

# MEMORANDUM



TO: Rafael Payan, Director  
FROM: Kerry Baldwin, Natural Resources Division Manager  
DATE: May 5, 2009  
SUBJECT: Parks Commission Report for May-2009 Meeting

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## **Open Space/Ranch Property Management-**

Spring branding is scheduled for A7 May 20<sup>th</sup>. A job announcement is out on the street for a cowboy/ranch hand position at A7.

Annual range monitoring data summaries were compiled and sent to all our ranch partners and cooperating agencies.

Staff worked on establishing and reading plots for an area on A7 ranch that will be part of a controlled burn by US Forest service in late May. We will monitor the changes in vegetation for several years post burn.

Pygmy owl surveys were started on Steven's property and surveys of Sands Ranch were conducted to verify ecological site boundaries for the Coordinated Resource ranch planning effort being done.

NRPR was awarded two grants from US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife Program. The two grants will total approximately \$43,000 and include enhancements on the A7 ranch and in Cienega Creek Nature Preserve. The grants will fund construction of a new year-round wildlife water, place wildlife escape ramps in existing water sources on A7 and 6 Bar ranches as well as some invasive grass control efforts and construct artificial bat roost sites and stabilize deteriorating soil caves in Cienega Creek Preserve.

Additional public access points and regulatory signage placement has been completed down on Sopori Ranch.

## **Invasive Species/Buflegrass-**

NRPR staff has been working on supporting formation of a Buflegrass 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. That group meets on a monthly basis now.

The county is waiting to hear on a \$470,000 grant proposal to Arizona Forestry Division for fire fuel reductions of buffelgrass across the county. NRPR will be the lead agency if we get the grant. Preliminary work has been done on several smaller buffelgrass related grants with US Fish and Wildlife based on expectations of Economic Stimulus dollars being made available for invasive species work.

Staff evaluated several sites on Tucson Mountain Park as locations for an interagency test of an aerial spraying technique to control buffelgrass in remote areas.

The county is completing an agreement with Adult Probation program to get 20,000 hours of buffelgrass control efforts from individuals doing community service. NRPR will identify locations for the work effort and act as the technical lead.

### **Open Space Acquisition-**

The county closed on Phase I of the Marley acquisition. To be called the Marley Ranch Conservation Area, the ranch covers over 115,000 acres of deeded lands and State grazing lease lands. This is one of the largest working ranches in southern Arizona. The acquisition will be completed in three Phases and over at least a 8 year periods and is the largest acquisition under the 2004 Open Space Bond program. Phase one acquired about 6,800 acres of fee title land.

NR Division staff is assisting with preparation of an auction of a parcel of State Land associated with the Valencia Site. An API matching grant will be requested from State Parks to cover half of the acquisition costs. The City of Tucson is supporting the application for use of Jurisdictional Open Space Bond funds. This site is one of only three remaining Hohokam ball courts in metro area.

Phase II of the Sopori Ranch acquisition should be completed by June 30. This will finalize the acquisition of the full 4,135 acres of title lands and the transfer of the 10,480 acres of State grazing leases.

The Conservation Acquisition will be considering four more properties for acquisition in next month or so that could add another 4,000 acres of fee title to the lands system on four properties.

### **Environmental Education-**

The spring programming is beginning to slow down and demand for school program scheduling is dropping off. In April, over 4,500 people participated in

EE programs in the Parks. The volunteers gave just over 975 hours of support in March. The annual Earth Day event at Agua Caliente Park attracted over 400 students this year. The Tucson River of Words award ceremony was held at the Children's museum on April 15<sup>th</sup>. One of the winners from Challenger Middle School was also chosen as finalist in the International River of Words contest.

New program locations within the NRPR system are continuing to be explored and additional opportunities for our increasing volunteer cadre are under development.

### **NR Parks-**

The overall NR Division budget is down about 7.5% from FY08/09 levels.

Catalina Regional Park has been identified by the County Administrator for closure if necessary in FY 09/10. Plans are to stop all further development but keep the park open for hiking, equestrian and biking use. Staff will be moved to other program needs but will continue to monitor and make emergency repairs to maintain site security. They will also complete the Watchable Wildlife Viewing Blind grant construction project.

Four out-of-town educational groups were hosted at TMP last month and CNN did a story from Gates Pass. Discovery Channel has plans for use of the park this month. One wedding was held at Gates Pass overlook. The senior class of Arizona School for Deaf and Blind held their senior picnic at the park for almost the 25<sup>th</sup> year.

The Board of Supervisors renamed the Hidden Canyon Trail in TMP the Lorraine Lee- Hidden Canyon Trail at their April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Supervisor Elias wanted to pass along his apology for going around the Park Commission process due to a timing issue with the Lee family.

Easter at Agua Caliente Park was at maximum use levels and people had to be turned away. A burn successfully reduced the annual pile of cattails pulled from Pond 1.

Staff helped put out additional remote cameras as part of the bioreconnaissance project at TMP. The Commission will be shown a slide show of images from the cameras. A power point of the images is now on the TMP page on the NRPR Natural Resources Parks section of the NRPR website at [pima.gov](http://pima.gov).