

MEMORANDUM



TO: Rafael Payan, Director

FROM: Kerry Baldwin, Natural Resources Division Manager

DATE: September 17, 2009

SUBJECT: Parks Commission Report for October-2009 Meeting

Open Space/Ranch Property Management-

NRPR is working with Nature Conservancy staff on a rangelands assessment and invasive species removal project down on Clyne and Sands ranches near Sonoita.

A new gate and road alignment was completed on Empirita Ranch to address the historic illegal road location outside of State Land easement.

The open space O&M program staff assisted regional Flood Control with several fencing projects and buffelgrass spraying issues.

General drought and minimal monsoon conditions have caused a number of operators to look at current cattle numbers. We anticipate some reductions in herd sizes this fall. NRPR staff is doing more site monitoring to look for pasture uses a that need to be addressed.

NRPR staffb will participate in tour of Altar valley sites with U of A School of natural resources staff and Altar Valley Alliance members on 9/26. Outcome will hopefully be more cooperative research projects in area.

The County provided 1 to 1 match requirement for a \$400,000 grant proposal by Altar Valley Conservation Alliance for a Resource Assessment update on lands within Alliance planning area. That includes about 200,000 acres of county open space lands. In-kind match funds were generated by utilizing a portion of the phase II acquisition of the Sopor Ranch.

NRPR staff will be assisting AZ Game and Fish with Mt. Lion capture project in Tortolita Mountains the last week in September. Project will attempt to collar at least on lion and up to three lions with GPS collars. The study involves lion movements and wildlife corridor identification.

Invasive Species/Buflegrass-

An Interagency group had proposed doing a controlled test of new aerial spray methods utilizing a helicopter to control stands of buffelgrass in rugged terrain and the test would be conducted in Tucson Mountain Park. As a result of Board and public concerns, several public meetings were held in August and on August 17 the Board of Supervisors approved the project to go forward if weather conditions were right for the test. Unfortunately, rains have been too sporadic so the test has been postponed till late July or early August next year.

The county has completed an agreement with Adult Probation program to get 20,000 hours of buffelgrass control efforts from individuals doing community service. The groups have been working on Kinney Road and other sites identified by NRPR staff. By early September the groups had pulled over 800 bags of grass.

NRPR staff has updated the public presentation displays on buffelgrass and several trainings for buffelgrass volunteer project coordinators will be conducted in the fall.

Open Space Acquisition-

The open space program saw closings on four properties in past 60 days. The 160 ac. Bloom property in Tucson mountains, 49 ac. Cortaro/Hartman in NW Tucson, 2,700 ac. Empirita-Rocking K on the north end of Whetstone mountains and completion of the 15,000 ac. Sopori Ranch. The 900 ac. Clyne R adjacent to our 5,200 ac. Sands Ranch should close by the end of the year.

The county is working on acquisition of Valencia Site, a Hohokam ball court, and received funding from the State Parks managed Arizona Preserve Initiative for half of the cost of the acquisition. The parcel is State Land and will be sold at auction later in fall.

Environmental Education-

NRPR EE staff are working with two of five schools in Tucson Unified District to generate Green Schools projects and events. We will be working with Ft. Lowell and Hudlow.

In the past two months the EE program has workwed with over 4,000 residents and visitors in programmed events. Our volunteers contributed well over 800 hours in past two months.

NRPR in partnership with Desert Museum and Arizona Game and Fish hosted a workshop on the economics of nature tourism and wildlife watching.

NR Parks-

Catalina Regional Park has been identified by the County Administrator for closure FY 09/10. Plans are to stop all further development but keep the park open for hiking, equestrian and biking use. Staff has been 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. Communication with the local community continues on a day to day basis.

Five out-of-town educational groups were hosted at TMP last month and several film crews shot in the Park.

Chip seal was applied to Gates Pass and some of the main road turnouts late in June thanks to funding from Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement Fund.

Water flow from the spring at Agua Caliente Park is dropping off rapidly. We now have to pump ground water to maintain Pond one. The well went down in July and was off line for several days. About \$5,000 in repairs to system were made and the system is back up and keeping water levels stable in pond one.

Additional Mt. lion photographs have been captured on remote cameras in Tucson Mountain Park.