

Arizona Wildlife Podcast

Transcript: Episode 6 – Human-Wildlife Conflicts Resulting from Outdoor Recreation

(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)

The content for this episode came from the training day at the 2008 National Envirothon competition. It was originally recorded on July 29, 2008, outdoors at the Flagstaff Arboretum. It consisted of Arizona Game and Fish Department employees providing background information about some of the wildlife and wildlife issues found in the state. It concluded with a question and answer session by the students participating in the competition.

Listen as Sam Huselton, a Department educator, explains the conflicts that can arise when humans recreate near wildlife. Kellie Tharp and Eric Proctor, also Department educators, help Sam answer questions at the end.

SAM:

Humans...have a great deal of use for being out in the wild. So we have a lot of human and wildlife conflict. Humans like to come out and recreate. We like to come out and drive OHV, off-road vehicles. We like to go fishing. We like to go hunting. We like to go hiking. We like to go rock-climbing. And these are all issues that we have to deal with regarding wildlife because wildlife do use...do use this same area.

Caves are a big thing here. Arizona has a lot of caves. You guys have heard of Kartchner Caverns down in the southern part of the state. It's a very large cave, and the people who originally discovered that cave planned to keep it quiet. And they did for close to thirty years before they told anybody about that. Part of that they wanted to preserve that cave. Once you're in a cave, once you open up a cave, you've changed that whole ecosystem inside that cave and the bats use those systems. And if you change that then the bats can't come back, they can't use those areas as nursery roosts where they raise their offspring.

We have that issue also with mineshafts. Arizona has been mined extensively since the "white man" have come here. And we've got mineshafts that are just out in the middle of nowhere and drop down. They're very dangerous to humans but a lot of wildlife use those areas. Barn owls will use those to nest in. The bats, of course, will use them. And a lot of other larger mammals will use those areas as a den to...to help survive.

OHV use. Off-highway vehicles. That can be really detrimental to a habitat. And if a...if a OHV goes off-road in the desert it can take up to fifty years for that section of desert to return to normal. So they can be very, very destructive. They need to stay on the trails.

So, we have those conflicts between humans and wildlife who wants to use these areas. This can lead to animals abandoning a...uh...a traditional route that they use for migration. Or for fawning. Or to, uh, go to their feeding areas. So, those disruptions are all things that have to be balanced so that the habitat survives, so that we have recreation, and so that the wildlife can survive.

STUDENT:

Besides education what are some of the strategies, um, management, uh, uses to keep people on the trails even when their just like hiking or biking?

SAM:

Signage is a big one. Most of it is signage and just education is...is...is our primary, uh. You know you...you can put up signs doesn't necessarily mean somebody's going to read them.

ERIC:

We use tasers.¹

(LAUGHS)

ERIC:

Just kidding. Just kidding.

SAM:

But, uh, the signage is a big...is a big, big part of that but education is the biggest. It's just getting in contact with people. Letting them know when they go off what...what...what damage they were causing to the habitat.

ERIC:

And there's something of presence. We'll talk about like our wildlife managers. They're out in the field all the time trying to make...trying to make those one-on-one contacts with people, trying to get to know them. I mean that's the biggest...

KELLIE:

A lot of people don't understand the impacts and I think once they understand, it's an easy concept to get.

SAM:

Most people are really good, really responsible.

ERIC:

But it's tough. There's a lot of world out there. There's a lot of forest and it's tough to monitor it all. So there's always challenges...that's one of the challenges we face, absolutely.

STUDENT:

Do you guys use the whole "Leave No Trace" thing a lot here? Is that talked about a lot?

ERIC:

It's part of it.

KELLIE:

It's part of it. I think that's more, um, park service and forest service, campgrounds, leave no trace. Um, with us it's more monitoring the trails usage from a recreational standpoint from OHVs. Its "Stay on Roads and Trails" is our slogan for Game and Fish. But its...its along the same guidelines and we all work together, all the agencies work together to try to educate the public.

STUDENT:

You said that the off-road vehicles, they cause a lot of damage. Is there any way that you can reach them or educate the people not to go into those areas?

KELLIE:

“Stay on Roads and Trails.” We have a large campaign right now for OHV use. You might see some billboards around the area. We’ve been doing a lot of outreach education at events. Um, we have a lot of our wildlife managers that are out in the field, that are talking with OHV users, explaining. Most OHV users are, you know, outdoor enthusiasts. They’re wildlife watchers. They’re, you know, they’re...they’re very, um, interested in learning. Um, it’s just one of those learning curves. Stay on the roads and trails and learning why. So...

ERIC:

Starting...starting...I don’t know when it starts but just in our Arizona legislature this past session that just ended in June, um, we just passed a...a bill that is going to allow us to charge a vehicle license fee for OHV. We haven’t been able to license them in the past so that’s going to give us a little bit of additional money to do more of that stuff as well.

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Thank you.

¹ *This comment was made as a joke. This is not an actual strategy used by management officials.*