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**PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**  
of  
**NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**(NAPAC)**  
of  
**THE ARIZONA STATE PARKS BOARD**

The Natural Areas Program Advisory Committee (NAPAC) held a meeting open to the public on Tuesday, October 13, 2015 beginning at 12:00pm at Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch, 366 Research Ranch Rd, Elgin, AZ 85611.

**AGENDA**

**(The Chair reserves the right to set the order of the agenda.)**

**A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL – 12:06**

**NAPAC Members:**

Chair; Rebecca Davidson, Vice Chair; Tom Skinner, Linda Stitzer, Dave Weedman, and Bob Pape.

**Staff:** Heidi Lauchstedt, Brianne Fisher, Dawn Collins, and Bob Casavant.

**Public:** Friends of Sonoita Creek (FOSC) President; Anne Townsend, Joe Watkins, and Andy Gould and Linda Kennedy; Appleton Whittell Research Ranch (AWRR)

**B. CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

Andy Gould discusses the collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on stream assessments. Pete Stacey, an expert in the field, has given 2 days of training for river assessments and the group has conducted several. FOSC is happy to see this collaboration and citizen science effort. Gould and Luke Reese, TNC Manager of SC, are working on a report of the river assessment findings.

Fisher asks how many people completed training. Gould responds 8 people did and a minimum of 3 people for rapid stream assessments.

Townsend states that they are now concerned with the whole watershed not just the natural area (1/3 of the river) owned by Arizona State Parks (ASP). TNC is the other large owner of the watershed.

Casavant expresses his interest and opportunity in this type of effort.

Davidson asks who will they be sending the report to?

Gould responds ASP, TNC, Pete Stacey, and Border Lands.

Collins invites FOSC to share and explain their findings and this opportunity with other ASP staff to increase involvement and awareness.

### **C. ACTION ITEMS**

#### **1. Approve of Meeting Minutes from the June 2, 2015 and July 23, 2015 Meetings**

Weedman moves to approve meeting minutes from June 2, 2015, Tom Skinner seconds. Unanimous approval.

Skinner suggests edits to July 23 minutes. Skinner wants to ensure that the record shows that the following information was provided to the Executive Director at this meeting. He proposes to include: "Skinner said that Director Black was shown a U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) video that explains Sec. 9 of the ESA, and Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) development requirements for an incidental take permit, and referred to the September 2014 meeting that was held with FWS concerning the issuance of a permit for Ross Humphreys to graze cattle on the SRSNA. He quoted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WS) as stating, in an email following the meeting, that "ASP may not allow grazing on the SNA until Ross' HCP is complete."

Then, please replace the next paragraph with:

Skinner reported that Doug Duncan of FWS is currently working with Humphreys on the development of an HCP for grazing to meet federal requirements, as agreed to in the September 2014 meeting. The understanding is that ASP will eventually develop an overall SRSNA management plan with an accompanying HCP that will then replace Humphrey's HCP. If the decision is made now not to issue a grazing permit, then Humphreys and FWS should be informed ASAP.

Chair asks if there is a motion to accept the July 23 minutes with Skinner suggestions implemented. Pape moves to approve the minutes

#### **2. NAPAC will tour and discuss the operations of Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch**

Chair Davidson explains that since ASP leadership could not attend today that NAPAC might be able to translate key findings for ASP decision makers when looking at application of management regimes on properties that may be similar in habitat to Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch (AWRR).

Stitzer comments on the interesting lesson about fire protocols that have to be considered in any kind of burn regime. Collins clarifies that the second best fire mitigation includes chemicals.

Kennedy explains that lehmann lovegrass and other invasives spread significantly and it was found that grazing was not as closely correlated as thought. So, unfortunately, AWRR also experienced the spread of invasives. Managers tried a number of tools to reduce and found that spraying with chemicals on a maintained schedule, one plant at a time is the best.

Skinner reports that other agencies have come to similar conclusions.

Stitzer asks how serious invasive species are at SRSNA? Skinner says that George Rule at University of Arizona has conducted utilization studies on the natural area and conservation easement. He has an idea of composition of species.

Davidson suggests moving the conversation more towards how to explain to ASP decision makers the value of a model like AWRR or the lessons learned from managing grasslands grazed from un-grazed.

Kennedy asks if SRSNA management plan is looking to graze with domestic livestock? Collins answers that is one potential use of the land that has been used in recent years. Kennedy says if it a natural area and it is to be managed as such that is not consistent with livestock grazing.

Weedman expresses his agreement with Kennedy's statement. He explains that the passage of the Heritage Fund in 1991 and the subsequent purchases of state natural areas (SNA) by ASP the purpose, goals, objectives, values of what ASP wants to do with these land resources are unclear. Therefore, NAPAC has been left advising them on an undefined management goal and how to achieve that goal.

Davidson explains the evolution of the SRSNA Management Framework along with a brief history of the last five years on NAPAC.

Pape mentions that the original verbiage created by ASP for SNA when they were acquired states the intent explicitly. Along the lines of what Kennedy was saying, the natural areas are for preservation of the ecology. Davidson explains that this is understood but the issue of grazing continues to be brought up so NAPAC continues to have the opportunity to advise ASP in the clearest, most effective way possible and that ASP can choose what they want.

Kennedy explains the volumes of research on differences of grazed and un-grazed lands but this information is difficult for non-ecologist to interpret. She suggests the book "The View on Bald Hill" by Carl and Jane Bock, professors at the University of Colorado, is a great resource.

Davidson asks about the breadth of AWRR.

Kennedy responds by mentioning research projects from China interested in climate conditions. Also, 8 sites on AWRR used as ecological site descriptions for the Natural Resource Conservancy Services (NRCS). This has an impact on management practices of over 300,000 acres of those ecological sites throughout AZ. Lately, NRCS has had a difficult time finding sites in optimal conditions and thinks that SRSNA may have some sights NRCS could use. Kennedy also mentions Dr. Phil Heilman, Southwest Watershed Research Center, that research at AWRR has direct management implications for over two million acres of grassland habitats in the southwestern United States.

Collins asks how many models like AWRR exist? Kennedy says not very many but names Santa Rita Experimental Range is long standing research area,

Southwestern Research Portal, Northern Arizona University research facility, Coronado and Sevilleta in New Mexico which are primarily chihuahuan desert grasslands, Walnut Gulch. Most have somewhat different ecosystems or focuses.

Pape asks what Kennedy's idea is on the importance of preserving the 3,500 acres of land at SRSNA as one of the few remaining grasslands retaining ecological values in the region?

Kennedy responds by saying as a grassland ecologist its critical! AWRR is not an entity that believes all cattle should be removed from lands but that lands need to be managed knowing that there is an exotic influence. Grazing sets the ecological time clock back depending on how much it was grazed. It's also important to have a large area to understand ecological trends. As an ecological grassland scientist I would be disappointed to lose what SRSNA has to offer for grassland ecology.

Davidson asks if the group has a recommendation or if we want to communicate this information? Collins suggests providing a summary to provide to ASP staff that could not come today.

Kennedy asks what the rationale for the recent grazing was?

Collins explains that there was no staff on the land due to cuts so it provided presence there. Weedman also mentions it was a way to control the grasslands as fire protection.

Kennedy says she agrees that a presence on the land is important but that the Ryan fire burned neighboring cattle ranches that practice both holistic and traditional management, so grazing does not prevent blaze. Fire is a natural process.

Skinner comments on prescribed burning being expensive and lacking manpower. Kennedy says that TNC and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had trainings here that would burn small areas. This effort was put on hold because of natural fires. Prescribed fires could be alternative to allowing fires to burn naturally to reduce fuel. From an ecological standpoint, if lightning strikes let it burn.

Weedman reminds group that this is the same information and direction NAPAC advised ASP on with the white paper provided in SRSNA Management Framework, besides the fact that this is in its history a meridian mixed grass. Weedman argues that NAPAC has explained the natural system of un-grazed grassland for the future opportunity to learn or research the ecology has been a previously proposed model for SRSNA to ASP.

Davidson agrees but says that we need to be able to describe what is happening here in a way that gives it more weight and relevance then a mere grazing permit. How do we give weight to the long-term benefits as keeping it as an ecological reference site that has a much broader impact and a seat at the table in a more global, conservation place then that of a short term grazing lease. Showing ASP the missed opportunity and giving it more weight then we have given to it before.

Casavant suggest that there are economic benefits to this as well in research dollars, grants, eco-tourism will come into those sites where the vision and mission is well managed. When you don't have good management of the ecology you lose the economy, ranchers know this too!

Skinner comments on the fact that when Kennedy was on NAPAC they were discussing similar things. Kennedy says that 9 years ago NAPAC's task revolved around describing what constitutes a natural area.

Kennedy does mention that one challenge is being located so remotely. No Audubon staff nearby. She thinks this is less of a challenge for ASP.

Weedman mentions there are several paradigms on how to get this done and that internal investment is one of them however, ASP needs to decide and invest on this vision, staff, infrastructure that could become self-sufficient in a couple years.

Watkins chimes in on the infrastructure conversation. He states that volunteers are tremendous resources and that the friends group has built several trails and received minimal support. The group is hesitant because they don't get tools, direction, or resources from ASP and they might move on to more stable grounds. Watkins thinks it's important to include volunteers when considering infrastructure.

**Collins mentions that ASP is working on the volunteer program in these areas and would like to hear more ideas on how to improve after the meeting.**

Chair Davidson reiterates the opportunity for NAPAC, in its advisory capacity, to continue to nudge ASP management forward to heave the consistent advice NAPAC has provided over the years but translate it in a new way to which it gives reference to a more broad meaning that extends beyond the natural area itself. I think we should translate some of the important findings, why they matter to the vision for San Rafael and the breadth and greatness of what that is versus whatever the current alternative is.

Chair Davidson proposes to produce a summary about the AWRR and the relevance, opportunities, and why they matter to San Rafael for ASP Executive Director and staff. Stitzer seconds. Unanimous approval. Pape volunteers to head the writing effort and Kennedy says she will be happy to help.

#### **D. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **1. NAPAC will discuss updates on the status of Verde River Greenway State Natural Area (VRGSNA) inventorying.**

Davidson provides a summary of the recent activities with the subcommittee including the two meetings and the creation of maps. **Davidson says she will be creating the maps before she has to retire from NAPAC. Davidson will also see if Santiago can be of assistance in transferring these to GPS files.**

Collins adds that a meeting with Paula Pflapson, ASP's State Archeologist, took place and she was provided the map notes. She has completed the Collings parcel and the others are on her radar. Rockin River is probably her next stop.

Davidson says that in mapping the pressures, values, and resources one of the things that is clear is that because of the threatened and endangered species there is going to have to be some engagement with FWS.

## **2. NAPAC will discuss updates on the status of Sonoita Creek State Natural Area (SCSNA) inventorying**

Weedman says progress is slow but that he inventoried the documents he has and sent out a request within his agency for any documents others might have.

Lauchstedt reports that she went through one of Joanne Roberts, the previous ecologist, folders. There are a lot of documents on various species. Also, cataloged files in Dawn Collins office.

Watkins asks if there has been any progress on the fence Jackson put in on lower Sonoita Creek?

Lauchstedt says that Colt Alford would be the best person to ask since he is the man on the ground out there. We will be seeing him tomorrow for the tour.

Watkins also mentions the trail being in horrible shape due to the floods last year.

Collins says that we have been working with State Land about fencing. When we had staff at SCSNA one of their responsibilities was to maintain fencing but we haven't had staff there since 2008 so **we need to inventory and GPS fencing needs.**

**Kennedy says that sounds like a great project for volunteers. Watkins agrees.**

Davidson asks if there is a volunteer coordinator at ASP? Collins replies yes but the position has been in recent transition.

Stitzer asks Weedman about the water rights, wells, in-stream flow? Weedman can't recall but Collins reminds them that the last they heard was from Bob Sejkora had asked if the protest could be resolved. **Collins says we will absolutely find out where this is when back in office.**

Collins reports that the State Land Department point person for trespassing cattle and 2011 letter, John Schnedman had retired but that she was in communication with Simone Hall. **Collins will follow up with Simone about the report that John Patton was in the process of.** The report was based off of a site visit he had with Colt Alford.

Skinner clarifies that at this point ASP does not know if there was follow up from the 2011 letter. Collins reports that Schnedman says there was no other action taken after the 2011 letter.

Collins also says there has not yet been a meeting scheduled to discuss the Coalmine Springs MOU with Game and Fish. Watkins chimes in that on the Southside of Coalmine Spring the fence has been taken down.

Weedman asks if there is a pipe rail fence around the spring because that was the original plan.

Lauchstedt offers one more update. Candy Bowen and herself attended a watershed restoration meeting and the head of that group and other constituency groups have come together on a grant to have Pete Stacey conduct more rapid stream assessments. Grant went in a month ago. Caleb Weaver, botanist from Border Lands, is in the process of receiving permission for access to harvest seeds along the natural area.

Casavant states that the fencing issue is fundamental to the entire program. Heidi mentions that going through the old files she indicated that cattle trespassing were an issue 9 years ago as well.

Collins updates the group on her recent communication with Tahnee Robertson regarding facilitation of the stakeholder meeting.

Skinner asks Gould what his estimate is on the amount of fencing needed? Gould is not sure but Lauchstedt responds that she saw something in the files from Steve Haas about fencing.

Casavant mentions that Steve was the body charged with maintaining fences and it was still a problem when ASP did have staff down there. Kennedy says that if fences were done to NRCS standards the framework is probably still there it just needs to be repaired.

Skinner asks if landownership issues are the reason why it's taking so long? Casavant responds yes and no. The South side will always be an issue because private lands go all the way to river so you cannot fence this unless approval.

Skinner said yes, but the North side is still not fenced which would save the riparian area a lot of damage from cattle.

Skinner asks if AZ G&F been involved with Coalmine Springs fencing. Weedman responds yes, maintained – no, put money into it – no because of the agreement with ASP that said they were going to oversee it when they had staff. **The MOU needs to be discussed in a long-term perspective.**

**E. REPORTS** – Committee and staff reports may be verbal or written.

Collins reports that Davidson came to ASP and ran the short term grazing lease through decision tool to determine given the information provided in the document what kind of recommendation we could provide. We found that there was conflicting and lacking information within the permit.

Casavant reiterates the findings of the exercise were that the 2014 grazing lease would not have been adequate? Collins clarifies that based off of the decision tool exercise our recommendation would be that there was not adequate information provided to make a recommendation and we would know exactly how much and what information we would need to know in the future to make a well informed decision.

Weedman asks if there was any update on the Governors Boards and Commission press release? Collins reports that there is no new news but as soon as she is informed she will let members know.

#### **F. PROPOSE MEETING DATES**

Staff will Doodle about dates Nov. 16-18 or Dec. 14-16

#### **G. ADJOURNMENT – 2:14pm**