Santa Barbara County Public Works Department whether the deadline given to the Water Agency for transferring responsibility (December 2005) could be extended until July 2006 in order to allow for continued administration of the unsigned grant. If another County would be able to volunteer to take over the 3rd grant by August 15th, this would allow for transition in July of 2006. San Luis Obispo and Ventura County representatives agreed to follow up with their departments to see whether either county could take over administrative duties. Ms. Roper noted that a verbal commitment for Grant # 3 would be needed by August 15th, 2005, but that paperwork could follow at a later date.

TCFT Project Status

Mr. Peters gave a project status report on several projects being carried out by Questa. Mr. Peters talked about the BMP handbook in development. It will serve as a quick reference for design guidelines, a field guide, as well as a list of permitting conditions for fish related projects in the tri-counties, but it will not fulfill these three goals in the stand alone document. Rather, the handbook will refer readers to more specific and complete information in other sources. Mr. Peters also discussed the Permit Streamlining project, in which Questa's assigned task was to develop a work plan for creating a streamlined permitting process for the tri-county region.

Mr. Peters outline four components of the work plan: (1) strategy to address short term/high priority projects, (2) a regional general permit, (3) coordination with the CCRCDC on its permit coordination program, and (4) exploring the use of general permits in ongoing routine maintenance. Ms. Roper volunteered to provide the TCFT with DFG's version of the regional general permit. Mr. Peters inquired about what DFG would need from the tri-county region in order to get DFG to agree to a regional general permit. Mr. Peters also asked whether asking DFG to be involved in the development of both a regional general permit and the RCD's coordinated permit program simultaneously would be problematic for the state staff. Ms. Roper commented that the RCD program is much less involved than the regional general permit would be. Mr. Almy asked whether the TCFT could pay DFG for additional staff time to work on the regional general permit and/or to have a consultant work on TCFT's side of the work. Ms. Roper answered that both would be possible, and that there are examples of agencies paying for DFG staff time for work on their projects in northern California.

Mr. Livsey presented a powerpoint presentation on their progress to determine fish passage priorities for the tri-county region. The powerpoint presentation is available on Questa's FTP site. The presentation described the basis for the methodology used, the factors considered in prioritization calculations, and the ranking calculations, based on key barrier ranking and watershed ranking. Key Barrier Ranking takes into account habitat quality, length of reach opened to passage with correction of the barrier, and salmonid population status. Watershed ranking takes into account recovery potential and habitat suitability for salmonids. Data from all known studies on habitat in the tri-counties were used. Data gaps exist because streams and rivers across the tri-counties have been studied to differing degrees.

Next steps include adding other determining variables such as constructability, equipment access, landowner willingness, and cost to keystone barriers and all barriers within top ranked watersheds. Mr. Offerman asked where Questa is in the prioritization process. Mr. Livsey answered that the model is set up and waiting for additional data to be entered. Mr. Stoecker noted that information on the Santa Clara River was coming, and would be ready in the fall of 2005.

Mr. Almy noted a concern that large and small watersheds not be considered through the same framework, and that there was a need to incorporate into the methodology a way to distinguish between the general sizes of watersheds. Mr. Stoecker replied that the keystone barrier calculation would take that into account. Mr. Almy suggested that the presentation of the results be shown by size or type of comparable rivers and streams. Mr. Offerman asked whether tributaries would be considered separate from mainstems. Mr. Stoecker replied that yes, several keystone barriers could be located in a single system, on the mainstem, as well as important tributaries. Mr. Offerman asked whether there would be any additional ground-truthing of the data sources used in the prioritization. Mr. Stoecker said that many of the systems had already been ground-truthed, and the current budget did not allow for further ground-truthing for the TCFT effort. Ms. Rees asked whether flights over these systems had been used for any of the prior ground-truthing work. Mr. Stoecker replied that yes, flights had been used in some cases. Mr. Weir asked whether a past prioritization of fish passage barrier done in San Luis Obispo County has been taken into consideration in the currently proposed prioritization model. Mr. Peters replied that the data from that study had been used, but not the prioritization. Questa staff also noted that all existing known studies on fish passage in the tri-county region had been used to develop the current database.

Participant Updates

Ms. Rees announced progress on the Santa Ynez River Fish Plan including the completed analysis of appropriate flows for overwintering of steelhead in Hilton Creek. Another study in progress looks at the effect of releases to replenish groundwater for downstream water rights holder on fish movement: the study is showing no significant effect. Ms. Rees also announced the publishing of the first Fish Management Newsletter from her agency. She also described a study about to start which will look at genetic samples of fish above Cachuma Lake for comparison with downstream stocks. Ms. Rees also mentioned a new employee at her agency, Tim Robinson, a hydrologist, who will likely be joining the TCFT effort.

Mr. Stoecker described a project he is working on with "American Rivers" to remove a dam on Horse Creek, an important tributary on the Sisquoc River. The project will open approximately 8 miles of habitat.

Mr. Weir announced that San Luis Obispo has started the process to remove their #1 ranked barrier at Feraski Crossing on Santa Rose Creek.

Mr. Harper highlighted a July 12th article in the LA Times about snorkel studies down by Mark Capelli on some area rivers that revealed a surprising number of

young fish. It is assumed that heavy runoff this spring has helped to scour our pools and clean gravel, allowing for strong populations.

Ms. Wain explained that the Habitat Conservation Plan the City of Ventura has been working on was not progressing as well as hoped due to initial feedback from NOAA that the HCP was not the best route to take. Ms. Wain expressed frustration at this feedback, due to NOAA's involvement in the development of the HCP for several years.

A person in attendance noted a concern about the Los Robles diversion, saying that twice this spring, there has been no flow in the river. The concern is that the Casitas District, in charge of controlling the flow, has allowed two periods of no flow into the river. Others present suggested that Casitas District be contacted with this concern, and that USGS flow gauges be examined for evidence of the lack of flows.

Mr. Offerman announced that the Ventura County Board of Supervisors had certified the final EIR for the Matillija Dam removal. He mentioned that the funding request is at the Senate, waiting for a decision.

Mr. Almy announced that the Water Agency had received approval for several projects from the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors including the barrier modification project at the Gobernador Debris basin, and also for the recent TCFT grant funding request. Mr. Almy mentioned that Carpinteria Creek Plan is nearly complete, and that a briefing on fish issues was given to the County Board of Supervisors on July 5th.

Wrap-Up

The next Public Meeting of the TCFT will be held Thursday, October 12th at 1:00 in San Luis Obispo County. Mr. Weir will reserve a meeting space for this meeting.