

Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Advisory Committee Meeting

02/25/2013

- Jim Heffelfinger, Regional Game Specialist, apologized for the breach of ground rules by giving an interview about the project to the media.
 - The Department had several hours in meetings, emails, and phone calls working to resolve the issue.
 - All media inquiries will go through Mark Hart.
 - The Department needs to revisit the ground rules and is seeking more flexibility in dealing with information request.
 - Jim conducted an interview with a media contact that he trusts and has spoken with in the past several times about the hiking/dogs regulations in the BHS management area of Pusch Ridge.
- Brian Dolan recognized that these inquiries occur annually and that there should have been more preparation.
- Brian has a difficult time as does the Advisory Committee members of avoiding media inquiries.
- Several members expressed concern and disappointment with the breach and now have serious trust issues with the department.
 - The largest concern was not the content of the article but that there was a release of information when the rules were explicit.
 - There is concern that there is institutional forces/culture that impedes the Department's ability to abide by the ground rules.
 - There were differing interpretations of the ground rules
 - Some found the ground rules to be abstract
 - Some believed that the only topic that could not be discussed was the Advisory Committee not all aspects of the project
 - Others felt it was a media blackout until the Committee was comfortable that the project would move forward
- Why did the Department agree to something that they could not do? The ground rules are important.
 - When the ground rules were developed there was not a clear understanding of the expectations amongst Department personnel; this is now clear.
 - The Department has a policy of responding to "send comments"; an internet inquiry system within 3 days.
- Game & Fish credibility was called into question
 - The Department has taken steps to ensure that this will not happen in the future.
 - The Department will be diligent in regaining trust.
- Is the Advisory committee just "Window Dressing"? Is this project a done deal regardless of what the committee decides? Will the committee have any voice?

- Department personnel reassured the Advisory Committee that they are relevant and valued. The Committee is a new direction for the agency and there is commitment to the process.
- Department staff has invested considerable resources to help ensure the success of the Advisory Committee.
 - Desire to model a new process that will aid future efforts
- Why weren't the committee members informed of the upcoming Commission meeting presentation of the project?
 - One of the Ground Rules is "No Surprises" however the Committee received notification about the Commission Meeting agenda item from other groups; this was a big surprise.
 - The fact that this occurred after the article, further erodes trust
 - The presentation was an Agenda Item for the 2/25/2013 Advisory Committee meeting to be discussed. The Commission meeting announcement/agenda with the Catalina BHS project came out prior to the Advisory Committee meeting.
 - Joe Sacco apologized for the lack of timely dissemination regarding the reintroduction effort project as a Commission Meeting Agenda Item.
 - At the request of the Advisory Committee (forwarded by Brian Dolan) Raul Vega will work to remove the agenda item from the March 8th Commission Meeting in Sahuarita. If this is not possible the Department will provide the PowerPoint for the Commission meeting for the Advisory Committee's consideration and work together to craft an acceptable presentation.
- If the November 2013 release timeline isn't met what will happen to the project?
 - Currently there are two sources of sheep for transplant in Region 4 from the Chocolate and the Trigo Mountains. If the November timeline isn't met those sheep could go to another area because the project could be reprioritized.
 - Funding/resources could be directed towards other projects
- The Department needs to continue to prepare for a November 2013 release even if it does not happen
 - Large coordination effort for resources
 - Includes securing funding for project components
 - Ordering long lead items such as collars
 - Tentatively scheduling resources for the project
 - The Department is concerned that these actions will be interpreted as the reintroduction project's outcome being predetermined which it is not.
- If the Department is unable to go forward with securing funding will the Advisory Committee members provide resources?
 - Brian Dolan and Mike Quigley had discussions about going out to the business community and soliciting donations for the project in the future.

- The Advisory Committee concerns and discussion are appreciated by the Department reinforcing the seriousness of trust and how important it is to the process.
- Stan Helin expressed his optimism about the synergy of the committee and hoped that the Advisory Committee would be successful. He was impressed by the Committee's functionality and could see the potential for future efforts. Stan intends to use the Committee as a model for other projects including the Redington Pass planning effort.
 - Stan asked that the Advisory Committee stay engaged and continue the collaborative effort.
- Stan introduced guest; Rachael Biggs with Forest Service and John Thornburg with the National Park Service.
- Rachael Biggs from the Forest Service provided a PowerPoint presentation about the Forest Service's fire plan for the BHS management area, as well as wilderness and prescribe fire considerations.
 - Rachael will provide a copy of the PowerPoint presentation that will be disseminated to committee members
- Rachael showed the treatment areas and priorities to reduce fuels
- Firescape is NEPA
- Wilderness Guidelines
 - Restore the natural role of fire
 - Reduce the unnatural buildup of fuels
 - Wildlife enhancement is not a reason to use fire in the wilderness. Why?
 - There is a focus on the natural role of fire in the wilderness as opposed to modification of the landscape for a given species.
 - Need to be able to argue that wildlife is a wilderness resource.
 - Need to complete the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide (MRDG) for the project area in preparation of management needs including prescribed burning efforts and collar recovery.
- Areas below 4500 feet are not allowed to burn
 - Approximately 30% of the BHS Management Area
 - These areas did not evolve with a fire component
 - Fire kills Saguaros
- What months are preferable for fire management?
 - Spring months of April and May and the Fall months
- The Forest Service needs input from the committee on where to plan for Rx burns, in lambing areas or in areas with high vegetation.
 - Fuel management areas Finger, Pusch and Buster were discussed.
 - Potential for natural ignitions to burn if conditions are right
- Decisions can be made while suppressing wildfires to treat specific areas.
- The FS needs more knowledge of what needs to burn before the wildfire season so they can prepare a fire suppression plan.

- Can the boundaries in the current burn units be tweaked?
 - Yes but the burn units are represented by defensible fire breaks i.e. trails, terrain etc.
- What scale is the burn plan? Can burn be done for the entire wilderness area instead of block by block?
 - Perhaps but there is a concern about the smoke component.
 - Need to be aware of the air shed and the affect on surrounding communities
- Timeline
 - MRDG initiated in Mach 2013
 - Firescape planning effort completed in 2014
 - Enhanced fuel treatments around Summerhaven 2013 through 2015
 - Implement prescribed burning in wilderness 2015/2016
- How much can realistically be burned by 2016?
 - About 5,000 acres.
- Obstacles to the fire plan: Cost, how can it be made more affordable?
 - Will look for funding through the HPC process
 - Seek creative funding strategies i.e. solicitation from communities

Action Items

- Talk with Research Branch about Commission Presentation – Joe (completed)
- Work to remove Catalina BHS Agenda Item from Commission Meeting Agenda and report back to the Committee – Raul /Joe
- Next Meeting – March 5th 2013 at Arizona Game and Fish Department Office
- Agenda Items:
 - Ground rules
 - Firescape
 - Items not discussed on the 2/25/2013 agenda