

**Arizona Habitat Partnership Committee Meeting**  
**February 18, 2011 – 9:00 AM**  
**Arizona Game and Fish Department Region 5 Office in Tucson, AZ**

Present:

J.W. Harris, AZ Game and Fish Commission, Chair  
Art Craker, Mule Deer Foundation  
Amber Munig, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Reuben Teran, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Tom Mackin, Williams-Flagstaff HPC and AZ  
Wildlife Federation  
Clair Harris, Williams-Flagstaff HPC and Rocky  
Mountain Elk Foundation  
Ben Brochu, AZ Game and Fish Dept  
Tom Finley, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Dennis Humphries, Forage Resource Study Group  
Mike Sumner, AZ Game and Fish Dept.

Raul Vega, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Natalie Robb, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
John Windes, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Steve Clark Arizona Elk Society  
Duane Aubuchon, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Joe Sacco, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Brian Dolan, Tucson HPC and AZ Desert Bighorn  
Sheep Society  
Chirre Keckler, Kaibab National Forest  
Zachary Holder, Tonto National Forest  
Brad Fulk, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Matt Walton, AZ Game and Fish Dept.  
Beth Humphrey, Kaibab National Forest

Roll Call of HPCs:

Springerville-Alpine – none  
Winslow – none  
Show Low – none  
Forage Resource Study Group – Dennis Humphrey  
Williams-Flagstaff – Tom Mackin  
Fredonia – none  
Kingman – Tom Finley

Prescott – Tom Finley  
Southwest Arizona – Mike Sumner  
Tucson – Brian Dolan  
Sierra Vista – Brad Fulk  
Safford – Duane Aubuchon  
Payson Natural Resources Committee – Natalie Robb

Steve Clark was recognized as representing the Arizona Sportsmen For Wildlife Conservation. He is their license plate coordinator, as well as President of the Arizona Elk Society. Other wildlife conservation organization (WCO) representatives present were: Art Craker, The Mule Deer Foundation; Tom Mackin for The Arizona Wildlife Federation; Clair Harris for The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Brian Dolan for the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society.

Introductions and Welcome:

Amber Munig, the Arizona Game and Fish Department's (Department) new Big Game Management Supervisor welcomed everyone and introduced the Department's new Habitat Partnership Coordinator, Reuben Teran. Reuben replaces Ron Thompson, who retired in November 2010. Reuben's position is now wholly dedicated to the HPC program and one of his endeavors will be to try to revitalize the defunct local HPCs.

Agenda Review:

The group reviewed the agenda and there were no changes.

Approval of minutes from the July 30, 2010 meeting in Pinetop:

A motion was made to approve them, seconded and carried.

Review of 2010-2011 Special Big Game Tag Funding:

Amber referred everyone to the handout, listing all the projects and funding. The funding decisions were made by consensus decision between the Department and the WCO funding partners at their meeting on January 22, 2011. Since that meeting, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society (ADBSS) had agreed to special bighorn sheep tag funding for Project No. 10-701, Landscape Genetic Assessment of Arizona Bighorn Sheep. Brian Dolan stated that it was a tough decision on the part of the ADBSS board over this controversial project. Despite its benefits, a concern is the effect on the special bighorn sheep tag sales and funds should the genetic assessment indicate hybridization between Desert and Rocky Mountain sheep in the Unit 22 herd, which will influence future decision on subsequent translocations. Currently the populations are viable for transplants. If the study indicates hybridization, the sheep may not be "pure" enough to command a high bid on an auction tag. Commissioner Harris pointed out that the same perception could also happen without the study. At this point, it is not clear when the results of the assessment will be complete. The Department must first initiate a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of California, Davis.

Brian Dolan stated that Safari Club International (SCI) Arizona Chapter is always interested in assisting with the Tucson HPCs projects; for instance, the Silverbell pipeline. The Mt. Fagan catchment project had requested \$31,000 in funding, but was only funded for \$20,000 by the whitetail deer special tag. SCI will fund an additional \$10,000 and the Department's Development Branch will fund the balance.

Amber asked for motion to approve project funding. The motion was made, seconded and carried.

Amber reported on recent Special Tag sales: At the Wild Sheep Foundation convention, the Mexicana sheep tag sold for \$105,000. This was the highest of the sheep tags sold that evening, but there was some confusion during the auction and it was agreed that it probably could have gone for more. At the Mule Deer Foundation's event, the Mule Deer tag sold for \$200,000 and the Whitetail tag for \$25,000. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's event is coming up in March.

HPC Discussion – Revisions to AHPC Charter:

Amber told the group that she will be doing some housekeeping changes to the charter for consistency.

A motion was made to approve the charter as presented. The motion carried.

HPC Discussion – Draft HPC Project Instruction Manual:

The Commissioner gave the group five minutes to look at the draft manual. Amber explained that the instruction manual is a living document that can be updated as needed. The group was not asked to vote on or approve the manual as it is simply a revamped document offering clearer direction to project proponents on what is needed for a good proposal. Anyone who had any thoughts for changes or additions should contact Reuben.

Thoughts, ideas and suggestions from the group:

Ben Brochu asked about the funding priorities meeting to be held in the month of May. He suggested that perhaps this meeting should be earlier because it's usually around May when the local HPCs determine their priorities for proposals that will be submitted for the September 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. It would be helpful to the local HPCs to know the Department's priorities as soon as possible. Amber mentioned that the Department's priorities will be tied to the Comprehensive Game Management Plan (CGMP) that is currently being formulated. Brad Fulk echoed Ben's request that Department priorities need to be shared with the local HPCs sooner rather than later. Amber does not anticipate that the priorities surrounding CGMP will change much from year to year.

Brian Dolan gave kudos to the three HPCs in Region 5 for providing the Department with a prioritized list of their project proposals.

Steve Clark gave his compliments on the document as a great resource for people who are new to the program.

Ben suggested perhaps adding a section listing potential cost sharing opportunities, such as landowner-livestock operator contributions, NRCS grants, and others. Brad mentioned that there are other partnership opportunities with various non-game organizations, especially for grasslands. Steve suggested that information could be included as part of the block funding section.

Tom Finley suggested making past successful proposals available for new proponents to look at for tips and funding opportunities.

Brian Dolan mentioned that the annual cycle timeline is hard for the WCOs because the time to read project proposals occurs during the busiest time of the year for them. He expressed this as his opinion only and was not suggesting changing it if everyone else is fine with it. Ruth explained that the cycle was shifted about four years ago to allow the WCOs to be more involved in the planning portion, prior to submitting proposals. It was also pointed out that the proposals were posted to the Department's web page by early October, giving the WCOs three months to read them prior to the January funding meeting.

Duane Aubuchon explained that from the Wildlife Manager perspective, the current cycle is much better, because the fall is patrol season and it's easier for WMs to plan HPC projects in spring and summer.

Ben also suggested that there should be a section to explain out of cycle projects and the process to follow should the need arise to propose something out of cycle.

Ben also asked if email addresses for the WCOs could be by position instead of name as people change. This would be too difficult to manage for these volunteer organizations, but proponents can always contact the Game Branch for the latest names and email addresses for the WCO partners.

Steve mentioned that in the "Suggestions for Proposal Success" section, in the second bulleted point the word "completion" should be replaced with the word "funding."

Clair suggested clearer wording indicating that NEPA and archaeological clearance **MUST** be completed. Many proposals state that it **WILL** be completed with no definite timeline as to when. It should be better defined. Tom Finley asked the two USFS partners present at the meeting (Beth and Chirre) their thoughts on NEPA

commitments and how they affect proposals. They agreed that the proposal should clearly indicate when NEPA will be completed and if the USFS is responsible for NEPA completion to make sure it is coordinated. Some NEPA is quick, water projects for instance, but others take longer, particularly vegetative treatments.

The discussion wrapped up with Amber asking everyone to send in their comments, questions and suggestions.

Success Stories:

Ben Brochu reported on the next phase of the 96 Hills water developments. The next one is slated for April 15. There is a noticeable increase in the deer population in the area, although there's no specific data that points to the waters as being the reason for this.

Brian Dolan reported on the Silverbell Pipeline project, a cooperative effort with the Kile Family. There are now 2 bighorn sheep tags in the unit and the latest surveys indicated a 40:100 lamb to ewe ratio. He commended the cooperative effort between the Tucson HPC, the Department, and the ADBSS who all rallied to keep this population going. The pipeline is on the Ironwood National Monument, but with much of it on sections of private land. He expressed hope that there will be a project in the area every year.

Ben reported on the Unit 37B Game and Fish waters. If they're on state land or BLM land, there's no cost share apart from volunteer labor, so these special tag funds are critical. Noting that a number of developments are being redeveloped and a few old ones are being replaced, some ranchers have come on board who are hearing of the successes and are interested in EQIP grants. There is much potential in working with landowners. In Region 5, landowners have often been hesitant to partner with the Department, but this seems to be easing up. The WCOs also deserve their fair share of the credit in helping this situation.

Brad Fulk reported for the Sierra Vista Douglas HPC and their efforts to make the group community-based with a focus on a lot of landowner participation. Their group is relatively new and it's been a learning process for everyone. At their meeting of February 17, 2011, they reviewed last year's funded projects. Sunnyside should be completed soon. The Huachuca chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation completed the Collins Canyon project last spring. The 75 Well has been drilled and is producing water; money well spent. The Forest Service will be providing the dollars to complete it. Upper John's Well is done and producing 30 gallons per minute, from a depth of 200 feet. This project was a partnership with the Glenn family. The proposal for a cooperative project with the Magoffin family will be revamped for next year. The Johnson Peak burn near Rucker Canyon is 40% completed. Future project planning will emphasize grassland projects.

Natalie Robb reported that the Payson Natural Resources Committee (PNRC) met last Wednesday and present at the meeting were 26 people, including 4 new landowners. Projects funded last year are being implemented, and future planning will be for more landscape projects. Houston Mesa, Diamond Butte, and Black Mesa tanks are done. The third phase of the Cherry Burn will be starting soon. Zach Holder from the Tonto NF is their fuels specialist, having gained experience from his former position in the Clifton Ranger District. Regarding the charter, part of the reason the PNRC has such good participation is that they have a core group of highly engaged individuals, and others come to comment on recent decisions. They are also very engaged in the hunt guidelines-recommendations cycle. Natalie asked how to keep these discussions from dominating meetings. There were suggestions about having such discussions be a specific agenda item at the appropriate quarterly meeting and the group reminded of how they may provide comment to the Department on hunt issues outside the HPC process. There is ample opportunity for input, but it has to be the right venue.

Amber mentioned that comments on hunt guidelines can be submitted at any time to [Azgamebranch@azgfd.gov](mailto:Azgamebranch@azgfd.gov).

The HPC Charter lists discussion of hunt guidelines as a suggested topic at the appropriate meeting. It's a good opportunity for landowners to discuss their issues; for example, the dove hunts. Local HPC participants are often very knowledgeable and can help other members understand the issues. But the discussion should be part of the posted agenda, and for a specific time period.

It was asked if the group should reopen the charter to clarify this at the next meeting, and agreed that it will be discussed at the summer HPC meeting.

Tom Finley expressed appreciation for the Federal agency and WCO participation in the HPC process. In Region 3, they find it more valuable to meet one on one with landowners, who typically don't show up for formal meetings. This has been a slow process for the Prescott HPC, but some people are starting to re-engage. Projects completed in the Prescott HPC area in recent months include the Orme Ranch Water distribution project, a pipeline with 2 drinkers, and the Pinetop Catchment, which appears to be quite successful judging from the amount of wildlife sign around it. The big success story is the Tank Car pipeline project on the Boquillas Ranch. Tom thanked the WCOs for their willingness to use special big game tag funds for projects on the Boquillas. Perhaps it is a direct result of this type of partnership that lead to the Navajo Nation granting an unprecedented 2 years of sportsmen's access. The tribe has also been very engaged with the Department in developing a management plan for the ranch. The 16 Pipeline project, submitted this year, was funded, which is more good news in sustaining the relationship with the tribe. For all intents and purposes, Unit 10 would mostly cease to exist should access to the hundreds of thousands of acres on the Boquillas be lost.

Tom also spoke about the push for alternative energy projects that are occurring in Regions 2 and 3. Many of these projects, especially wind farms, require that participating landowners lock their land. Tom suggested that the HPC should revisit the Responsive Management study from 2001 to approach the counties on the benefit and economic impact of outdoor recreation. Tom acknowledged that the information from the study is a bit dated, and suggested that it should be revisited at least every 10 years or so. John Windes reported that Region 5 is also experiencing this issue. Steve Clark said that he is one of the members of an organization called "Hunting Works for Arizona," whose focus is this very issue and they could possibly fund a new study. Steve will visit with Tom Finley on this.

Mike Sumner reported for the Southwest HPC in Yuma. Six people attended their last meeting. Two projects are soon to take place – the Marquette development and another pothole cleanout. The group does an annual fundraiser dove hunt on private property. Last year's hunt was derailed by the land changing hands. Mike has the same issues that Ben mentioned about only having volunteer labor as match since most of the public land they work on is BLM land. The group is very engaged with youth hunts. Mike asked why we cannot use migratory bird stamp funds on some of these projects. Amber informed him that the proceeds from the stamps currently go into the Department's general fund.

Tom Mackin reported for Williams-Flagstaff that they are wrapping up a specific 2-year project designed for water catchment O&M throughout Region 2. Over the years, maintenance on these catchments has not been a priority. This is the 14<sup>th</sup> year of O&M that the group from the Coconino Sportsmen has maintainrd the Pat Springs pipeline. Originally built for cattle and sheep in the 1950s, Pat Springs waters about 200 square miles, 40 miles of pipeline, all gravity fed, with 24 drinkers. Maintenance occurs from April to October, between work on this and catchments in Unit 5 through 9 (a funded project from 2008). The costs are low, about \$1,300-\$1,500 per

year. Maintaining these waters makes a big difference in dispersing animals. Tom was appreciative that this project was again funded for the next 2 years. Working with Carl Lutch, the group also assisted in the redevelopment of 2 trick tanks, rebuilt with 7,000 gallon storage tanks. The apron and collectors are done; the next step is to plumb the drinkers. A 2008 project, Peaks Trick Tank Upgrade in Unit 7W is completed and last June, Upper Basin Tank in Unit 9 was done. The Unit 7 grassland improvement project was done last May, in cooperation with the Forest Service and the Arizona Elk Society. Commissioner Martin's Conservationist Committee also participated. Williams-Flagstaff will meet next week and will be submitting at least 13 projects for the next cycle. The Williams and Flagstaff HPCs combined 4 years ago in the hopes of increasing participation, especially from landowners. A lot of alternative energy developments are being implemented in the area and there are issues that go along with them. Landowner issues also include the thousands of mining claims in the Tusayan area.

Clair Harris suggested that each Game and Fish region recruit a couple of retired people to do water repairs and suggested that this would be a good thing for the local HPCs to undertake. The PNRRC recently hired a person to repair tanks in Units 22 and 23. Raul Vega mentioned that Region 5 accomplishes a lot with volunteers, including Boy Scouts. The Commissioner remarked that it's one of the Commission's goals to have the Department increase its use of volunteers across the agency. There are a lot of people out there who want to help.

Denis Humphrey, for the Forage Resource Study Group, reported that the FRSG continues to meet 3 times a year. They are still monitoring forage in Units 5A and 5B, providing their information to state and federal agency people and ranchers to look at on-the-ground issues when planning projects. They also measure precipitation at 15 different sites. This year's is slightly below normal. Working in cooperation with Garrett Fabian, the Arizona Antelope Foundation and the Hopi 3 Canyons Ranch, the group completed the Sunset Fence improvement, 2.8 miles of wildlife friendly fence. Also on Anderson Mesa, 12,000 acres are getting juniper treatments with NRCS and LIP dollars funded through the Department.

For the Safford HPC, Duane Aubuchon reported that their chairman, Chuck Brooks moved and Scott Heap will be returning as chair of the HPC. Grasslands projects in the northern Sulfur Springs valley are underway in cooperation with the Arizona Antelope Foundation and with match from NRCS – brush removal on 13–15 thousand acres. A fence modification work project is scheduled for March 12<sup>th</sup>. The Sunset project will be continuing in the Clifton RD. The National Wild Turkey Federation funded \$24,000 for 3 projects. There are now 6 mountain ranges in southern Arizona with sustaining populations of Gould's turkeys, and there will be over 30 tags for this spring's hunts. The next meeting date for the Safford HPC is March 30<sup>th</sup>. Duane also reported that the Southeast Arizona Sportsmen's Club packed tools, people, and food by horseback into the Galiuro Mountains wilderness for 2.5 days to clean out a silted-in spring.

Commissioner Harris remarked that NWTFF recently touted their success with Gould's turkeys by revealing that the 200,000<sup>th</sup> bird they've had a hand in translocating throughout North America is a Gould's turkey in Arizona.

Steve Clark reported that Arizona Elk Society (AES) is now able to send an email link to 60,000 scouts. They will now be able to conduct Hunter Education and have been asked to conduct seminars at Camp Geronimo and assist with NRA certification for Boy Scout pack leaders. The Department's Wildlife Recreation Branch is working to provide consistency in working with the various Boy Scout councils. A scout project took place at the Foster Ranch, where the scouts camped out in the cold and then proceeded with their fence removal project. There is also a Venture Scouts program for kids ages 14–20. A wildlife organization can sponsor the scouts and the kids then adopt your mission. The Hunting and Angling Heritage work group will be engaging with them.

Commissioner Harris expressed appreciation for AES's coordination in the Unit 7 grassland improvement project. There were 135 volunteers on the project representing a lot of non-traditional groups, including Defenders of Wildlife and the Sierra Club. Steve reported that some AES members will be certified by next year for using chain saws on projects. This year's big project is slated for April 20–May 1 at the Horseshoe Ranch.

Five projects were also completed on the Burro creek allotment, including 39.5 miles of fence removed and 10 miles of riparian exclosure fence repaired. Clair remarked that he noticed a big difference on elk movement and use in the area. AES members also worked in Springerville to harass approximately 800 elk back to Green's Peak and away from the local alfalfa fields.

Raul Vega commended the HPC and Special Turkey Tag programs for the success of the Gould's turkey work, which dates back a decade. He also noted the difference it makes in relationships with landowners. Ruth Gregory mentioned how impressed she was with the number of projects completed or under way in the last two years (see December 2010 newsletter). The Commissioner remarked that this program is making a huge difference for wildlife.

Steve Clark asked the group to read the instruction manual, specifically the section on block funding. AES plans to roll out some ideas at the summer HPC meeting. Setting up money to be made available to match against other grants speaks to the long-term vision of the program and the valuable leveraging of tag fund dollars. Some of these outside grants will match at a ratio of 9:1.

Announcements:

The meeting on March 9 at 6:30p at the Phoenix Department offices is a follow-up to previous meeting between the Department and the WCOs on revision to the Special Big Game License Tag sales agreements made recently by the Commission. The Commission wants to ensure clarity to the process to avoid any confusion at the June 2011 Commission meeting when they will award next year's Special Big Game Tags.

There will be a webcast on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 explaining the Department's vision for the Comprehensive Game Management Plan (CGMP). It will also be broadcast at all the Department's Regional offices. The presentation will be captured on video and stored on the web site. This may be viewed at your convenience at [www.azgfd.gov/cgmp](http://www.azgfd.gov/cgmp). During the 2-hour presentation, viewers can email questions and they will be answered on air as time allows or will be followed up after the meeting. The Department will continually be seeking public comments. The statewide section of the CGMP will be shared with the Commission in January 2012. Part of the vision of the plan is to consider multiple competing objectives within a given management area. It's a step beyond what the Department currently does and it needs to be a living, collaborative plan. The collecting of comments for hunt guidelines is currently under way. Draft recommendations will be formed in June. Please get comments to the Department at your earliest convenience.

Reminder: The Department's annual Outdoor Expo will take place the weekend of March 26–27, 2011.

Set summer meeting date:

The Flagstaff regional office has recently been renovated and now has a conference room with the capacity to hold a State HPC meeting. The group agreed on Flagstaff and the date of Saturday, July 23, 2011. Ruth will see if the room is available that date and send out a "Save the Date" notice.

Anything else?

Brian Dolan reminded everyone that the Department summarizes volunteers' hours as match for its Federal Pittman-Robertson grants. Would the Department please give the WCOs information the value of this contribution? Yes, it can and will. There needs to be consistency and a more programmatic approach in how volunteer hours are being captured and everyone should take responsibility for ensuring that they are captured. This contribution also needs to be publicized and all volunteers need to be educated on the importance of recording their time by signing in when they show up to work on a project.

The meeting wrapped up by 12:00 PM. The Commissioner thanked everyone for their participation and asked them to contact Ruth with any questions or concerns.