

STATE HABITAT PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE
Saturday, August 2, 2008, Arizona Game and Fish Department
2878 E. White Mountain Boulevard, Pinetop, Arizona

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

1. Introductions and Roll Call – Commissioner Bill McLean, Chairman, State HPC:

Present:

Al Eiden, AZ Game & Fish Dept. (AGFD)
Rex Brown, Springerville HPC
Brian Wakeling, AGFD
Randy Wadlow, Rocky Mountain Elk
Foundation (RMEF)
Ed Jahrke, AGFD
Joseph Currie, AGFD
Sal Palazzolo, AGFD
Bill McLean, AZ Game & Fish
Commission
David McCasland, AZ Desert Bighorn
Sheep Society
Tom Mackin, Williams/Flagstaff HPC
Bob Jacobs, Mule Deer Foundation (MDF)
Steve Clark, AZ Elk Society (AES)
Rex Brown, Springerville HPC
Gregory Stainton, AES
John Dickson, AGFD
Scott Paulsen, Arizona Public Service
(APS)
John Koleszar, AES and AZ Deer Assn.
(ADA)
Ron Eichelberger, AES
Shawn Wagner, AGFD

Billy Masters, RMEF
Gen Masters, Private Citizen
Tom Finley, AGFD
R. L. Brim, Enviro-Land
Management
Jeff Rivera, Springerville Ranger
District
Denis Humphrey, AZ Land
Department
Marty Underwood, U.S. Fish &
Wildlife Service
Duane Aubuchon, AGFD
Wade Zarlingo, AGFD
Don Borg, MDF
Mark Weise, AGFD
Scott Lerich, National Wild Turkey
Federation
Ben Brochu, AGFD
Paul Greer, AGFD
Bob Birkeland, AGFD
Ron Thompson, AGFD
Connie Giesie, AGFD
Ruth Gregory, AGFD
Dave Dorum, AGFD
Jon Cooley, AGFD

HPC Roll Call:

Springerville/Alpine – Rex Brown
Show Low – Paul Greer, Bob Birkeland
Winslow – Bob Birkeland
Forage Resource Study Group – Dennis
Humphrey, ASLD
Williams/Flagstaff – Tom Mackin
Fredonia -

Kingman -
Prescott – Tom Finley
Southwest -
Tucson – Ben Broschu
Safford – Duane Aubuchon
Payson Natural Resources Committee
– John Dickson

2. Approval of the March 1, 2008 Meeting Minutes – All

A motion to approve was made by Duane Aubuchon and seconded by John Koleszar. The motion carried.

3. Agenda Review – Ron Thompson

Dave Dorum was added to the agenda for a presentation about the U.S. Forest Service Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) units.

4. Old Business/Meeting Goals – Ron Thompson

Ron thanked everyone for traveling to Pinetop for the meeting. Citing the charter, Ron reiterated that the goal of the Habitat Partnership Committee is to reaffirm working partnerships and working in cooperation for wildlife conservation. A main focus should be on matching funds to use, along with Special Big Game tag funds, the primary source of HPC project funding. Ron also commended Connie Giesie for her work to produce the first issue of the HPC newsletter and urged the group to submit items for future issues.

5. Discussion on the HPC scoring matrix team for the 2009-2010 cycle – Brian Wakeling

Brian gave a brief explanation described the work of an internal Department team's task to identify Department priorities and how they affect the scoring of proposals. Proponents are getting better at discussing project with funding partners prior to submitting proposals. By the time this pre-collaboration has taken place, possible funding, as well as compliance issues and landscape level priorities have been identified. The Department receives approximately 80 project proposals per year. Another important consideration in scoring is how soon the project can be implemented, with projects that have all compliance work completed scoring higher. It was noted that low scores should have an explanation.

DAVE DORUM – added to agenda.

Jon Cooley explained that Region 1 is heavily involved with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and that surrounding communities are becoming involved with wildlife protection plans. The communities identify the issues, not the Forest Service. AGFD provides comments on Forest Service WUI projects. The Department has advocated for WUI projects for transitional areas and winter range. Dave Dorum represents the Department on the WUI monitoring board. There is value in using HPC funding for some of this work, albeit on a case by case basis. Dave displayed maps to show WUI areas and asked the question, "Should sportsmen's dollars be used? The Department's Stewardship program is the major funding source for contracts for the mechanical thinning of pine. Stewardship does not provide funds for pinon juniper thinning or prescribed burns.

Jeff Rivera, District Ranger from the Springerville Ranger District talked about a 10-year, \$25M dollar contract, but they would have to cut other programs to pay for it. They do, however, pay for NEPA work. Their biologists are expanding the acreage outside the WUI, and therefore, there are huge benefits for wildlife. The Department has been very engaged with planning process, and it's good to have input apart from only looking at hazardous fuels reduction. The Department's input is also valuable as to what types of treatments are used. Other Ranger Districts with WUI's are also engaging in this process.

Jeff was asked specifically about the Eagar South WUI proposal. Jeff explained that prescribed fire will release seeds for browse improvement. The goal is to realize as many benefits to watersheds and forest health as possible. Jeff encouraged the group to take field trips to see the work. Another question - will this draw the wildlife closer to the urban areas? There is no data as yet, but it would probably be attractive to them. It was also pointed out that the Eagar South project is winter range, and therefore, might not have this issue. It was also noted that a WUI bear project that was funded by HPC has reduced bears.

6. HPC Letterhead – Craig McMullen

The group discussed the need for an official HPC letterhead for correspondence on behalf of the committee. The group was presented with several different designs and chose one as the official letterhead.

7. Arizona Elk Society Presentation - Big Lake Allotment – Steve Clark

Steve Clark gave a presentation about the 2005 Burro Creek Accomplishments. These included 24,000 acres excluded from livestock grazing. In January 2008, another permittee expressed interest in participating. The commitments for the Big Lake area are to develop partnerships to help retain ranching, but improve sustainable watershed and ecosystem health, as well as the economic viability of ranching on public lands. All parties are committed to the protection and enhancement of recreational wildlife and fisheries resources. Livestock operators like the project because it helps forage production. The Springerville Ranger District is coordinating pasture rests and in April, signed a cooperative agreement with two permittees to restore riparian areas. Certain pastures in the watershed will be rested for five years until the habitat recovers. Steve gave kudos to Springerville Ranger District for their hard work in securing the agreements. The agreements will also benefit fisheries and provide more herbaceous forage and cover for wildlife. AES is currently working on a similar project in Unit 6A that will potentially retire permanently about 53,000 acres from livestock grazing. Jeff Rivera clarified that the USFS intent is that the retired acreage will not be reallocated into the permit system, but will be held as a grass bank. AES is pursuing other partnerships with Audubon and others.

8. Arizona Public Service Presentation - Habitat Improvement Partnership Opportunities in Juxtaposition with APS Power Lines - Scott Paulsen

Scott Paulsen from APS told the group that 20,560 acres will be cleared along power lines in 5 out of the 6 national forests in Arizona. For power line purposes, APS considers pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pines to be noxious weeds. APS is currently involved with clearing on Babbitt Ranches. Because APS has right of ways, they are not subject to the state and federal compliance requirements.

Having biological decisions on right of ways and can get programs to the ground sooner. This is important to APS because most of the blackouts in the U.S. are vegetation related. Other utilities will also participate.

Some bullet points from Scott's presentation:

- Partnerships on clearing right of ways benefit the wildlife as well as the utilities.
- The HPC project proposal form is a good tool for providing information needed to contract such projects.
- If we have a project that connects to right of ways, APS will do the work.
- APS has an archaeologist and they can get a project on the ground within in 90 days.
- The machine that APS uses is a hydro axe.
- APS has to clear right of ways, but wants to see wildlife are included in planning.
- APS will cut in mosaics and fund catchments.
- APS has 5,600 employees, many of whom are willing to do volunteer projects. They have helicopters as well.

9. Juniper Thinning Using the Gyro Track – R. L. Brim, Enviro-Land Management Services

R. L. Brim gave a presentation about his company and the mulching equipment they use. The Brims are a ranching family from Linden, and the business is based in Buckeye. He explained gyro track – the machine has low ground pressure and provides cleaner results, with smaller mulch that helps to retain soil moisture. Costs varies, but the company tries to get the figure into the \$150 - \$200 per acre range. More information can be found at www.enviro-land.com.

10. AZGFD Water Development Construction/Proposal Process – Mark Weise

Mark introduced his staff – Sal Palazzolo and Al Eiden from the Landowner Relations program and Ed Jahrke and Joseph Currie from the water development section. Ed presented on water development projects – most of which come through as HPC proposals. Once a project is identified, a site visit is made to determine specifics – species to benefit, design, etc. The Development has a standards manual. Joe explained the implementation schedule, timelines, etc. Each region has a representative to coordinate with Development Branch. The importance of coordination was stressed, especially because of rising costs for steel, concrete, helicopter time, etc.

11. Cost-share Leveraging Opportunities with Other Habitat Improvement Funds or “How does \$20 million for wildlife habitat sound?” – Sal Palazzolo/Al Eiden

Sal provided the group with a handout listing all the granting programs from the federal government and Arizona Department of Agriculture. Between the various granting programs there is \$3.9 million available and it can be used on federal lands. Some of the funds are for conservation easements.

From the Farm Bill programs – WHIP, EQIP, LIP, Arizona gets \$25 million per year. The majority of these dollars go to private land owners. Eligible activities include grassland restoration, and work to control invasive species. As an FYI, the USFS has approved an herbicide

that requires no archaeological clearance for an aerial application. NRCS will pay \$40 per acre for aerial spraying.

It is the intent of the Landowner Relations program to assist in the leveraging of special tag funds as match for grants in order to expand the scope and scale of projects.

12. Local HPC and Conservation Groups Briefings – All

John Dickson for the Payson Natural Resources Committee (PNRC) – Boundary Tank was funded and completed. It was a cooperative effort between the Mogollon Sporting Association (MSA), PNRC and the Flying H Ranch. Other projects completed or underway: Fences and elk jumps; Table Mountain tank, for which MSA bought bentonite. The Houston Mesa grassland project is pending. The Wildlife Manager is in the process of arranging clearance for 600 more acres. The 3 Bar project was done in March 2008. The PNRC created a subcommittee to seek funding for thistle treatments. The Cherry Creek prescribed burn should be taking place this fall. Other projects include the Pleasant Valley grassland maintenance and repairs to 200 Forest Service catchments in Unit 23. Both AES and RMEF provided funding for the catchment work. The Rimtop prescribed burn was not funded but will be resubmitted.

Tom Mackin for the Williams-Flagstaff HPC - 200 acres of invasive junipers were cleared. Cinders catchments are being rebuilt and the Double A browse release project was completed. The HPC will submit a new proposal for Pat Springs pipeline, which was damaged by freezing. Slate Mountain thinning was completed as were repairs made to several Forest Service trick tanks. On Hwy 180 by Kendrick Park, volunteers completed a fence modification for antelope and livestock. The HPC is looking into different design and road closures to prevent vandalism to tanks and pipelines. Padre catchments in Unit 5B North were also completed.

Bob Birkeland for the Winslow HPC – More work was completed on the Unit 4A landscape scale project. Plans are in the works for a 4,000 acre prescribed burn in Unit 4A. Durfee trick tank is done. The Unit 4B Horse Trap burn near Chevelon Canyon was funded and burning will start this fall. Volunteers from RMEF have done a lot of work on the Long Tom allotment tanks, as well as a lot of fence work.

Tom Finley for the Prescott HPC - The Yavapai Ranch completed a LIP project. The land exchange with the Forest Service is still pending. We are in the 2nd year of the Chino Valley antelope study. The goal is to collar 20 more pronghorn. Other projects include the Black Hills project on Mingus Mountain; work with the Prescott NF on WUI; a mule deer project on Cane Springs Ranch and a windmill project with the 2Y Ranch.

Paul Greer for the Show Low HPC - In Unit 3C, 50 tanks were renovated for \$32,000, funded by special tags. Another project will be the clearing of junipers in the Lakeside Ranger District for pronghorn. There are two new waters in west Unit 3A. Cottonwood Catchment has been moved and refitted for greater capacity for elk, turkey and deer. It's in the Bunger Allotment. Prescribed fire is being considered in the Rodeo/Chediski area to maintain browse. All big game species, apart from bear, have benefited, from the fire. The 2006 fawn to doe ratio - 46 to 75 in 2 years 2006 and 2007. Literature recommends a 10-year burn cycle for most wildlife benefit. It is planned to set aside \$150,000 per year of WCF dollars for burning.

Shawn Wagner reported that the Unit 3B Woolhouse grassland project is completed and once the trees were cut they finished with a grinder. Wade Zarlingo reported that they are trying to tie work on state and private land to the Unit 4A federal land projects. Over 18,000 acres of grassland maintenance work have been completed in Unit 4B.

Rex Brown for the Springerville HPC – They have 6 projects for which all the NEPA work is done. He commended what the Forest Service has accomplished with their WUI work, especially in the Nutrioso winter range.

Denis Humphrey for the Forage Resource Study Group – reports good participation from the area ranchers. The Arizona Antelope Foundation and Diablo Trust are assisting with forage monitoring.

Ben Brochu for the Tucson HPC – The HPC has been very proactive in coordinating their projects with the Coronado National Forest, who are great at getting NEPA done. The Agua Caliente burn in Unit 33 is done. The goal is to burn Pusch Ridge to be able to put sheep into the Catalinas. Other funded projects include a Region 5 water trailer, to be purchased by SCI and ADA. SCI has been a great project partner. Their volunteers helped to reseal aprons – 16 in the last year. This included Eagle scouts who were mostly non-hunters. ADBSS and ADA were instrumental in helping to complete Buzan and Brandenburg catchments, as well as two catchments in Unit 37B. The main issue for the HPC is the redevelopment of old and nonfunctioning catchments. They are getting participation from various entities including Pima and Pinal Counties.

Duane Aubuchon for the Safford HPC – The group submitted seven of the funded projects, including: 4 Bar/NO Bar habitat restorations, ten Whitlock catchment redevelopments; the Sunset prescribed burn, a burn in the Galiuro Mountains; several catchments in the Dos Cabezas; and in cooperation with the Douglas Ranger District, a manzanita removal project of 1,000 acres in Tex Canyon in Unit 30A. Southeast Arizona Sportsmen's Club is getting donated equipment and volunteers.

Ron Eichelberger for the Arizona Elk Society – The special elk tag brought \$195,000 from the auction. In May, 60 AES volunteers showed up for the Burro Creek fence removal. In July, the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle elk tag raised \$130,000.

Dave McCasland for the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society – 70 volunteers completed 4 projects - Danny Nasca tank, a wilderness project in Unit 44A; Bushead Catchment in Region 2, and Buzan and Brandenburg catchments in Region 5. The auction sale of the Rocky Mountain sheep tag brought in \$95,000.

13. HPC Awards: Commissioner Bill McLean

The group initiated its first annual recognition awards. The first award was for one of the local HPC's in appreciation of their work. Wildlife Manager John Dickson accepted the award on behalf of the Payson Natural Resource Committee for "Efforts resulting in significant benefits to wildlife from projects completed through the HPC process."

The second award was presented in appreciation of a nonprofit organization for their use of volunteers in support of HPC projects. Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society President David McCasland accepted the award for the Society in recognition of “Significant contributions towards wildlife using ADBSS members as a voluntary work force to complete projects funded by special Big Game Tag Funds.”

14. Future Agenda Items, Date and Location of Next Meeting – Commissioner McLean

Items for future improvement of the program:

- Clarification of out of cycle projects/process
- Explanation of the project proposal scoring system
- Plan to ensure consistency in getting BLM compliance work done
- Opportunities for tribal projects
- Cooperative meetings with non-consumptive as well as consumptive user groups. In this area there needs to be clear agreement on definition of terms such as “conservation” and “protection.”
- The importance of project proponents submitting completion reports.

Ron Thompson urged the group to view these meetings as presentations of opportunity. The Department plans to continue the recognition program and the second annual awards will be presented at the next summer meeting in August 2009.

Next meeting – will be a Saturday morning. The project funding meeting between the Department and the conservation funding partners will take place in January. A tentative date of February 21, 2009 was set for the next State HPC meeting. Location – Phoenix headquarters.

Meeting adjourned at 2:40 PM.