

MEMORANDUM



TO: Rafael Payan, Director

FROM: Kerry Baldwin, Natural Resources Division Manager

DATE: November 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Parks Commission Report for November-2009 Meeting

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Open Space/Ranch Property Management-

A new gate and road alignment was completed on Empirita Ranch to address the historic road location outside of State Land easement we have. Access for recreational users is by free permit through NRPR.

Annual fall vegetative and forage use transect monitoring is going on at ranches.

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

NRPR staff participated 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 to benefit better management decision making.

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 Sopori Ranch. Unfortunately the grant was not approved but will be brought back again with modifications.

Open Space O&M staff are working on solar well conversion on a well at Rancho Seco and additional cattle guards to reduce cut or destroyed fences/gates due to drug running in area.

The NRPR rangelands program will be putting out a DRAFT Standards and Guidelines document for public review in November. This document outlines the methods and strategies the county grazing program will be managed on the open

space lands. Copies of the Draft and final document will be available on the NR Division portion of the NRPR web site.

NRPR was awarded a small grant from the Arizona Game and Fish Department Bat Management Program. The grant will help NRPR acquire some basic equipment to monitor bat populations and begin to do baseline surveys on bat habitats found on new open space properties. Bats are considered an indicator species and the presence and stability of bat populations tends to indicate a well functioning ecosystem.

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 October the groups had over 175 probationers involved and pulled over 1800 bags of grass (~ 54,000 lbs.) .

NRPR staff are involved with planning additional work projects for the spring 2010 Beat Back Buffelgrass Day being sponsored by Southern Arizona Buffelgrass Coordination Center.

The 91 Weedwacker volunteers put in over 400 hours in October. National Make a Difference Day events were also held on the North and South sides of the community to beat back buffelgrass infestations.

Open Space Acquisition-

The 900 ac. Clyne Ranch acquisition adjacent to our 5,200 ac. Sands Ranch property 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 November.

Environmental Education-

In the past two months the EE program has worked with over 5,000 residents and visitors in programmed events. Our volunteers contributed well over 800 hours in past two months.

Over twenty public programs will be available in November in the parks. The EE staff also completed a draft booklet for youth called Discovering Nature at Pima County Parks. This little booklet encourages youth to explore various parks with their families and complete basic nature investigations. Once completed the young nature explorers books can be presented at a Sonoran Desert Kids Club or Outdoor family Days program for a special reward.

NR Parks-

The Watchable Wildlife Viewing Blinds at Catalina Park are still being completed and should be finished by early spring. These are Eagle Scout projects using funds NRPR received from Arizona Game and Fish Department's Heritage Fund.

Three out-of-town educational groups were hosted at TMP last month and several film crews shot in the Park. Pima Community College used the park for a multi-day field biology class out near Ironwood Picnic area.

Water flow from the spring at Agua Caliente Park continues to be at historic lows. We now have to pump ground water to maintain Pond one at a rate of about 55,000 gallons/day. Similar low water flows are being seen in Cienega Creek Nature Preserve and other shallow wells in the area. Based on a 10 year trend review of water flows and pond water demands, the main pond at Agua Caliente will not get enough flow from the spring to keep it up. Supplemental water will be more and more necessary. Long-term management strategies need to be generated and reviewed. Unless we see a significant increase in rainfall, we can expect more periods where mud flats are exposed at AC Park.

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