

Element Background - (Packet 1 & 2)

To: CAC Members and Alternates
From: Staff
Date: September 21, 2010
Re: Environmental Planning and Conservation Element

Note: As discussed at the September 15, 2010 CAC Meeting, the new process sending two separate packets to the CAC for comment will not commence with the Environmental Planning and Conservation Element. It will, however begin in November with the Open Space and Recreation Element.

ASSIGNMENT:

Please find attached three different files:

1. “Element Background – (Packet 1 & 2)”
2. Draft “Environmental Planning and Conservation Element”
3. Listing of Proposed Goals and Policies
 - I. Please read, “Element Background – (Packet 1 & 2)” that contains
 - a. Identifying the state statute requirements;
 - b. Background information/trends/data;
 - c. Element relationships;
 - d. Listing existing goals/policies with Staff critique
 - II. Please read, prepare and submit comments upon the draft text of the “Environmental Planning and Conservation Element”
 - III. Please read, prepare and submit comments upon the “Listing of Proposed Goals and Policies”

For your convenience, we have listed all the Environmental Planning and Conservation’s goals and policies separately such that you may copy and paste this section into your word processor. It is suggested that you use a bold or color font that easily distinguishes your edits or recommendations. Also, you should indicate whether or not the goal/policy is “acceptable” or a “need for discussion”. Likewise, for the draft text, you may copy and paste the text into your word processor to make edits, comments, suggestions as well.

Please email comments to bcaravona@flagstaffaz.gov by the morning of Monday, October 18th. Based upon your comments, staff will prepare for the October 21st.

STATE STATUTES: The applicable AZ state statutes frame the requirements the Regional Plan shall address.

(a) Environmental Planning Element:

The **environmental planning element** contains analyses, policies and strategies to address anticipated effects, if any, of plan elements on air quality, water quality and natural resources associated with proposed development under the general plan. The policies and strategies to be developed under this element shall be designed to have community-wide applicability and shall not require the production of an additional environmental impact statement or similar analysis beyond the requirements of state and federal law.

(b) Conservation Element:

The **conservation element** addresses conservation, development and utilization of natural resources, including forests, soils, rivers and other waters, harbors, fisheries, wildlife, minerals and other natural resources.

The conservation element may also cover:

- 1) The reclamation of land;
- 2) Flood control;
- 3) Prevention and control of the pollution of streams and other waters;
- 4) Regulation of the use of land in stream channels and other areas required for the accomplishment of the conservation plan;
- 5) Prevention, control and correction of the erosion of soils, beaches and shores; and
- 6) Protection of watersheds.

In the Flagstaff region where the environment is such an important part of the character and economy of the community, staff believes it would be difficult, if not impossible to consider environmental planning separately from conservation. Therefore, for purposes of this plan, the two statutorily-required elements are proposed to be merged into one based on the presumption that the conservation of natural resources and the natural environment is critically important for the future prosperity of the Flagstaff community.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND TRENDS: *This is an informational presentation to CAC, introducing the element and Regional trends, in the way of numbers, maps, graphs, and/or expert presentations; including community experts’ information, report summaries.*

The text of each element contains background information, current conditions, and trends. It would be redundant to report on that same information in this section of this report. Therefore, staff recommends that the CAC read the draft element at the end of this report to gain an understanding of the topic.

A. Public Open House Comments

Public Open Houses occurred in 2009 on 8/12 at Sunnyside Farmers Market), 8/16 at City Hall Farmers Market, on 8/26 at Ft. Valley Plan Open House – Coconino County office, on 8/29 at Doney Park Picnic in the Park, and 9/12 at Kachina Village Picnic in the Park of 2009. The public was asked to comment upon two questions in respect to Conservation and Environment. It was noted their comments would be presented for the CAC to take into consideration when drafting the Regional Plan. This information is posted on the regional plan website and previously presented to the CAC. For detailed [Environment and Conservation Open House Comments](http://www.flagstaff.az.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=9963) please visit the following link. <http://www.flagstaff.az.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=9963>.

B. Focus Group

A Focus Group was conducted on September 24, 2009 consisting of experts, professionals and interested citizens who break into groups to have a concerted discussion about certain topics. For details, please see [Regional Plan Focus Group 2](http://www.flagstaff.az.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=11405) (<http://www.flagstaff.az.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=11405>) which has been previously provided to the CAC and posted upon the Regional Plan website.

At the conclusion of the Focus Group meeting, a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was performed to summarize their comments in respect to Environment and to identify needs/concerns when developing the revised Regional Plan.

Environment	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Connections between agencies + city/county	Enforcement
Visionary county comprehensive plan	Lack of programmatic staff support
Existing regional plan as starting point	Inadequate public notification / public participation
Plentiful natural resources & wildlife	County sprawl - lot splits
Good water and air quality	Lack of cohesive plan
Recycling program	Adequacy of hazardous materials.
Opportunities	Threats
Need for education/ public relations	Development at periphery- creation of conflicts
Conservation lands system (Pima County Model)	Resources- e.g. city needs staff biologist
Meshing City/County plans with Federal / state plans	Invasive species- plants and animals
Gateway corridor definition/ clarification /protection incentives for protecting open space, developing with conservation focus.	Cumulative effects of dovel. (death by 1000 cuts)
Tools to implement the plan	Push back by developers

Coordination between plan and ordinances	Potential USFS exchange adjacent to community
Education to visitors about waste	Desire of neighbors for Open Space vs. forest desire exchange
Improve recycling	Wildlife fragmentation
RP policies up to date	Increased waste stream
Biological assessment as part of development checklist	landfills

C. Conservation efforts in the Flagstaff Region

- **Coconino County Comprehensive Plan**—strong Conservation Framework & Natural Environment policies
- **Picture Canyon Meander Restoration Project:** Stakeholders Group include over 16 agencies. This project restores about 8 acres of stream and wetland habitat, create educational signage interpreting archaeological and natural resources, and will complete a FUTS connection along the Rio de Flag.
- **Community Gardens:** Victory Garden (local food production) and La Plaza Vieja Gateway Garden—xeriscape landscaping on brownfield.
- **Brownfield Redevelopment:** 116 West Phoenix -Mass transit infill project.
- **The City of Flagstaff’s Sustainability Program** has won the Governor’s Excellence Award for Leadership and Energy Efficiency - for the residential energy efficiency program.
- **Coconino County Parks & Open Space Program:**
 - 2002 voter-approved sales-tax initiative = \$33 million dollar fund to acquire approximately 2500 acres for conservation & recreation.
 - Voters selected conservation areas—Rogers Lake, Observatory Mesa, and lands near Walnut Canyon.
 - To date, 66 acres have been conserved mostly in Pumphouse Greenway.
 - Coconino County attempting to acquire over 1,300 acres of State Trust lands around Rogers Lake.
- **Forest Restoration:** The US Forest Service and Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership have restored over 39,000 acres of forest in and around Flagstaff since 2000. This has restored fire-adapted forests to a more natural condition while protecting the Flagstaff community from wildfire.
- **Rio de Flag Wetland Restoration:** The City of Flagstaff and AZ Game & Fish are working together to ensure in-stream flow of reclaimed water in the Rio de Flag. In-stream flow of reclaimed water will help restore and sustain riparian and wetland habitats along the Rio.
- **Friends of the Rio de Flag:** Community based organization dedicated to conservation and restoration of the Rio de Flag
- **Rio de Flag Flood Control Project:** Phase I (Clay Avenue Wash Detention Basin) was completed in July 2009. Construction of Phase II (Butler Ave. Tunneling) is 60% complete and scheduled to be finished by December 2009. Construction of Phase III (the lower reach of the project) is schedule for construction by March 2010, if Federal funding is approved.
- **Ecological Restoration Institute** at NAU (www.eri.nau.edu)
- **Friends of Walnut Canyon:** In 1996 the Friends of Walnut Canyon were instrumental in expanding Walnut Canyon National Monument by 1,300 acres. In 2002 the Friends introduced a new proposal to expand the even further with another 20,000 acres.

D. Element Relationship

The following briefly addresses the relationship of Environmental Planning and Conservation Element upon other elements.

STRONG RELATIONSHIP:

Land Use: Helps identify lands to preserve and develop; type urban form and densities contribute positively or negatively to environmental quality, and use/preservation of scarce resources and habitats.

Growth Area: Land located at the perimeter, if developed and dependent upon the resulting urban form, may contribute to a decrease in air quality due to increased vehicle miles travels and emissions based upon types of use; increase cost of delivering public services to outlying areas; lands may or may not possess wildlife/plant/cultural characteristics to preserve.

Conservation: Direct correlation as self-evident of the title of the chapter.

Energy: Goals and policies may support and re-enforce sustainable energy practices and renewable energy sources.

Open Space: Preserving quality ecosystems may assist in identifying valuable lands to acquire and preserve.

Safety: Establishing and maintaining a healthy ecosystem prevents hazards such as forest fires and degradation of water quality.

Circulation: Environmental and conservation goals and policies contribute to the needs of an efficient, multi-modal transportation system that decreases vehicle miles traveled and avoids potential conflict with wildlife.

MODERATE RELATIONSHIP

Recreation: Depending upon recreation uses, water quality and sources may be an input to support the recreation function (i.e. Golf course, ski resort, fishing, water sports, etc); passive and active recreation locations to be appropriately located; noise abatement may affect recreation areas;

Housing: Affordable housing may affected if the cost of development increases as well as costs associated through utilities.

Cost of Development: Water shed protection and providing water may increase cost; if air quality deteriorates, attaining NAASQ standards may be passed on to local jurisdiction; resulting urban form (compact or sprawl) contributes to cost of development of providing services;

Neighborhood Preservation and Redevelopment: Depending upon the urban form, if compact and walkable for example, may contribute positively to the environmental quality such healthy air and efficient land use.

WEAK RELATIONSHIP

Bicycle

Public Facilities and service/buildings

EXISTING GOALS AND POLICIES: *Explores whether current plan and goals/policies are working or need ‘tweaking’ by:*

1. *List existing Goals and Policy.*
2. *Providing a Staff Critique and Recommendation of the existing goal/policy;*
3. *Implementation – working/not working*
4. *Potential Strategies.*

The 2001 Regional Plan contained fewer elements and a different configuration of elements than what is now required by statute. The element that is most similar to the proposed “Environmental Planning and Conservation” element was referred to in the 2001 plan as the “Natural and Cultural Resources and the Environment” element. It contained one goal and 18 policies, and it had a somewhat different focus in that it included cultural resources and other topics that will be addressed in different elements in this plan update. While the single goal and 18 policies in the existing element all contain some positive aspects, staff is recommending some revisions that would incorporate the existing positive concepts, but present them in clear, straightforward goal and policy statements.

GOAL NCR1

High standards will be maintained for protection and improvement of the region’s quality of life offered by its natural and cultural, historic and archaeological resources and its natural environment.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: While the existing goal contains some positive concepts, staff recommends that, rather than a single goal for the entire element, each subsection of the element should have a separate goal and policies applicable to that subsection. The positive concepts embodied in the existing goal would not be lost, but would be incorporated into more specific goals for each subsection. See the draft element at the end of this report for what that would look like.

b. Implementation -- Working/ Not working: **Mixed feedback, but could improve.** ARS provisions pertaining to the Regional Plan states that the Environmental Planning element “...shall not require the production of an additional environmental impact statement or similar analysis beyond the requirements of state and federal law...” which binds a jurisdiction’s hands. Outside of Federal projects requiring an Environmental Assessment, how does one determine a condition if prevented from requesting a study.

c. Suggested strategies:

1. Adopt proposed changes in Zoning Code (include investigation and protection in the development process).
2. Fund historic structures inventory (update and expansion).
3. Fund mapping of known archeological resources.
4. Lobby state legislature to require Environmental Analyses for Major Regional Plan Amendments and large subdivisions.
5. Infuse protection and improvement considerations in processes for making policy determination.

Policy NCR1.1—Improve Air Quality

Protect and improve air quality by implementation of air quality programs including but not limited to reducing the growth rate of total vehicle-miles of travel in the greater Flagstaff area, reducing the total emissions of high priority pollutants from commercial and industrial sources, and reducing area-wide smoke emissions.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The phrase “Improve air quality” is more akin to a goal than a policy, and may be incorporated into the goal of the “Air Quality” subsection of this element. The sentence following “Improve air quality” attempts to expand upon the concept by suggesting some examples of how air quality might be improved, i.e. reducing vehicle miles traveled and reducing emissions, but it does not sound like a policy statement that would help much in the decision-making process regarding future development proposals.

b. Implementation -- Working/ Not working: **Working**, as evident of being in continued compliance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards, however air quality is worsening. There has been little to no emphasis on this in policy development or long term planning.

c. Suggested strategies:

1. Alternatives to drive-thrus? (idling vehicles greatly contribute to air pollution).
2. Time traffic lights to prevent unnecessary idling.
3. Seek alternatives solutions to forest prescribed burns.
4. Proactive approach to maintaining standards as NAASQ criteria may change in 2011.
5. Engage in regional dialogue with upwind jurisdiction and agencies.
6. Incorporate climate management into discussion – conduct risk assessments, i.e. what happens when are air quality worsens ... what is the impact on public health? Cost of public health challenges?

Policy NCRI.3—Sustainable Levels of Water Use

Support Plan supports on-going analyses to identify the sustainable levels of water use that can be maintained relative to development and the community living within its resources.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The topic of this policy is addressed in the “Water” element of the updated Regional Plan, which contains rewritten goals and policies and has already been reviewed and approved by the CAC. This version is poorly worded and makes little sense, i.e. “Sustainable levels of water use” – what about sustainable levels of water use? “Support Plan supports on-going analyses...” makes no sense.

Policy NCRI.4 - (Does not exist in the RLUTP document. Mis-numbered.)

Policy NCRI.5—Address Natural Hazard Areas

Natural and human-caused hazards which present danger to life, resources, and property shall be identified, their associated risks assessed, and development carefully controlled or conditions and areas avoided. Efforts shall be made to mitigate the impacts of natural hazards (e.g., forest fire, flooding, unstable soils, seismic or subsidence areas, high winds, steep slopes, or similar conditions) and human-caused hazards on existing areas and to plan for their post-disaster recovery. The City, County, and other appropriate governmental agencies shall cooperatively continue to develop plans, programs, regulations, and incentives which reduce the impacts from these hazards.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: A Natural hazards are not addressed in the draft “Environmental Planning and Conservation” element. Staff recommends that natural hazards be addressed as a subsection of the “Public Safety” element of the plan. Natural hazards that could be addressed under “Public Safety” include the wildland-urban interface, floods, earthquakes, and steep slopes.

Policy NCRI.6—Abate Noise Impacts

Noise abatement shall be a continuing environmental concern in the region.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Similar to the air quality policy above, “Abate noise impacts” is more akin to a goal than a policy statement. The sentence following is likewise not much of a policy statement. There is a consideration to include a subsection on “Natural Quiet” in this element – the topic could also be referred to as “Soundscape” and could be included in the “Community Character” element instead.

b. Implementation-- Working/ Not working: **Not working** -- regulation and policy direction does not exist.

c. Suggested strategies:

1. Adopt Noise Ordinances with criteria for urban and rural noise standards
2. Establish policy for land use for compatible and non-compatible uses and mitigation methods.
3. In respect to alternative energy facilities, please ensure that this policy is not used as a scapegoat -- it's happened in other states.

Policy NCRI.7—Minimize Waste

The City and County shall actively pursue and support programs and activities that reduce the amount of waste that must be landfilled.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation Again, the initial phrase, “Minimize waste” sounds like a goal rather than a policy. Staff recommends that this topic be addressed in a subsection on “Solid Waste” in the “Public Services & Facilities” element.

Policy NCRI.8—Address Hazardous Materials Disposal and Reduction

The City and County shall work to reduce use and ensure safe disposal of hazardous materials by developing plans, programs, and incentives for the safe disposal and reduction of hazardous materials.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Same comment as in NCR 1.7 above – this could be addressed in Public Service and Facilities.

b. Working/ Not working: **Working**

1. All hazardous waste collected at the HPC is safely stored and properly disposed of using a licensed hazardous waste contractor. The city and it's contractor work to reuse and recycle as much waste as possible to minimize land filling of hazardous wastes.

Policy NCRI.9—Protect Dark Skies

Protection of dark skies and conservation of energy shall be undertaken by minimizing the detrimental effects to the region's quality of life and astronomical observing conditions.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Same comments regarding the goal-like initial phrase and poorly-worded policy statement. This topic is currently included in this element. Dark skies could arguably be included in the “Community Character” element instead

Policy NCRI.10—Protect Archeological and Cultural Resources

Historical, archeological, and cultural resources shall be identified and preserved through restoration or adaptive reuse, as links between past, present, and future generations. Any discovery of aboriginal human remains or archaeological materials shall be reported to the appropriate federal or state agency as required by applicable laws.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Topic will be addressed in the “Community Character” element.

Policy NCRI.11—Promote the Community's Cultural Diversity

The Flagstaff area is a diverse region with various cultures, such as Native American, Hispanic, and estern, that would benefit from a cultural center providing a venue for learning about heritages and a means of acknowledging and showing appreciation of this cultural diversity.

a. Existing Goal/Policy Critique and Staff Recommendation: Topic will be addressed in the “Community Character” element.

Policy NCRI.12—Plan within an Ecosystem Framework

Natural systems, like watersheds and air sheds, and their relationships and impacts to the built environment should be considered when planning for the region.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The concept to “Plan within an ecosystem framework” is embodied within this element, but alternative language is suggested for goals and policies to make them more understandable to the lay audience. See proposed goal and policies in the “Ecosystem Health” subsection and throughout the element.

b. Working/ Not working: **Not working.**

1. Do not have authority to require dedication or preservation of watercourse and surrounding system (escarpments).
2. There is a disconnect between policy and planning.

c. Suggested Strategies:

1. Lobby State Legislature.

Policy NCRI.13—Maintain and Restore Natural Processes and Systems

Maintain and restore natural processes and systems, which will sustain, protect, and enhance such systems like the Rio de Flag.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Same comment as above regarding “Plan within an ecosystem framework.”

Policy NCRI.14—Promote Forest Restoration and Sustainable Management

Preserve the ponderosa forest ecosystem processes by vegetation and fire management, recognizing fire as a natural and/or human-caused occurrence with certain benefits and risks to the ecosystem. The City and County shall strive towards balancing the natural processes of the ecosystem with development concerns.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The concepts included in this policy are carried forward in slightly revised form in the “Ecosystem Health” subsection of this element.

b. Working/ Not working: **Working but needs to improve.**

c. Suggested Strategy:

1. Improve partnerships with Federal agencies.
2. Link in economic development risks and opportunities.

Policy NCRI.15—Protect Hillsides and Ridgelines

Protection of hillsides and ridgelines shall be carried out in a manner that, to the extent possible, avoids or minimizes both negative environmental consequences to the immediate and surrounding area and degradation of views and vistas

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The concepts included in this policy are partially addressed in the “Environmentally-Sensitive Lands” subsection of this element. Staff anticipates other aspects of hillsides and ridgelines to be addressed in the “Community Character” element (i.e. viewsheds) and “Public Safety” (i.e. steep slopes as a natural hazard).

Policy NCRI.16—Identify Natural Hazardous Areas and Control Development

Identify hazardous areas which present danger to life and property from flooding, unstable soils, seismic or subsidence problems, wild fires, steep slopes or similar conditions, and control or prohibit development in such areas.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Staff recommends that these topics be addressed in the “Public Safety” element.

Policy NCRI.17—Address Flood Hazards

Natural flood hazards in existing developed area should be reduced through both structural and non-structural measures. Development in natural rural floodplain areas shall be limited and floodplains should be restored to maintain the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains and natural washes.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: Floodplains are partially addressed in the “Environmentally-Sensitive Lands” subsection of this element. The topic will be addressed further in the “Public Safety” element.

Policy NCRI.18—Inventory, Eradicate or Control Noxious Weeds, and Restore Native Vegetation

The City and County shall coordinate with other agencies, organizations, and land managers to inventory and eradicate or control state-regulated noxious weeds; prevent establishment of new infestations through public awareness and education; and restore disturbed areas with native species.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: The draft element contains an expanded subsection on “Noxious and Invasive Weeds” with a goal, several policies, and a number of strategies identified. The concepts in the existing policy are incorporated into the updated draft element.

b. Working/ Not working: **Not Working.**

1. Under-funded.

c. Suggested Strategies:

1. Identify funding.

Policy NCRI.19—Create a “FireWise” Community

Measures, practices, and regulations should be developed and implemented to decrease the potential for destructive wildfires, to improve the survivability of structures and other infrastructure, and to provide for the safety of visitors, residents, and emergency responders.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: This topic, i.e. wildland-urban interface, will be addressed in the “Public Safety” element.

Policy NCRI.20—Encourage Energy Conservation Measures

In addition to and support of sustainable building and site design policies and strategies promoting the use of alternative means and sources of energy efficiency, the City and County shall consider energy conservation measures such as the use of alternative energy sources.

a. Staff Critique and Recommendation: This topic is addressed in the “Energy” element, which has already been reviewed and approved by the CAC.

Natural quiet/Sounds cape: No policy exists.