West Mojave Plan
Task Group 2
Ramada Inn, Victorville
May 15, 2002

Attendees

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Jim Anderson	AFFA, CORVA	Lorelei Oviatt	Kern County Planning
Jim Arbogast	CORVA	Doug Parham	WSBCLA
Marie Brashear	CDC, WRA, SPCW	Joe Pendleton	Desert Survivors
Paul D. Condon	Consultant	Mary Anne Phillips	AFFA, CORVA
Michael Connor	Desert Tortoise Grps	Eddie Phillips	AFFA, CORVA
Paige Donahoe	CORDR	Bob Sackett	Desert Vipers
Jeri Ferguson	Cal 4-Wheel Drive	Bob Sadderup	AFFA
Jennifer Foster	PLPU BCHC	Ron Schiller	High Desert MUC
Ken Foster	PLPU BCHC	Joe Schuster	Public
Martin Gill	CORDR	Debbie Stevens	AVTREC
Peter Kiriakos	Sierra Club	Robert Strub	Trona
Paul Kober	CORVA	Barbara Veale	People for USA
Carol Landry	Public Land/ Use	Hector Villalobos	BLM - Ridgecrest
David Matthews	Public	Jim Wilson	Lost Coyotes MC
Sam Merk	Public		

West Mojave Team: Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks.

Introduction

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:15 PM and introductions were made. Haigh noted that this will be the final meeting for Task Group 2. He asked that any changes to the April 24th Task Group 2 meeting notes be e-mailed to him.

Route Designation Update

Bill Haigh noted that the network for the tortoise DWMAs has been completed. Les Weeks reviewed the process to date and indicated that within the DWMA, the process is driven by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and that biology is central to the process. Les Weeks indicated that feedback from the April 24th Task Group meeting was incorporated into the decision tree for the route designation effort. The following discussion occurred:

- Eddie Phillips asked what is being used to determine the habitat designation? Actual,

model or potential habitat? Larry LaPre responded that most of the areas designated in this process are in critical tortoise habitat, and that for the remaining species, points or polygons of actual locations are being used. LaPre emphasized that the team is using data showing where the species has been found.

- Peter Kiriakos stated that the logic tree needs to evaluate the cumulative effect on the management area. Kiriakos also asked that the network be evaluated against the 1980 route inventory. Les Weeks replied that the route designation team focused not only on the individual routes, but also on the wider area, and did take cumulative effects of routes into consideration.

- Dave Matthews asked that the numbers in the boxes on the decision tree be clarified.

- Mike Connor asked that the biologist responsible for reviewing the decision on each route sign the ROD for that route. Connor also expressed concern that the MAZs are driving the process, and asked for better definition of how the MAZs are defined, and whether the variability in scale between the various MAZs influences the decision making process. Bill Haigh responded that the size variation between the MAZs has little relevancy to what the route network will look like. MAZs are used as a geographical reference tool only. Les Weeks indicated that various scales of maps are used in the designation effort, and staff is continually zooming in and out to look at an area at various scales. Connor indicated he was concerned about the process affecting objectivity.

- Eddie Phillips stated that directed recreation has a greater cumulative effect than dispersed recreation.

- Doug Parham asked about language in the CDCA Plan in regards to routes created after 1980. Bill Haigh indicated that the CDCA Plan language is confusing and contradictory, and needs interpretation. Haigh added that existing language could be modified with the plan amendment. Parham asked whether there is anyway to determine the age of a route. Haigh responded that it would be possible to check against old aerial photography. It was noted that the 1986 access guides do not provide a good representation of on the ground conditions at that time.

- Jim Wilson asked how RS2477 was considered. Bill Haigh responded that RS2477 claims will proceed on a separate track and that the designation of a public land route network will not preclude local government's ability to assert an RS2477 claim.

- Martin Gill asked that the Back Country Discovery Trail be included in the document.

- Pete Kiriakos asked that route maps for the public show DWMA and HCA boundaries.

- Lorelei Oviatt asked what information will be available at the scoping meetings. Haigh

responded that the decision tree, samples of data forms and maps showing the proposed network will be available.

- Jim Wilson suggested showing routes as a dashed line where they cross private land in order to show the connection while distinguishing them from designated routes on public lands. Harold Johnson noted that there is no authority to designate routes on private land. It was suggested that BLM should look more closely at private lands proposed for purchase or exchange, such as certain Catellus lands. Pete Kiriakos suggested adding an item to the decision tree that considers whether it is feasible to cross private property, or whether an alternative route needs to be considered. Bill Haigh added that if a major road is affected by denial of access across private property in the future, a plan amendment could implement an alternative route. Some discussion occurred as to whether BLM under FLPMA has the right to condemn land to acquire access rights. Jeri Ferguson added that the decision tree should consider private and public routes, and that if redundant, access must be provided on public lands. Harold Johnson noted that access over private land has been an issue in only a few instances over the years. Les Weeks indicated that he will carefully consider this issue, and where it makes sense, concentrate routes on public lands. Bill Haigh added that staff will use their best judgment in these decisions, and that the system is flexible enough to adjust routes later if necessary.

- Ed LaRue's opinion was that a methodology should be developed to track the degree of change in the route system. This is needed to show the level of change in important tortoise areas.

- Doug Parham expressed concern that some of the routes included in the inventory have not been ridden on for a long period of time. If involved in the number crunching, he is concerned these routes may skew the numbers. Bill Haigh noted that routes have been attributed based on level of use making it easy to query the system. It was noted that while some routes may be used occasionally or seasonally, they are still important routes to users (i.e. upland game hunting routes used only in the fall).

- Ed LaRue was asked whether a study has been done to determine whether route closures have had a positive effect on tortoise populations. LaRue responded that such a study has not been done. Mike Connor indicated that lack of compliance with road closures further complicates the issue.

- Les Weeks was asked whether provisions were being made to provide connectivity between areas for green sticker vehicles. He responded that this is being taken into consideration.

- Jim Wilson noted that closure of some heavily used routes, in particular those that are widened over time as riders avoid poorly maintained sections, may be appropriate in order to rehabilitate the route. Les Weeks noted that this may be appropriate in more urbanized

areas, while a different approach may be better elsewhere, as lightly used roads that are closed will recover more quickly.

- It was pointed out that public safety must be considered prior to closure of duplicate routes.

Les Weeks indicated that the next steps include completing the designation process, and entering the designations into the GIS system.

Bill Haigh summarized the route network proposal as consisting of the 12 areas surveyed in 2001 and 2002, as well as networks identified in the ACEC plans and routes designated in 1985 and 1987 for the remaining MUC Class L and Class M areas. Haigh indicated that maps would be displayed at the scoping meetings and available for review through the EIS review process. The following additional discussion occurred:

- Bob Strub indicated that the community of Trona might want more restrictions on roads due to air quality (PM10) concerns and the potential of air quality issues to impact the mining community.

- Mike Connor asked for clarification of how the significance of the route network to recovery would be determined. Bill Haigh responded that the Fish and Wildlife Service would review the EIS and make that determination. Connor indicated that he is interested in reducing redundancy and proliferation, and reducing routes in certain areas.

- The following website address was provided for people to access West Mojave data at the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Project website (MDEP): www.mojavedata.gov.

- Pete Kiriakos indicated that in regards to dust, a study exists that analyzes and links the affects of dust on vegetation. Bill Haigh asked him to provide the study to Ed LaRue for consideration.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 PM.