

Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Advisory Committee 12/12/13

Guests: Jim Hinkle, Asst. Director AGFD, FOD, and Jim Paxon, Information Branch Chief, AGFD

Emergency meeting called to deal with media storm.

Meeting moved to another location due to public protest held at the Tucson Office

Raul opened meeting by stating the Dept. and Committee need to have an agreement on media relations.

Jim Hinkle gave a brief history of his career with the department, he also recognized the hard work and commitment of the committee. He stated that the project was already a success because of the work of the committee. He recognizes the success of the committee by coming together and working through the project. The committee needs to cooperate and play to each others strengths. It is good that the public's passion has been ignited but there needs to be timely media updates.

Jim Paxon gave a brief personal history on his work with the USFS and how he brings different experiences and viewpoints to the department. He stated that Director Voyles is proud of the accomplishments of the committee.

Sheep on the Car\atalinas on 2 conditions:

1. Biologically possible
2. Gain widespread public support.

There were 5 areas looked at for sheep relocation and the Catalinas was moved to top of list because of this committee.

The Director has 4 pillars for the department's success

1. People
2. Quality of Science
3. Commission

4. Public's passion for wildlife.

Credibility is the center point of the pillars

Sheep reintroduction is not a G&F driven project, but is a public supported project.

It is a long term project and will require determination and tenacity. The probability of lions taking sheep was 100% and the committee was aware of this.

His philosophy on bad news is "Go early even if it is ugly" be upfront about what is happening. Media will invent stories if no updates are given.

Jim Paxon gave examples of bad media relations.

He also commented on the website only having the May news release and the July OPEd . He said that it should be populated with FAQs and videos.

Committee need to designate a spokesman and be available or give authorization to G&F staff to perform those duties

Weekly updates: who is taking responsibility for putting them out, also send to different websites-G&F, USFS, hiking clubs, committee members websites.

Crisis management: there is a difference between breaking news & op eds. There will be an article in the Arizona Republic on Sunday. Linda Valdez contacted Jim Paxon for information for the article.

He stated that conservation is never easy, you have to go against the grain.

The Director wants to know there is public support for the project.

In 1950, 51% of Arizonans hunted, in 2010, 19% of Arizonans hunted

Trica asked "Is there a different mindset within the department, since society has changed and we now have more conservationists than hunters?"

Jim Paxon answered the question by talking about the wolf reintroduction, and Watchable Wildlife programs that the department has now.

In 2012 60% of our 85,000,000.00 budget came from sale of hunting & fishing licenses and PR & DJ acts.

We need to manage wildlife forever, when hunters decrease where will the money come from- Watchable Wildlife programs.

Brian Dolan felt that Jim Paxon was condescending and did not recognize the work that has already been done.

He stated that the committee members all had jobs and could not be available several hours a night to release information.

Media sees this story as a “fire” and wants immediate info.

“No Comment” is not an option for G&F when asked for information.

Public records request must be released

Can we control the message & release information on our terms

Jim Hinkle: the initial news release should not have gone out.

Jim Paxon: the committee is not prepared to handle media storm

Info on sheep movement & mortality is on need to know basis, only the WMs will get info.

Need to develop FAQ and put it on website and direct request to website. G&F has someone who can help with website and FAQs

Need to schedule press conference to answer media questions: with holidays coming up schedule after first of year. Date set at Jan. 8th.

Agee to not release information after every sheep or lion kill

Raul: Sense that committee wants to continue working together, but needs to have sound process in place to deal with crises.

Acaia: can we expect more dead sheep? As long as sheep stay in dense wooded areas, expect more mortalities.

All of the mortalities to date have been in fair to poor sheep habitat.

Need to work with the Forest Service on habitat improvements before release of more sheep.

There have been 11 plus successful transplants of sheep in AZ.

How does this transplant camper to others? Every one is different and this is an adaptive management plan.