

Measure M Environmental Oversight Committee

October 5, 2011
Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Chair Patricia Bates, OCTA Board of Directors
Vice-Chair Melanie Schlotterbeck, Measure M Support Groups
Chris Flynn, Caltrans
Nancy Jimeno, California State University, Fullerton
James Kelly, Measure M2 Taxpayers Oversight Committee
David Mayer, CA Department of Fish and Game
Jonathan Snyder, US Fish and Wildlife Services
Greg Winterbottom, OCTA Board of Directors

Committee Members Absent:

Veronica Chan, US Army Corps of Engineers
Dave Means, California Wildlife Conservation Board
Adam Probolsky, Probolsky Research
Dan Silver, Endangered Habitats League
Sylvia Vega, Caltrans

Orange County Transportation Authority Staff Present:

Marissa Espino, Senior Community Relations Specialist
Lesley Hill, Planning Department Project Manager
Janice Kadlec, Public Reporter
Dan Phu, Project Development Section Manager
Monte Ward, Measure M2 Consultant

Members of the Public

Michael O'Connell from Irvine Ranch Conservancy

1. Welcome

Chair Patricia Bates welcomed everyone to the meeting at 10:00 a.m. and asked Nancy Jimeno to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of September 7, 2011 Minutes

Chair Patricia Bates asked if there were any additions or corrections to the September 7, 2011 Environmental Oversight Committee (EOC) meeting minutes. Melanie Schlotterbeck had the following corrections:

- Page 4, paragraph 4, first sentence: "Melanie Schlotterbeck asked if the Section 6 Grant could be use to offset some of the ~~endowment costs~~ **acquisition and restoration expenditures.**"

- Page 4, last paragraph, second sentence: “As far as the immediate threat of development, the big properties are on the current list.”

A motion was made by Melanie Schlotterbeck, seconded by Nancy Jimeno, and passed unanimously to approve the September 7, 2011 EOC meeting minutes as corrected.

3. Acquisition Properties

A. Appraisal Status (Aliso Canyon, Irvine-Mesa, and Shell-Aera): Dan Phu gave an update and overview of the appraisal process on the Aliso Canyon, Irvine-Mesa, and Shell-Aera properties.

4. Restoration Properties

A. Second Call for Restoration Projects Update: Lesley Hill gave a status update on the second call for Restoration Projects which ended August 30, 2011.

James Kelly asked for an explanation of what was typically done to restore a property.

Lesley Hill used the San Juan Capistrano property as an example and said usually the first step is to remove the non-native invasive species (mustard seed, artichoke thistle, pampas grass, etc.). Once this is accomplished native species will be planted.

James Kelly asked if they knew what to look for. Dan Phu said yes, a lead person gives a short training session before they begin work on any particular property. They also need to know what to do if they stumble across any native animals or snakes. Jonathan Snyder said the goal of upland restoration is to convert the habitat from one type to another and to get the non-native species under control. Once the native plants are in, there will be continuous weeding until the native plants are established. This takes approximately five years. Once the native vegetation is in place, it is stable; it is not going to revert back to the non-native plants unless some natural disaster such as fire occurs. Once the land is restored, it is restored with some kind of limited ongoing maintenance. David Mayer said when scoring restoration projects, the evaluation team looks at the long term management of the property and what the expectation is for the long term success of the effort.

James Kelly asked if part of the restoration funds are set aside as an endowment similar to the acquisition properties. Dan Phu said this was not the case for the first set of funded projects (\$5.5 million allocated last year). Most of the funded projects were already in a conservation easement and there was some sort of program in place to manage the properties in perpetuity. This does not mean it will not be looked at in the future. Dan Phu said he would also like to make clear

the expectation is not to restore the property back to 100% native habitat; the expected target is about 80%.

James Kelly said he would like the next site visits to include some of the restoration properties which have gone through the process. Chair Patricia Bates suggested Fairview Park in Costa Mesa would be a good example. Monte Ward said another project to look at would be the Irvine Ranch Conservancy project. Irvine Ranch Conservancy is a larger project and some of the strategies and approaches are different than the smaller Fairview Park. There are certainly contrasts in the types of projects and what the funding is used for. They are always trying to get more done and use less money.

Chair Patricia Bates invited the opinion of Michael O'Connell from Irvine Ranch Conservancy. He said species diversity is being looked at on the smaller sites. On the larger sites, ecological function is being looked at; they don't have to achieve the 80% native plants goal.

Marissa Espino said she will email the members some possible dates for the Restoration Property tours. The possible dates are either Wednesday, November 9 or Tuesday, November 15.

5. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

6. Committee Member Reports

Nancy Jimeno asked if the letter asking questions of the EOC from the land owners regarding the possibility of purchasing their property had been addressed yet. Monte Ward said the time table for property acquisition has been communicated to the owners. Part of what will be discussed in Closed Session will be the timing of the offers. When further time tables have been established it will be communicated to the owners. The ability to proceed with an additional round of offers depends on completing the appraisals for the properties mentioned earlier in the meeting.

Monte Ward shared the sign being placed on acquired properties in the access areas. These signs are meant to control access to the properties while the property's conservation plan is being developed. Once the conservation plan is completed there will be a better idea of what the conditions for public access will be.

7. Next Meeting – November 2, 2011

The next meeting of the EOC will be on Nov. 2 in the OCTA offices.

8. Closed Session

The regular meeting adjourned to Closed Session at 10:25 a.m.

After closed session adjourned, Melanie Schlotterbeck reported, in public session, the following action item that was unanimously approved by the EOC.

Endorse staff's recommendation to accept funds from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the acquisition of open space lands within the Trabuco area that support gnatcatchers.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.