

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting

Saturday, January 19, 2008

Arizona Game and Fish Department - Phoenix Office

Committee Members Present

Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Bill Gibson, Bureau of Land Management
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
James O'Haco, Livestock Grower
Jennifer Martin, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
David Hoyle, Sportsmen Group
Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
Tami Emmett, Coronado National Forest

Committee Members Absent

Stephen Williams, Arizona State Land Department
Joe King, Livestock Grower
Joe Underwood, Sportsmen Group
Scott Heap, Sportsmen Group
Dennis Moroney, Livestock Grower
Duane Coleman, Livestock Grower

Others Present

Harry Seck, Special Services Assistant Director, AGFD
Mark Weise, Development Branch Chief, AGFD
Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Sal Palazzolo, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/ Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. An introduction of those present was initiated.

Nomination of New Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Sanford Cohen's and James O'Haco's two-year terms as Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively were complete. The Committee unanimously reelected Sanford Cohen and James O'Haco to continue serving as the officers of the Committee.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Committee accepted the meeting minutes for July 30, 2007.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Jennifer Martin welcomed the Committee to the new Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) headquarters building, which was just opened in November 2007. (Mark Weise would take Committee members on a tour of the facility after the meeting.) Commissioner Martin said that the 'Appointments to Standing Committees' had been postponed until the February Commission meeting, but even if she did not continue in the role of liaison for this committee she would continue to support the Committee's efforts to improve public access.

Updates from Land Management Agencies

Bill Gibson, sitting in for Julie Decker, gave an update from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM is making progress on a number of Resource Management Plans (RMP) for the state. Public scoping has been completed on three of the RMP's and the finals will be published this year. Information on the RMP's can be viewed at www.blm.gov, click on Arizona. Mr. Gibson answered some questions which Jon Fugate had regarding the Travel Management Plan for the Quartzsite area.

Tami Emmett gave an update from the United States Forest Service (USFS). She had contacted the other National Forests in the state for input/updates for this meeting and she plans to continue networking with each National Forest prior to upcoming meetings.

Ms. Emmett informed the Committee of developments regarding the efforts to restore access to the Aravaipa Wilderness. A lawsuit was brought against the landowner who was locking off the access by neighboring residents whose access to their own properties was being affected. The neighbors' case was supported when Matt Walton, the AGFD Landowner Relations Coordinator in Tucson, Melissa Warren and Tami Emmett discovered historic documents which demonstrated that the access was a public road. Currently the road is open. Jon Fugate expressed appreciation for the efforts of Tami Emmett and the other people involved toward resolving this issue which had been going on for so long. Mark Weise added that Matt Walton had been recognized for his efforts by the Commission during the previous day's public meeting.

The Committee briefly discussed some issues involved with the proposed Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Area and Travel Management Plans (TMP) on various national forests. Ms. Emmett suggested that we invite someone from the USFS to speak on TMP's at the next Committee meeting.

Landowner Relations Program Updates/Current Issues

Sal Palazzolo said that the Committee was already aware of the large range of programs and projects the Landowner Relations Program (LRP) is involved in, so he would only take time to give updates on some of the major developments. First, he updated the Committee on the status of the 2008 Farm Bill currently being considered in Congress. The current versions include an Open Fields Bill, which is an annual \$20 million competitive grant process in which state agencies can compete for funding to complete projects with private landowners who provide public access. Second, Mr. Palazzolo told the Committee that the LRP is cost sharing to make possible a large Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) grant which will open a large ranch in Region I which had been closed for the last 15 years. Next, he informed the Committee that, for the first time, LRP received a portion of the off-highway vehicle (OHV) fuel tax. The funding is slated for habitat protection against damage from OHV's. There was an overabundance of demand for the funding; all the funding is going towards some projects which will protect riparian areas and revegetate damaged areas.

Sal Palazzolo informed the Committee of a program the AGFD has to help ranchers in the Mexican wolf recovery area. The AGFD uses funding from the Mexican Wolf Conservation Fund to assist ranchers with purchasing supplemental feed for their livestock so they can be kept in a more protected area during the calving period and reduce the likelihood of depredation. The Defenders of Wildlife had a similar program before but there were unreasonable expectations that accompanied the financial assistance. A recent Arizona Cattle Growers' Association newsletter had a positive

article on the AGFD program. Darcy Ely said that it was a win-win situation and added that area ranchers like working with the AGFD. Commissioner Martin asked why the LRP was handling this program rather than the Non-Game Branch. Sal Palazzolo and Mark Weise explained about the experience LRP has implementing these types of agreements and the importance of the relationship building LRP has done with the ranching community. James O'Haco and Darcy Ely elaborated on how the LRP is very good to work with and more efficient than other agencies or organizations.

The Committee discussed the desire to expand the road maintenance program, which has proven itself very beneficial to both landowners and sportsmen. Mr. Palazzolo stated that the \$1.5 million of carry-forward money that was previously available to the LRP had all been put to use, and he explained the current funding situation. In the recent biannual budget process, LRP put in a request for supplemental funding which would be used to increase the amount of road maintenance LRP could complete. This request was not to acquire an additional road grader machine and a second operator, but to hire contractors or potentially to reimburse landowners who do their own road grading. Commissioner Martin asked that she be kept informed and said she would do whatever she could to help with LRP budgetary issues. She added that helping with road maintenance is a very reasonable tradeoff for a ranch that allows public access and she considered this program a budgetary priority for the access program.

Mr. Palazzolo informed the Committee that the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is no longer being funded, despite his efforts in Washington D.C. to keep it going. Some remaining LIP funds are being used to keep the two regional employees working for another year; the two employees are considered more valuable than the LIP project money because the two employees have the good working relationships with the landowners and they have experience finding funding from other sources to complete the projects. Commissioner Martin asked that LRP communicate with her on these issues and she would try to help gain political support.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Mark Weise relayed a response from the AGFD Law Enforcement Branch to the action item from the last meeting regarding investigating the feasibility of a volunteer law enforcement program. The response from the Law Enforcement Branch included information on various efforts which they are involved in to increase law enforcement presence. Recently, using OHV fuel tax funds, Arizona State Parks entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office to provide overtime funding for deputies with the sole purpose of OHV enforcement – efforts are being made to expand this effort to other locations. There is another OHV management bill (similar to the one proposed last year) being considered; if it passes it will provide for additional enforcement. Sanford Cohen gave some additional information on this proposed legislation; he added that it has lots of support in the House of Representatives, but still needs some additional support to pass the Senate. The Department currently has an active reserve program which had seven active officers in 2007. The OHV Ambassador Program began in September 2007; thirty ambassadors were trained to assist agency personnel with OHV management, education, and enforcement efforts. Bill Gibson gave additional information on this program and added that all indications are that the program is working well and will expand. David Hoyle told the Committee about the Ambassador Program's first event, which was at Desert Wells Multi-Use Area – Mr. Hoyle and Troy Christensen had assisted with this multifaceted project. The Law Enforcement Branch had been looking into the idea of creating its own volunteer law enforcement program even prior to the Committee's request and they will continue to research this option while addressing cautions advised by the Assistant Attorney General's Office.

The Committee also discussed some other issues related to increasing funding to expand the road maintenance program. Sal Palazzolo had contacted officials in Wyoming to discuss a land use ticket program which they have used. The program was problematic in Wyoming and it was determined that it would simply add unnecessary process to AGFD's current program. A land use ticket program could be a method of prioritizing the ranches which desired road maintenance, but inadequate funding would still limit the work that could be done. Commissioner Martin asked the AGFD staff to provide information showing the amount of funding that this well-received program could realistically put on the ground prior to the Commission's budget work session in February. Jon Fugate said that he would attempt to make sure that Commissioner Woodhouse fully understood the importance of this program. Commissioner Martin thought that it would be an easy sell because maintaining roads for landowners who are keeping access open is such an obviously reasonable and fair solution.

Next Meeting

The Committee decided that this summer's meeting would be scheduled in conjunction with the Conservation Workshop, which will be held at Treasure Park on Mount Graham. An effort will be made to schedule the LLSRC meeting on Saturday, May 31; Committee members will be informed of the date and time of that meeting once it has been determined.

Action Items:

1. Provide information showing the amount of funding that the road maintenance program could realistically put on the ground prior to the Commission's budget work session in February. (LRP Staff)
2. Schedule the summer LLSRC meeting in conjunction with the Conservation Workshop. (LRP Staff)
3. Invite someone from the USFS to speak on Travel Management Plans at the next Committee meeting. (Tami Emmett)
4. Meeting minutes distributed. (LRP Staff)

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