

**IDOT District 1, Will County
Caton Farm/Bruce Road
Environmental Assessment
Information – Status Update
ESA – Consultation open on Hines Emerald Dragonfly, Biological Assessment expected**

DECISIONS:

Formal concurrence was not requested at this meeting.

USFWS – River crossing is okay, on board with its preferred location of the crossing, need to look at the eastern portion of the preferred

USFWS – No Critical habitat further south of existing critical habitat designation.

NEXT STEPS:

USEPA – Requests a site visit late July (invite USFWS and USACE). Civil tech to work with agencies to identify appropriate dates for site visit.

USFWS – FHWA will need to begin formal consultation after informal review of BA is completed. USFWS will begin informal review now that project is advancing.

Anticipate requesting concurrence on Preferred Alternative in September 2012. Concurrence on Preferred will occur prior to completion of Section 7 consultation.

Civil Tech to provide meeting minutes from 2/2011 meeting with USFWS to the USACE and USEPA.

DISCUSSION:

The purposes of the meeting are to update the FHWA and regulatory and resources agencies on the environmental coordination, detailed design, and schedule for the project.

Civiltech (Young) began by stating that the project is located in Will County, north and east of Joliet and includes a study area covering approximately 11 miles by 3 miles in area. Previous studies, including the 1995 IDOT Strategic Regional Arterial (SRA) Studies, stated a new bridge over the Des Plaines River Valley (River Valley) would connect Caton Farm Road on the west to Bruce Road on the east. In March of 2005, Concurrence Point #1 – Project Purpose and Need was reached. Following that meeting, 14 build alternatives were developed and evaluated including eight different River Valley crossing locations. In January of 2007, Concurrence Point #2 was reached with six alternatives to be carried forward, which included two different River Valley crossing locations. The following alternatives were carried forward:

- Caton Farm – Bruce – Gougar Alignment
- Caton Farm – Bruce – Middle Alignment
- Caton Farm – Oak – Bruce – Gougar Alignment
- Caton Farm – Oak – Bruce – Middle Alignment
- Caton Farm – Oak – Gougar Alignment
- Caton Farm – Oak – Middle Alignment

One River Valley crossing location surfaced as the preferred location through Agency coordination. After 9/11, the United States Coast Guard requested to push the alignment south, away from the Lockport Lock and Dam, citing national security reasons. In 2007, the critical

habitat for the Hine's Emerald Dragonfly (HED) was listed in the Federal Register and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requested the alignment move as far south away from the critical habitat as possible. The roadway approach on the west is on new alignment that diverges south from Bruce Road just north of the Canadian National Rail Road and bridges IL Route 53/7, crosses the River Valley south of the known HED critical habitat and Lockport Park District property (Dellwood Park West), and meets existing grade at the intersection of IL Route 171 and Oak Avenue, nearly a 3,500 bridge structure.

The six alternatives were presented for public comment in June of 2007. Although clear support was expressed for a new river crossing, there was no consensus for a specific crossing location or for the north-south (Gougar or Middle) alignment connecting Bruce Road to 159th Street (IL Route 7). Following the public meeting further coordination was held with the City of Crest Hill, the City of Lockport and various property owners to try to address specific concerns regarding design features that were raised at the public meetings.

In 2009, the Transportation Corridor Committee reached a consensus that the locally preferred alternative is Caton Farm – Oak – Bruce – Middle. In July of 2009, the Will County Board passed a resolution adopting the Caton Farm – Oak – Bruce – Middle as the locally preferred alternative.

The most sensitive area for environmental concerns is within the Des Plaines River Valley. In 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009 HED studies were performed by IDOT's specialist, the University of South Dakota. HED adults were identified in numerous areas south of the Crest Hill Water Treatment Facility, on the MWRD Island, and east of the shipping canal. CBBEL (Matkovic) stated that coordination has continued with the USFWS regarding the HED and a meeting was held in February of 2011 to obtain preliminary concurrence on the locally preferred alternative to move forward with detailed studies. At that meeting, the USFWS agreed that the alignment was as far south as possible, the alignment does not impact the HED Critical Habitat, and that Section 7 consultation would be required and a Biological Assessment would have to be developed. A field review was completed in May of 2011 with USFWS, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, and the Illinois State Geological Survey to determine if there was the possibility of larval habitat on the MWRD Island. It was determined that there was no potential for larval habitat on the island.

Since then, the consultant team performed detailed engineering design studies including geometric design, additional traffic studies, and drainage studies. Coordination has begun regarding historic sites with Illinois historic Preservation Agency and they provided some requirements and setbacks they preferred. The project team has complied with their requests and are awaiting reaching Concurrence Point #3 to conduct further coordination with the local historic preservation group. The sites that are being investigated are Kopper's Coke Oven Plant, Illinois and Michigan Canal Heritage Corridor, and the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. The piers for the bridge have been designed to clear span all significant features in the River Valley. There are six locations for noise walls that are both feasible and cost reasonable within the project area. A Preliminary Environmental Site Assessment has been conducted and there are over 50 sites with Recognized Environmental Concerns.

AGENCY QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

USEPA (West) was concerned that there was no agreement on the alignment and there was a meeting with concerns by the community. Civiltech (Young) stated that the meeting was held with a developer concerned that the alignment was going through their property. Since that time, the developer has gone out of business and a bank owns the property.

USEPA (West) asked why the alignment moves back to Bruce Road east of the river crossing. Civiltech (Young) stated that the City of Lockport has planned for the alignment along Bruce Road by obtaining right-of-way as properties develop. Also, Oak Avenue is a small roadway with narrow right-of-way.

FHWA (Fuller) stated that the Draft Biological Assessment was submitted to USFWS in February. This will require Section 7 consultation. The USFWS will review the Biological Assessment and it will likely require a Biological Opinion. The Biological Opinion is needed before the Environmental Assessment is released for public comment. USFWS (Cirton) reiterated that the locally preferred alignment is as far south from the HED Critical Habitat as possible.

USEPA (West) and USACOE (Chernich) requested the February 2011 meeting minutes with USFWS. The PESA will also be sent to USEPA. He would like a site visit to look at the area before the September NEPA/404 Merger Meeting for Concurrence Point #3. Many of the signoffs are waiting on reaching Concurrence Point #3. FHWA (Fuller) stated that the Biological Opinion would be needed by January to meet our schedule.