



## **Town of Marana Habitat Conservation Plan Stakeholder Working Group Update**

### **Meeting regarding Programmatic Agreement with US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**

Jennifer Christelman, Scott Richardson, and Marjorie Blaine met regarding the development of a Programmatic Agreement (PA) between the USACE and USFWS for HCP projects that may impact Waters of the U.S (WUS). The Corps would prefer to develop a Regional General Permit (RGP) for the entire Pima County, covering both capital improvement and private projects. The Town will need to create a list of projects that will impact WUS. The USACE will decide whether the covered activities require notification or non-notification and will consult with the USFWS on the RGP. The County and Town's HCPs would be considered Biological Assessments (BAs). The USFWS will issue a Biological Opinion on the HCPs under consultation of the RGP. The USACE will be setting up credits for mitigation in place of the current \$/acre; this process may take about three years to set up.

Each community in Pima County will be contacted to participate in developing the RGP covered activities. The Town has developed a draft list of projects (as impacts to waters of the US) and sent to the County for comment and coordination. If you have any suggestions for projects (or impacts) to include please submit to your jurisdiction representative or the Town.

### **El Rio Open Space Plan**

The El Rio (aka old borrow pit) Open Space Management Plan was adopted by the Town Council on Jan 18, 2011. The NW Fire District provided a fire prevention plan as part of the management plan. The plan details what disc golf activities are allowed, such as the number of tournaments, no new disc golf baskets, no bleachers or night lighting, etc. It describes vegetation maintenance activities such as not removing tamarisk until new native vegetation which will be planted has matured, not damming up the flow of the river into the pit during storm events, and similar items which were previously recommended by the TBT for management of this space. Dennis Abate (AGFD biologist) wanted to know what the protocol is if a sensitive species should move into the area. This was not spelled out in the plan, but avoidance would be the policy. Some rules for the site have been posted to remind disc golfers to avoid disturbance to wildlife, and additional signage will be posted now that the management plan has been approved.

Tucson Audubon Society will be working with the Town to plan and plant native vegetation, under a contract to use riparian mitigation money the Town received previously. The money came to the Town through USFWS and a portion will be rolled over to future years for maintenance or replacement of plants. Kendall Kroesen (Audubon Society) noted that the El Rio Open Space is a challenging site because it is very dry most of the time, but floods occasionally and water can remain for months. Jen will talk to the USACE to see whether areas like the El Rio Open Space and the Avra-Valley/I-10 County property could be set up as receiving sites for mitigation credits.

## **Inclusion of Red and Yellow Bats in the HCP**

Christa Weise, Bat Conservation International provided information on these two species. The yellow bat in our area is now called the western yellow bat (*Lasiurus xanthinus*). Yellow bats are insectivores that are mainly known to inhabit untrimmed palm trees in the Tucson area, where they hang from the undersides of the leaves. There are not many areas in Marana Town limits that have groups of palms. Scott Richardson, USFWS, said that the yellow bats could possibly be found at Alamo Springs in Wild Burro Canyon or in Cochie Canyon.

Western red (*Lasiurus blossevillii*) bats are known to use riparian areas along the Santa Cruz River. Christa said they are solitary and somewhat migratory, so there is not much information on this species. They are difficult to mist net and acoustic analysis provides presence/absence information, but not numbers of individuals. Red bats also are killed by wind turbines. They are not known to occur in town, but there has not been much effort to trap them here either. Scott Richardson believes they could be found in some of the drainages in the Tortolita Mountains. They are known to occur in broad-leaf trees in riparian areas. They may be listed in the future since they are tied to riparian areas, which continue to decrease.

The TBT recommends that western red and yellow bats be included in the HCP, with the understanding that no additional mitigation measures would be required.

Adding these species will require that the HCP and EIS go back out for public review, as was planned anyway due to the changes in the covered activities (mostly reduction). USFWS has no petitions to list the either of these species now, but in general, tree-dwelling bats are in decline.

We will need to develop habitat models for the red and yellow bats, in part based on current Pima County maps, and then refined by this group. It was suggested that Scott Richardson, Christa Weise, Tim Snow, and Sandy Wolf would be a good group to take a field trip to determine habitat potential within the Town limits. Christa and Scott will help write the HCP sections for the red and yellow bats.

## **Tucson Shovel-nosed Snake (TSS) Mitigation**

AZGFD is coordinating with snake experts to develop a standardized TSS survey protocol for use in the Town of Marana. Scott Richardson recommended regional road surveys be conducted, and have the stakeholders contribute funds for the surveys.

## **Other Items**

AZGFD performed track counts and collected road-kill data for Tangerine Rd. and La Cholla Blvd. since these roads will be widened (in the RTA plan, Tangerine Rd. will be widened in three separate sections). The desert tortoise survey map for the HCP has been revised because desert tortoises were identified along Tangerine Rd. The ground snake was also found as road-kill in this study. The Town will overlay the new locations on soils and topography maps to determine which areas should be mapped as habitat for the tortoise and ground snake.