



Minutes

Measure M2 Environmental Oversight Committee

Committee Members

Lisa Bartlett, Chairman
Melanie Schlotterbeck, Vice Chair
Chris Flynn, Caltrans District 12
Brian Goodell, OCTA Board of Directors
Veronica Li, US Army Corp of Engineers
Derek McGregor, DMc Engineering
Bev Perry, Civic Engagement Consultant
Dan Silver, Endangered Habitats League
Jonathan Snyder, US Fish & Wildlife
John Walsh, CA Wildlife Conserv. Board

Orange County Transportation Authority
Via Teleconference

Wednesday, February 3, 2021 at 2:30pm

Member(s) Absent

David Mayer, CA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
Dr. Pauline Merry, Taxpayers Oversight Comm.

1. Welcome

Chair Lisa Bartlett call the Environmental Oversight Committee (EOC) meeting to order. Chair Bartlett went over meeting protocols and asked Marissa Espino to take roll call attendance.

Chair Lisa Bartlett introduced new EOC member and OCTA Board Member Brian Goodell from the City of Mission Viejo.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Lisa Bartlett led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Approval of August 5, 2020 Minutes

Chairman Lisa Bartlett asked if there are any additions or corrections to the August 5, 2021 EOC minutes. Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck said on page three, second paragraph it says she is a member of Hills for Everyone. She is a consultant. She asked that the letter "s" be added to Chino Hill in the second sentence.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck, seconded by Bev Perry and passed unanimously to approve the August 5, 2020 EOC meeting minutes with changes.

4. Environmental Mitigation Program Endowment Fund Investment Report

Dan Phu said each year staff provides an update on the Environmental Mitigation Program Endowment Fund Investment Report. Dan then introduced Robert Davis of OCTA's Treasury and Public Finance Department. Robert provided a status of the endowment fund for the quarter ending September 30, 2020. He provided background on the fund. Based on the September reports provided by the foundation, assets in the endowment pool were \$1.14B and the foundation assets were \$2.03B for the quarter. Robert said OCTA deposits approximately \$2.9M to the fund on an annual basis. He said OCTA's total balance for the quarter ending September 30, 2020 with the foundation was approximately \$16,046,000, which exceeds the fiscal year 2021 target by approximately \$44,000. If the fund continues to grow at this rate, it will exceed the target for this fiscal year. Robert said overall the fund is on track to reach the goal of \$46.2M by the end of the funding period.

5. Fires Update

Lesley provided an overview of recent wildfires in Orange County and the impact on OCTA Preserves. She said on October 26 two wildfires broke out – the Silverado and Blue Ridge Fires – and on December 2 the Bond Fire started. Together these fires burned over 33,000 acres. These fires threatened several preserves and affected three of OCTA's restoration projects. The Silverado fire impacted three restoration projects – the Agua Chinon, Bee Flat and West Loma Restoration Projects. The Blue Ridge Fire did not impact any preserves but just missed the North Coal Canyon Restoration Project. The Bond Fire came right up to the Silverado Fire, but it did burn a bit of the Bee Flat Restoration Project and a good portion of the West Loma Restoration Project. Lesley provided a matrix of the costs of the projects. She said the Bee Flat project will not incur additional costs. Staff is working through the costs and strategies associated with the damage to the Agua Chinon and West Loma projects

6. Irvine Ranch Conservancy (IRC) Restoration Projects Update

Lesley Hill introduced Michael O'Connell, President and CEO of the Irvine Ranch Conservancy. Michael provided information on the IRC and the restoration projects. He started with the Bee Flat Restoration Project. He showed pictures of the habitat before the recent wildfires, and said a healthy habitat should come back after being burned. Next, he said the Silverado Restoration Project is on track to meet success criteria in 2021 barring any more fires. The Agua Chinon Restoration Project is adjacent to the Orange County Waste and Recycling mitigation project. OCTA has a smaller portion of the overall project. This project was on track to meet the success criteria, but the entire project was burned. He said it will take a couple years to get it back on track for final sign-off. The West Loma Restoration Project was hit by the Bond Fire and it was completely burned. This project should recover well because work was done to rid the area of weeds and leave the native plants. Michael talked about the

devastation that dozer lines have on the projects. He said there is a lot of erosion associated with these projects after burns. The IRC will be doing reseeding to help, and supplemental irrigation will be needed. In Agua Chinon there will be oak reseeding done. Weeding will need to be done in these burn areas. Michael said wildlife management agencies will most likely be changing their wildlife expectations for the burn areas.

Committee Member Comments:

Chair Bartlett asked about vertical posts on slide 26. Michael O'Connell said they are tree tubes with oaks and other woody trees inside. The tubes protect the trees from deer and creates warmth for the buds to grow. The tubs come off when the trees are strong enough. He said when a tree seed or acorn falls the chance of it becoming a tree are one in a million, so this is how we protect it.

Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck asked about the funding for these projects and wondered if contingency funds would pay for the damage. Lesley Hill said there are some contingency funds built in, but they have been eaten up by recent droughts and were not big enough amounts to cover the damage done by the wildfires. She said on the preserves, fires are anticipated and covered within the endowments.

Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck said she hopes the IRC is documenting the recovery process. She would like OCTA Staff to flag this item to be shown to the EOC in one-year from now, so the EOC can see how the recovery process is going and how it can be learned from. Michael O'Connell said the IRC is using a scientific landscape approach to restoration to make restoration dollars go further. He said this is an experiment that has been forced upon us and the IRC will lean on it and document everything. They will use burned land that is not being restored as a control. The IRC will publish papers on all of this. Michael said it might take a couple years before we really know if the land is healthy. It may look like weeds are taking over, but then some years later the native plants come back.

Melanie Schlotterbeck asked if soil samples are being done to determine if mycorrhizae in the soil needs to be replenished. Robert Freeze (IRC) said the IRC is not planning on sampling the soil mycorrhizae. He said from his research the impacts of extreme heat only go about an inch. There should be enough healthy mycorrhizae below that in the soil. He said it would be interesting to look at, but the priority will be managing the vegetation over the next years.

Dan Silver asked what it means for the mitigation credits. Jonathan Snyder noted the credits that have already been signed-off on, OCTA has those credits, but the areas that have not been signed-off on, OCTA would still be on the "on-the-hook" to continue the work to bring them up to the standards. IRC will continue to manage the sites. Lesley Hill thanked the wildlife agencies and the IRC for their responsiveness, partnership, and flexibility on these matters. She said it has felt like a great collaboration.

Bev Perry asked if OCTA can take some of the excess endowment fund money to help pay for these sorts of impacts since there is not enough contingency funds for the restoration projects. Dan Phu noted that the endowment funds that were just discussed were meant to be a closed system to help establish sufficient funds (up to a total of \$46.5M) to later create individual Preserve endowments for management purposes. As far as what has happened to the IRC project, OCTA is able to absorb some of the financial impacts with the existing revenues under Measure M2.

Chair Bartlett asked Dan to confirm if it's a non-wasting endowment; Dan confirmed that a non-wasting endowment will be established.

7. OCTA Preserves' Fire Management Plans (FMP) Update

Lesley Hill provided background on the OCTA Preserves' FMPs. She introduced Carol Rice of Wildland Res. Mgt. who provided an update. Carol said this is the second progress report of a project that will conclude in 2021. She and her team have just about completed an FMP for the Silverado Chapparal Preserve, which will serve as a template for the rest of the preserves. Carol provided background on the development of the FMPs to date. She said during recent fire activity the Silverado Chapparal Preserve was threatened and Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) referenced the draft FMP including a sensitive resources map. The team has submitted a draft FMP for the Trabuco Rose Preserve and expects to be finished in 2021.

Committee Member Comments:

Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck asked if the target completion date of 2021 is for all the preserves. Carol Rice said the intention is for all the plans to be completed in 2021.

Brian Goodell asked if he could get a copy of the Trabuco Rose FMP. Carol Rice said the Silverado Chaparral would probably be the most beneficial because it has gone through all the reviews. Lesley Hill said they will all be shared and distributed to the EOC when they are complete.

Derek McGregor asked who has the final approval. Lesley Hill said because the FMPs are a requirement of the Conservation Plan and the Resource Management Plans, staff is working closely with the wildlife management agencies and will get their sign-off. She said the document itself will have OCFA as well as OCTA sign-off on the FMPs. She said they do not technically need OCTA Board approval.

8. Hikes and Equestrian Rides

Marissa Espino said the recent hikes/rides have been cancelled due to statewide executive orders. OCTA will release the revised 2021 Wilderness Preserve Hiking and Equestrian Riding Tour calendar once the order has been lifted and in-person outreach and events resume. Currently all OCTA public/community meetings are being conducted virtually at this time for the health and safety of everyone. Marissa said

OCTA has been talking to some of the equestrian community members and there is a plan to extend the trail to some of the fire trails already established on the preserves once the rides resume.

9. Public Comments

Marissa Espino said a public comment was received regarding Item 8 from David Seroski on February 3, 2021 at 11:22 am and was emailed to EOC members at 2:25 pm February 3, 2021 and will be retained as part of the record.

10. Committee Member Reports

Chair Lisa Bartlett mentioned the OCTA Board of Directors has one opening for a public member. She said OCTA is looking to fill the gaps and said it would be great to have a member with an environmental or air quality background. If you or anyone you know would be interested, please apply.

Vice Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck thanked staff for making these meetings happen virtually. She also welcomed new committee member Brian Goodell and offered to chat with him about the environmental community and the work with OCTA. Chair Lisa Bartlett said Vice Chair Schlotterbeck has a wealth of knowledge. Brian Goodell said he met with staff yesterday and received an abundance of information and would meet with Vice Chair Schlotterbeck in the future.

11. Next Meeting – May 5, 2021

Chairman Lisa Bartlett thanked all in attendance and said the next meeting is scheduled for May 5, 2021.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.