



**MINUTES OF THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREA
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEATAC)
MEETING OF 1 August 2011**

(Minutes approved as amended by electronic mail on 28 September 2011)

PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE:

SEATAC MEMBERS

Dr. Jonathan Baskin
Dan Cooper (absent)
Ty Garrison (absent)
Robb Hamilton
Michael Long
Dr. Thomas Scott (absent)
Dr. Cheryl Swift (absent)

REGIONAL PLANNING STAFF

Dr. Shirley Imsand (Biologist,
SEATAC coordinator)
Dr. Wesley Colvin (Biologist)
Emma Howard (Planner)
Julie Lowry (Planner)

OTHER ATTENDANCE:

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|---|--|--------------|
| Jui Ing Chien | jchien@parks.lacounty.gov | 213-351-5129 |
| Julie Yom | jyom@parks.lacounty.gov | 213-351-5127 |
| Wendy Reed, Antelope Valley Conservancy | avconservancy@yahoo.com | 661-943-9000 |

MINUTES pagination:

- A. Approval of SEATAC minutes for 11 July 2011, p.1**
- B. Discussion of use of non-expert data in SEATAC reports, p.2**
- C. Presentation of SEA program revision in General Plan revision, p.3**
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 NOTE: SEATAC meetings are informal working sessions. Members are appointed volunteers in an advisory capacity. Minutes are prepared by planning staff from notes and tape. Visitors are advised to take proper notes and/or record the session. Issues not discussed by SEATAC do not imply tacit approval. New or clarified information presented in subsequent submittals may raise new issues and may require further analysis. Minutes are generally approved at the next SEATAC meeting. Draft minutes may be requested but are subject to revision.

**MINUTES
1 August 2011**

OLD BUSINESS

- A. Minutes of previous meeting 11 July 2011 were approved as amended. Dan Cooper had moved by email for approval and Mickey Long seconded the motion.**

B. Discussion: Use of non-expert data in SEATAC reports

SEATAC Coordinator presented the issue of the request that applicants use non-expert data in SEATAC reports when this is warranted. Current examples are the alternative energy projects in the Poppy Reserve area, for which there are over 20 public comment letters that have been written to SEATAC describing biota of Portal Ridge-Liebre Mountain SEA#58. The area is believed to be a migration corridor for birds, but capture of episodic data constrained in time and space is difficult to do. Observing a migrating flock of birds is unlikely in routine surveys such as those used for preparing SEATAC reports. Therefore, it is important to try to use observations of year-round residents, who are more likely to observe short-lived phenomena such as migrations. The suggested remedy is for applicants to present the data in summarized form in the biota report and comment on its validity and indications giving scientific citation data from reliable sources that weigh on all sides of any question. In this case, whether or not the project areas are migration corridors would be what is discussed.

- (1) SEATAC agrees that certain kinds of data can be obtained from residents that a scientific observer is unlikely to see during a daytime survey in standard working hours. An example would be observations of bobcat or other nocturnal predators. One can usually verify such observations by questions about details of the observation. The source of the observation must be given, of course, and evaluation of the observation using scientific records and citations is reasonable.**
- (2) SEATAC noted that some of the letters have accompanying photos of identifiable sensitive species such as the tricolored blackbird and Swainson's hawk, so this makes them very useful.**

- C. **Planner Julie Lowry presented the new webpage and various aspects of the SEA program revision. She introduced Emma Howard, who will be the**
- D. **planner responsible for the SEA Program. Ms. Lowry said this is her last day of work. She is very grateful for all the advice SEATAC has given her in development of the SEA program.**

- (1) SEA program should be completed by time of the NOP release and be approved with the General Plan. The SEA CUP program is currently in review by County Counsel.
- (2) Goals of the SEA program combine the first primary goal of preserving biodiversity in Los Angeles County with the necessary goal of linking SEAs by habitat connective corridors for plant and wildlife movement.
- (3) A primary goal of the SEA program is also eliminating the cost of redesign and mitigation. BCAs should be produced and reviewed by SEATAC first, and then used to detail development design.
- (4) The SEA webpage is available at: <http://planning.lacounty.gov/sea/>
- (5) The opening pages give an overview of the Significant Ecological Area (SEA) program, its history, and evolution to the current program. Related material is summarized and referenced such as the Caltrans connectivity studies, discussion of local and regional habitat linkages and their extension beyond the County boundaries, and grassland study done by Dr. Wesley Colvin. The SEATAC role as advisory panel is presented. Areas subject to other regulations and constraints such as the coastal zone of the Santa Monica Mountains and Marina del Rey are discussed.
- (6) The webpage organizes the SEAs in alphabetical order. The goal is to have the webpage be a public outreach tool. The page presents each of the SEAs as an interactive map, with a photo gallery, and with text of scientific description. The maps present the biotic diversity in the SEAs and not just the sensitive species. Light green lines show boundaries of the proposed SEAs; green transparent overlay shows designated open space; white transparent overlay indicates city jurisdictions, where County oversight and regulations will probably not apply. The map resolution at 400% is pretty good for details. Higher resolution becomes pixilated. "Blue line" streams were drawn from Thomas Guide data.

SEATAC asked if one could get GPS coordinates off the maps.

Answer: The maps are not georeferenced, and one cannot get coordinates off the maps.

- (7) It is possible to download an interactive .pdf version that will have all the pertinent resource data: CNDDDB data, critical habitat areas, water courses, floodplains, fault zones. The data view the user wants can be printed out as a .jpg file.

Public comment: It would be good to have a way to capture the created, desired map to a small .pdf file (eg. 1 Mb). Many printers cannot handle very large files and "crash," especially when color may be needed for map clarity.

- (8) The admonition against considering absence of data as indication of absence of biota is in the program documents. "The absence of [data on] species' occurrences does not indicate the absence of those species in a parcel. Information about particular species occurring in areas where biological surveys have not been conducted or species data not reported to state or federal agencies is [are] not shown on the map."

SEATAC states that this disclaimer is necessary to include.

- (9) The webpage vision is that it be interactive with possibilities for public to send in photographs taken in the SEAs of the biological resources found in each one of the SEAs. Peer reviews will also be posted. The site needs more landscape photographs.
- (10) A new feature of the program will be continuing annual updates for CNDDDB information, preparation of assessment reports by development applicants detailing amount of SEA land developed, and biennial reports to the Regional Planning Commission summarizing SEA gain and loss from development. The baseline will be adoption of the EIR.
- (11) Ms. Lowry recommends that SEATAC have an advisory session with County Counsel on the proposed SEA program. Counsel can outline kinds of recommendations and advice that SEATAC can provide

to applicants during meetings that will directly relate to the SEA program changes and what makes a project compatible with the SEA.

Public comment pursuant to Section 54954.3 of the Government Code.

Copies of public comment letters received by SEATAC on the renewable energy projects in the vicinity of the Poppy Preserve were distributed to SEATAC members and will be mailed to Antelope Valley Conservancy.

Wendy Reed, a founding director of the Antelope Valley Conservancy, spoke as a member of the concerned public about the importance of using the SEA designated areas for preservation in the Antelope Valley. The AV Conservancy is preparing a map that illustrates their recommendations for development in the Fairmont Corridor of the Antelope Valley.

The Antelope Valley Conservancy has been working for conservation in the Antelope Valley for a period of 6 years, and during that time their Conservancy has developed a recommendation on the most important areas to conserve within the Antelope Valley, areas which do coincide with some of the designated SEAs. The primary areas for conservation concern are three of the wildlife movement/habitat connectivity areas (core connectivity areas), which are (1) the Big Rock Wash extent from the San Gabriel Mountains through the *de facto* preservation lands of Edwards Air Force Base to the Rosamond-Rogers Dry Lakes complex (including Saddleback State Park and other buttes), (2) the connection of the San Gabriel Mountains through the San Andreas Fault Zone and the Tehachapi Foothills in the vicinity of Gorman, and (3) the Fairmont Valley watershed around the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve, extending from Elizabeth Lake of the San Gabriel Mountains through Portal Ridge-Liebre Mountain, through the Poppy Reserve, and through Joshua Tree Woodland Habitats to the Tehachapi Mountains and the Sierra Nevada beyond.

AV Conservancy believes conserving these three areas is the primary conservation need for the Antelope Valley. Without their largely intact preservation, the Antelope Valley biota and natural areas will eventually all be lost, probably in the next year as renewable energy projects come before the SEATAC and the Regional Planning Commission. It is important to recognize the linearity and preserve the whole length of these corridors. At the core of an SEA is a watershed resource, and if this is impacted, the remaining acreage in the SEA habitat is compromised so that the integrity and value of the SEA is eventually lost. If the core watershed resource in an SEA is made unavailable to animals (by proximity to human activities), the use of the entire SEA can be compromised, and all is lost.

The Little Rock Wash is viewed as more developed and having more development planned than the others, so that its preservation is probably less possible.

Mrs. Reed is aware that SEATAC is an advisory body. She wants SEATAC to consider (A) the Conservancy's statement on the primacy of the three (3) identified connective areas, (B) the buffer size needed around watershed resources within SEAs that would provide sustainability and prevent net loss, and (C) the compatibility of industrial-scale renewable energy projects in the SEAs.

E. SEATAC Procedures and Guidelines Revision

- (1) The Biological Constraints Analysis (BCA) is the foundation of SEATAC's evaluation of a project and needs to be accurate. The BCA is the bulk and foundation of the Biota Report, so it is important that the BCA be acceptable. A problem has arisen when BCAs are not received corrected by the second meeting. Then only one last meeting is required for review of the Biota Report, and this is problematic without an accurate BCA as basis. The Board of Supervisors proposed and approved the three-minute limit for appearances at SEATAC. Therefore, a preliminary step will be added, which is that County Biologist will review BCA and may request revision of the BCA before it goes to SEATAC. There will probably be one revision allotted to requests by County Biologist. There is no requirement that the applicant amend the BCA nor the Biota Report according to recommendations from SEATAC after the applicant completes three (3) meetings with SEATAC. It is up to the planner to see that this is done.**
 - (2) General literature review does belong with the introductory summary description of primary biological resources of the site.**
 - (3) SEATAC recommended that there be two sections of bibliography, literature cited in the text of the document, and additional general references that were used to prepare the report but are not cited in the document. One method to handle this is have an introductory paragraph summarizing documents reviewed for the report. This can be a separate section or the references may be combined with the others if cited in this way.**
 - (4) The re-submittal format is to be 2 CD/DVDs of materials and response letter in .pdf file format, and the hardcopies needed by County Biologist. (Applicants consult County biologist for number of hardcopies, as this number changes from time to time.) There needs to be an accompanying response letter from the applicant that has numbered full responses (full text) that accord to numbered comments and recommendations in SEATAC minutes of review of the documents. Appropriate page numbers of the BCA or Biota document shall be referred to in the response letter.**
 - (5) SEATAC recommended that the table of impacts with answers to specific questions indicating impact be retained. All questions are pertinent to determining significant impact.**
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