

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION: **RECORD OF MEETING**

MEETING TITLE: **LAST CHANCE GRADE PARTNERING MEETING**

MEETING DATE: 4/17/19	TIME: 1000 - 1200	LOCATION: PARKS SOUTH OPERATIONS CENTER, ORICK, CA
Facilitator Joan Chaplick Meeting initiated by: Caltrans District 1	Attendees Victor Bjelajac Joan Chaplick Rosie Clayburn Craig Compton Tim Keefe Alexis Kelso Jaime Matteoli Maria Mayer Kevin Mealue Jason Meyer Steve Mietz Troy A. Ralstin David Roemer Brett Silver	Titles / Affiliations District Superintendent, California State Parks Principal, MIG, Inc. Tribal Heritage Officer, Yurok Tribe Manager, Green Diamond Resource Company Senior Environmental Planner, Caltrans Senior Transportation Planner, Caltrans Project Manager, Caltrans Project Associate, MIG, Inc. Cultural Resource Specialist, Elk Valley Rancheria Environmental Planner, Caltrans Superintendent, Redwood National Park, National Park Service Executive Director, Tolowa Dee-Ni' Deputy Superintendent, National Park Service Sector Superintendent, California State Parks

Notes:

I. INTRODUCTIONS:

- A. Introductions were made and a brief overview of the agenda was given.
- B. Caltrans' Last Chance Grade (LCG) Project Manager, Jaime Matteoli, revisited the purpose of the Partner Group, which consist of those with land management responsibilities in the project area. The purpose of the group is:
 - 1. To advise Caltrans and aid them in acting collaboratively and transparently; and
 - 2. To assist with integrating and coordinating the activities of other LCG stakeholder groups.
- C. Jaime explained that Caltrans has two roles at Last Chance Grade: to keep the road open and safe while finding a long-term solution. The Project Manager's role is focused on the long-term solution.

II. CALTRANS UPDATES

- A. Caltrans Updates
 - 1. Full Funding of Project Environmental Phase
 - a. The environmental phase of the project was fully funded with an award of \$50M in March 2019.
 - b. Caltrans is seeking to execute a large contract for the environmental study work. A contracting firm will be hired to lead the majority of the necessary environmental studies including geological, tunneling, biological, etc. Cultural resource studies will be conducted in-house.
 - 2. Current Alternatives Under Consideration
 - a. Caltrans reviewed the various alternatives in the project area which they continue to study, noting that the last mile of LCG poses the most difficult issues.
 - i) The A1 alternative features a tunnel and the necessity of much cutting and filling, largely on Green Diamond's property. A2 takes a different route around the area. They are considering whether tunneling or other mitigation of impacts provide better value.
 - ii) Access and storage of equipment, excavated soils, etc. are also an important consideration.
 - iii) Alternatives being studied include possibilities for alternatives on the current alignment. These are fully engineered alternatives utilizing dewatering and other solutions to stabilize the road; they are not the same as taking no action. They also potentially provide additional funding opportunities.
 - iv) While the various alternatives still continue to be studied, the team has been able to narrow the possible footprint of alternatives.

3. Current Status of Engagement
 - a. Caltrans is meeting regularly with the four federally recognized Tribes in the area to share information. They plan to meet with all local Tribes once a year.
 - b. The Biological Working Group last met in February 2019, with a focus on mitigation. Helicopter platforms may need to be dropped in to access some study sites. California State and National Parks have been extremely helpful with access. The next meeting is expected to take place in May or June 2019.
 - c. Caltrans will seek to fund an Senior Environmental Planner position to manage the biological study process.
 - d. The Huffman Stakeholder Group met last week. The conversation included a focus on considering the need to begin discussing how mitigation can impact project delivery and cost. Stakeholders and the public are beginning to accept that this is a challenging, difficult process that will take many years to complete.
 - e. The next public community Open House will most likely take place in November 2019.
 - f. A California Transportation Commission meeting will take place November 6, 2019, in Del Norte County, and participants will get an opportunity to fly over the project site so they can get a full view of current conditions.
4. Cultural Resources Groups and Status of Programmatic Agreement
 - a. A programmatic agreement is under development. Local Tribes will be signatories to the agreement, which addresses how the Tribes will engage in cultural resource studies, disclosure of resources, and how decisions will be made. Regular meetings will be conducted by phone to investigate specific topics. Caltrans will oversee the cultural resource study process. No decisions will be made until the draft environmental document is complete, as it is important to avoid impacting resources located on alternatives that are not being considered.
5. Preliminary Geotechnical Studies
 - a. The first phase of geotechnical studies, completed in 2018, involved drilling 13 holes and monitoring ground water and movement. The report is available and shows no reason to discontinue studies. Phase 2 will begin this summer, and include drilling 16 holes, plus diameter borings. The contract will likely begin in November, with the prime consultant expected to be ready to work in 2020.
 - i) Phase 3 will be more challenging as it moves off road into the parks in some sensitive areas, and will require helicopters to stage equipment. This process will be bound by CEQA and NEPA requirements. Caltrans is sensitive to the issues of working on parklands, and State and National Parks are being extremely supportive and helpful while ensuring their own environmental clearance procedures are followed.
6. Overall Environmental Study Process
 - a. Jaime provided some context regarding the overall environmental study process and the alternatives currently being studied.
 - i) While cost estimates for each alternative are included, these are approximate and extremely preliminary, and represent capital costs only – they do not include mitigation costs. It's worth noting that some of the alternatives with a lower capital cost may necessitate a greater amount of mitigation, and therefore not necessarily more advantageous. Alternatives involving a smaller number of acres may not be automatically advantageous as it isn't a one-to-one comparison; for example, the impacts on an acre near the northern portal differ greatly from those on an acre in the midst of old growth redwoods. Studies to investigate mitigation needs are only beginning and it will be a very complex process.
 - ii) The preliminary engineering process will provide better numbers, and continuing risk assessment and the various environmental studies will assist Caltrans in determining when work on an alternative may start.
 - iii) Once the draft environmental study is complete, a scoping meeting will be held to solicit public input. There will be another, more limited opportunity for comment when the Record of Decision (ROD) is published.
 - b. There was a question raised regarding whether impacts upon plants of native significance and mitigations have been discussed. The environmental process provides an opportunity to identify these areas and consider what can be done to enhance them. Studies currently being conducted by California State Parks and as part of the Redwood Rising project regarding the identification and revegetation of indigenous plants (proceeding with tribal consultation), will be very helpful. It's important to identify this kind of information in the scoping process.
7. Road Maintenance Update
 - a. Work will begin this summer on a new wall, 5A, at the "ski jump" area, where there was significant movement after the storms during the winter of 2016-2017. One lane traffic control is likely to be in effect for most of summer 2019.

B. Partner Updates

1. Green Diamond Resource Company:
 - a. Green Diamond has had a change in leadership, with a new Vice President/General Manager who is currently getting up to speed on Green Diamond's involvement with the project.
2. Elk Valley Rancheria:
 - a. The tribe is continuing to work with the project team and participate in the Cultural Studies Group and the associated Programmatic Agreement.
 - b. There was some concern regarding impacts in the Mill Creek area, both from this project and the allied Redwoods Rising project. Caltrans noted that all alternatives, such as the "C" alternatives, going through the Mill Creek area have been officially removed from further study.
 - i) A supplemental project report is being prepared that shows how the alternatives have changed over time, with the result of narrowing the potential footprint.
 - ii) Redwoods Rising collaborative partners National and State Parks and the Save the Redwoods League are holding two meetings regarding the two main focus areas of the project. One meeting took place last night, focusing on the Mill Creek area; another meeting in Arcata tonight will focus on the Prairie Creek watershed.
3. California State Parks:
 - a. State Parks are currently looking at key study areas and doing whatever they can facilitate project permitting and access needs throughout the Parks.
 - b. Brett Silver is now Deputy Superintendent for Redwood State Parks.
4. National Park Service (NPS):
 - a. The NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), and the Yurok Tribe are partnering to reintroduce California condors in Redwood National Park. The 60-day comment period for the Restoration Program Environmental Assessment is currently open until June 4, 2019, with meetings in Klamath and tonight in Arcata. Partners enquired how this might impact the project, and were told impact would probably be limited. The USFWS' proposed protection rule restricts development within 200 meters of an active nest. The birds they expect to receive will be immature; California condors do not reproduce until they are 6-9 years old, and then usually produce only one egg. The decision document is expected in June or July 2019.
 - b. The parks are committed to their role in protecting parklands while ensuring that geotechnical studies can move forward. They are currently reviewing the ARPA permit. It is likely that the Environmental document will be a fairly streamlined Environmental Assessment document limited to around 35 pages. In response to Caltrans' noting the need for a designated permitting representative with National Parks, NPS responded that a key person recently retired and there is currently an acting replacement; a permanent project permitting liaison will be designated within the near future.
5. Tolowa Dee-Ni':
 - a. There has been lots of change recently in tribal positions; Troy is new to the Tribe. They are working to determine how the Tribe can best be a more active partner in the project.
 - b. The Tribe recently received a visit and update from the Parks regarding the Condor project.
 - c. They are glad to see good Tribal representation in the Partner group.
6. Yurok Tribe:
 - a. The Tribe is involved with the Cultural Resources Working Group and associated Programmatic Agreement. They are not currently represented on the Environmental Working Group, and are working to remedy that. They are very invested in finding a solution while protecting resources.
 - b. The Yurok Tribe has also recently undergone significant reorganization due to an increase in size. Rosie is now the Tribal Heritage Officer.

C. Partner Roundtable

1. Partnership MOU
 - a. At Partner request, Jaime will revisit the Partnership MOU to confirm that the signature page and all organizational information is up to date. He reiterated that the MOU has two parts: the agreement and signature page, as well as an organizational chart intended to be a living document.
2. Next Steps in Project Delivery and Community Outreach
 - a. The Community Open House, which is likely to take place in November 2019, will repeat several features from previous Open Houses that have proven informative to the public, including:
 - i) A panel representing partners and other stakeholder experts
 - ii) The augmented reality activity with a reduced area of focus to reflect the smaller area that is being considered for alternatives.
 - b. Caltrans reiterated that effective partnering is critical to project delivery, helping create a solution with better value at lower cost. The group discussed several topics to prepare for upcoming public outreach and engagement activities:
 - i) It was suggested that short videos clarifying the process and challenges presented by the environmental study process be added to the website.
 - ii) It would be helpful to find a way to engage permitting agencies in the process, perhaps convening a forum that integrates these groups.
 - iii) Partners are beginning to discuss mitigations for impacted resources.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- A. The next Partnering Meeting is yet to be scheduled. It will probably take place in late September, after the site review. The team will determine whether the meeting is in person or if a teleconference will be suitable. (Note that annual federal shutdown dates needs to be avoided in scheduling.)

Meeting concluded at 12:00 p.m.

Next Meeting – To be determined

ACTION ITEMS:

Responsible	Action	Due Date
MIG/Caltrans	Update and augment information on project website	May 2019
MIG/Caltrans	Send out Doodle Poll to determine appropriate date for next Partner Meeting	August / September 2019
Caltrans/MIG/Partners	Plan and coordinate Community Open House	Fall 2019