

MEMORANDUM



TO: Rafael Payan, Director

FROM: Kerry Baldwin, Natural Resources Division Manager

DATE: February 20, 2009

SUBJECT: Parks Commission Report for March, 2009

Open Space/Ranch Property Management-

The final version of Bar V Ranch Coordinated Resource Management Plan prepared in cooperation with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has been signed off on by all parties and is posted on the NR website. We will begin working on a CRMP on new Sands ranch in early March.

Staff assisted PAG staff on annual wet and dry mapping survey of the Cienega Creek Nature Preserve.

Worked with PAG to establish a new Wildlife Task Force as a sub-unit of the PAG Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) as a way to create a forum to discuss and collaborate on a broad range of wildlife specific topics.

A new property boundary fence was constructed between Kings 98 Ranch and Buckelew Farms to better delineate grazing pastures. The Open Space O&M program is working with Tucson Water on additional fencing projects in area to secure property boundaries.

NR staff completed conversion and upgrade of well on Rancho Seco West unit to solar and completed similar project with BLM on conversion of well on BLM lease property on Rancho Seco east unit. Both upgrades will reduce O&M costs and establish year-round water for wildlife.

The open space O&M program staff has been busy with site security projects on new properties in cooperation with the ranch manager and Arizona Game and Fish department. Considerable time has gone into the Sopori ranch and securing the property boundary while re-establishing public access across portions of the Ranch to public lands in the Tumacacori mountains blocked by the previous owner. Access to about 50 square miles have been improved and will be managed into the future by NRPR established permit systems, designated travel routes and

seasonal closures in cooperation with the Arizona Game and Fish Access program.

Invasive Species/Buflegrass-

NRPR staff and Weedwackers continue to work on the rugged face of Bushmaster Peak in TMP and are making noticeable inroads. Planning has started for the FY 09/10 growing season control effort prioritization. Since 2000 the Weedwackers have removed over 120 tons of buffelgrass in Tucson Mountain park.

NRPR staff has been working on supporting formation of a Buffelgrass Coordination Center that is a 501c(3) not-for-profit entity. The Center will help coordinate mapping data, treatment activities and research on a regional scale. Pima County will be a major contributor. Also, staff worked with utility companies to establish a voluntary procedure to identify, map, control and monitor buffelgrass on utility rights-of-way. Commitments have been made by Cox Communications, TEP, SW Gas, TRICO, Comcast and Tucson Association of Realtors. An Ordinance amendment is being taken to the Board of Supervisors in mid-March that will list buffelgrass as a noxious weed and allow county to work with landowners to control infestations that are health and safety concerns in unincorporated Pima County and if the land owner is unresponsive then issue citations and be able to do direct abatement projects.

Open Space Acquisition-

The Conservation Acquisition Commission approved due diligence on acquisition of parts of the historic Sopori Ranch at the September 4, 2008 meeting and the Board of Supervisors approved the acquisition package in November, 2008. The acquisition closed in late December and includes approximately 4,200 acres of deeded land and 10,500 acres of State grazing lease lands. The acquisition will include most of the Ranch lands in Pima County. The acquisition was structured in two units and the second unit will formally close before June 30, 2009.

The county also acquired a portion of the Sands Ranch east of Sonoita. This acquisition is for 5,200 acres and the acquisition closed in early January. Several large parcels are still under consideration but currently the program has more identified parcels than funds available. The Conservation Acquisition Commission has provided direction to staff to primarily focus on large parcels of lands but bring all opportunities to them for initial review.

NR Division staff has assisted with preparation for auction of the 320 ac. parcel of State Land associated with Tumamoc Hill. An API matching grant has been secured from State Parks to cover half of the acquisition costs. The auction should occur on February 23, 2009.

The Conservation Acquisition Commission approved a recommendation to the Bond Advisory Committee to amend the 2004 Bond language to include new lands recommended by the CAC for listing as potential acquisitions in next Bond program. The new lands were determined utilizing the same scientific identification process as the 2004 lands. This decision will increase the flexibility of remaining 2004 Bond funds to be used to acquire high value properties at a reduced cost with current trend in real estate market.

Environmental Education-

The spring programming is beginning to gear up with increased calls and demand for school program scheduling. The class of new volunteers out at Tucson Mountain Park are now giving weekly nature hikes from the Gilbert ray campground. In 2008, the Environmental Education program volunteers contributed over 5,000 hours of time or about \$100,000 dollars worth of staff support. The EE program staff and volunteers contacted in programs just over 38,000 people.

We are working with TUSD and the University of Arizona to set up a Special Use Permit for use of TMP lands for the Camp Cooper education center off Trails End Road. We will be setting up more communication and doing complementary programming to better use our parks and their facility.

NR Parks-

Staff at Catalina Regional Park is beginning development of a series of Watchable Wildlife Viewing Blinds at the park. This project is being funded by a grant from Arizona Game and Fish Department for \$26,000. Several Boy Scouts are going to be involved as part of Eagle Scout projects.

Boundary fencing and invasive weed control continue to be major projects at Catalina Regional. Plans are near the final bid stage for construction of the small kids playground, picnic Ramada's and turf play area near Golder bridge.

Winter visitation is peaking out at Tucson Mountain Park. Registration numbers seem to be holding with last year and don't show a downward trend due to the economy.

Vandalism at west side trailheads has been increasing requiring more monitoring and signage replacement. The 36th Street trailhead has been especially hard hit.

A new parking area has been opened up at the Sweetwater Nature Preserve Trails Park. This trailhead is accessed off El Camino del Cerro west of Silverbell and left

on Tortolita to the end of the road. The trailhead access approximately 8.7 miles of new interconnected multi-use trails. The parking area can accommodate over 25 cars and includes parking for equestrian users.

The NR staff has been very involved in preparing options to address possible cuts that might be necessary beyond the current 2.5% cut currently in place. The 20% cut options will significantly impact the Division just like the rest of the agency and would mean park closures and staff reductions.