

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting

Saturday, January 12, 2019

Arizona Game and Fish Department Headquarters - Phoenix

Committee Members Present

Bill Brake, Arizona Game and Fish Commission

Steve Carmickle, Sportsmen Representative

Joe King, Livestock Grower

Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Representative

Doug Beach, Sportsmen Representative

Jim Lawrence, Sportsmen Representative

Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower

Steve Rusiecki, Arizona State Land Department

Committee Members Absent

Kurt Bahti, Sportsmen Representative

Jim O'Haco, Livestock Grower

Dan Rodriguez, Livestock Grower

Jack Mann, Livestock Grower

Joseph Winfield, Coronado National Forest

Maile Adler, Bureau of Land Management

Others Present

Rebecca Antle, Arizona State Assoc. of 4-WD Clubs

Becky May-Pope, Sportsmen Representative

Al Sue, Sportsmen Representative

Don Larsen, Habitat Enhancement and Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD

Jake Jaeger, Partner Biologist

Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee or LLSRC) meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Brake talked about the success of last July's joint meeting of the LLSRC and Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) at the ACGA Convention. He was impressed by the turnout of ranchers, especially since the timeslot in which it was scheduled required some attendees to arrive a day early and experience much added expense. The Commissioner said it is extremely important to maintain good working relationships between the agricultural community and sportsmen/recreationists. He said, grants and funding for conservation are often available, and partnering with farmers and ranchers is an efficient way to get the wildlife habitat improvements accomplished. Due to our many common goals, it is important for the agricultural community and sportsmen/recreationists to be allies. He added that it is important for the Arizona Game and Fish

Department (Department) and sportsmen to give recognition to ranchers and farmers for their contributions to wildlife conservation and providing public access.

Commissioner Brake and Don Larsen informed the Committee of a new series of Department videos which feature ranchers and farmers giving their own perspectives on hunting, land management, wildlife conservation, and issues regarding impacts from recreational uses on private, state, and federal lands. The intent of these videos is to highlight how the efforts of ranchers and farmers benefit wildlife through improvements made to private, state, and federal lands and to spread the message of how respect and proper etiquette helps keep public access open. The Department plans to promote these messages in a variety of ways, and Commissioner Brake welcomed everyone to share and promote the videos. Darcy Ely had viewed the videos and provided favorable comments, but expressed the need for this to be a continuing effort. She recommended making the videos a required part of the hunter education curriculum, using the videos in some kind of online education refresher, and including a requirement to watch them with any free bonus point offers that develop. Jim Lawrence liked the videos and said the messages were important; he added that he would link them to the AZ Mule Deer Organization website. Committee members suggested that the Department make additional videos, and maybe consider a video to show the perspectives of various recreational users.

Landowner Relations Program Updates/Current Issues

Don Larsen gave an update on the Habitat Enhancement and Landowner Relations Program (LRP). He informed the Committee that each AGFD region has a LRP specialist. There are also three partner biologists, including the newest, Max Thompson (406-239-9667, mthompson@pheasantsforever.org) - this cooperative NRCS position will focus its efforts on riparian area projects. The U.S. Farm Bill passed in December and will be in effect for the next 5 years. A subprogram, the Voluntary Public Access Program, was funded at \$50 million; there is a good chance that the Department could receive \$1 million or more of those funds to use for projects on ranches which provide access across their private property. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) was also funded; grants from this program typically allow the Department to cooperate with multiple partners to double the amount of money put on the ground. Mr. Larsen informed the Committee that, this year, the HPC Program will be delegating around \$2 million amongst many project proposals.

Don Larsen informed the Committee that LRP wants to do a presentation at the ACGA convention, at a date and time which will be convenient for additional ranchers to attend. He asked for the committee's input regarding the summer LLSRC meeting. Committee members expressed a desire to continue conducting the LLSRC meeting in conjunction with the convention. Darcy Ely suggested that a side room could be reserved before or after the LRP presentation for us to conduct additional LLSRC business. Mr. Larsen will be meeting with ACGA staff to determine when a LRP presentation can be worked into the convention schedule. As details develop, we will determine how best to schedule the LLSRC meeting and whether or not to host a reception.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Rebecca Antle, the president AZ State Association of 4-WD Clubs, gave some updates related to off-road recreation. There is a proposal to increase the weight and width limits to be considered an OHV. The bigger, heavier OHV's being manufactured are resulting in more damage to roads/trails; there are concerns that it could eventually lead to restrictions on which types of OHV's can use various trails. A change is underway to allow out-of-state OHV decals; this addresses seasonal residents who bring their OHV's to the state for part of the year. Legislators were able to prevent the OHV grant funds from being swept this year - the funds will remain available for their intended uses of trail inventory and maintenance, education, and enforcement. Steve Carmickle mentioned that OHV groups can provide signs, kiosks, education, and labor to help ranchers who are experiencing problems from OHV recreation. Ms. Antle said she has been putting on seminars for various groups to provide information on OHV laws, grants, and partnering opportunities. She spoke about her efforts to replace outdated OHV information. Sanford Cohen expressed concern that ADOT may be looking at additional regulation on OHV's; he added that OHV's need to be allowed to travel short distances on highways to get from one trail area to the next and to get access to gas stations, stores, etc.

Jim Lawrence told the Committee about a 35-mile pipeline project the AZ Mule Deer Organization (AMDO) has been helping the 51 Ranch with. AMDO volunteers have conducted multiple Adopt-a-Ranch workdays to help install the water distribution system, which will provide water to the New River allotment and Cook's Mesa. Along with providing labor to place the pipeline, storage tanks, troughs, solar panels and pumps, AMDO also contributed several decommissioned solar panels which had been donated to the organization by APS. LRP helped by contributing \$30,000 towards materials, but the ranch has shouldered most of the costs. Additional volunteer days will be scheduled, so if you would like to be a part of this epic project, contact jim@azmuledeer.org. Al Sue mentioned an upcoming pronghorn relocation project - antelope from near Prescott will be moved to the Elgin area. Commissioner Brake elaborated on the successes of the landscape level antelope habitat improvement work in southeast Arizona.

Nomination of New Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Due to his many obligations, Jim Lawrence chose to remain as vice-chairman, rather than assume the role of chairman. Joe King was unanimously elected to become chairman.

Updates from Land Management Agencies

Due to the federal government shut-down, no representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) nor the United States Forest Service (USFS) were present.

Steve Rusiecki provided an update from the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD). He informed the Committee of some personnel changes: the range manager position for northeast Arizona, vacated by Josh Grace, was filled by Jeff Baker, the OHV Coordinator position has been filled by Richard Spencer. Offering ASL recreation passes online has greatly increased the number purchased. Mr. Rusiecki spoke about the difficulties his agency is having with maintaining the main staging area at Desert Wells Multi-Use Area; very expensive resurfacing repairs are expected to be needed once or twice a year. Since putting up signs requesting that people not use the staging area when muddy didn't work,

closing the area during wet conditions would just increase damage to neighboring areas, and enforcement efforts remain too limited, the agency is not sure how to address the problems of irresponsible use and vandalism at this site. Millennials are less likely to be involved in clubs; we need to find ways to reach them with information regarding responsible use, etiquette, and regulations. Commissioner Brake shared what is done in his part of the state - landowner-lessees can photograph the licence plate of the OHV rider's vehicle, then send that to the AGFD officer, who will send a letter to the person letting them know they were observed causing damage and what the laws are. It has been an effective way to educate and change those riders' behaviors.

Wildlife Waters Database

Jake Jaeger, MDF/AGFD Partner Biologist, gave a brief update on the HPC Program. Commissioner Brake added that we need to increase education regarding HPC and get more ranchers around the state involved. Mr. Jaeger gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the wildlife waters database. Department staff and volunteers have so far gathered much-needed data on the location and condition of more than 14,000 water sources, using a user-friendly collector app, which allows options for both connected and non-connected data collecting. The database provides useful information for planning where new water developments or improvements of existing waters are needed; it also is very valuable for coordinating the water hauling efforts of the Department and sportsmen groups. Doug Beach asked for additional instructions so the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club could use the collector app during their monitoring of waters in Region IV. Although Darcy Ely recognized the value and importance of the information to wildlife management, she expressed concerns that the information could possibly pose unintended negative consequences to lessees. Commissioner Brake understood her concerns and asked that the Department look into possibly limiting access to the information.

Next Meeting

Don Larsen will be meeting with ACGA staff regarding when LRP can be worked into the ACGA convention schedule. Once that is determined, we will determine how best to schedule the LLSRC meeting. Committee members will be informed as details develop. (The ACGA convention itself is scheduled July 25-27 at Fort McDowell Casino/Resort.)

Action Items:

1. Send out A.) the rancher perspective videos for Committee members to share and promote and B.) an updated list of LRP staff and contact information (LRP staff)
2. Coordinate with ACGA regarding a LRP presentation and a LLSRC meeting at their annual convention, then inform Committee (LRP staff)
3. Distribute meeting minutes (LRP staff)

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