



Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation



Meeting: Federal Steering Committee Meeting

Date: September 17, 2002

Location: Big Sky, Montana

Proceedings

Attendees:

Meeting participants Rick Bennett (Chairperson, USFWS), Alison Haskell (FASC Coordinator, USFWS), Dan James (USGS-ARMI), Stan Austin (EPA), Pete Heard (NRCS), Peter Dratch (NPS), Ernie Garcia (FS), Margaret Lorenz (NMFS), Whit Gibbons (PARC Executive Committee Chair, SREL), Rosemary Forrest (SREL), Bruce Taubert (Arizona Game and Fish Dept), Steve Corn (USGS-ARMI), Chuck Peterson (USGS-ARMI), Roy Averill-Murray and Matt Goode (Arizona Game and Fish Dept).

Meeting minutes

1) Welcome and Introductions

Rick Bennett (Chairperson, USFWS) welcomed Federal Agency Steering Committee (FASC) members to the September 17, 2002 meeting at IAFWA in Big Sky, Montana, and asked each member to introduce themselves and their respective agency affiliation. Rick reviewed the agenda for the meeting which was accepted by FASC members. Rick shared his vision and commitment for the Federal Agency Steering Committee to take a leadership role in supporting PARC's missions and goals.

The role of FASC chairperson is to coordinate and facilitate the federal agencies agenda and meetings for PARC, as well as provide status updates and information to the Joint Steering/Executive Committee. It was agreed that chairpersons would rotate according to signatory order among the seven federal agencies on the MOU (i.e. EPA, FWS, USGS, NPS, FS, NRCS, and NMFS). A vice-chairperson - who follows the signatory order of the current chair -serves with the chairperson, and succeeds this person as the next chairperson. Stan Austin, EPA, is the current vice-chairperson who will succeed Rick Bennett as chairperson upon completion of his tour of duty.

Decision-making is by group consensus of official representatives (designated individuals from federal agencies that have signed the MOU) present at the meeting.

2) Federal Agency Steering Committee Coordinator

All FASC members agreed on the need to develop a funded position to coordinate their efforts related to PARC. As a commitment, several agencies signed an MOU and some have dedicated fiscal resources (USFWS, USGS, FS, EPA, NRCS, FHWA) to this position. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to sponsor the position at its regional headquarters in Hadley, Massachusetts. Alison Haskell was hired in this capacity and may be reached at the following address: U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, MA, 01035; 413-253-8505; email Alison_Haskell@fws.gov

The group discussed roles for the FASC Coordinator, including assisting the FASC Chairperson and representatives, broadening responsibility outside of FASC to support PARC in a national context (i.e. assist executive/joint steering committee in their efforts), coordinate training opportunities in herpetology for agency biologists, solicit fiscal support from other partners to leverage existing funds, and continue to build internal and external PARC relationships.

During the meeting, the group identified several action items for the FASC Coordinator (**attachment 1**).

3) April 2, 2002 Meeting Minutes--*accepted as currently posted on **PARC** web site*

4) FASC's Official Agency Representatives

The original intent for FASC was to have representatives from federal agencies with decision-making abilities and leadership positions. A few individuals - or their designees- appointed by federal agencies have consistently participated in FASC meetings, but generally representation has been inconsistent with new individuals attending each meeting. The cost of continually changing agency representation is (i) difficulty in making decisions or commitments on joint action items generated at meetings, and (ii) lack of continuity, understanding, and history of previously agreed upon agenda items.

FASC representatives noted PARC lacks the high profile/status to require attendance of individuals with the ability to make decisions or commit resources while at meetings. Generally, the group indicated it was more important at this stage in PARC to get agency representatives that can commit to participating in FASC and attending the meetings.

A list of current FASC representatives and their addresses was distributed (**attachment 2**), reviewed, revised, and accepted.

The group identified two action items for the FASC Coordinator: (i) contact agencies not currently involved in FASC to encourage their participation in PARC, (ii) inreach within federal agencies currently involved in PARC by preparing and using a 'PARC toolkit' explaining PARC's accomplishments and benefits for involvement.

4b) FASC Meetings

FASC is one of four "National Steering Committees" for PARC; the other three committees are State agencies, Industry, and Non-governmental Organizations and Universities. Members of these four committees include decision-makers and individuals holding leadership positions in their respective agencies. Representatives from these four committees meet twice annually (IAFWA and North American Wildlife and Natural Resources annual conferences) as a group referred to as the "Joint Steering Committee" and have primary decision-making responsibility for PARC.

FASC representatives agreed on the need to continue meeting twice a year at IAFWA and the North American (March 21-26, North Carolina), and requested a Monday meeting for the North American.

The question was raised whether FASC meetings have to be tied to both IAFWA and the North American, with general agreement that perhaps some meetings could occur in a different venue.

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NMFS indicated that IAFWA and North American conferences were not the best forum for their participation, and would like to see other avenues explored. The group agreed on the possibility of augmenting these two meetings on an as need basis, with communication taking the form of a meeting, conference call, or email. Whatever the forum, the group indicated discussion should be project focused. The group shared the need to develop other forums of interactions to build relationships within FASC and enhance agency understanding of PARC.

Meetings should be focused on tasks, action items, and outcomes. For example, what's the vision for PARC and how does FASC facilitate accomplishing PARV vision and goals? Where is FASC/PARC headed...what do we envision for FASC accomplishing five years from now? How do other stakeholders (i.e. State Agencies, Industry, NGO's, and Universities) fit within PARC goals?

5) Overview of PARC from a State's Perspective

Bruce Taubert (Arizona Game and Fish Dept) shared an overview of PARC from a State's perspective. He led a discussion on the need for Federal and State agencies by nature of their statutory responsibility/authority to take a leadership role in furthering the mission and goals of PARC. Bruce also provided an update on the status of creating a coordinator position for the State Agency Steering Committee, as counterpart to the FASC Coordinator. State and federal agencies need should work closely to stimulate PARC into a higher level of action.

6) Habitat Management Guidelines

The Habitat Management Guide (HMG) project is designed to offer information to landowners and land managers who want to provide best management practices (BMP) for conserving amphibians and reptiles. The Management Technical Working Group of PARC identified five HMG regions and respective project leaders, as follows: Bruce Kingsbury for Midwest, Joe Mitchell for Northeast, John Jensen for Southeast, Roy Averill Murray for Southwest, and Klaus Richter for Northwest. Randy Gray (NRCS) serves as the national representative for the HMG project, and spearheads the initiative to raise funds to complete all HMGs. Alison Haskell distributed the fund raising flyer developed by Randy Gray for HMGs and reviewed with FASC the status of all HMGs. The Midwest HMG has been completed, whereas the remaining four HMGs are in varying stages of development largely due to insufficient funds. The Midwest HMG varied from the original template developed by the PARC Management Technical Group.

FASC representatives discussed the need to secure additional funds, and explore possible avenues within their respective agencies. We also talked about the potential need for more than the existing HMG model to target different audiences; e.g., summary sheet style and strawdog HMG model'. In order to further this discussion representatives requested the 'strawdog HMG model' developed by the Management Technical Working Group. This model was received by Kurt Buhlman, and forwarded by Alison Haskell to FASC representatives for feedback (email 12/05/02). The need for a different HMG for other audiences will be discussed via email, and issues resolved at the next FASC meeting (North American, March 21-26, NC)

7) Monitoring and inventory priorities, standards, and protocols

There has been general agreement amongst agencies at previous meetings about the need to standardize inventory and monitoring protocols for amphibians and reptiles where possible, and to assess current strategies for possible coordination. FASC provides a forum for bringing agencies together to discuss existing monitoring strategies and initiatives. Several federal and state agencies

are currently monitoring lands for herps, but may be using different survey methods. To understand trend and distribution information, it is important to use consistent or comparable methods.

Reports on herp monitoring initiatives from three federal agencies were presented, including the Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) of USGS by Dan James, the Herp Initiative of the Forest Service (Region 8) by Ernie Garcia, and monitoring initiatives of the NPS by Peter Dratch.

ARMI. Dan James provided an overview of ARMI. In 2000, the President and Congress directed agencies of the Department of Interior (DOI) to develop a plan to initiate monitoring trends in amphibian populations on DOI lands, and conduct research into the underlying causes of amphibian declines and malformations. USGS was given lead responsibility for planning and organizing ARMI, in corporation with the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. ARMI monitoring is organized nationally among seven regions, with Dan James acting as the national coordinator. ARMI has several objectives that include (i) long-term monitoring to determine trends in amphibian populations, (ii) research into causal factors of decline and malformations, and (iii) share information with cooperators, land managers, scientific community, and other publics.

FS Herp Initiative. Ernie Garcia presented a report on the Forest Service's Herp Initiative on reptile and amphibian conservation. He indicated the Initiative will augment existing programs such as ARMI, and the desire to expand scope of involvement to include partners outside the FS. The Herp Initiative is a three year proposal with three main products, including to (1) prepare a Handbook on herp inventory and monitoring protocols across PARC regions, (2) prepare a Handbook on the Conservation Status of herps (300 species) in the United States, and (3) provide training to agency biologists on herp identification, survey techniques, best management practices, and data analyses. To provide these products, the FS received funds for year one of a three year "Herp Initiative" proposal from the FS Director's Fund Proposal, Region 8 FS has tentatively committed funds to support year two, leaving the project short \$140,000 in the final year. The FS entered into an agreement with DOE for Whit Gibbons to coordinate efforts for the first two products. In addition to these three products, the FS Initiative also provides fiscal support for the FASC Coordinator, HMG, and organizational meetings and workshops.

NPS Initiative. Peter Dratch indicated that NPS is using amphibians and reptiles as indicators in environmental baselines/health. **PARC** needs to link with NPS land and management coordinators, as knowledge of **PARC** within NPS is low. NPS has provided fiscal support to ARMI, but is presently unsure of the application of ARMI inventory and monitoring protocols to NPS lands.

8) Interagency Training

Outside of academic programs, few federal agencies have existing educational programs on herpetology (natural history, identification, capture/restraint and survey methods) for their employees.

Under the FS Herp Initiative, inter-agency training will be provided to the Southeast region through an agreement with DOE for Whit Gibbons, and thereafter potentially expanded to include other regions.

Another option would be to explore the possibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service's National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) providing a course on herpetology. This course could cover natural history, identification, monitoring and survey techniques, and best management practices, and could be offered off-site the Shepardstown, WV, training facility to allow region-specific field experience.

Attachment 1

Action Items for FASC Coordinator and Representatives

1. FASC Coordinator prepare and distribute Big Sky Montana meeting minutes to FASC representatives.
2. FASC Coordinator contact other federal agencies currently inactive in PARC- FASC, and explore opportunities to engage them.
3. FASC Coordinator explore the need for a FASC meeting prior to North American (March 22-26, 2003).
 - Email or call FASC representatives by October 4th to get feedback on (i) Alison's roles, responsibilities, and priorities, and (ii) vision and goals for FASC within PARC.
 - Dependent on feedback, organize a conference call for the week of November 4th to finalize meeting agenda items.
4. FASC Coordinator help facilitate completion of remaining Habitat Management Guidelines (HMG)
 - Explore funding options to meet remaining needs for regional HMG's
 - Get original template developed by PARC Management Technical Working Group from Joe Mitchell, and distribute to FASC representatives
 - Explore whether there is a need to design HMGs for two different user groups within FASC and PARC Management Technical Working Group
5. FASC Coordinator explore options to leverage current funds for Forest Service Initiative by securing alternate sources (e.g., NFWF, Congress).
6. FASC Coordinator develop PARC outreach tools for FASC, such as power point slide show template that can be modified to fit respective federal agency needs. (Explore possibility of modifying portions of existing PARC slide show developed by David Scott for PARC).
7. Federal agencies maintain dialogue regarding monitoring protocols with USGS-ARMI, NPS, and FS.
8. FASC Coordinator work with Bruce Kingsbury, Bruce Taubert, and Whit Gibbons to clarify the inclusion of representatives from the regional and technical working groups to the Executive Committee.
9. FASC Coordinator and Bruce Taubert work together to assist in planning and coordinating next two meetings of the 'Executive Committee'.

Attachment 2

PARC Federal Agency Steering Committee (FASC)

Agency	Official Representative	Telephone	FAX	E-Mail	Address
FWS	Alison Haskell FASC Coordinator	413-253-8505	413-253-8487	Alison_Haskell@fws.gov	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 300 Westgate Center Drive Hadley, MA 01035-9589
FWS	Rick Bennett (chairperson 4/02-04)	413-253-8300	413-253-8308	Rick O Bennett@fws.gov	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 300 Westgate Center Drive Hadley, MA 01035-9589
EPA	John Meagher (Stan Austin; vice-chairperson)	202-566-1353 (202-566-1385)	202-566-1349	meagher.john@epa.gov (austin.stanley@epa.gov)	U.S. EPA Wetlands Division (4502T) Ariel Rios Building 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW Washington, DC 20460
USGS	Dan James (ARMI Coord)	703-648-4253 (Also, Susan Haseltine, Associate Director of Biology)	703-648-4238	Dan_James@usgs.gov	U.S. Geological Survey 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive Reston, VA 20192
NPS	Peter Dratch	970-225-3596	970-225-3585	Peter_Dratch@nps.gov	National Park Service Biological Resources Management Division 1201 Oakridge Drive, #2000 Fort Collins, CO 80525
FS	Jim Fenwood	530-934-1100	530-934-7384	jfenwood@fs.fed.us	U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Mendocino National Forest 825 North Humboldt Avenue

Agency	Official Representative	Telephone	FAX	E-Mail	Address
NRCS	Mike Anderson (Pete Heard; Madison, MS)	202-690-0856	202-720-2646	mike.anderson@usda.gov (Pete: LPH@ms.nrcs.gov)	U.S. Dept. of Agriculture NRCS-Ecological Services Division P.O. Box 2890 Washington, DC 20013
NMFS	Therese Conant	301-713-1401 ext. 126	301-713-0376	Therese.Conant@noaa.gov	National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Protected Resources 1315 East-West Highway, 13th Floor Silver Spring, MD 20910
BLM	Fred Stabler	202-452-7767 ext. 3767	202-452-7702	Fred_Stabler@blm.gov	Bureau of Land Management Fish, Wildlife & Forests Group, WO-230 1849 C St., NW (LSB-204) Washington, DC 20240
DOT	Paul Garrett	303-969-5772 ext. 332	303-969-6727	paul.garrett@fhwa.dot.gov	Federal Highway Administration 555 Zang St., Room 400 Lakewood, CO 80228

Ad-hoc PARC Federal Agency Steering Committee

Agency	Representative	Telephone	FAX	E-Mail	Address
FWS	Sam Hamilton (1 st chairperson)	404-679-4000	404-679-4006	sam_hamilton@fws.gov	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 1875 Century Boulevard Atlanta, GA 30345
FWS	Earl Possardt	770-214-9293	770-836-6633	earl_possardt@fws.gov	University of West Georgia Department of Biology Carrollton, GA 30118

FS	Monica J. Schwalbach (2 nd chairperson)	828-257-4268	828-259-0584	mschwalbach@fs.fed.us	U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Deputy Forest Supervisor No. Carolina National Forests 160A Zillicoa St., P.O. Box 2750 Asheville, NC 28801
FS	Ernesto Garcia (FS Herp Initiative)	404-347-4081	404-347-4154	egarcia@fs.fed.us	U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Forest Svcs- Southern Region 1720 Peachtree Road, NW Suite 816N Atlanta, GA 30309
NRCS	Randy Gray (HMG Project)	Telecommute 505-895-5428 Office (CA)	530-792-5730	randy.gray@ca.usda.gov	U.S. Dept of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, HC 66 Box 76 Deming, NM 88030

		530-792-5712			
EPA	Bill Sipple	202-566-1377	202-566-1375	sipple.william@epa.gov	U.S. Env. Protection Agency Wetlands Division (4502T) Ariel Rios Building 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW Washington, D.C. 20460