



Habitat Partnership Committee Connection

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July 2015



FROM YOUR FORMER STATEWIDE HPC CHAIRMAN COMMISSIONER J.W. HARRIS

My five-year term on the Arizona Game and Fish Commission has come to an end, and so has my term as HPC chairman. As I depart, I would like to thank each and every sportsman, wildlife conservation organization and other partners involved with the HPC for your dedication. This committee is one of the most productive and effective groups I have been involved with and really hits the mark for an agency such as the Arizona Game and Fish Department. I enjoyed my time with this group and look forward to seeing its continued success in conserving Arizona's wildlife resources. I am certain the incoming HPC chairman, Commissioner Ammons, will continue to build on the HPC program's great success. Although I have departed, I will still be involved with wildlife conservation at a local and state level. With that said, so long for now ... but don't be surprised to find me at future meetings or conservation projects!



FROM YOUR STATEWIDE HPC CHAIRMAN COMMISSIONER JAMES R. AMMONS

Hello, Habitat Partnership Committee. Many of you may not know me, but I have been a member of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission for nearly two years. Personally, I am an avid outdoorsman and own a family business in my hometown of Yuma. I have been involved with wildlife conservation for many years, most notably with the Yuma Valley Rod & Gun Club. I was the president for five years and helped implement bylaws that allowed women to join the club. I recently attended a site visit in game management unit 21 to visit various HPC-funded habitat projects within the Central Arizona Grassland Study Area. I was not aware that so much work was involved to make habitat improvement a reality. The before-and-after visuals derived from the prescribed burn and juniper removal were amazing. The funding and work that go into these projects are astonishing and really show the value of this committee in identifying valuable projects and approving the very best proposals. I understand that all projects are geared toward big game, but many species of wildlife benefit (including many nongame species), which creates a healthy ecosystem. This firsthand experience has fueled my excitement to be part of this great committee. I look forward to meeting many of you at the next State HPC meeting on July 25, 2015, at the Pinetop regional office. The meeting agenda will be available on the [HPC website](#). Thank you for all your hard work in conservation. I look forward to working with you.



COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Dennis Fogle, HPC Coordinator

Personnel Changes

My time as HPC Coordinator has come to an end. I recently accepted a position as a wildlife manager for Arizona Game and Fish, starting July 27. This has been a lifelong goal of mine, and I am excited for the challenge. I want to thank each of you for your passion and dedication to wildlife conservation. This committee is very important, and I am proud to have served with you. Once I am assigned a district, I hope to be very active with HPC, and thus I will continue to work with you. Until a replacement is hired please send all inquires to hpc@azgfd.gov.

As of July 1, 2015, the Landowner Relations Program has joined the Game Branch within Arizona Game and Fish. HPC already resides in the Game Branch, so this will allow the two programs to work even more closely together. This will be a benefit to both programs and their constituents! At the local HPC level, Steve Rosenstock will now chair the Flagstaff/Williams LHPC and Forage Resource Study Group. Thank you to Larry Phoenix for your many years in chairing those groups; we know you still will be involved. Lastly, I want to recognize the Prescott HPC and Kingman HPC for their efforts in re-energizing their local group and hosting meetings for the first time in many years!

HPC Project Reporting

Great job to everyone on ensuring projects are within reporting requirements. A few projects still require reporting, but for the most part, we are caught up. Please don't forget progress reports are due **March 1st** annually and completion reports are due within 30 days of project completion. If proponents do not comply with deadlines, their future HPC proposals will **not be accepted**.

2015–2016 HPC Proposal Deadline **Sept 1, 2015**

The annual deadline to submit project proposals for the upcoming HPC funding cycle is **Sept. 1, 2015**. All proposals need to be filled out on the updated HPC proposal form on the [HPC website](#). Please be sure to review the proposal [manual](#) to understand what is expected of each proposal. As always, proposals will be reviewed and rated by an internal department committee. The wildlife conservation organizations will also rate each proposal. Both groups will meet in January to allocate funding, which is officially approved at the winter State HPC Meeting in late January. Please submit your proposal or any questions to hpc@azgfd.gov.

HPC Proposal Forms Update

As time moves on, our goals and objectives often change. The same can be said for the HPC program. We are making a concerted effort to create a GIS database of HPC projects to display a geospatial map to assist with future wildlife management and habitat work. The HPC proposal now requires GPS coordinates of your project location to allow our database to create a point, line or polygon. If your project already has a shapefile created, please note that in your application.

Another update for the HPC proposal form is the request to attach cultural clearance verification. This could include a cultural report, Inventory Standards Form, Decision Memo, etc. We understand that many projects may not have this information available, but if your project has the documentation, please attach it, as this will assist us with administration and during priority ranking.

What do your efforts and Special Big Game Tag Funds accomplish? Mike Godwin, Wildlife Manager Field Supervisor

The Habitat Partnership Committee has been a part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department since 1992. This committee approach started as a way to bring stakeholders together to assess opportunities to resolve issues with elk use on private lands, commonly referred to as “elk depredation.” In the evolution of this process was born a collaborative process to do habitat improvement projects across Arizona.



In 2002, the regional office in Pinetop began a comprehensive planning effort to approach habitat improvement on a watershed basis, looking at the effectiveness of implementing many smaller projects to accomplish a larger objective of watershed habitat improvement. The improvement plans were based on game management units and wildlife manager districts. Regional office staff, field supervisors and wildlife managers crafted a whole district plan for potential habitat improvement projects. There were and are many potential projects that needed to be accomplished to begin to have a beneficial impact at a watershed level. In conjunction with these planning efforts, close coordination with the land-managing agency was imperative. In the Pinetop region, this largely fell to collaborative efforts with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest.

To implement projects, there were several factors to consider, including funding sources, available matching funds to stretch funds as far as possible, and completed NEPA and archeological clearances. The challenges these aspects presented seemed somewhat daunting, but the Pinetop team aggressively pursued completion of shovel-ready project proposals. This set the stage for the initial funding source as a result of legislative actions and the return of sportsman dollars in Senate Bill 1331 funds. The Pinetop regional office was awarded a substantial portion of these funds and put them to

work in unit 27, thinning and prescribed burning in habitats of the Eagle Creek and Blue River watersheds. A synergy formed as a result of collaboration with the Forest Service, permittees and private landowners in these large watersheds. HPC project funds began to be used to further the projects,

eventually resulting in over 120,000 acres of habitat improvements in unit 27 alone.

In 2009, we began pursuing projects in northern unit 1 and southern unit 2B. Fast-forward to today: the watershed approach is still being used, and we still work with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, permittees and private landowners across the region. But environmental compliance in terms of completed NEPA and archeological clearances continue to present challenges.



(HPC Coon Mtn RX Burn Project 2012)

The White Mountain Stewardship Program gave us several thousand acres environmentally cleared to complete project work. Within those areas of unit 1 we have another 25,000 to 30,000 acres of habitat improvements completed or underway. We are still aggressively pursuing partnerships to accomplish habitat improvements across watersheds. In the future, we will need to consider partnerships and HPC funding to assist with NEPA and archeological clearances to continue this important work.

So, what else has HPC project implementation accomplished? Thanks to collaboration with industry, permittees and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, project funds have been supporting an industry in fuels removal, power generation and pellet production using byproducts of these projects. As many as 300 jobs are supported either directly or indirectly in these industries. The White Mountain Stewardship Program has slowly been closing down, and lack of materials would have put some of this industry support in jeopardy. HPC projects have provided affordable access to products this industry can use, and it was an effective cost-share match for projects, since the removal was conducted at no cost in exchange for access to that wood product.

The San Juan Fire in July 2014 uncovered yet another very beneficial result from project implementation. On the day the fire started, winds were reaching more than 35 mph and running the head of the fire northeast at a rapid rate, so firefighters couldn't develop an immediate action for control. It is often the case that the head of such a fire cannot be controlled even for many days into the fire. On the first day, the head of the San Juan Fire ran into a White Mountain Stewardship Program treatment that had also been a part of the Coon Mountain HPC burning project in 2012. When the fire's head reached this location, it went from a wind-driven crown fire sweeping across the landscape to a ground fire spotting through small bunches of grass with little to no impacts on standing timber. Firefighters assessed this situation and essentially left a skeleton crew to "mop up" the "HEAD" of the fire. It's reported this was unheard of among fire bosses with many years

of experience! Fire crews used habitat treatment areas on the fire's flanks to contain it from moving laterally the next few days.



(San Juan Fire 2014)

In total, the HPC project process using Special Big Game Tag funds, the Pinetop region's habitat improvement planning efforts, and collaboration with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest (particularly Fire Management Officer Rob Lever), permittees, and private landowners have affected approximately 150,000 acres of habitats, preparing them for conditions that favor improved habitat diversity, increased energy production and support for wildlife populations. The projects have had a substantial effect on relationships with landowners, permittees and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest staff. We will stay focused on continuing to plan watershed habitat improvement and on our collaboration, to ensure the future of wildlife populations for many generations.



(Post-burn-recovery elk use)

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Project Title: Bonita Grasslands Restoration Phase 4 — KJ Ranch Windmill Pasture	
Project Proponent: Rancher	
Region and Game Management Unit: Region V — GMU 32	
Local Habitat Partnership Committee: Safford HPC	
Special Big Game License Tag Funds:	\$30,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Mule Deer Tag Funds • Special Pronghorn Tag Funds 	
Cost-Share Funds:	\$90,272
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFWF • Rancher 	
Total Project Costs:	\$120,272

The Bonita Grassland Restoration Project is a multi-phased project encompassing more than 20,000 acres of landscape-level grassland restoration. This project involves many partners, including the National Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ranchers, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Arizona Game and Fish.

This phase of the Bonita Grassland Restoration Project has restored 320 acres of historical semidesert grassland that was encroached on by mesquite trees. This was accomplished by the use of mechanical grubbing and pile burning. Burning/removal of the carcass is necessary to restore the desired vegetation composition.

Habitat degradation and fragmentation have negatively impacted grassland species such as pronghorn over the past few decades. This project will help restore grasslands and corridors that many species rely on. The combination of this grassland restoration and predator control will continue to aid recovery of grassland species such as pronghorn. This project is a great example of a landscape-level effort with many layers that benefit wildlife.



(Before grubbing – 2012)



(After grubbing – 2014)

BRIGHT FUTURE**Dennis Fogle, HPC Coordinator**

Wildlife management provides many challenges, including social, practical, environmental and monetary challenges. Some, such as environmental concerns, are nearly impossible to control. In layman's terms, Mother Nature is uncontrollable and acts without regard. Luckily, some challenges can be battled and HPC has evolved into a program that offers solutions to many of these challenges. The most effective piece of this puzzle is the partnerships created with sportsmen, wildlife conservation organizations and government agencies. This partnership creates the venue for collaboration to deal with some of these challenges, most notably the monetary ones.



As you know, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission offers 30 Special Big Game License Tags per year, three per big game species. Each tag is awarded to one of the non-profit wildlife conservation organizations involved in HPC. These organizations raffle or auction the tag for the highest dollar amount possible. These 30 tags generated \$1.7 million last year, of which 100% of the funds are donated to the Department to be spent in the HPC process. These funds help combat management issues but it does not completely solve the monetary issue with wildlife management. With that said, we are off to a record year in tag sales and other changes have created positive momentum for the future of wildlife management!

For example, this year the mule deer Special Big Game License Tags sold for a record dollar amount — twice. Your partners in the Arizona Deer Association collected \$270,000 for one mule deer tag, and the Mule Deer Foundation collected \$320,000 for the other! Many other species tags also sold for near-record numbers this year. Also, your partner the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle has been working extremely hard to raise even more money through the Big Game Super Raffle. They accomplished that this year by reaching out to a larger percentage of Arizona big game hunters, and initial reports indicate that tag sales have increased. When you add these accomplishments together, it creates a very bright future for HPC and wildlife management in Arizona.

With the bright future ahead, I want to remind you of the current successes and recap our numbers from the 2014–2015 HPC cycle. We approved 74 projects with a dollar amount of roughly \$1.8 million. Please click the link below to see the full list of approved projects.

WHAT HPC PROJECTS WERE FUNDED THIS YEAR?

For the complete list, click:

[2014-2015 FUNDED HPC PROJECTS](#)

LIFE OF AN HPC PROJECT

Ruth Gregory, Game Program Administrative Coordinator

As one of the people responsible for the administrative coordination and bureaucratic moving parts associated with getting HPC project proposals from the paper to the ground, I have the privilege of working with an outstanding group of dedicated and diligent people with a passion for wildlife and a hopeful vision for its future in our magnificent state. Volunteers from our wildlife conservation organization partners, people from other agencies both state and federal, landowners and livestock operators, vendors, buyers from our purchasing unit, agreement people from our planning unit, our wildlife managers, water development crews, habitat specialists — the list goes on and on. Almost without exception, these interactions are positive and productive, resulting in an amazing number of projects completed every year, despite any administrative hurdles we may encounter.

Let's see how it looks from the HPC project's point of view:

A Year in the Life of an HPC Project



I'm just a proposal — words on a page. I'm a great idea, but I need help to be fleshed out. Thank you, local HPCs, for imagining me. Thank you, wildlife managers, agency land managers and landowners, for providing the necessary details.



I'm in the process of being evaluated. Will I make the cut? Do I demonstrate a clear wildlife benefit? Do I provide all the necessary details? Do I indicate partnerships that benefit all stakeholders? Thank you, project committees, for evaluating me, refining me and recommending me for funding.



I'm an approved project. But who will pay? Where does the funding come from through the HPC process? I hear most of it comes from the Special Big Game Tag fund. I also hear this money is raised by countless hours of work by exceptionally dedicated volunteers. Thank you, WCO funding partners, for all you do to help pay for your passion.



I'm ready to get out there, off the desk and onto the ground. That requires something called paperwork. OK, let's go through the list. Hmmm ... Environmental Assessment: took a little while, but finally done. Check it off the list. Agreement or contract: check. Funding requisition: check. Purchase order: check. Yay, I'm ready to go! Can't wait to get out of this stuffy building and out there where I belong. Thank you, compliance people, agreements people, procurement people, for making it happen.



I'm finally taking shape: a place for wildlife to drink; a meadow, thick with trees, yielding to a grassland; a headcount of bighorn sheep or antelope to inform management of species. Thank you, construction crews, tree cutters, biologists, paid staff and volunteers alike, for breathing life into me. I'm finally alive and real and playing my small part to benefit wildlife.

In Fiscal Year 2015, this was the story of 86 HPC projects that hit the ground to the tune of \$1.28 million. I believe I speak on behalf of all who love wildlife in thanking everyone involved. The success continues!

MEET YOUR LOCAL HPC CHAIRPERSONS

as of July 2015

<i>HPC</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>	<i>Email</i>	<i>AGFD Contact</i>	<i>Email</i>
Forage Resource Study Group	Vacant		Steve Rosenstock	srosenstock@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	Steve Rosenstock	srosenstock@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

MEETINGS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**Arizona Game and Fish
Department**

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- **State HPC Meeting: July 25, 2015**

Arizona Game and Fish Department Region 1 Office
2878 E. White Mountain Blvd.
Pinetop, AZ 85935
9:00 AM

- **HPC Project Proposal Deadline: September 1, 2015**

2015–2016 Funding Cycle. Please submit to the Arizona Game and Fish Department – hpc@azgfd.gov .

- 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.
- Local HPC's meet on a regular basis. To see a calendar of upcoming meetings, please visit http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/hpc_meetings.shtml .
- If you have an idea for an article, success story, announcement, project status update, or any HPC-related news, please submit them to hpc@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!