

Nature Reserve of Orange County (NROC)  
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)  
Minutes of Regular Meeting

Date: June 6, 2005  
Time: 1:00 p.m.  
Location: Irvine Ranch Water District  
15600 Sand Canyon Avenue  
Multi-Purpose Room  
Irvine, CA

Meeting was started at 1:00 p.m. by committee chair Milan Mitrovich.

The following members of the TAC were present at the meeting:

Will Miller, US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Trish Smith, The Nature Conservancy  
Sharon Heider, City of Irvine  
Jon Keeley, UC Los Angeles  
Milan Mitrovich, Nature Reserve of Orange County  
Lyn McAfee, Nature Reserve of Orange County

The following members of the TAC were absent:

Kathy Keane, Biological Consultant  
Dave Mayer, California Department of Fish and Game

The following invited guests of the TAC were present:

Cathy Tucker, City of Irvine  
Albert Lucero, County of Orange

Michael Goulden, Department of Earth System Science, UC Irvine, presented information concerning research he and Katharine Suding, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UC Irvine, proposed be conducted on lands within the reserve. Described research will measure the impact of environmental change on southern California grassland and coastal sage ecosystems. Proposed study site is located on The Irvine Company property near Loma Ridge in upper Hicks Canyon. Research involves a series of treatments manipulating precipitation, nitrogen deposition, and fire history across an eight-acre area of coastal sage scrub and grassland. The study is scheduled to run for six to nine years with fieldwork beginning later this year.

Following the presentation and subsequent discussion, TAC members approved the request for research permission. At this time, members suggested that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be entered into between current and future landowners, UC Irvine, and NROC to layout the agreed upon terms of the study. UC Irvine was encouraged to put together the MOU for review and agree to put up a bond to fund any needed rehabilitation of the land following completion of the study.

Committee chair Mitrovich introduced the second topic for discussion concerning the standardization of procedure for approving requests for permission to conduct research on lands within the reserve. During the discussion that followed, the TAC agreed standardization would simplify the approval process for landowners and land managers and enhance the ability of NROC to capture research being conducted on the reserve. The TAC recognized a significant challenge to this initiative would be enforcing the terms of the agreement after researchers completed data collection on reserve land. To meet this challenge, TAC members suggested NROC develop a relationship with individual departments of participating research universities and create an umbrella agreement, or MOU, with the departments to ensure sponsored researchers meet the terms of their individual agreements.

Following the discussion, TAC members suggested that a draft document detailing the procedure be completed by Mitrovich and made available to the committee for review. In addition to the procedural outline, members suggested example files of the necessary forms and instructions for researchers be created and made available for downloading on the NROC website.

In a related discussion, the TAC suggested that Mitrovich compose a draft document to be reviewed by the TAC describing the formal policy of the TAC regarding the prioritization of research efforts on the reserve. Relevant sections of the Natural Community Conservation Plan, Implementation Agreement, and other documents are to be referenced in the policy.

As a third topic for discussion, Mitrovich introduced a proposed NROC directed research study for the year 2006. Described research is designed to fill current gaps in knowledge concerning the status of cactus wrens in the coastal reserve. Proposition of the research follows the identification of this population as of conservation concern. Research specifics include: mapping of southern cactus scrub in coastal reserve, including special linkage areas; measuring key characteristics of cactus scrub; surveying mapped cactus patches for presence and absence of cactus wrens; building statistical models that best explain presence and absence of cactus wrens; and researching the dynamics of fire and southern cactus scrub recovery in coastal southern California.

Following discussion on the topic, the TAC suggested going forward with the described research and putting out a call for proposals to estimate costs associated with the specific research activities. At the next TAC meeting members will review proposals and vote to decide what proposal(s) will be recommended to the board for funding.

In a related discussion, the TAC outlined the need to identify external sources of funding that can be used to fund research of significant cost (e.g. updating the reserve-wide vegetation map) or associated with habitats (e.g. riparian areas) that lie outside of reserve boundaries.

In a final discussion, the TAC assigned Mitrovich the responsibility of filling out TAC membership as directed by the board. This responsibility includes finding a second scientific advisor and second biologist to serve on the committee. TAC members suggested a faculty member at UC Riverside or San Diego State University might be the most qualified and valuable to serve as the second scientific advisor to the reserve.

At the close of the meeting the TAC decided to meet quarterly with the next TAC meeting scheduled for September 7, 2005.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.