

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting Wednesday, July 29, 2009 Loews Ventana Canyon Resort - Tucson

Committee Members Present

Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Melissa Warren, Bureau of Land Management (proxy for Julie Decker)
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
James O'Haco, Livestock Grower
Robert Woodhouse, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
David Hoyle, Sportsmen Group
Tami Emmett, Coronado National Forest
Stephen Williams, Arizona State Land Department
Joe King, Livestock Grower
Duane Coleman, Livestock Grower

Committee Members Absent

Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
Scott Heap, Sportsmen Group
Dennis Moroney, Livestock Grower

Others Present

Jesse Davis, Livestock Grower
Tom Dabbs, Bureau of Land Management
John Hunt, Arizona Department of Agriculture
Mark Weise, Development Branch Chief, AGFD
Sal Palazzolo, 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.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Committee accepted the meeting minutes for January 17, 2009.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Robert Woodhouse said that he was pleased to be appointed as the new liaison to the Committee. He stated that he has a keen interest in this committee and their efforts to resolve issues and maintain public access for recreation. The Commissioner added that his background with agriculture would help him relate to the issues which might be brought up by landowners. He said that one of his desires was to have representation from crop producers on the Committee. Commissioner Woodhouse stated that he was very open to hearing the issues and that he would always be available to talk.

He expressed his feelings regarding the importance of communication for solving problems.

Updates from Land Management Agencies

Melissa Warren, sitting in for Julie Decker, gave an update from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). She informed the Committee of the progress being made on a number of Resource Management Plans (RMP) for the state. Information on the RMP can be viewed at www.blm.gov. Route signing is beginning in the Bullhead area. Ms. Warren answered a few questions that Committee members had on specific plans.

Tami Emmett from the Coronado National Forest updated the Committee on the progress of Travel Management Plans for various forests. Ms. Emmett informed the Committee that the Coronado National Forest had been awarded \$2,000,000 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This Stimulus money will be used to complete several projects involving realignment of roads to address access issues and decommissioning of roads identified for disposal under the Travel Management Rule.

Stephen Williams gave an update from the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD). ASLD has been providing input to BLM on the RMP and working with AGFD on administrative protocols for addressing hunter access and law enforcement issues. Luckily, funds generated by the new OHV law were not swept to help with the State's budget crisis; ASLD has already been using the money to fund local jurisdictions' OHV law enforcement efforts. Mark Weise added that the AGFD OHV law enforcement positions, which are funded by the new OHV law, are currently open for hire.

Landowner Relations Program Updates/Current Issues

Sal Palazzolo provided the Committee with an update from the Landowner Relations Program (LRP). He informed the Committee that budget loading was slow, but LRP was funded about the same as last year so the various subprograms will continue as usual. One exception to that is the road maintenance program which was seriously hurt due to decreases in the Wildlife Conservation Fund (WCF) and increased equipment repair costs. Commissioner Woodhouse stated that the Commission recognizes the importance of this program for improving public access and landowner relations. The option of reimbursing ranchers or contracting for road maintenance also involved the WCF funds which were not received. LRP continues to look for funds to supplement the program.

Mr. Palazzolo briefed the Committee on a couple changes to the Farm Bill which may help with cooperative projects. He also told the Committee that LRP was asked to help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which had some Stimulus money that they were unable to put on the ground by the deadline. An agreement has been signed to transfer \$110,000 to AGFD which will use the money for habitat restoration on private property. LRP is already looking at a number of projects around the state which will generate jobs directly and indirectly.

Mark Weise informed the Committee that five people had submitted nominations for the vacant sportsmen's representative position on the Committee. (On August 7, 2009, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission appointed Larry Audsley to the position.)

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Dennis Moroney had called Sal Palazzolo regarding the problem of theft of ranch infrastructure and possible cooperation on addressing it. The Committee discussed possible ways to partner resources to address the problem by publicizing thefts and providing rewards. Jim O'Haco and Sal Palazzolo offered to look into some of the ideas suggested and present their findings at the next meeting.

The Committee discussed a recent announcement that Mexico intended to release captive Mexican wolves, perhaps as early as October-November 2009, in northern Mexico. The reintroduction will be discussed at the Arizona Game and Fish Commission meeting on August 7. Commissioner Woodhouse invited anyone interested to participate in the meeting.

Jim O'Haco stated that habitat improvement work on his Forest Service lease land was being held up due to delays in getting archaeological clearances completed. He asked if AGFD could help out. Over twenty AGFD employees have completed NRCS cultural resources training and are able to assist archaeologists with ground surveys on NRCD projects, however the training may not be acceptable on federal lands. Sal Palazzolo suggested that Mr. O'Haco have the USFS contact him to discuss the issue.

Jesse Davis, a rancher sitting in on the meeting, told the Committee about some issues he experienced regarding law enforcement during last year's hunting season. Commissioner Woodhouse and Mark Weise addressed his concerns.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the Meet the Commission Event on January 16, 2010 at the Arizona Game and Fish Department headquarters in Phoenix. LRP staff will follow up with more details on this item at a later time.

Action Items:

1. Look into possibilities of cooperative efforts to address theft of ranch infrastructure and present findings at next LLSRC meeting. (Jim O'Haco and Sal Palazzolo)
2. Ask Sitgreaves National Forest personnel to contact LRP to discuss whether or not AGFD employees, who have NRCS cultural resources training, can be of any assistance with USFS archaeological surveys. (Jim O'Haco)
3. Meeting minutes distributed. (LRP Staff)

