



Habitat Partnership Committee Connection

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FROM YOUR STATEWIDE HPC CHAIRMAN Commissioner J.W. HARRIS

Wildlife management is ever-changing and always difficult. This business is complex, because wildlife populations are unpredictable and there are always multiple factors wildlife managers must work through: budgets, social acceptance, land management, climate change, etc. Of recent concern is the added scrutiny being given to archaeological clearances (see page 3). Once all of these challenges are met, the work can begin.

Icons of the American West, mule deer are one of the most complex ungulates to manage for several reasons. Population numbers have been in a downward trend, and like most wildlife management concerns, there is not a single resolution. The Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies helped create the Mule Deer Working Group, which has identified the main management concerns for mule deer in different ecoregions. For the Southwest Desert Ecoregion, the main concerns are drought, fire suppression, overgrazing and human encroachment, which all lead to depleted habitat and reduced survival. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has embarked upon a Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Initiative to battle these concerns and aim towards increasing mule deer populations.

The Initiative consists of mule deer habitat improvement projects in Units 16A and 21. Mule deer populations in these areas have seen the largest decline of any two hunt units in Arizona. Past data suggests that the population levels are well below carrying capacity, suggesting the opportunity for growth. What makes this effort unique is that more than \$2 million has been allocated for habitat improvement in these two hunt units over the next three years because of an increase in Pittman-Robertson funds. This initiative will also use funding from the new application fee structure at an estimated level of \$200,000 per year.

This major effort will dovetail nicely with all the great work that has been completed by the Habitat Partnership Committee. Special Big Game Tag funding through the HPC process will play a critical role in the success of this Initiative. Predation management within the Initiative areas will be an important component for enhancing mule deer population growth, but these efforts cannot be funded with Pittman-Robertson dollars. This is where the HPC comes in. SBGLT funds are state dollars and can be used for predation management. Two HPC proposals outlining predation management plans in the two Initiative areas have been submitted. Predation management projects in conjunction with water improvement, prescribed burns and invasive plant removal can be effective in bolstering mule deer populations.

As a reminder, the next State HPC meeting will be Saturday, January 24, 2015, at Arizona Game and Fish headquarters in Phoenix. The meeting agenda will be available on the [HPC website](#), along with the meeting minutes from the August 2014 State HPC meeting. Thank you for your continued support of the HPC program.



COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Dennis Fogle, HPC Coordinator

While putting together this newsletter, I struggled with the best way to introduce myself as the Department's new HPC coordinator, then it hit me. What is the sole reason I am sitting here today? I am in this position because of my love for the outdoors and specifically for big game, which started before I could walk. My parents (especially my father) love the outdoors: our family vacations consisted of fishing and camping trips in the White Mountains of Arizona. When I turned 10 years old, my father started hunting, and I tagged along on these unpredictable hunts. Our place in the NSSF adoption sequence model progressed from stage 1 to stage 5 in no time.

At age 11, I harvested my first mule deer doe on the Kaibab Plateau, and the next day I harvested my first cow elk near Chevelon Canyon in game management Unit 4A. Talk about one heck of a weekend for a couple of greenhorns! From that moment, I have been hooked on big game hunting. This passion burns deep within my family, as my dad and I still hunt together year-round. Luckily my mother and now my wife share these same passions. My wife and I had our first child last year and, believe it or not, this has trickled down to her also. Her favorite word is "deer," and she has already spent many days in the White Mountains fishing and camping.

All those years in the field and learning about wildlife taught me the importance of wildlife management and the role hunters play as population regulators and as the main funding source for wildlife. For these reasons, I chose to pursue my education and work for the Department. I am a graduate of American Public University with a Bachelor of Science degree in environmental studies and a concentration in fish and wildlife management. My Department career began more than five years ago in the Information

and Education Division. My most recent position was as the shooting sports coordinator in the Wildlife Recreation Branch. In that position, my primary task was to manage the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP), a team-based youth development program that uses the shotgun sports of trap, skeet and sporting clays to instill life skills. While there, I created hunt camps open only to SCTP members, to share my passion for the outdoors and help mentor the next generation of hunters. The ultimate goal of this effort was to offer these young adults their first hunting experience using shotguns, since they are trained to be proficient and safe with all firearms. I plan on assisting with more hunt camps in the future.



My first day as HPC coordinator was at the August 2014 Habitat Partnership Committee meeting in Flagstaff. I was truly amazed by the dedication and passion of all HPC members. The most impressive part of the meeting occurred when each of the local HPC groups presented success stories. The complex and diverse work completed by this partnership will ensure Arizona stays ahead of the many challenges faced in wildlife management. I plan on doing all I can to ensure a smooth transition and continue this great momentum.

I believe communication is the key to success for any business or program. Communication will be a high priority, and I hope all members feel the same way. If you have suggestions for improvement in the HPC process, let me know. I am always learning and looking to improve. With all that said, I am very excited to be in this position. I look forward to working with each of you to ensure the continued success of Arizona's wildlife and its habitat.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER (CONTINUED)

2014–2015 HPC Funding Cycle Update

One hundred and ten project proposals have been submitted, totaling \$3,232,484 in Special Big Game License Tag (SBGLT) funds. This year's funding coordination meeting between the Department and wildlife conservation organizations participating in the SBGLT fund program will take place **January 3, 2015**, at the Department's headquarters in Phoenix. The final discussion and formal approval of projects recommended for funding will take place at the State HPC meeting on **January 24, 2015**. For a list of all 2014–2015 proposals submitted for funding consideration, please visit the [HPC website](#).



Archaeological Clearances

Archaeological clearances for all projects funded by the Department have seen added scrutiny. In speaking with many members of HPC, most recognize the importance of obtaining required archaeological clearances for their HPC project. As a reminder to all, an archaeological study is required for any HPC project that requires new ground disturbance, even a project on private property. Because these projects are funded through state dollars, the State of Arizona is liable; that's why archaeological clearances are mandatory, even on private property. The level of archaeological clearance needed will vary from project to project. I am available to help you determine the best path for your project. So, please feel free to contact me with any questions.



HPC Project Completion Reports

Starting with the 2015–2016 HPC cycle, project proposals **will not be accepted from a proponent unless that proponent has submitted a completion report or progress report for all previously funded projects**. Project completion reports and progress reports are required and are a vital part of the integrity of the HPC and SBGLT programs for many reasons. These reports help inform all funding partners exactly how the money allocated per project was spent. These reports are also vital in assisting the Department in balancing annual budgets. Most importantly, these reports provide us the information needed to create a landscape view of all habitat projects in Arizona, which provide important data to aid in wildlife management decisions.

I am going through our files and cleaning up the last three years of data. Therefore, I will be soliciting completion reports or progress reports for all projects approved for funding within the last three years. If your project is still in progress, please fill out the progress report form to keep your project in good standing. Remember progress reports are due March 1st of each year. Completion reports are due within 30 days of project completion. We have tried to simplify this process, and I believe our reports are fairly simple to complete.

I am here to work with you and clean up our records. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about this process. I look forward to working with you and improving our HPC process.

HOME ON THE RANGE

Carl Lutch, Wildlife Program Manager

There are only two places in Arizona where the old Western song “Home on the Range” rings true as a place where the buffalo actually do roam. Buffalo, more properly known as “bison,” are managed as free-ranging wildlife on two wildlife areas in northern Arizona managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department: House Rock and Raymond. Unfortunately, in the past 20 years or so, the bison have actually roamed much farther than the Department would like. Bison are more difficult to manage than other wildlife. Keeping them within the boundaries where they’re allowed to roam is challenging.

Arizona is one of the few states that classifies bison as wildlife, and northern Arizona is considered within the historic range of Plains bison. In 1906, Charles “Buffalo” Jones trailed bison to the North Kaibab. The House Rock and Raymond bison herds are descended from these animals. House Rock Wildlife Area was officially established in 1950 through agreements with the Kaibab National Forest, the Department and surrounding ranchers as a place for the state’s bison herd to graze. In 1945 prior to the designation of House Rock Wildlife Area, bison were moved from the House Rock herd to Raymond Wildlife Area to create the state’s second herd.

Early bison managers used a more hands-on approach to managing bison than we have done in recent years. Since 1982, when a hands-off approach was adopted at House Rock, much of the early knowledge of bison management and handling has been lost due to retirement and attrition. Consequently, both bison herds began to lose trust in people and sought areas where they were less disturbed and left alone. Unfortunately, that was away from both House Rock and Raymond wildlife areas. I’ll focus the rest of this article on recent efforts to turn around the Raymond herd.

On Raymond, the herd often ventured onto surrounding private cattle ranches, causing fence damage, loss of time and disruption of cattle

operations. The herd would often range up to 20 miles away from Raymond. Faced with the possibility of either solving bison management issues at Raymond or getting rid of the Raymond herd entirely, the Department set out to regain the lost knowledge of managing bison. We turned to the nation’s biggest bison manager, Ted Turner. After a trip to Turner’s Armendaris and Ladder Ranches in New Mexico in 2013, we implemented a new management strategy at Raymond.



With the help of HPC funding, about 15 miles of perimeter fence and holding pasture upgrades were completed. Before the fence upgrades, the Raymond herd was leaving the wildlife area an average of 40 times a year, costing considerable manpower and equipment maintenance to bring them back. Since work began a year and a half ago, the herd has not crossed or, even better, attempted to cross the upgraded fence. To the best of our knowledge, only one rogue bull crossed the new and improved perimeter fence when he returned to Raymond to breed this past summer. The new fence still allows for antelope to cross under and for safer crossing by elk. The holding pasture will be used during the busiest elk hunts, to further separate the bison from the public.

New tractor-tire water troughs have been installed, replacing most old metal troughs. In addition, solar-powered aerators and larger-capacity black storage tanks have been and are being installed.

Together, these measures make open water more available to bison and to all wildlife during the coldest winter months when temperatures drop below zero. Prior to this, ice had to be busted every day for wildlife to drink. When there was no open water, the bison often left Raymond to find larger dirt stock tanks to the south on private property, where they could break through the ice to drink. This caused many headaches for neighboring ranches.



The bull-to-cow ratio has been changed drastically in the last two years. Hunters removed most of the older bulls that spent most of the year away from Raymond and on surrounding state and private land. The bull-to-cow ratio was changed from nearly one bull to one cow to about one bull to 10 cows. We also changed the harvest strategy for the Raymond herd so the herd doesn't stampede away when approached.

New rules were implemented requiring signing in upon entering Raymond Wildlife Area and closing

Raymond to public entry during calving season (May1-July29). We closed some roads, designated others "open" for public travel and made it unlawful for the public to approach closer than a quarter mile of the Raymond bison herd. These steps were taken to create space on Raymond where the herd would be less disturbed and more likely to stay. We learned, to nobody's surprise, that disturbance to the bison herds at both Raymond and House Rock was a major factor in where the herd stayed and didn't stay.

We also introduced the bison to a special feed developed by Turner ranches formulated for range conditions in the Southwest and for the specific needs of bison. This feed is a proprietary blend that is not available to other bison ranches. Our bison readily took to it. Trust between the bison and Department employees was regained as a result. In fact, we used this feed on the Kaibab Plateau this past summer to capture and move some bison back to House Rock Wildlife Area.

We could not have undertaken the measures we did nor in the timeframe that they occurred at Raymond Wildlife Area without funding available through the HPC. I can attest to the positive results we are seeing with the Raymond bison herd and the effectiveness of the HPC process. We are planning to offer more public outreach efforts and events in the future. From facing the possibility of eliminating the Raymond bison herd completely to now planning to double the herd, it looks like Raymond Wildlife Area will be a "home where the buffalo roam" into the foreseeable future.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Project Title: San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Wildlife Water Maintenance/Development Phase 1	
Project Proponent: Bureau of Land Management	
Region and Game Management Unit: Region V – GMU 30B, 34B, 35A	
Local Habitat Partnership Committee: Sierra Vista-Douglas HPC	
Special Big Game License Tag Funds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Javelina Tag Funds 	\$4,400.00
Cost-Share Funds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureau of Land Management Friends of the San Pedro River 	\$23,261.56
Total Project Costs:	\$27,661.56

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area was established by public law to protect the riparian area that is so vital to many types of wildlife. Long-term drought in this 57,000-acre area has created an issue where only 15 miles of the 50 mile river contains permanent water. This project is part of a landscape project that will space water no more than 3 miles apart, which is ideal for big game and other wildlife species.

During this phase, six different wildlife waters received maintenance or development. Overall, we saw two new solar panels installed, one well pump replaced, one new storage tank installed, two salt cedar removal procedures completed, new pipes/valves on three waters installed and two new wedge drinkers installed.

These new and improved waters yielded immediate results. Officials observed heavy use by wildlife within days. Successful completion of phase 1 has provided quantifiable habitat improvement. Completion of future phases will provide this conservation area with new blocks of habitat that have seen very little use.



SPECIAL TAG FUNDS UPDATE**Ruth Gregory, Game Program Administrative Coordinator**

A huge THANK YOU to our wildlife conservation partners who worked so diligently in 2014 to raise more than \$1.7 million in Special Tag funds, the primary source of funds for HPC projects. The tremendous success of this program is a result of the valuable partnerships that have arisen through the HPC process. Outstanding efforts from our Wildlife Conservation groups in conducting auctions and raffles to sell these tags make it possible for the HPC program to fund a multitude of wildlife projects that benefit both game and nongame wildlife species. The HPC has become one of the Department's premier enhancement programs for the benefit of Arizona's wildlife. The following is the summary of funds raised for 2014:

TAG	ORGANIZATION	SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSE TAG FUNDS RAISED
Bighorn Sheep	Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society	\$145,000
Bighorn Sheep	Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society	\$180,000
Bighorn Sheep	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$151,800
	Total Bighorn Sheep Tag Funds	\$476,800
Black Bear	Arizona Bowhunters Association	\$3,500
Black Bear	Arizona Elk Society	\$2,000
Black Bear	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$7,695
	Total Black Bear Tag Funds	\$13,195
Buffalo	Arizona Elk Society	\$21,000
Buffalo	Arizona Bowhunters Association	\$21,000
Buffalo	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$38,460
	Total Buffalo Tag Funds	\$80,460
Elk	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	\$125,000
Elk	Arizona Elk Society	\$180,000
Elk	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$121,075
	Total Elk Tag Funds	\$426,075
Javelina	Arizona Bowhunters Association	\$1,225
Javelina	Safari Club International - Arizona Chapter	\$800
Javelina	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$6,995
	Total Javelina Tag Funds	\$9,020
Mountain Lion	Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society	\$5,500
Mountain Lion	Safari Club International – Phoenix Chapter	\$10
Mountain Lion	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$7,325
	Total Mountain Lion Tag Funds	\$12,835
Mule Deer	Arizona Deer Association	\$225,000
Mule Deer	Mule Deer Foundation	\$220,000
Mule Deer	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$96,300
	Total Mule Deer Tag Funds	\$541,300
Pronghorn Antelope	Arizona Antelope Foundation	\$20,500
Pronghorn Antelope	Arizona Antelope Foundation	\$30,000
Pronghorn Antelope	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$38,320
	Total Antelope Tag Funds	\$88,820
Whitetail Deer	Safari Club International - Arizona Chapter	\$34,000
Whitetail Deer	Arizona Deer Association	\$33,000
Whitetail Deer	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$28,180
	Total Whitetail Deer Tag Funds	\$95,180
Wild Turkey	National Wild Turkey Federation	\$4,500
Wild Turkey	National Wild Turkey Federation	\$8,360
Wild Turkey	Arizona Big Game Super Raffle	\$14,510
	Total Wild Turkey Tag Funds	\$27,370
TOTAL SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSE TAG FUNDS FOR 2013		\$1,771,055

MEET YOUR LOCAL HPC CHAIRPERSONS

as of December 2014

<i>HPC</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>	<i>Email</i>	<i>AGFD Contact</i>	<i>Email</i>
Forage Resource Study Group	Stephen Williams	swilliams@azland.gov	Larry Phoenix	lphoenix@azgfd.gov
Arizona Strip Habitat Working Group	Luke Thompson	lthompson@azgfd.gov	Luke Thompson	lthompson@azgfd.gov
Kingman HPC	Vacant		Velma Holt-Buhr	vholt-buhr@azgfd.gov
Payson Natural Resources Committee	David Daniels	ddaniels@azgfd.gov	David Daniels	ddaniels@azgfd.gov
Prescott HPC	Gail Steiger	gailsteiger@msn.com	Darren Tucker	dtucker@azgfd.gov
Show Low HPC	Vacant		Bob Birkeland	bbirkeland@azgfd.gov
Safford HPC	Daniel Ward	wardsbuilders@q.com	Duane Aubuchon	daubuchon@azgfd.gov
Sierra Vista-Douglas HPC	John Millican	j2dbmill@msn.com	Brad Fulk	bfulk@azgfd.gov
Southwest Arizona HPC	Jean Wilson	jeanrenegade@gmail.com	Mike Sumner	msumner@azgfd.gov
Springerville-Alpine HPC	Bill Masters	billy.masters@empire-cat.com	Mike Godwin	mgodwin@azgfd.gov
Tucson HPC	Brian Dolan	bfd@dakotacom.net	Joe Sacco	jsacco@azgfd.gov
Williams-Flagstaff HPC	Tom Mackin	tmmackin@q.com	Larry Phoenix	lphoenix@azgfd.gov
Winslow HPC	Vacant		Bob Birkeland	bbirkeland@azgfd.gov

Got questions about the HPC Program?

Contact:

Dennis Fogle, HPC coordinator, (623) 236-7350 or dfogle@azgfd.gov

Ruth Gregory, Game Program administrative coordinator, (623) 236-7349 or rgregory@azgfd.gov

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MEETINGS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **HPC Project Funding Coordination Meeting: January 3, 2015**
Arizona Game and Fish Department Headquarters (Eagle Room)
5000 W. Carefree Highway
Phoenix, AZ 85086
10:30 AM
- **State HPC Meeting: January 24, 2015**
Arizona Game and Fish Department Headquarters (Eagle Room)
5000 W. Carefree Highway
Phoenix, AZ 85086
8:00 AM
- **HPC Project Progress Reports: Due March 1, 2015**
- Looking to get out into the field and assist with big game habitat improvement projects? Volunteer opportunities are available through some of our wildlife conservation partners. To see a list of upcoming habitat conservation projects, please visit the [Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife Conservation](#) website.
- If you have an idea for an article, success story, announcement, project status update, or any HPC-related news, please submit them to dfogle@azgfd.gov. Microsoft Word documents are preferred (please try to keep articles to between 500 and 700 words). Pictures of your projects and volunteers are always welcome!