

Minutes of the Meeting of the
Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Wednesday, January 3, 2001 – 9:00 a.m.
Arizona Department of Agriculture,
Cooperative Extension Office
402 E. Hopi Drive, Holbrook, AZ

PRESENT: (Commission)

Director's Staff

Chairman W. Hays Gilstrap
Commissioner Dennis D. Manning
Commissioner Joe Carter

Director Duane L. Shroufe
Asst. A.G. Jay Adkins
Asst. A.G. Jim Odenkirk

Chairman Gilstrap called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. He introduced members of the Director's staff and Commission members who were present.

Director Shroufe stated persons wishing to speak should fill out blue slips and get them to the Chairman. He gave opening remarks about today's meeting, the purpose of which was to seek information. The Commission would take no action at this time.

Chairman Gilstrap acknowledged the presence of former Commissioner Bill Berlat. He stated Commissioner Golightly was unable to attend because he was out of the country and Commissioner Chilton was unable to attend due to schedule conflicts.

1. Elk Management and Private Lands

Representative Jake Flake stated he requested that this meeting be held. He is a rancher in this part of Arizona and was aware of the problems with elk on private property. The area was specific. Fifty percent of the land was not forest land. The elk has either driven ranchers out of business already or is driving them quickly out of business. Ranchers' complaints have been coming to him. Something needed to be done.

There would be nine presenters at today's meeting and comments were limited to 10 minutes.

Gerald Flake, President of the Navajo County Farm Bureau, stated only a few ranchers were selected to speak, but elk problems affect over 90 ranchers in the area.

Ranchers making comment:

Otto Mills, who owns a 50 acre farm near Snowflake, started raising alfalfa in the mid-1970s. The elk began visiting him in 1995. Elk can do a lot of damage to fences. The elk are on the land when the sprinklers are going; they can make a lot of tracks and ruin a lot of crops. He has had several elk calves born in his fields; this also damages a lot of crops. Part of his land borders on Highway 277. He noted several elk were hit by cars. Elk usually contribute to car accidents or near misses on the highway. Elk graze from mid-April until sometime in October. He gave calculations regarding the amount of feed 17 elk eat per night and per season. This can amount to over 55,000 pounds of feed, costing over \$5,000 a season. This can be devastating to a small farmer. A barbed wire fence surrounds his property.

Loren Hunt owns a ranch near Taylor and works 200 acres. The farm has been in the family since the 1950s. About six years ago, the elk started coming on to private land on the farm. The elk have caused a lot of damage. There were 80 acres of oats that were not harvested; 50 acres of alfalfa were harvested. The worse problem was with sweet corn because none of it was harvested. He lost up to \$475 per acre (totaling about \$10,000). This past year, up to 50 elk were spotted each night. Fences do not keep deer and elk out of the fields. He usually put up barbed wire fences. He noted that elk were a danger to humans, especially bulls in rut. Elk love apples and have caused ranchers to incur losses on the orchard crops. He was out of the ranching business and was in the process of sub-dividing. Elk put him out of the cattle business and now the farming business.

Mr. Hunt noted he put up electric fences two years ago; they do not work. He did not know what would keep the elk out. He used flood irrigation in his fields.

Bill Elkins, who owns the Rocking Chair Ranch, owns 46,000 acres of which 30,000 acres are private, 10,000 acres are on State Land and 4,500 acres are on BLM land. He estimated 1000 elk on his property. His cow herd has been reduced by 25%. The elk have torn down his fences. He tries to maintain the outside fences the best he can but the inner fences have not been kept up. The elk come in and eat all the grass, drink the cows' water and lick their salt. Jack Carlisle, landowner representing self, agreed with Mr. Elkins and stated one day when he was with Mr. Elkins, he saw a lot of elk. If something was not done, the ranchers would be totally done.

A video taken recently was shown of the elk and fences. Mr. Elkins wanted the Commission to allow ranchers to have permits so that the elk problem could be taken care of (ranching for wildlife). Elk populations double every year.

Representative Flake asked why the Commission has not addressed a ranching for wildlife program. The state should be responsible for elk depredation on private property. Ranching for wildlife might be a solution. Chairman Gilstrap clarified that the landowner/lessee permits have been studied since the late 1980s. The Commission did not see how these would have any potential feasibility in Arizona. It has been tried in various other places under different circumstances. It would be difficult to put together a process that would be fair.

Michael Reidhead, who owns Reidhead Ranches and Dry Lake Farm (paper mill farm consisting of 3600 acres), stated elk were on his property every night. The elk have taken over and they cannot be kept out. The elk have destroyed fences and crops. A video taken recently of the elk herds was shown.

Gerald Flake stated his problem was with elk on the ranches and not on the farm. He presented photographs of elk herds and elk depredation. He stated another problem was with the fences. The elk were now in resident herds. The problem was real and he hoped the Commission would help.

Bentley Baird owns 11 sections near the Little Colorado River on Chevelon Canyon with two State sections and nine deeded sections. His family came to this ranch in 1945. Originally they raised sheep, now they raise cattle. There used to be deer everywhere; now it was just elk. The Commission needed to come out and look at the problem first

hand and on the spot. There is no feed left for cattle. He could not understand why ranching for wildlife could not work in Arizona. It was hard making a living as a rancher or farmer.

Jed Flake stated he and his brothers ranch in Navajo County in four areas. Locations of the ranches were described. Elk move on to the Apache Reservation during the summer but tend to move down in the winter. Elk can be seen during the night on the farms. The thing that was affecting ranchers is that elk are attracted by farms but spend 80-90% of the time on the ranches. They are staying in the lower elevations. He stated rotational grazing is done on the ranches. Mr. Flake noted he was President of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association and ranchers were devastated about elk moving into areas that are not elk habitat. The ranchers were alarmed about elk depredation problems on private lands and on lands that are non-native to this species.

Bob Baird owns Love Lake Ranch consisting of 2100+ acres private land and 2300+ State leased land. The ranch has been in the family for over 100 years. He irrigates 120 acres from a natural spring. He was concerned because there was no more pasture management in his area. If the rancher did not use the resource, the elk would. That was poor management on the pastures. The drought has caused the ranges to be in terrible shape. He noted about 16-17 years ago Silver Creek Golf course was put in about 4-5 miles above his property. It took several years for the elk to appear at the golf course. Several years after that, the elk appeared on his property because they outgrew the golf course. During the first week of September, he counted 19 bulls in a two section pasture; cow elk were not counted. He started out with nine antelope; now he has 39. He could not get any help from the Department. He goes to the Habitat Partnership meetings in Show Low. He encourages (archery) hunters to hunt on his ranch. Hunters do not want to go for anything but bull elk. Nothing is being done to reduce the cow elk numbers. Instead of buying ranches with Heritage monies, perhaps the Commission could lease ranches. He did not want to sell because the ranch was his heritage. Elk habitat was disappearing due to loss of habitat and subdivisions. He wondered what the Commission intended to do.

Doy Reidhead has a ranch near Chevelon Canyon. He stated hunting was an irritating problem on private property. He did not see any way the ranchers could help themselves. Ranchers could not fight the public.

Others making comment:

Martin Moore, representing Eastern Arizona Counties, stated that what was happening to the ranchers was a significant concern. There was a proper balance in dealing with natural resource issues. Something needed to be done to address ranchers' concerns either by rule or legislation. Many ranchers are also hunters.

David Saline, who farms 1600 acres on private land near Taylor, stated he had nine bull elk three years ago. Two years ago he had 14 bull elk and this past year he had 48 bull elk. He did not get a corn crop this year and his dad gave up when he could not farm any more. The elk are not transient any more; they have become permanent.

Quinn Smith owns a family farm in Linden and has a section of private land. It was an all-night job for several months to keep elk out of the crops. The problem was affecting everybody.

Jack Carlisle brought up the issue of elk being chased by 4-wheelers. This was a problem because the elk are scared of them. He tried to encourage hunters to walk. The 4-wheeler is a detriment to a hunter trying to get an elk.

Drew Shumway, representing self, owned a ranch and a farm. He stated hunters do not want to hunt cow elk, but the problem was there were too many cow elk herds. The cow elk should be rounded up in the fall to make "hamburger".

Lyle Button, Arizona Regional Director for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), stated RMEF was willing to work with the ranchers and Commission to attempt to get to the bottom of the problem. There was room for cattle and there was room for elk; the proper amount of elk and cattle had to be determined. There were a lot of volunteers willing to help a rancher through the Department's Adopt-A-Ranch Program. There were things that could be done to make a fence friendlier to keep calves out of fenced areas and RMEF was willing to help.

Loren Hunt stated there was supposed to be due process in this country when someone damages or injures you that you have right to recourse. Where did he go for recourse for depredating elk? Solutions need to be found. He offered that if Game and Fish could not manage elk outside his boundary, its management should stop at his fenceline on his private property. Once the elk have crossed onto his private property, the Department should have no more control and no more responsibility. He would take care of the elk. He did not believe a person could put up a fence that would keep elk out. There was no recourse for takings that occur on private property.

Representative Flake noted that there were many environmental groups that did not want any natural resources harvested. The Department and hunting groups did not want this. Whenever there was a bill regarding depredation on private property, every hunting group backed Game and Fish and the bill did not pass. Groups harvesting grasses or crops do not have the same voice in the Legislature to change the law; therefore, farmers and ranchers have to work with the hunting groups and work at educating and informing Game and Fish.

Al Kreutz, representing the Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) and past president of the Show Low Habitat Partnership Committee, believed in multiple use and trying to work with farmers and ranchers. The reason why he gave up the chairmanship of the Habitat Partnership Committee was that attendance at those meetings was very low. At a meeting, he suggested a cow elk hunt for juniors. The Department at that time thought that that kind of a hunt was too difficult for kids. The advantage of a juniors hunt would be the taking of cow elk. At the Habitat Committee meetings, there were 10-15 professional people present from the Forest Service, Game and Fish, Soil and Conservation, who donated their time to answer questions but no one showed up. He felt it was a worthless cause. He never saw Representative Flake at a meeting. Maybe something could be worked out at habitat meetings. A cow elk hunt in January or February would not have to be called a "depredation hunt". Commissioner Manning pointed out that cow elk were pregnant in January and February. The animal rights

activists would have a field day and it would be a problem having a cow elk hunt this time of the year.

Jeb Flake stated more cow elk needed to be harvested in the state. Success of calf crops was 80-90% and hunts do not take care of the numbers of increase. Because of that, more and more animals have to move to lower elevations and to new areas that are not normal habitat for the species.

Representative Flake stated last year he introduced a bill in the Legislature to get an accurate count of elk. The only way to do it would be to capture and collar 500 elk to be monitored. It would have cost \$1 million a year for a 5-year program. Estimated numbers of elk widely fluctuate. He did not know how to interest the public enough to get the money to get an exact figure.

Commissioner Manning stated the Department issued a record number of elk tags last year. The Department is waiting to get harvest figures for this past year's hunts. Hunt recommendations for next year will be determined in April by the Commission. The number of elk harvested during the past season will be a determining factor in the number of permits recommended for next year. The public will probably see another record year for cow elk permits.

Commissioner Carter hoped to see a change in the federal government's attitude with respect to forest management. A lot of the problem was due to a decline in habitat in the forests because of litigation and attitudes by special interest groups. He intended to work with the congressional delegation from Arizona. He chairs the Heritage Public Advisory Committee. He favored conservation easements 100% over acquisitions.

- 1) Property should be required to have a unique and specific wildlife value. Future acquisitions must be looked at carefully. If acquisitions are proposed, he wanted local government support for any acquisition before proceeding.
- 2) Bills should be addressed in Congress regarding the following issues:
 - a) Conservation easements
 - b) Development of rights so that land stewardship could be kept in the responsible hands of ranchers who have experience and knowledge of managing those lands.

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Meeting adjourned 11:10 a.m.

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