

## Implementing Eco-Logical Stakeholder Meeting

June 4, 2014

10:00 a.m. -11:30 a.m.

North Central Texas Council of Governments

**Agencies in Attendance:** City of Arlington, City of Benbrook, City of Cedar Hill, City of Farmers Branch, City of Grapevine, Tarrant County, Fort Worth Transportation Authority, University of Texas at Arlington, NCTCOG, TxDOT Dallas District, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Forest Service, Upper Trinity River Water District, EPA Region VI, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Trees Foundation, Connemara Conservancy, Bowman-Melton Associates, Halff Associates

### Agenda:

#### 1. Regional Transportation & Conservation Planning Integration Efforts

Dan Lamers with the NCTCOG Transportation Department described efforts the agency has undergone to increasingly integrate environmental considerations in the transportation planning process. Since 2008, NCTCOG has been awarded two grants from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to introduce and implement the Eco-Logical Program, which is an ecosystem approach to developing infrastructure projects.

#### 2. Regional Ecosystem Framework Development

Tamara Cook with the NCTCOG Environment & Development Department gave a high-level overview of how the Regional Ecosystem Framework (REF) was developed. The REF is a planning tool used to identify natural resources by subwatershed. Through the FHWA Implementing Eco-Logical grant, NCTCOG has begun updating the REF and the next steps are to identify priority resource areas and candidate sites for mitigation or enhancement.

#### 3. Subwatershed Mapping

Kendall Wendling with the NCTCOG Transportation Department described efforts to further prioritize subwatersheds by highest ecosystem needs. Three priority maps were created that show the relative importance of ecosystem value, green infrastructure, and water considerations in each subwatershed. One subwatershed in the Trinity Forest area was selected to further determine critical resources of concern, potential coordination with resource agencies, and possible mitigation and enhancement opportunities.

#### 4. Next Steps

- *Future Initiatives:* Kendall explained that in addition to updating the REF, the two other project emphasis areas are to apply the REF to a pilot corridor and to launch a Regional Shared Value Mitigation pilot program. Sandy Wesch will be leading the Loop 9 corridor effort and Chris Anderson will be leading the Regional Shared Value Mitigation program.

- *Request for Data:* Kendall requested data from partners to help enrich the project analysis. Types of desired data include conservation easements, existing and future conservation areas, future parks, tree cover, mitigation sites, and habitat/species data.

## 5. Partner Input

Regional Ecosystem Framework (REF) Maps: There was discussion related to the data that is currently included and what could potentially be added to future versions of the REF maps. Suggestions for data to be incorporated in the future are:

- Future land use, including development induced by transportation projects
- Results from NCTCOG/Trust for Public Land Greenprinting initiatives
- Fly zones for migratory birds

Additionally, it was noted that the value of soil conservation needs to be more explicitly addressed in the REF maps. Specifically, the Blackland Prairie should have more weight as a priority ecosystem. Another comment was that non-impaired water segments should be a concern in addition to already impaired segments since the goal is to keep them in good condition. There were several questions about how the sustainability layer was created. The methodology for all of the layers is included in the REF User's Guide, which is posted on [www.nctcog.org/traces/Reg\\_Ecosystem\\_Framework.asp](http://www.nctcog.org/traces/Reg_Ecosystem_Framework.asp). For reference, the definition of sustainability is included below.

*The Sustainability layer describes the state of the environment in terms of stability (how resistant to disturbance an area is) and resilience (how capable is the area in returning to its predisturbance state). Sustainable areas are those that can maintain themselves into the future without human management. The sustainability layer consists of 11 measures that can be divided into two groups: fragmentors and stressors. The fragmentors include contiguous land cover type, regularity of ecosystem boundary, appropriateness of land cover, waterway obstruction, and road density. The stressors include airport noise, Superfund National Priority List and State Superfund Sites, water quality, air quality, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Sites, Treatment-Storage-Disposal Sites, Corrective Action and Voluntary Cleanup Program Sites, and urban/agricultural disturbance. Data Source: Texas Ecological Assessment Protocol.*

Subwatershed Mapping: One suggestion related to the subwatershed mapping exercise was to include some sort of water component to the green infrastructure category. Additionally, another suggestion was to consider changing the map titles to be more reflective of the data that is shown. Another comment was to show continuity of resources to emphasize existing landscape continuity and to identify potential landscape linkages.

Data and Partner Coordination: Several attendees offered additional data sources that would be helpful for the project. The project team is coordinating with the Research and Information Services (RIS) Department that regularly requests data from local governments to avoid duplication of efforts. NCTCOG will be able to share the REF layers for review to our partners by request.

Additionally, one question was if other Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in Texas have conducted similar work related to integrating environmental considerations earlier in the transportation project delivery process. The Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC) has also been working towards implementing the Eco-Logical approach and NCTCOG has had discussions with them in the past. According to federal transportation authorization legislation, MPOs are encouraged to consider Planning-Environment Linkages (PEL) in their transportation process, but the level of involvement depends on the staff resources at the MPO.

Next Steps: In addition to data, NCTCOG also requested that partners share best practices for mitigation and noted that the development of a regional mitigation bank could be a consideration as part of this project. It was noted that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should be involved in these discussions. Finally, attendees stated that it would be helpful to have the REF data layers accessible through a data sharing resource or online; NCTCOG will explore options to share the data.