

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting

Wednesday, July 20, 2016

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort - Phoenix

Committee Members Present

Eric Sparks, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
James Ammons, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Joe King, Livestock Grower
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
Jim O'Haco, Livestock Grower
Dan Rodriguez, Livestock Grower
Fred Breedlove, Arizona State Land Department
Jarrett Babincsak, Sportsmen Group
Sean Lockwood, Coronado National Forest, USFS
Doug Clark, Sportsmen Group

Committee Members Absent

Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Steve Carmickle, Sportsmen Group
Bill Gibson, Bureau of Land Management
Doug Beach, Sportsman Group

Others Present

Christy Davis, AZ Farm Bureau
Glen Dickens, Sportsmen Group
Jim and Sue Chilton, Livestock Growers
Bob Benne, Livestock Grower
James Heitholt, USFS
Stephen Williams
Jesse Davis, Livestock Grower
John Griffin, Livestock Grower
Chris Lowman, Arizona State Land Department
Steve Rusiecki, Arizona State Land Department
Ruth Cowan, Livestock Growers
Mike Hemovich, Livestock Grower
William Hayes, Sportsmen Group
Cody Hatfield, Arizona State Land Department
Bill Conway, Livestock Grower
Mike Gross, Livestock Growers
Jack and Catherine Mann, Livestock Growers
Sarah King, Livestock Grower
John Fowler, Livestock Grower
Patrick Bray, Arizona Cattle Growers Association
Al Eiden, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD
Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 1:10 p.m. An introduction of those present was initiated.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Sparks introduced himself and Commissioner Ammons. He welcomed the Committee and everyone sitting in on the meeting. He stated that public access issues and landowner relations are very important, to not only himself, but, to the entire Commission. Commissioner Sparks informed the audience that the Department's Landowner Relations Program has a lot of good programs which are beneficial to landowner/lessees and that Al Eiden would talk about the varied programs later in the meeting.

Updates from Land Management Agencies

Bill Gibson from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was unable to make the meeting, but Troy Christensen relayed an update Mr. Gibson had emailed. BLM continues their work to get out four Travel Management Plans (TMP's). The La Posa TMP was signed in March. St. George/Colorado City and Imperial Hills TMP's are in development and are expected to be completed within the next 6 months. BLM has contracted to complete the TMP's for Gila/San Simon and the entire Kingman Field Office. More information on the TMP's and how the public can participate can be found at <https://www.blm.gov>.

Sean Lockwood, sitting in for John Titre, gave an update from the U.S. Forest Service. He said the Coronado National Forest is working on its TMP. The various districts are currently doing their environmental assessments and the TMP would hopefully be done by middle of 2017.

Fred Breedlove gave an update from the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD). He gave a little background on himself, since it had only been six months since he had hired on as the Director of the Natural Resources Division. Mr. Breedlove said ASLD is working on filling vacant range con positions and he added that the salary was increased to attract better candidates. He also told about a memorandum of understanding ASLD created in an effort to streamline the archaeological clearance process. Steve Rusiecki has been appointed as the manager of the new Field Services Section.

Landowner Relations Program Updates/Current Issues

For the sake of the people sitting in on the meeting, Al Eiden gave a detailed overview of the Landowner Relations Program (LRP). He explained various LRP programs and the varied types of assistance which are provided – from signs and volunteers to various programs which provide financial support for large ranch improvement projects. LRP's objectives are to open access, improve wildlife habitat, and foster a conservation ethic in the public, but the program's goal is to build good working relationships. To increase communication with landowner/lessees, regional LRP specialists have been hired who can meet with landowners and discuss all the programs. As an example of a perpetual

access easement, Mr. Eiden showed a film about the Frye Mesa Access Project – Yamaha and sportsmen groups contributed funding to assure permanent public access across private property to nearly 20,000 acres of Coronado National Forest lands. Mr. Eiden explained that LRP is now the program lead for the Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) Program, as well as, the Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Initiatives (WHEI). A record \$2.4 million was raised during the latest funding cycle for the HPC, mostly through the auctioning or raffling of special big game permit-tags; the proceeds are expected to fund more than 70 projects to improve wildlife habitat or management. For more information, visit <https://www.azgfd.com/Wildlife/HPC>. The WHEI grant provides funds for focused habitat restoration in 3 specific areas around the state; plans are to use some of these funds in such a way as to also support the 4 Forest Restoration Initiative. Over the last year, WHEI and other LRP programs enhanced 500,000 acres of habitat; Mr. Eiden said that habitat improvements do not necessarily have to be tied to access. He explained that there are also many varied partnering opportunities which can allow LRP to help offset landowners' cost share for NRCS projects. The Department revised the Arizona Recreational Liabilities Statute (ARS 33 1551) to ensure that ranchers who have access agreements are still protected under this statute. Under the new law it clearly states that payments from a state agency in agreements which secure public access are not considered compensation for allowing public access; this removes a potential issue that existed which could have opened cooperators to liability. Mr. Eiden also mentioned that the Department has been working to effect changes to the U.S. Farm Bill language which will support the Livestock Loss Board. Mr. Eiden told about the Landowner Respect and Adopt-a-Ranch Programs helping to promote recreational ethics. Jim Chilton added that he had noticed a reduction in vandalism over the years, and that he felt hunter education classes played a role in bringing about that improvement. Commissioner Ammons explained that although the classes couldn't be required, the Department is trying to incentivize enrollment in hunter education classes.

Landowner Compact Program

Al Eiden presented on the Landowner Compact, a new program designed to recognize cooperating landowners, improve user ethics, and allow landowners to manage recreational use with specific ranch rules. Landowners may choose to designate the Department to act as an agent on their behalf related to noticing for trespass; this increases the effectiveness of enforcement officers. Violations can result in the loss of access to all ranches in the compact. The Committee was given a brief presentation on the landowner compact website, <https://agfdlandownerrelations.com>, which list each of the ranches in the program and their associated rules. Online registration is currently available through the website along with an option for generating an access pass; however, passes are still available at the ranch sign-in boxes, as well. This program has received positive feedback from participating ranches.

Access Survey Updates

Al Eiden briefed the Committee on some of the findings from a recently completed survey. The results showed a need to increase outreach about LRP. Ranchers who have partnered with LRP gave very favorable opinions, however many ranchers were not familiar with the program. The survey showed that many hunters also are not familiar

with AGFD's Access Program. Mr. Eiden informed the group of some of the things LRP has been doing to increase outreach and promote recreational ethics. He shared a video which the AZ Lottery had produced a few years ago which highlights how Heritage Funds are used by LRP for working with ranchers. Jim O'Haco told the audience about the various LRP programs which his ranch has benefitted from.

Responsible OHV Use Project

Jarrett Babincsak, a recently-appointed LLSRC member, and coordinator for the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers gave a presentation. The organization had been awarded a grant for a project designed to educate OHV users on their impacts to wildlife, habitat, and future recreational access. The project, which has been implemented in other states, involves signs at trailheads, information to hand out to users, advertisements about ethics, habitat restoration, plus rewards for people who report violations. Mr. Babincsak said he would welcome any suggestions regarding locations for this ethics promotion; suggestions can be sent to Jarrett@backcountryhunters.org.

OHV Trail Management Update

This presentation was postponed.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

All questions and issues had been brought up during the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next LLSRC meeting will be held in conjunction with the "Meet the AGF Commission Event" on January 14, 2017. It will be at the Game and Fish Department headquarters in Phoenix. Committee members will be informed of the time and location of the meeting once it has been determined.

Action Items:

1. Solicit a livestock grower to fill the vacant seat on the Committee. (Jim O'Haco)
2. Distribute meeting minutes. (LRP staff)
3. Finalize venue for next meeting and inform Committee. (LRP staff)
4. Coordinate on Responsible OHV Use Project. (Jarrett Babincsak and LRP staff)
5. Coordinate with ACGA on venue for future LLSRC meetings, and about joint HPC/LLSRC meeting next July. (Jim O'Haco and LRP staff)