

ARIZONA STATE HABITAT PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE (HPC)
Meeting of January 17, 2004
Sheraton Crescent Hotel, Phoenix, AZ

Hays Gilstrap, AZ Game & Fish Commission
 Joe Melton, AZ Game & Fish Commission
 Scott Heap, SE AZ Sportsmen's Club
 Jim Jett, Mohave Sportsmen
 John Cooley, AGFD
 Todd Curtis, SE AZ Sportsmen's Club
 Clay Sarriugarte, SE AZ Sportsmen's Club
 Floyd Willett, Kingman HPC
 C.W. Gunter, AGFD
 Randy Lamb, Prescott HPC
 Sharon Eichelberger, AZ Elk Society
 Ron Eichelberger, AZ Elk Society
 John Koleszar, AZ Elk Society
 Steve Chevront, AZ Deer Association
 Randy Gaskill, Show Low HPC
 Sal Palazzolo, AGFD
 Ron Sieg, AGFD
 John Tuter, Rocky Mtn Elk Foudation
 Chris Mitchell, Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club
 George Reiners, Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club

Craig McMullen, AGFD
 Larry Boeschling, Mogollon Sporting Assn.
 Gary Martin, Mohave Sportsmen's Club
 Manny Bercovich, Rocky Mtn. Elk Foundation
 Stan Baker, Natl Wild Turkey Federation
 Nick Heatwole, Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club
 Jeff Pebworth, AGFD
 Tice Supplee, AGFD
 Donald Begalke
 Eric Gardner, AGFD
 Lyle T. Button, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
 Jerry Gotchie, Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club
 Jim Unmacht, AZ Antelope Foundation/AZ
 Desert Bighorn Sheep Society
 Dan Hunter, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
 Mike Rabe, AGFD
 Ted Williams, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
 Garry Williams, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
 Mike MacCauley, Williams HPC
 Ruth Gregory, AGFD

Roll Call – Hays Gilstrap

HPC	Representative
Alpine HPC	Ron Eichelberger
Flagstaff HPC	Ron Sieg
Forage Resource Study Group	Ron Sieg
Fredonia HPC	Ron Sieg
Kingman HPC	Floyd Willett
Payson Natural Resources Committee	Craig McMullen
Prescott HPC	Randy Lamb
Show Low HPC	Randy Gaska
Southwest Arizona HPC	George Reiners
Springerville HPC	Jon Cooley
Williams HPC	Mike MacCauley
Winslow HPC	Jon Cooley

Actions taken:

Motion	Moved by	Seconded by	Carried?
Approve minutes	Hays	Randy Lamb	Yes

Minutes of last meeting, July 11, 2003, in Flagstaff approved and accepted.

HPC Success Stories:

John Cooley for the Springerville HPC:

Springerville HPC Chairman Blaine Bickford provided information to report improvements to winter range on Fish Creek near Greer. A local pasture project that consisted of thinning encroaching trees from approximately 170 acres of habitat was completed. The total cost was \$32K, of which \$15K was contributed by The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). Coordination is ongoing for the completion of two tanks in the winter range area, Milligan and Coon Canyon.

Ron Sieg for the Flagstaff HPC, the Fredonia HPC and the Forage Resource Study Group (FRSG):

Flagstaff and FRSG have been assisting with pronghorn issues on Anderson Mesa and some surrounding state and private lands. The Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) provided extra funding this year to help restore the grassland habitat in the area, which is an important step to help the antelope herd. Fredonia HPC has been involved in East Strip water projects.

Craig McMullen for the Payson Natural Resources Committee (PNRC):

The Arizona Elk Society funded project for USFS catchments in Game Management Unit (GMU) 22. These funds provided a person who visited 90 catchments and performed maintenance on 46 of them (float valves, vegetation removal, tank sealing, elk jump installation). The Forest Service provided the cost share. Cost per catchment worked out to about \$174 per catchment for labor only; \$261 per catchment for labor and materials. The purpose of this project was to fix infrastructure that already exists. The Buzzard Roost project (515 acres of p-j clearing), and the Gentry Mesa habitat treatment projects were also completed. The contractor who cleared Gentry Mesa took more time than he had planned, but honored his original bid and completed the project. Buzzard Roost cost \$46 per acre. Two volunteer projects also took place, including 15 volunteers who repaired fence around the RRC Wildlife Area. A member of the committee, Dick Henry devised a new design for float valves, an underground unit that eliminates problems of freezing and vandalism (by humans or wildlife). Five of these float valves were installed on USFS drinkers. Craig asked any interested parties to contact him at the AGFD Mesa Regional Office if they would like information on this new design.

Randy Gaska for the Show Low HPC:

The Powerline Grassland, and Cottonwood Burn and Seed projects have been completed and the Forest Service is completing reports. In GMU 3B, 350 acres of the Woolhouse Agra Axe project have been completed, phase two of the project is ready to go pending arch clearance. The GMU 3C browse planting is also completed.

Eric Gardner for the Prescott HPC:

Most of their projects are scheduled for spring completion. Two water buffaloes (for water deliveries to remote waters) have been funded by the Wildlife For Tomorrow Foundation and the purchase is in progress. The Happy Camp Trick Tank was replumbed. One rancher and HPC member, Jim Fletcher, will be recognized at the Arizona Game and Fish Commission's Awards Banquet tonight, receiving the Wildlife Habitat Steward of the Year award. In GMU 10, as discussed at July 2003 State HPC meeting, projects on the Bouquillas Ranch are on hold pending an access agreement with the Navajo Nation. The sale of CV/CF Ranch in GMU 19B (a potential subdivision) to RCA (Ranching Communities of America) fell through. The City of Prescott is interested in purchasing the ranch, primarily for water rights, in which case it will remain an active ranch. The sale of the ranch has important implications for pronghorn management.

Mike MacCauley for the Williams HPC:

The Williams HPC and Unit 9 Wildlife Manager Matt Bratz have been working with the RMEF on completion of several tank cleanouts in Unit 9, including the Lockwood Catchment. Tusayan wastewater pipeline project is planned for spring. The No Name Grassland pinon-juniper treatment is done. The USFS brought a few projects to table. Some of the habitat treatments will require chain saw crews, due to the terrain. Grassland treatments have also taken place in GMU's 7 and 8. About twenty miles of pronghorn fence modification in GMU 7 is complete. Area permittees presented projects totaling about 500 acres in grassland treatments and six stock tanks for renovation. Burns are scheduled for 2005 in GMU's 7 and 8. Mike shared cost per acre agra axe prices, provided by one of the state contracted agra axe vendors, Glen Reed. The costs are based on tree density: 0-40 trees per acre - \$32.50 per acre; 41-60 trees per acre - \$47.30 per acre; 61-80 trees per acre - \$59.70 per acre; 81-100 trees per acre - \$72.10 per acre.

Ron Eichelberger for the Alpine HPC:

The group has not met since the summer meeting and there are no items to report.

Wayne Gunter for the Southwest Arizona HPC:

The group has not met, but Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club (YVRGC) members have assisted AGFD's John Hervert capturing Sonoran pronghorn. YVRGC is also involved in water projects on Organ Pipe National Monument and with the Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) and the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society (ADBSS) on 3 water projects on the Cabeza Prieta in GMU 41 (20K gallon water capacity). Fourteen projects are scheduled, of which 4 are on hold for the NEPA process. \$30K has been raised to use as match for federal funding. Also, expensive equipment had been donated.

Floyde Willett for the Kingman HPC:

Completed projects include a pipeline, a windmill, stock tank cleanouts. The ADBSS has provided most of the funding for projects in the Kingman HPC area. The HPC's annual barbecue had to be rescheduled, but right in the middle of elk season, so turnout wasn't what it normally is. Mohave Livestock Association and Mohave Sportsmen all participate in the HPC. Floyde commended the ADBSS and the AGFD for their presence, noting that since the habitat in Region 3 for sheep is so rough, it is likely that there would be no sheep there without help from these two entities.

Scott Heap for the Southeastern Arizona Sportsmen's Club:

Other groups are beginning to get involved and this week will be the first meeting of the newly formed Safford HPC.

Tice Supplee distributed copies of a brochure about the antelope herd in the Prescott area, a collaborative effort of the AGFD, the Prescott HPC and The Nature Conservancy.

“Critter Groups” Success Stories:

Lyle Button for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:

Lyle distributed a brochure explaining RMEF's Arizona Elk Country Conservation Initiatives (AECCI) and asked the group for input and to keep this in mind for project funding. The Water For Wildlife Tusayan Pipeline project is described. RMEF decided that for the past 18-20 years has seen a shotgun effect on funding projects. The question that should be asked is, “Are they the right projects in the right

place?” RMEF will have meetings with a team of agency people and other interested parties to put together initiatives. They will be developing plans as a group in order to focus efforts on landscape level planning.

The Tusayan pipeline project will begin in June. This will be a focus area; another will be the Bouquillas Ranch and range restoration. Building up the grass bank in GMU 3C will be another area of focus. The RMEF wants the agencies to let them know what they need and what their priorities are. The first meeting on AECCI has been held, the second meeting is scheduled for January 21 in Pinetop. Lyle encouraged the HPC's to contact the RMEF about projects that should be considered. Bob Vahle from AGFD's Pinetop office and Dennis Darr or John Goodwin from the AGFD Flagstaff office are helping to coordinate this process.

Dan Hunter and Gary Williams from the RMEF, reported on the successful Youth Unit Watch in GMU 6A. Approximately 20-25 volunteers participated, as well as AGFD. About 100 youths participated; 500 people total. Southwest Game Processing provided free skinning. Several guns were raffled. The goal of events such as these is to recruit youth into hunting. Lyle Button reported that the event also provided 97 tooth samples for AGFD.

Steve Chevront for the Arizona Deer Association (ADA):

Steve explained that the organization (formerly known as the Arizona Mule Deer Association) changed its name because they work for the benefit of all deer. Their highly successful fundraising banquet raised several hundred thousand dollars for tags. They have a very good project committee. The group's focus is to take care of today's deer herd. Existing waters need repair and more than half of the drinkers are broken, including those owned by the BLM and the USFS, as well Department catchments. The project committee appreciates the professionalism of HPC's project proposals. At last year's winter HPC meeting, the ADA distributed project criteria for their funding decisions and their concerns in this process seem to have been addressed. He reminded the group that the ADA is available to the HPC's to discuss proposals.

Craig McMullen commended the ADA, who hosted a juniors' camp in GMU 23, coordinated thru Blaine Bickford and Mike Wilson on very short notice. The event was a first rate youth camp. About half of the 50 youth tag holders participated in the camp. Steve reported that the ADA also participated in several youth hunts in coordination with the Arizona Elk Society.

Ron Eichelberger for the Arizona Elk Society (AES):

AES approved 25 projects, last year, some of which are complete. They have money left over and are looking for more projects. He told the group to contact AES if any emergency projects arise. Other projects that members have assisted with: Winona Wildlife project – one member of an NAU fraternity coordinated to completely rebuild a catchment. Nine miles of fence were removed in GMU 9. The group participated in Wapiti Weekend at the AGFD's Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area in August. About 90 kids participated, with 350 total participants and plenty of help from the ADA and the Chandler Rod and Gun Club. They also conducted a Unit Watch in GMU's 1 and 27. The fundraising banquet will be held on March 20. AES also noted that project proposals are getting better. One thing they would like to see included in the proposals is a budget breakdown. The organization will be inviting HPC reps to their project meetings.

Stan Baker for the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf):

Members have participated in work in the Springerville Ranger District, completing installation of 5 enclosure sites for wet meadow restoration. The organization has also fully supported, with funding and workers, the Gould's turkey restoration project in Southeastern Arizona. Birds were released last April and the goal is to release for 100 more this year. The group is also involved in a Guzzlers For Gobblers project in the Huachucas, powerline reseeding in the Black Mesa Ranger District and pinon-juniper removal on Anderson Mesa. They are always looking for projects.

Jim Unmacht for the Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF):

The group has received good project proposals. One suggestion: Since in many areas, antelope and elk habitats overlap, the expectation should be that on mixed species habitats, projects should be split funded. Projects that request full funding from AAF should be in pronghorn only habitat. AAF projects include 2 Dugas area projects with about 50 people at each; another near Sonoita with NWTf and one in partnership with YVRGC on the Cabeza Prieta.. Anderson Mesa is a key area for AAF and they have been working with the Diablo Trust. AAF would like to see more groups to coordinate on pinon-juniper projects. The City of Prescott has contacted AAF about the CV/CF Ranch acquisition in GMU 19B and AAF wants to be active in managing the antelope herds near Prescott.

Jim Unmacht for the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society:

ADBSS participated in the transplant of Rocky Mountain sheep from New Mexico. They conducted a hunters' clinic in September. A current issue of concern for the group is in the Silverbell Mountains where it is believed that the resident sheep herd has been impacted by escape of domestic goats posing a disease threat to the sheep. See the AGFD website for the latest on this situation. The ADBSS is gearing up for a full slate of projects upcoming in 2004.

Larry Boeschling for the Mogollon Sporting Association:

This year, the group provided funding to pay students from Payson High School to pick up downed trees in a burn area.

Other discussion:

Mike MacCauley brought up the issue of road maintenance and the continual formation of wildcat roads. This is a problem that needs to be addressed, on private property as well as public land. What often happens it that the Forest Service will close a USFS road, and a wildcat road will then appear on the adjacent private property. Tice suggested that Mike contact the FRSG and examine the Road Management plan that this group put together. This would be a worthwhile endeavor for the Williams HPC Committee.

Tice explained to the group that there are many new funding sources on the horizon and that the State HPC, at last summer's meeting, approved funds from the AFFD's big game donation account to be used as non-federal match in acquiring this funding, specifically LIP (Landowner Incentive Program), which is coordinated through AGFD. Of particular note is that the Farm Bill has been expanded to include rangelands and AGFD has hired Margie Latta as coordinator for Farm Bill projects.

Criteria for these new funding sources covers a Commission-authorized, broad species habitat list, including pronghorns, scaled quail, grassland habitats, and whitewing doves. These are all eligible for funding under the LIP and Heritage programs, particularly for conservation easements. One of the roles

of the local HPC's is to identify and inform funding partners of the landscape-level priorities in your geographic areas. Several of last year's projects not funded by tag funds were forwarded to the AGFD Development Branch for consideration in the LIP and Heritage IIPAM programs.

On the topic of new funding, Hays Gilstrap reported to the group on the Arizona Game and Fish Commission's approval, on January 16th, of various AGFD projects to be funded by the Wildlife Conservation Fund (Proposition 202 funds). The Commission approved project funding of \$2.9 million. The list follows:

Project	Approved Funding
Water Development Infrastructure Redevelopment	\$200,000
Contracted Water Development, Maintenance and Redevelopment	\$300,000
Wildlife Water Development Database	\$162,000
Acquisition of Perpetual Easements	\$100,000
Road Maintenance	\$77,500
Sipe Wildlife Area Bunkhouse Replacement	\$170,000
Accounts Payable Technician (needed for the increased volume Wildlife Conservation Fund projects)	\$56,443
Contract Manager Specialist	\$57,800
Wildlife Area Operation and Maintenance	\$506,000
Overtime for Law Enforcement Investigators	\$40,000
Regional GIS workstations	\$80,000
Radio Systems Upgrade	\$82,900
Region 1 Contracted Tree Thinning	\$75,000
Game Program Software	\$125,000 (for Year 1 of 2)
Big Game Survey Restoration	\$55,680
Predator Management	\$50,000
Farm Bill Coordinator	\$54,450
Contracted Programmatic NEPA Coordination	\$100,000
Wildlife Disease Monitoring	\$45,000
Watchable Wildlife Enhancements	\$36,500
Shooting Range Program Support	\$190,760
Communications Improvements	\$100,000
Match for Federal Grants Programs	\$150,000
Volunteer Coordinator	\$60,000
Budget Support Specialist	\$26,050 (split funded with Heritage fund)

Sal Palazzolo, Conservation Stewardship Coordinator, AGFD:

Hays introduced Sal who explained his role in the AGFD Development Branch. His work unit will oversee the Access, LIP and Farm Bill programs, with the goal of "one stop shopping" for lessees and private property owners.

Sal invited the group to contact him if they have questions. The AGFD is the coordinating agency for the LIP program. Call the AGFD to participate. Sal's office can assist in identifying compatible

funding sources: Tags funds are non-federal match. Federal funds provide cost share, but all projects require the non-federal match.

The two principal funds to be considered are the Conservation Title in the 2002 Farm Bill, which allocates dollars for Arizona and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services LIP program. LIP has allocated \$1.4 million for Arizona for a 3-year period.

Sal explained that the primary focus for the LIP is private lands, meaning private, deeded lands owned by private individuals. For Farm Bill funding, any non-federal lands are eligible, including private property and State Trust lands. In some cases, federal land is eligible if it ties into private land objectives. Arizona Game and Fish Commission land is also eligible. Sal also explained two other federal funding programs, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), as well as the The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Sal distributed a draft of WHIP priority habitats. WHIP projects enjoy a 75% federal cost share.

Mike MacCauley, who is also a Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD) chairman, also offered some points. To be eligible for these funds, you have to be an agricultural producer. The funding is managed thru NRCD. Districts are funded by the state, and are currently receiving little if any funding. The private property individual is required to fill out the application for funds. The funding is done by reimbursement, with water projects getting a 75% cost share and other types 50%.

Sal distributed a second handout on the LIP program criteria. Last year, Arizona received \$250K. This year AGFD will be asking for \$1.4 million. Priority habitats are listed within program. Everything is scored, with priority habitats obviously receiving a higher score. Sal distributed the LIP species list and emphasized that the more species/habitats you can address in your project, the higher your project will score. Consider other species to benefit besides game species and this may open up opportunities for more funding sources, including the Heritage Access and IIPAM programs. Sal cautioned that anyone applying should not get too bogged down in details and offered his assistance in applying for funds. There is big potential for other funding sources. Check species eligibility.

It was asked if AGFD would help drafting proposals. Sal explained that the process is not as cumbersome as one might think. In the first phase of the application process, the landowner fills out a 1-page application. This brief gets submitted into ranking process and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff approves. The federal agency will do NEPA and EA's and provide cost share. The process is fairly simple, but fairly long. It is an annual process with proposals due in January. If the application makes this first cut, then the landowner, Sal and NRCS staff will meet and flesh out the details of the project proposal.

Tice added that the AGFD's new Farm Bill coordinator will be contacting the local HPC's and suggested that each group prepare the wildlife priorities they would like to see addressed. She also added that the AGFD has a new internal process for prioritizing projects submitted for State Wildlife Grants. Several landscape-level projects are currently in the hopper for funding. She added that volunteerism is very favorably considered in this funding.

Mark Zornes, HPC Coordinator, AGFD:

Mark gave a presentation on suggested changes for the HPC project proposal process, including an HPC logo. The AGFD is bound by restrictions on logos, but a suggested HPC logo was presented.

The new step that Mark is proposing is to have the local HPC's review and give a pass/fail rating to each project that is submitted for the geographic region of their HPC (not all proposals are submitted through the local committees). He emphasized the importance of keeping landscape level goals in mind when evaluating projects. The local HPC should not rank the projects, but just provide Mark with a "Yes, we like it," or "No, we don't like it," rating. Mark was asked why the committees should not rank the proposals. Historically, ranking by the local committees has been frustrating due to the species-specific nature of the process and the ability to tap into other resources. It was suggested that representatives of the "critter groups" should attend these local HPC evaluation meetings. Jim Unmacht echoed this sentiment and noted the importance and value of having input from the conservation groups during the planning stage of a proposal. He suggested that the local HPC's notify the groups about meeting. Contact information for the local HPC's and the "critter groups" is provided in the packet handed out at the start of the meeting.

Another point that Mark made is that the focus should be on funding righteous wildlife projects, even if they are not as well written as a project of lesser wildlife value.

Another part of Mark's presentation involved using the AGFD website as a tool for posting HPC info - a centralized communication center. AGFD is currently working on a HPC web page.

Mark completed his presentation by reminding the local HPC's once again to think landscape planning. They are the people on the ground who know the issues – habitat, socio-political, etc. Evaluate projects to see if they fit into the landscape level planning of the local HPC.

Discussion:

Tice explained the internal AGFD scoring process and reminded the group that it is not a ranking process. The objective is to find money for every good project.

Concern was expressed about the differing timetables/deadlines of various agencies. For most special tag funded projects, implementation can often happen within a year, while other funding cycles may take a year just to receive notification of funding.

Mike MacCauley said that the NRCD evaluates and inventories his ranch. It can sometimes take 3-4 years just to do inventory. The ranch plan then becomes an overview of the long term. Then the HPC can get involved. Landowners also need to know and be able to provide up front funding, because the programs are reimbursement programs.

The group was reminded that the objective of the HPC program is more resources for wildlife. Local HPC's should have a total plan with several moving targets. Local committees have to become more inclusive.

Another tool that the HPC's can use to address game species concerns is the hunt recommendations process.

There were some concerns about the new water development process and how it tiers back to HPC's. Proponents are concerned about redundancy and this is causing some confusion, due to the fact that the AGFD plan is geared to AGFD waters. The new AGFD waters database will include all waters, not just AGFD's. This is important because sometimes a BLM water project is more necessary than an AGFD water. The suggestion was made to possibly ask the critter groups to rank water projects, with a certain percentage of funds to be set aside specifically for water projects.

Eric Gardner mentioned that the Prescott HPC plan wants to identify resources, GIS, landowners, key issues, without necessarily identifying a particular project. They will discuss this at their meeting.

Ron Eichelberger said that from the AES perspective, the organization is willing to work on emergency basis, but wants proposals to be submitted on AGFD form. AES will use the same scoring criteria as on projects originally submitted during the regular funding cycle.

The group reached consensus that the HPC concept is one of the best communication tools in a small geographic area, as well as one of the best ways to involve all interested parties (sportsmen, landowners, government agencies, etc.).

The idea of better annual planning with landscape-level goals (e.g., a watershed, as opposed to a single project) and the additional resources available was the next topic during an open discussion of how to be more efficient and effective at local level. It was suggested that a map that indicated local HPC boundaries should be generated.

The discussion then shifted on how to keep interested parties involved in the process. A concern was raised that we still need to look at scattering projects across various ranch ownerships to keep them interested in participating in the HPC's. A couple of funding groups opposed this idea and favored a landscape look at projects. A suggestion was made to have a 2-tiered process where large-scale projects are looked at for multiple year funding, while smaller, more immediate projects were also considered. A first step in this process would be to produce maps of what areas each HPC actually covers and then consolidate available GIS information into useable maps with land ownership, soil, vegetation, waters, etc.

Using tag money to leverage Farm Bill funding may also help participation. Also, it is important to involve the 40-acre ranchette owners. Entire developments must be involved. How to bring them into process is something that needs to be addressed.

Project planning should include:

- 1) Geographic parameters of local HPC's
- 2) Waters
- 3) Who's doing what? By species.
- 4) Identifying how much money is needed.
- 5) Post on website for communication.

The critter groups would like to be kept informed about ongoing projects. Communication is the key between the local HPC's and the Department.

Hays mentioned the scholastic shooting programs. He will ask the conservation groups to sponsor. There could possibly be Proposition 202 money in the funding mix. He would like the critter groups to promote and coordinate and will provide the details to anyone interested.

Suggestion for project proponents from critter groups: Please provide maps (2 levels) to help project committees figure out where projects are.

Other points:

- 1) HPC's in Regions 1, 2, and the PNRN will be involve in RMEF initiatives.
- 2) AAF prefers proposals for this funding source prefers proposals for 100% antelope projects.
- 3) Provide priority wildlife habitat input to Farm Bill Coordination office (AGFD Development Branch)
- 4) Coordinate on water project rankings
- 5) Facilitate AGFD support for GIS based planning tools
- 6) Use HPC process for communication and coordination on a wider range of issues
- 7) Develop HPC page on Department Website.

Date and location of summer meeting:

Saturday, July 10, 2004 to accommodate volunteer members who have day jobs. Location TBD, but in a cool place.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM.