

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting

Saturday, January 18, 2003

Arizona Game and Fish Department - Phoenix Office

Committee Members Present

Sue Chilton, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Ron Eichelberger, Sportsmen Group
Shelby Bennett, Livestock Grower
Richard Rico, Special Services Assistant Director, AGFD
Tammy Pike, Arizona State Land Department
Steve Gobat, Bureau of Land Management
Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
Jerry Reid, Sportsmen Group
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
Ron Searle, Livestock Grower
George McKay, Coronado National Forest
John P. King, Livestock Grower

Committee Members Absent

Hubby Grounds, Livestock Grower
Phil Smith, Sportsmen Group

Others Present

Wayne Lackner, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent
Fred Bloom, Development Branch Chief, AGFD
Josh Avey, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD
Troy Christensen, Land Access Coordinator, AGFD
Gerry Perry, Region V Supervisor, AGFD
Jim Underhill, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club
George Reiners, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club
Buck Appleby, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club
Jerry Gotchie, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/ Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 10:00 A.M. Chairman Sanford Cohen initiated an introduction of those present.

New Members/Presentations

Fred Bloom handed out certificates of appreciation to two new members to recognize their achievements in being chosen by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission to serve on the LLSRC.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The committee accepted the meeting minutes for January 19 and July 30, 2002.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Chilton commented on the shrinking land base for recreation. She said that the Committee must be creative to find methods to keep landowners cooperative and make sure that the land that is open stays open. Commissioner Chilton also talked about the importance of getting people involved to mitigate the problems that landowners have due to public access. Even though the problems may not necessarily be the sportsmen's fault, their efforts are essential to assist the landowners with the burden of maintaining the land while allowing access. From Commissioner Chilton's perspective, ranchers and sportsmen are the best allies for protecting the land. Many ranchers hunt and fish and they have the same challenges and goals as sportsmen.

Richard Rico gave some information on a new source of funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). He stated that the Department would probably be receiving about 2 million dollars in a couple months from LIP. Most of the funding will go into stewardship projects with landowners, which will benefit "at risk" species and potential habitats. Two new regional positions will be created to oversee these projects. The Public Access Program will now be called the Landowner Relations Program as we add these additional tools and personnel to our existing programs. Richard Rico asked that the Committee help spread the word to landowners about this new funding for projects. Identification, Inventory, Protection, Acquisition, and Management (IIPAM) Program funds were also transferred into the Landowner Relations Program. Those funds can help landowners with sensitive habitats such as riparian area protection and water projects. Ron Searle commented that it would be of great benefit if funding were available to put more officers in the field.

Updates/Current Issues

Wayne Lackner, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent from the Sonoita Station, was invited to speak on the complex problems in the southeast part of the state caused by Undocumented Aliens (U.D.A.'s) and increasing drug trafficking. He was happy to attend the meeting because he believes that it is important for us all to work together. Mr. Lackner gave a brief history of the situation. He told how the U.D.A. entries, which were historically in urban areas, moved to rural open areas. He said that U.D.A.'s (most of whom are not from anywhere near the border) will spend their entire life savings to get smuggled into the United States and that the smuggling is very organized with contracts between "coyotes" and big companies. All of which adds up to being very difficult to enforce. He briefly talked about the militia groups. Mr. Lackner talked about enforcement efforts and strategies- they are closing some highway checkpoints and increasing efforts to catch the U.D.A.'s at the border itself. However, he expected that the highway checkpoints might be reopened due to Homeland Defense. He said that one thing hampering their abilities to create a functional barrier along the border was getting NEPA compliances. Jon Fugate discussed enforcement efforts near Yuma and a project to install a border fence on the Cabeza Prieta N.W.R. to restrict at least vehicular traffic. Jon Fugate said that the damage to the land from U.D.A.'s is very visible from helicopter. Shelby Bennett stated that he has been run off the road by U.D.A.'s and that they crash through his gates. John King stated that, on the King's Anvil Ranch, they installed a fountain so U.D.A.'s could take water without damaging pipelines and floats.

Mr. Lackner then focused on the problems facing landowners and public access. He talked about the litter problem and damage to the environment (from U.D.A.'s and enforcement efforts). The Border Patrol created a Ranch Patrol Unit to work with ranchers to mitigate damages to facilities, fences, and waters. He gave the following contact numbers.

Ranch Patrol Unit Points of Contacts:

Wayne Lackner, in Sonoita: 520- 455 -5051

Ross Nichols, in Douglas: 520- 805- 6654

Larry Unger, in Willcox: 520 -384 -2412

Mr. Lackner also told the Committee that \$23 million has been requested from the federal government for cleanup of trash caused by U.D.A.'s. It depends on the Appropriations Act; the federal budget still has not been signed. BLM is the only agency that may be receiving some of the funds (probably \$1 million). The plan is, if they get the funding, to deploy the money to Cochise and Graham counties. The Malpais Borderland Group will help assist in coordinating the cleanup. The money will be used for cleanup on lands to include State Trust land. Richard Rico suggested pursuing a partnership with the Department to make that money go farther. Gerry Perry said that he would discuss the idea at his upcoming meetings with the Border Patrol.

Fred Bloom gave a PowerPoint presentation to inform the new Committee members about the Public Access (soon to be the Landowner Relations) Program. He also directed attention to a handout, which listed the accomplishments of the program during the last year. Richard Rico said that he was pleased with the large amount of work, which was done especially since it was with reduced staff. Wayne Lackner commented that he was appreciative of the stewardship project, which had recently been done on a ranch owned by he and his brothers.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Sanford Cohen played a tape of his interview with Jake Flake, the incoming Speaker for the Arizona House of Representatives, which involved several items of interest to this Committee. During the interview, Jake Flake expressed his concerns that the new Commissioner for the Arizona State Land Department may be bigger on development and harder on grazing. They discussed the possibility of non-grazing lessees closing out the public and a law requiring the maintenance of existing improvements on the leased property. Mr. Flake seemed to recognize the value of motorized travel and the importance to continue the road inventory effort. Tammy Pike encouraged the Committee to meet with the new State Land Commissioner.

A discussion began regarding OHV problems. Jerry Reid said that OHV problems are the main concern of the landowners that he interacts with. He suggested that OHV pamphlets should be handed out during hunter education courses. Gerry Perry said that hunter education already provides that information, but the laws are presently conflicting and confusing. Sanford Cohen said that the OHV culture as a whole is becoming more responsible, sighting a successful signing and education effort near Table Mesa Road and I-17. He also said that ATV training should be made mandatory. Fred Bloom said efforts should be made to optimize the contact between the dealer and the ATV purchaser regarding communicating responsible use. Fred Bloom also referred to a recent problem with a Prescott dealer directing users to an area, which was being abused and ended up being closed to vehicular travel. Tammy Pike updated the Committee on the ongoing efforts to make definitions and laws seamless. She said that the route inventories may be done statewide in seven years and she encouraged input from the ranchers on deciding which roads to keep open. John King said that some areas should be sacrificed for motor-cross type use in an effort to save other areas. Tammy Pike said that the ASLD did not have a mechanism to allow that. Sanford Cohen said that the Forest Service has two designated OHV areas around Prescott and that the private sector can create them as well. Richard Rico said that Game and Fish is not a land

management agency and so doesn't have land to establish OHV use areas. Then he told about a massive cooperative effort regarding OHV use near Sycamore Creek. Sanford Cohen informed the Committee that there is going to be an effort this year to get legislators to introduce a bill to have the funds from State Trust land recreation permits go back to ASLD for OHV management.

Next Meeting

Admitting that it was not a very central location, Jon Fugate made the offer of a conference room, lunch, and discounted hotel rooms if the Committee wanted to have the next meeting in Yuma. Some members suggested that there be more than two meetings per year. It was decided that the next meeting should be scheduled on August 6 or 7 in conjunction with the Arizona Cattlemen's Association Convention, which will be held at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson. Committee members will be notified of exact date and time as soon as it is known.

Action Items:

1. Contact Arizona Cattle Growers Association to schedule our next meeting. (Access Staff)
2. Meeting minutes distributed to all members. (Access Staff)
3. Follow up about possible partnerships with the BLM and/or Border Patrol if the Federal cleanup dollars are approved. (Access Staff)

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