

Recreation User Group (RUG)

Meeting 36

October 13, 2021

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Attendees

Representative	Organization
Greg Waterman	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club / LOST
Rich Smith	Tonto Recreational Alliance (TRAL)
Jim Schenck	Rebuild Superior, LOST & CWG
Mila Besich	Mayor, Town of Superior
Todd Pryor	Manager, Town of Superior
Bill Scott	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club / LOST
Erik Filsinger	Queen Creek Coalition/LOST
Chris Burkhart	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club/LOST
John Godec	Godec, Randall & Associates (GRA)
Sydney Uphouse	GRA
Courtney King	Community Relations Supervisor (Southern Region) ADOT
Jerry Stevenson	Mountain Brook Hiking Club, Gold Canyon
Nick Lund	LOST
Rick Schonfeld	Westland Resources
Heston Klenk	Resolution Copper
Mark Guerena	ADOT Area Construction Office
Mary Morissette	Resolution Copper Permitting Team
Jason Scow	Recreation Manager Tonto National Forest
Mark Flint	Southwest Trail Solutions
Elizabeth Butler	Friends of the Tonto, equestrians
Trisha Brown	ADOT Project Manager

Welcome and Introductions

John Godec welcomed everyone and asked that they introduce themselves. Some of the group attended the meeting in-person, while the rest joined via Zoom.

ADOT Plans for Queen Creek Bridge and Impacts Discussion

Godec asked Courtney King, who was filling in for Jeremiah Moerke, to share ADOT's current plans for the Queen Creek bridge and the anticipated impacts of the project. Courtney shared her screen with the group via Zoom. She provided an overview of previous major road projects since 2015 and their costs. She explained that this particular project will affect the US 60 corridor between Miami and Superior. It will involve the construction of a new bridge adjacent to the existing Queen Creek bridge. The existing bridge will remain in place during and after the construction of the new bridge. However, it was unclear how the old bridge would be used. The group expressed concern that their requests to use the old bridge for recreational purposes had

been turned down by ADOT. Courtney assured the group that she would look into their concerns and try to provide more clear answers.

Courtney went on to explain that the new bridge has an anticipated advertising date set for summer 2023, with approximately a 2 year construction duration. Anticipated restrictions will include, but are not limited to, full closure of US 60 for rock blasting during daylight hours (the restriction is expected to last one week, but may take longer); possible full closure for tie-in toward the end of project; flaggers and delays; and restricted access to some/all trails between Queen Creek bridge and Waterfall Canyon bridge at any given time. Courtney explained that ADOT is currently unsure where trail restrictions will be imposed at this time. However, they will have better information available once a contractor is selected. Furthermore, there will be no contractor provisions to provide barriers or protective features and no contractor provisions to keep trails open throughout the duration of the project. ADOT will coordinate with the contractor to attempt to keep some or all trails open when feasible.

It was made clear by the group that it is critically important to make recreational access better when the project is completed, and RUG will hold ADOT accountable for returning trails to equal or better condition prior to construction. Recreational access is important for Superior's economic growth. Concern was expressed that ADOT has ignored the needs of the town during past construction projects, creating economic hardship. The group agreed that knowing restrictions ahead of time will be important, and that maintaining recreation and access for emergency personnel is critical.

Erik Filsinger added that parking areas for rock climbers will be an additional concern. He encouraged ADOT to contact him, as the rock climbing community would like some input into closures and reroutes. He explained that winter is peak rock climbing season. However, Queen Creek Canyon provides morning climbing in the summer at Atlantis Point. Erik also added that 6 months ago, he had mentioned that climbers were trying to cross the road by the Waterfall Canyon bridge, which they are not supposed to do. This is primarily due to poor maintenance of the trail going underneath the bridge. He suggested that as a part of the planning process, it may be beneficial to restrict crossing the road. A higher quality trail going underneath the bridge may also help. Furthermore, westbound traffic trying to turn into the parking lot has created issues. Potential solutions for this could be explored in conjunction with the project.

Courtney asked the group if there are certain times when more people use the LOST trail. Members of LOST responded that October-May is the peak season for tourists, although locals use it in the summer, particularly in the early morning hours. The Queen Creek Canyon section of the LOST trail is the most popular. It has the unique attraction of hiking to the top and getting to the tunnel. It also has unique historical and geographical elements, making it difficult to replace this section of trail with something else during closures. In addition, after people recreate, they stop in Superior for refreshments. Thus, trails being shut down for 2 years would be terrible. Conversations among ADOT, the town of Superior, members of this recreation group and other stakeholders in the surrounding area are critically important. RUG expressed that they are willing to help ADOT communicate with the town and recreationists about closures. Hesston Klenk offered to help ADOT with mapping archaeological/tribal/cultural sites, while

Mary offered to provide mine-working information for mapping of existing tunnels and Native American sites.

Courtney stated that the Waterfall Canyon bridge will be combined with the Queen Creek bridge project to minimize delays. Waterfall Canyon bridge will not take as long to complete as the Queen Creek Bridge, as it will use the Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) technique.

One member asked if the US 60 Bridge Project will have negative impacts on Queen Creek water quality. It was stated that there is no way to know for sure at this time. Group members discussed how recreational use of the old bridge could be beneficial for a variety of reasons and could provide economic/tourist opportunities. It was asked what will happen to the parking lot that you enter to go to the old road on the old bridge. Currently, the parking lot experiences significant draining issues. Members agreed that it could be a good asset for the town to have a nicer parking lot there and suggested that this be worked into the project.

Wrapping up the discussion, RUG members asked and encouraged ADOT to keep in contact with the group and provide regular updates emphasizing that RUG is passionate about the issue. However, the group wants to work with ADOT, not against. It was also stated that a formal comment letter would be drafted to present to ADOT.

Update on Superior Tourism and Recreation Team (START)

Godec asked Jason Scow from USFS to give the group an update on the status of the START project. Jason explained that there was an endangered plant found within the proposed route of Forest Road 4. As a result, this road may need to be rerouted. Additional information on resource impacts are expected to start coming in. USFS is trying to figure out a realistic timeframe for the Telegraph Canyon and Forest Road 4 projects. However, this is highly dependent on the ecological review. There will be a hiking trail along the LOST reroute.

Southwest Decision Resources has been contracted to help facilitate the START project. The firm will be calling individuals to get in contact with various groups/stakeholders. At this time, they are shooting for November to set up a meeting and get everyone together. Planning of additional recreation opportunities will take place after this group meeting.

Godec stated that RUG will stay in existence on an as-needed basis separate from START, and it is expected that previous work done by RUG in conjunction with Resolution will be incorporated into START.

Next Meeting

January 2022

Date, time, and location TBD