Candelaria Farm Preserve
Technical Advisory Group
May 10, 2017 • 2:30pm – 4:30pm

MINUTES

TAG & Related Technical Assistance Members Present

Steven Cox
Beth Dillingham
Steve Glass
Brian Hanson
Loren Hines
Christianne Hinks
Yolanda Homann
Dave Hutton
Michael Jensen (Facilitator)
Judy Kowalski
David Mehlman
Peggy Norton
Jennifer Owen-White
David Parsons
Bill Pentler
Christina Sandoval
Kent Swanson

Community Members Present

Nikkihanna Baptiste
Ann Dunlap
Monica Gilboa
Kathleen Hall
Betsy James
Shannon Jones
Brandt Magic
Melinda Moffitt
Nancy Nicolai
Alison Owens
Paula Reiss
Andrew Stone
Carole Ward
Denise Wheeler

The meeting began at 2:35 with introductions.

There was a largely free-floating discussion among the TAG members and the public covering the purpose of the TAG and a range of issues and questions:

Agriculture

- The Land and Water Conservation Fund legislation and administrative guidelines apply to the entire site, even though LWCF funds were part of a larger funding package that involved State and City funds as well. The LWCF says that the primary purpose of any site purchased with its funds must be outdoor recreation, broadly understood. Agriculture is severely limited in the LWCF guidelines, only being allowed if it is not the "primary" activity and if it supports the site's outdoor recreation activities
- There should be a distinction made between "agriculture" (understood generally as commercial) and "cropping", by which is meant growing crops for wildlife forage and habitat
- Agriculture was not stated among the original purposes justifying purchase of the site, although it was being farmed by two leaseholders at the time. The constantly-repeated purpose was to create a nature study area and wildlife preserve, along with preserving a

large piece of open space, providing a buffer between existing development and the Bosque, and "shaping" urban development in the North Valley
- The USDA provided a wildlife cropping plan for the site in 1978 and the 1979 Predock Master Plan also delineated extensive wildlife cropping for forage and habitat
- The City said commercial agriculture had to continue because the City did not have the funds to convert the land; this became the new formal management plan in 1983, although commercial farming had continued unchanged from what it was before the land was purchased
- If farming of some type remains, but with a return to the idea that wildlife forage and habitat is more important, then it will surely be necessary to develop an interim cropping plan with the long-term goal of moving out of alfalfa and toward more grasses; the hedgerows will need a lot of work, but can supplement both forage and habitat

Wildlife Habitat

- The question was asked: what do we mean by "wildlife habitat"? One response was: "biodiverse ecosystem". Another answer came as a new question: "What wildlife values do agricultural lands have"?
- Jennifer Owen-White pointed out that the loss of agricultural lands at Valle de Oro NWR (mostly alfalfa) means some bird species will be looking for other similar areas, such as Candelaria Farm Preserve. She also noted that even wildlife cropping will have to mesh with outdoor recreation opportunities
- There is a lot of expertise in the Valley dealing with the intersection of farming and wildlife, including conservation easements

Tree Nursery Status

- Michael Jensen will research this issue in the Open Space files and report back at the next meeting

Baseline Data

- There is a lot of data already available because there has been so much work done on the Rio Grande and the Bosque
- Sources of data include:
  - USDA/NRCS soil surveys, maps, and plant material information
  - US Fish & Wildlife Service data and maps
  - US Army Corps of Engineers environmental assessments, maps, and hydrology information
  - Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program river, drain, and groundwater data, along with leaf litter and arthropod data and various animal counts and studies
  - Bird surveys by Steven Cox and others, as well as other animal studies
  - MRGCD historical and current data and maps

Hedgerows

- Kent Swanson said that Open Space will improve the hedgerows in the future

Outdoor Recreation Access

- State Parks asked for new signage acknowledging LWCF funding and explaining how public access to the fields could occur; Kent Swanson said the signs are on their way
- Access does not need to be unrestricted under LWCF rules; because of the current agricultural activities and the need to encourage wildlife, access will be through the Rio Grande nature Center on guided tours, the same way that tours of the ponds and wetlands and birding tours take place

Chemicals and Other Current Agricultural Activities

- There were many questions and comments on this topic
- One resident said that he and his neighbors had an irrigation problem because the farmer at CFP left a turnout or head gate in an improper position, although this was eventually taken care of by an MRGCD ditch rider (although the ditch *mayordomo* was not responsive)
- Past and future chemical spraying was the chief concern, with many people saying they had experienced spray drift into their yards and homes and seen spraying on windy days; people were also concerned that the workers applying the chemicals did so without protective clothing

Financing CFP

- This is a major issue, which the City Council recognized in its Resolution creating the TAG
- The City wants a "revenue neutral" solution (not sure if this includes capital improvements or only refers to operations and maintenance)
- Michael Jensen said that it might be better to defer discussion of the financial component until after a draft plan has been developed, after which, the details from the plan can be used to get expert opinions on the cost of implementing the plan's components and on the recurring O&M costs. If a plan seems unattainably expensive within a timeframe acceptable to State Parks and the National Park Service (which oversees the LWCF), then the TAG can look at ways to tweak the different components to try to meet the same goals at a lower cost. If it seems impossible to modify the plan without causing it to be ineffective, then the TAG will look at a "next best" plan that is financially feasible

Work Plan

There was very little time left to discuss a work plan. One suggestion was to break the TAG up into committees that would each tackle some part of the overall site and its planning needs. Can look at the 2004 Los Poblanos Farm Resource Management Plan and the 2010 Rio Grande Nature Center State Park Management Plan

The meeting ended about 4:45

The next meeting date/time TBD; Rio Grande Nature Center Education Building