



FINAL MEETING NOTES

PROJECT:	24970 Cottonwood Pass Concept Design (Eagle and Garfield Counties)
PURPOSE:	Natural Resources Issue Task Force (ITF) Meeting #1
DATE HELD:	September 12, 2022
LOCATION:	Videoconference
ATTENDING:	Jacob Rivera, Drew Stewart, Paula Durkin, Cinnamon Levi-Flynn, Jen Klaetsch (CDOT); Kristin Salamack (CDOT USFWS Liaison); Maureen Mulcahy, Marcia Gilles (Eagle County); Jill Bogdanovich, Monte Senor (BLM); Michael Gloden, Kara Swanson, Leah Langerman (David Evans and Associates)
COPIES:	ITF Members

Summary of Discussion:

1. Kara Swanson welcomed the group and provided a project overview using a PowerPoint presentation.
 - ◆ This conceptual design project does not include an intensive environmental survey. Instead, an environmental scan-type review of existing conditions was completed in order to document issues to be considered by the counties as in the future.
 - ◆ In addition to this Natural Resources Issue Task Force (ITF), a Property Owner/Residential ITF has been formed to focus on residential considerations. One meeting has been held with that group and two more are planned.
 - ◆ Existing conditions information has been gathered.
 - ◆ The project team is currently working on identifying safety improvements and then will complete a high-level evaluation to identify one concept to move forward at each site. Improvements will be rather minor, focused on safety. Slides are included at the end of the presentation to show an aerial view, photos, and a list of potential types of improvements for each location.
 - ◆ Following a review of existing environmental conditions, the team will send the presentation and known species list for a two-week review by this group.
2. Michael Gloden provided a discussion of existing conditions at each site for streams, water quality, wetlands, and wildlife/threatened and endangered species (T&E).
 - ◆ All of the maps show Cottonwood Pass as a red dashed line and each project site as a yellow dot.
 - ◆ Property ownership
 - ◇ Part of the scope includes survey work to confirm right-of-way (ROW) boundaries. Most of the sites are private ownership. Eagle County Sites 5 & 6 and Garfield County Sites 6 & 7 are within Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land.
 - ◆ Streams and Water Quality
 - ◇ Slide shows the overall stream network and water quality classification based on Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) use attainment status and segmentation.

- ❖ Data from Colorado’s Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters and Monitoring and Evaluation List.
- ❖ CDPHE assesses water quality of all surface water bodies based on their designated beneficial uses.
- ❖ Colorado’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) List identifies water bodies where there is reason to suspect water quality issues, but there is also uncertainty regarding one or more factors.
- ❖ Site streams include Gypsum Creek and Cottonwood Creek which drain to the Colorado River and Cattle Creek which drains to the Roaring Fork River.
- ❖ Beneficial uses of study area streams- Agriculture, Aquatic Life, Recreation
- ❖ Cottonwood Creek- all attaining. Gypsum and Cattle Creek – M&E list for dissolved oxygen (2016) and arsenic (2018) respectively.
- ◆ Wetlands
 - ❖ Maps were reviewed for each site showing wetlands data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wetland Inventory. A detailed wetland delineation or field survey is not included in this study A field review of wetlands was performed but no private property was accessed and observations were made from Cottonwood Pass.
 - ❖ Eagle County Site 5 is the most challenging site with steep slopes and the nearby Cottonwood Creek and wetlands.
 - ❖ Near Eagle County Site 2-4 4: East Coulter Creek drainage is crossed twice by Cottonwood Pass. Portions had no defined channel but wetland plants were observed. Based on review of historic aerial photos the Von Springs reservoirs have been dry since approximately 2015.
 - ❖ Garfield County Sites 6-7: Character of the pass changes here as the road is paved. Crosses Cattle Creek at intersection of Catherine Store Rd/ Cottonwood Pass Rd.
 - ❖ Eagle County Site 3: large culvert under Cottonwood Pass. No stream flow observed.
 - ❖ No fens were observed in the field.
 - ❖ **ACTION:** Obtain and review any available CDOT and CDPHE fen mapping.
- ◆ Wildlife
 - ❖ Map displays Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) High Priority Habitat areas-
 - » Originally developed for land development activities for oil/gas and mining.
 - » Includes recommendations to avoid/minimize impacts to wildlife from land development (big game, grouse, raptors/birds, small mammals, aquatics)
 - ❖ The map is only showing potential habitat of Canada Lynx (Federal Threatened and State Endangered), but there are a number of other federal, state, and BLM special status species with potential to occur in the area. Species lists will be sent to this group.
 - ❖ CPW raptor database was also reviewed but is not mapped. Nest occurrences along Roaring Fork River (bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey) and near Garfield County Site 6 (red tailed hawk)
 - ❖ The project team reviewed publicly available information. ITF members should send any site-specific data they may have available.

3. Schedule and Next Steps

- ◆ Survey work (using drones) is complete.

- ◆ Geotech site visit evaluation to understand ground materials is complete.
- ◆ Agency and public input will be used to develop initial evaluation criteria and design options. In addition to what was discussed today, CDOT is also considering potential cultural resources.
- ◆ One more meeting of this group is planned in November to share the improvement options developed and provide any updates to the existing conditions (if additional information is provided/obtained following this meeting).
- ◆ **ACTION:** ITF members to provide comments and input by September 28th.

4. Discussion

- ◆ Are the improvements meant to allow semis or is CDOT still restricting certain traffic?
 - ✧ Cottonwood Pass will not be an official detour or bypass of I-70. Semis will continue to be restricted. The counties have been working with mapping companies to avoid this being shown as a detour. CDOT is aware it is inevitable additional traffic will end up on the pass. There is a 45-foot length restriction on the roadway but it is reduced to 35-feet during closure events, enforced by the counties.
- ◆ Maureen noted there are some local organizations that may have information about existing conditions in the area. Roaring Fork Conservancy does monitoring in Cattle Creek and Eagle River Watershed Council may have some knowledge to share. Engaging with the local district CPW manager could be helpful.
 - ✧ CPW (Matt Yamashita and Michelle Cowardin) were invited to this meeting and a separate meeting will be set. Kara has been exchanging information with Michelle Cowardin.
 - » **ACTION:** Kara to reach out to CPW to coordinate.
 - ✧ **ACTION:** Cinnamon will send some Eagle County Safe Passages information about Gypsum Creek Road and Cottonwood Pass that could support the environmental review and potential issues of elk, mule deer and other large wildlife.
 - ✧ In an effort to keep the discussion on track, this ITF was limited to regulatory agencies at this stage. As counties move into design and implementation input from those other groups may be helpful at that time. CDOT is interested in any information that will influence the selection of improvements now.
- ◆ **ACTION:** Paula will look for fens data. (Sent to DEA after the meeting)
- ◆ **ACTION:** Michael or Kara will send materials to the Natural Resources ITF no later than tomorrow, for review and comment by September 28th.