

Approved January 20, 2007 at the
Glendale Civic Center in Glendale,
Arizona. Motion by Jim Jett, second by
Randy Lamb, approved as presented by
unanimous vote.

Heritage Fund Public Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes

August 26, 2006

Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area
Springerville, Arizona

Committee Members:

Bob Hernbrode, Tucson (Chairman) - Present
Paul Gomben, Show Low – Present
Ron Smith, Pinetop-Lakeside - Present
Clair Harris, Flagstaff - Absent
Maggie Sacher, Marble Canyon - Present
Jim Jett, Kingman – Present
Randy Lamb, Prescott - Absent
Nick Heatwole, Yuma - Absent

Valerie Morrill, Yuma - Present
Ron Bemis, McNeal – Absent
Roseann Hanson, Tucson - Absent
Tony Nelssen, Scottsdale - Present
Gary Barcom, Payson - Present
Heidi Vasiloff, Goodyear - Present
Brian Pinney, Chandler - Present
Dr. Jack Miller, Gilbert - Absent

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1. **Call to Order and Opening Remarks:** Commissioner Bob Hernbrode, Chairman called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. The Chair opened the meeting with a brief quotation about how birds can connect you to the greater glory of life. “I wasn’t looking for birds...not for reasons of science, or in the hope of a fabulous rarity or to make careful observations of seasonal behavior. Just because looking at birds is one of life’s great pleasures. Looking at birds is a key, it opens doors and you choose to go through them and you find that you enjoy life more and understand life better.” Barnes, Simon. How to Be a (Bad) Birdwatcher. Pantheon Books. New York, NY. 2005. page 4 (ISBN: 978-0-375-42355-0)
 2. **Introductions**
 - a) **Committee Members:** Chairman Hernbrode asked Committee members to introduce themselves.
 - b) **Department Representatives:** Deputy Director Steve Ferrell, Heritage Fund Administrator Ashley Ross, and other present department staff introduced themselves.
 3. **Approval of Minutes from June 2006:** Upon motion by Valerie Morrill and seconded by Jim Jett, the minutes were unanimously approved.
 4. **Presenters:** Tony Guiles, AGFD Legislative Liaison, gave an update on legislative interactions with the Heritage Fund. Since the inception of the Heritage Fund there have been 33 attempts to take money away from the Heritage Fund. Last year Representative Russ Jones tried to introduce legislation to protect the Heritage Fund from further legislative sweeps. The Department asked him not to introduce the bill because it would open opportunities for non-Heritage supporters to make changes to the Fund. Last year was the second year, since its inception, when legislators did not propose to take money from the Heritage Fund. Tony provided HPAC members with recommendations about how HPAC members could support the continued existence of the HF including finding out local Representative support of HF; and attending and broadcasting to local leaders the benefits of the Heritage Fund to their districts through check presenting ceremonies and other ceremonies. Tony also emphasized that as an election year, it is particularly important to educate Representatives about the benefits of the HF.

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The Committee comment and discussion revolved around issues of legislation. Questions were raised about Department interaction with the Arizona State Park Heritage Fund. Tony works closely with his counter part, Jay Ziemann (Assistant Director, Partnerships and External Affairs) and they have a good working relationship. Committee members wondered Representative Jones's bill was stopped. Tony answered that some of the people in majority positions have not supported the Heritage Fund and it is better to not give them the opportunity to turn their attention towards the Heritage Fund. The bill may be an option in the future, but will depend on a new President of the Senate and new Speakers more inclined to support the Fund. Tony was asked if he knew which incumbents and challengers were supportive of the Heritage Fund. Tony will send out a 'friend or foe' list to the members. Several groups regularly collect that information and Members should contact organizations like the Heritage Alliance, the League of Conservation Voters, and Sierra Club. Tony asked to be informed any time Committee members have a conversation with members of the legislature so he has a barometer to gauge their positions.

Legislation affecting the Department includes approval of the biennial budget, as well as an Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) program and supportive legislation. Tony will give an update at the January meeting on the status of impending legislation. Members requested a "Talking Points" email, so they could all give the same information to their legislators. A suggestion was made that if a member is struggling to make an appointment with a legislator sometimes it is easier to get in to see the county Board of Supervisors who have a great deal of influence over the Representatives. The Committee asked about upcoming 'big check' presentations. Tony told the Committee that there was one coming up in Kingman or Lake Havasu in a few weeks. Members requested prior notification on any presentations and Robyn Beck said she would put the Members on the notification list. It was suggested that members regularly consult the Game and Fish website (www.agfd.gov) for current news, legislative updates, the Wildlife News newsletter and the events calendar.

A member asked about the general fund monies the Department received in the guise of refunding the monies taken from the Heritage Fund in 2002. Tony replied that there had only been one other time that Game and Fish received General Fund dollars for a survey the Department took part in. There have been no indications about any further general fund appropriations. However, meetings with sportsmen's groups have been scheduled to discuss what legislative agendas may be coming up.

- 5. Presenter:** Bob Broscheid, AGDF Habitat Branch Chief, presented information regarding the land acquisition program. Since its inception, the Heritage Fund has contributed \$19 million to purchase 16,000 acres of wildlife area. (See attached document for details) Current and recent projects highlighted include: Coal Mine Springs Phase I and II, EC Bar Ranch easement, and the Soda Springs Ranch easement. The Coal Mine Springs Phase I project (2600 acres) was completed last year and Phase II this year (873 acres). There is a proposed Phase III under consideration. The Coal Mine Springs property was purchased through a cooperative effort with the Trust for Public Lands, who handled the acquisition all the way through escrow. Phase II was completed with Heritage funds (\$1.5 million) and a grant from US Fish and Wildlife Service (\$750,000). As one of the last remaining natural populations of the Gila Topminnow, it represents an essential piece of habitat in

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the recovery of this species. The Department has formed a significant conservation easement with the EC Bar Ranch, located in the Sipe Area. The EC Bar easement has allotted 125 acres with water rights along Nutrioso Creek. This agreement provides habitat management for and in conjunction with the Colorado Spine dace recovery plan. The final property discussed was the Soda Springs Ranch project, located in the Cornville area. This prime piece of property has a wide array of habitats including the natural springs, riparian areas, and marshlands. The Department is currently working to establish a 25-acre conservation easement on the property, which has 203 deed acres.

The Department is also working on the Zuni Heavens water rights settlement. The area historically supported a lush riparian habitat with springs, streams and a sacred lake as late as the 1930s. However, the area has suffered over recent decades from soil erosion cutting deep canyons into the area and other forms of ecological decline. The settlement includes \$19 million in Federal dollars and \$1.6 million from the State of Arizona in order to return water to the area. The Arizona Game and Fish Department will pay up to \$6 million through the Heritage Fund in order to supply 1,000 acre feet of water right per year to the Zuni Heavens. Currently the Department is looking at existing water rights (between Sipe, Grassland and Becker Lake), investigating if we can physically get the water there and if we can - how much should go there so we don't impact the quality of those properties. Other issues being investigated include available water rights, how to manage for wildlife habitat and water storage capabilities.

Committee comment and discussion began with questions about acquisition funding. Heritage is the only funding source available from within the Department. However, the use of grant dollars lets the \$2.4 million available each year go further. Cooperators include the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Trust for Public Lands, counties and private landowners. Members asked what would happen if Heritage funds were not available for acquisitions, operation and management (O&M) and if the Department would ever dispose of any acquired lands. Currently the Department uses \$500,000 in Wildlife Conservation Fund dollars to supplement Heritage funded O&M activities. However, since many of the Department properties are passively managed, the funding required is minimal. There are no foreseeable reasons the Department would dispose of property. In addition, benefits gained from a sale would be minimal because profits could only be spent on Heritage eligible activities. Members questioned whether any of the properties were deed restricted. Mr. Broscheid replied that they were not. The Committee was interested in the Department's participation in conservation easements. Questions asked included: criteria used, county participation and tax benefits to the landowner. Acquisitions are guided by the Heritage Fund IIAPM criteria set by statute. However, habitat and connectivity issues are also considered. The Department has worked on conservation easements with counties to ensure priorities and activities are aligned. Landowners receive different tax benefits depending upon the rights they give up. When the Department participates in a conservation easement, the landowner makes tax payments and if the Department acquires property, we make payments in lieu of taxes. In addition, a conservation easement raises adjacent property values.

- 6. Presenter:** Sabra Schwartz, AGDF Program Supervisor, gave an overview of the Heritage Data Management System (HDMS) and the new online Environmental Review Tool. The HDMS is a

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member program of the Nature Serve global network of more than 80 Natural Heritage Programs and Conservation Data Centers in the Western Hemisphere. The HDMS is a statewide-integrated data management system and repository of maps, computer files, and paper files of site-specific data on special status species. Activities supported by HDMS include: land and water development projects evaluations based on accurate and consistent species information; research guidance; provides scientific data for listing and recovery issues and sound environmental planning and conservation measures. Products from HDMS include: species abstracts (taxonomy, life history, habitat use, range); database reports (targeting specialized needs); status designation notebook (comprehensive listing of species, ranking, legal status); and distribution maps. HDMS acts as a central repository for several federal cooperators including the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service. The Department is able to integrate their raw data into the system and then give it back to them in a usable format. Currently, HDMS tracks over 850 species statewide. Arizona's HDMS program is 100% Heritage funded. HDMS has been a part of the Department since 1979 with the creation of the Nongame Branch and was transferred in 1990 to the Habitat Branch.

The Environmental Review Tool was created as a best business practice that allows the Department to reduce cycle time on environmental reviews and recommendations. It is based on a successful program created by the Pennsylvania HDMS program. The Department was able to buy the original program for just over \$300,000 or ¼ of the original price. Sabra Schwartz did a walk-through demonstration of the new on-line program. The new program will diminish the workload for staff by allowing customers to create their own sensitive species lists. Reports generated contain information like species designation, abstracts and handling guidelines. During the initial phase of the project over 130 customers were trained on the use of the system. It can be accessed at www.azgfd.gov/hgis. The program was launched on July 10, 2006 and as of the date of this presentation, the system has registered over 200 users and 400 projects have been submitted. In an effort to reduce the number of program licenses paid for by the Department, other programs will be able to use the HDMS hardware, such as the crayfish database program.

Committee comment and discussion asked about enforcement of recommendations and rulings. Most people are willing to work with the Department upfront to avoid any enforcement problems. The HDMS program functions as an information source for permitting agencies like the Forest Service and the Arizona Land department; however, the permitting agency guides the activities to mitigate impacts and to enforce any issues. There have been very few problems with permitting agencies rejecting or ignoring recommendations, however, a recent incident involving fencing for pronghorns is an example of how the HDMS gives the Department horsepower that allows us to make impacts through interactive planning with agencies, providing information to conservation groups, counties and land management agencies. Topics discussed included the possible imposition of a fee structure for use of the ERT, acknowledgement in publications for use of the information and if the system allowed users to use it as a training program or to run 'what-if' scenarios. The ERT allows the Department to be proactive by looking at proposed projects ahead of time. By looking at the projects that have been submitted, the Department can follow up with a project and provide additional comments. ERT realizes a significant return on investment for wildlife in that it creates the basis for sound scientific management of wildlife across the state. It also allows

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customers to look at funding requirements ahead of time and provides contact information for permitting agencies that may be involved.

7. **Presenter:** Lorraine Avenetti, AGFD Research Biologist, presented information on Arizona's Native Fish Repatriation program. The Native Fish Repatriation project objective was to reestablish the fish in historic drainages and in streams renovated for apache trout as well as to analyze the survival and recruitment of adult populations to make sure it is successful. These populations were drastically altered before the 1800's by dams and the introduction of nonnative species. Fish species that are affected by the project include: Apache trout; Speckled dace; Desert suckers; Sonoran suckers; Loach minnow; Roundtail chub; Little Colorado Spine dace, Gila trout; and the Blueheaded sucker. The project has three funding sources – Heritage Carry forward Grants, State Wildlife Grants and the Central Arizona project. How many fish are reintroduced to an area depends upon the species size, the size of stream, size of the source population and the effective population size to maintain genetic diversity. As a general rule the Department requires a minimum pool of 500 individuals for complete genetic variation, while the lowest amount introduced is 50 individuals. Individuals are introduced to a renovated stream, where the stream has been poisoned and is fishless. The first species introduced is the Apache trout, with others following depending on historical population information. In order to ensure the best possible outcome, fish are transplanted from local streams after a fish health assessment, which includes source population sampling, necropsies, disease checks and laboratory analysis.

Three native fish health assessments have been held on three sites in the Black River area. Diseases were found in 2 sites and are unusable, but the third one was given a clean health check. Live fish were collected, transported by truck, and backpacks to stream locations at least 200 meters apart. The fish were weighed and measured, then released. The project will be considered successful if reproduction is evident after one year. The transplant site at Snake Creek was not successful and new fish will be transplanted this year. It has not been an entire year since the Bear Wallow site was repopulation, so the results are inconclusive.

Committee comment and discussion revolved around the success of other native fish repatriation projects. Mrs. Avenetti mentioned that other areas, like the Grand Canyon, have had very good results. However, funding is relatively low because most of the species are not game fish species.

8. **Presenter:** Sue Sitko, The Nature Conservancy, White Mountains Program Manager, presented information about Hummingbirds of the White Mountains. Hummingbirds are considered the feathered jewels of the birding world. Arizona is a hot spot for hummingbirds. We can regularly see 12 species or so per year and 3-4 other species rarely. Typical hummingbirds are what we see in Arizona and range from two inches to eight inches in length. Hummingbirds exist because flowering plants exist. They have co-evolved and some flowers and hummingbirds have incredible adaptations. Why are hummingbirds so unique? They have an extremely long tongue that rolls up in their head and is canal shaped to allow rapid swallowing. They are small in size so they can maneuver inside a flower and so they move quickly. They are also the only family of birds that can fly forward, backward, hover and even fly upside down. On average their wings flap 50-200 times per second, they half their weight in sugar per day, they feed for 30-60 seconds at a time at 20-

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minute intervals. However, nectar is only the fuel that allows these tiny birds to become insect eating machines. Four species are commonly seen in the White Mountain region. The Broad-tailed hummingbirds are the first to arrive in the spring, and are recognized because their wings trill. The Black-chinned hummingbird is a common breeding hummingbird in the White Mountains. The Rufus hummingbird is the most territorial and has the most ideal size to weight ratio so it can out fly all other hummingbirds. The fourth hummingbird is the Calliope hummingbird.

Four or five years ago the Department partnered with the White Mountain Audubon Society and held a hummingbird event at the Sipe Wildlife Area. Sherry Williamson from the Southeast Arizona Bird Observatory was brought in to conduct a hummingbird workshop. She is considered the foremost expert in hummingbirds and wrote the Petersen Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America. Hummingbirds were trapped and banding stations were set up so people could get a close up view of how they process and band birds. The first year 30-50 people came for this one-day event. This year 470 people came to this partially Heritage funded event.

Committee comment and discussion was about the natural history of hummingbirds. One member asked if hummingbirds were able to fly over water. Mrs. Sitko answered that this was much more challenging for hummingbirds and probably one of the reasons we have more species in the West than in the East. However, the Ruby-throated hummingbird can fly across the Gulf of Mexico. Members asked about the timing of the Sipe Wildlife Area banding event. The event is always done when the most birds are present, either the last of July or the first of August. Advertising has been minimal because of the overwhelming response. The Committee commented that this was a great opportunity for people who do not regularly participate in outdoor activities to learn about wildlife.

- 9. Presenter:** Dan Groebner, AGFD Region I Nongame Biologist, gave an overview of the Chiricahua Leopard Frog Headstart program. The Chiricahua Leopard frog has experienced a drastic reduction in their ranges. At one time they were widely distributed in the high elevations of Arizona and New Mexico. Current studies have only found them in 24% of their historic ranges in New Mexico and only 5% of their ranges in Arizona. Localized extirpation was expected with the long-term drought conditions experienced across the West. However, the regional extirpation of the species created grave concern. Reasons for the reduction include non-native fish stocking, bullfrog invasion, disease, stream habitat alterations, habitat changes from drought, the natural maturation of the forests and siltation from recent wildfires.

The recovery plan is an example of how agencies can work together. Agencies involved include federal, state, county, schools, private organizations, and environmental organizations. From the initial phase the recovery plan only took five years to finalize. The plan has several objectives: to identify what is affecting the frogs; to maintain, restore and create habitat; to establish new populations; monitor existing populations; maintain old populations; continue to search for solutions using adaptive management techniques. Eight units have been identified for repatriation in New Mexico and Arizona. The use of safe harbor agreements has enabled the Department to work with private landowners without fear of land use restrictions due to having an endangered species living on the property.

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As part of the recovery plan, the Chiricahua Leopard frog Headstart program was begun. The idea behind the Headstart program is to increase survival by releasing frogs in varying stages of development, particularly those close to breeding age. The criterion for frog release sites includes: lack of predators like crayfish, trout, and frogs; the water quality; variety of habitat – sun, shade, and vegetation. Results from the recovery program have been very good. Wild frog egg masses have increased 60-70% and over winter survival has been documented.

Committee comment and discussion commended the program as an opportunity to create new partnerships with schools and landowners that focuses on populations of animals and their habitats. The Committee asked about surveying and tracking of released frogs. Usually the frogs are counted using a visual survey, but other techniques have been considered including telemetry, frog calling, transmitters, toe clipping, metal tags, rice tags, and transponders. However, the commitment in time and money involved would not represent a good return on the investment. Other topics covered included wild egg collection techniques and protocols, possible impacts to wild frog populations and genetic diversity problems.

10. Call to the Public: No members of the public requested to be heard.

11. Open Committee discussion

- a) **Open Committee Discussion.** The Chairman opened discussion. Members asked about the suggested recommendation to the Commission that would allow more than one Member to participate in the Heritage Grant Prioritization Selection process. Commissioner Hernbrode informed the Committee that he had initiated discussions with Game and Fish Department senior staff members. Several alternative recommendations have been proposed and he would like to discuss it further during the January 2007 meeting. The Committee was told about an opportunity to participate in a public workday in preparation for the annual Tres Rios Nature Festival. Last year 3500 people attended the festival, despite heavy rain. This year the event will be held at the Base and Meridian Wildlife Area. It is an opportunity to highlight a passively managed Heritage acquired property. Committee member Heidi Vasiloff will send out more information when it becomes available. Members were encouraged to attend the January 2007 meeting since it is the pre-evaluation meeting for the Heritage Grants Prioritization Selection.

The Committee would like to publicly thank Robyn Beck, Heritage Grant Coordinator, for the awesome job she has done on the grant workshops. The Committee would also like to publicly thank Ashley Ross, Heritage Fund Administrator, for an excellent meeting and agenda.

- b) **Future Meetings.** The fall meeting will be at the Glendale Civic Center located at 5750 West Glenn Drive Glendale, Arizona 85301. Notice of activities and times will be forthcoming.

12. Adjournment: Committee adjourned at 12:00 pm.