

Meeting Notes

1st Etowah HCP Steering Committee Meeting

January 10, 2003

Location: Sawnee Center, Cumming, GA

Notes prepared by Libby Ormes 02/13/03

Participants

See attached sheet for attendees and representatives.

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to familiarize the newly appointed Steering Committee members with the basics of an HCP, why one is needed in the Etowah watershed, what developing an HCP entails, and some of the science behind an HCP in the Etowah watershed. This meeting was also set to determine the next steps for the Steering Committee and how they get started.

All of the following power-point presentations are available on our website at www.EtowahHCP.org.

1. HCP Overview

Laurie Fowler began the first part of the meeting as an overview for those who did not attend the kick-off meeting in September. She introduced the important issues of the Etowah watershed and what has led to the development of a regional HCP for this area. She also covered some of the research we've done on other HCPs and what we've learned from them.

One of the questions brought up was if there are any HCPs in effect in Georgia right now, how many there are in the US and how long they've been in effect. Aaron Valenta, from FWS, replied mentioning the HCPs for the red-cockaded woodpecker and the indigo snake...

2. Why we're here

Following Laurie's presentation were introductions of everyone present, then Robin Goodloe, from the US Fish and Wildlife Service gave a presentation about the specifics of HCPs, ITPs, and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and why an HCP is important for the Etowah watershed.

Someone asked why there haven't been any HCPs in the Etowah watershed, given the number of endangered species in this area. Robin mentioned several different reasons including: A lot of the projects in the Etowah fall under section 7 and therefore do not need an HCP because of formal consultation; Some projects that would be section 10, like bridges and arch spans, were given section 7 status; FWS provides guidelines to avoid both section 7 consultations and HCPs, where appropriate, which takes of many road crossings, utility lines, etc.; FWS does not know about a lot of private projects until after they are finished, or its too late, and many private developers may not know they are

supposed to write an HCP, or they know but just don't do it; and FWS does not have the man power to look for projects that aren't complying with ESA.

Robin spoke about the benefits of a regional HCP, then there was a brief discussion about the benefits specifically to the Etowah watershed, and what will change. Some of the main points were:

- There will be coverage for all actions and the regional HCP will provide interagency connections to facilitate implementation of the plan.
- People will become more and more aware of water quality and endangered species protection, and the regional HCP is a way to protect actions from future conflicts. The HCP will provide many options for development, while acting as “free liability insurance,” at the same time.

Robin's presentation ended with a discussion about enforcement of the HCP. Some pointed out that the HCP will not work unless all of the counties involved are willing to use their environmental officers for citations and other forms of enforcement, for example. Robin mentioned again that federal law enforcement will be there to provide support, when appropriate, for serious impacts or law suits, for example.

3. Is it worth it? Lessons from a Successful HCP

After Robin's presentation, Steve Kinter, from Volusia County, Florida, spoke about his experiences with involvement with the Volusia County Beach Habitat Conservation Plan. Briefly, this HCP was written to protect all sea turtles that nest on the beaches in Volusia County (includes Daytona beach) from impact from driving on the beaches (an action that has been occurring for many years), and other relative impacts (More information about this HCP is available at <http://208.34.212.5/environmental/hcp.htm>). Some important made in this talk were:

- You don't have to make a commitment (to the HCP) until the end of the development of the HCP.
- It's important to get the public and all interested stakeholders involved in the beginning stages of development of the plan.
- Maps were effective as an interactive tool to use for stakeholders to identify and record information.
- Cover whatever species you can now, to avoid having to add it in later. (Steve learned from experience in having to take into account Florida Scrub Jay habitat later on in the process.)
- Take measures to minimize impact from the start (be proactive instead of reactive). Examples from Volusia County include conservation zones, limited

access, comprehensive training, and educational literature to all “users” of the beach.

Other topics covered included mitigation measures, unforeseen circumstances and thinking about the future, and more lessons learned.

4. The Science of Protecting the Etowah’s Imperiled Aquatic Species

Byron Freeman, from the UGA Institute of Ecology, discussed some of the science behind the HCP, focusing on the endangered species, some of the things we know about actions that impact these species, and the directions the plan is going, for example, land-use planning, preservation, and retrofitting, or corrective measures.

Following this talk, there was a brief discussion again about why a regional HCP is so important for the Etowah watershed, considering the extensive growth and development in this area and the endangered species: if development continues at the same rate, with the same regulations, then it will eventually reach the point in which there will be more endangered species, and the answer to future development permits will be ‘no’ because there will be no more left for mitigation because it will all be developed (for example). (Part of having a regional HCP in place is availability for federal funding to acquire and restore land.)

5. How Do We Proceed from Here?

Seth Wenger, from the UGA Institute of Ecology, spoke briefly about the tasks of the Technical and Stakeholder committees, and what can be done next.

The Steering Committee members agreed that an all-day retreat would be an effective way to cover a lot of ground and to discuss details of what’s next and a timeline of activities, and to learn more about the details of a regional HCP for the Etowah watershed. Representatives from UGA agreed to plan the agenda to cover these topics, and all agreed on Thursday, February 20, 2003, in Canton, GA.

The meeting ended with a lunch for participants to stay and talk more casually about the HCP, if interested.