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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 **Wednesday, December 16, 2015 beginning at 2:00 pm at Salt River Project, 1521 N. Project Dr., Tempe, AZ 85281 in the Project Administration Building.**

AGENDA

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

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL – 2:05pm

NAPAC Members Present: Chair; Rebecca Davidson, Bobe Pap, Tom Skinner, Dave Weedman (phone), Linda Stitzer (phone).

Arizona State Parks Staff: Heidi Lauchstedt, Dawn Collins, Brianne Fisher, Bob Casavant (phone), Deputy Director; Jim Keegan.

Keegan gives a brief description of his background and previous work in Wisconsin. He also shares his gratitude to the members of the group for their work. He says that no matter what happens with the Governors' Boards and Commissions we want NAPACs help and expertise.

Collins says there are three members whose terms expire on December 31, 2015. Typically these members would be replaced by three new members in January per the application process but since we are unclear on how we are suppose to move forward we are asking Stitzer, Davidson, and Pape to continue their membership until there is a resolution from the Governors' Boards and Commissions. All three members agree to continue to participate until the conclusion of the Governors process.

B. CALL TO THE PUBLIC – No public in attendance.

C. ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Approve meeting minutes from October 13, 2015 meeting – NAPAC** reviews the minutes and suggests the following changes
 - Clarification on content
 - On page 4 changing 35,000 acres to 3,500 acres
 - On page 4 changing “mandarin” mixed grass to “meridian”

Weedman motions to approve the meeting minutes with discussed changes, Pape seconds. Unanimous approval.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. NAPAC will consider recommendations for San Rafael State Natural Area (SRSNA) –

Subcommittee Chair, Tom Skinner wanted to make sure Keegan was aware of the following documents:

- Natural Areas Policy and Guidelines set forth by Arizona State Parks (ASP) Board - statement of purpose, definition, and management policy
- SRSNA Management Framework - reasons for acquisition
- Audubon Appleton-Whittell - model for land management without cattle
- Board direction of livestock grazing – Permits necessary and a comprehensive natural resource management plan. No grazing shall be allowed unless in benefits the natural values for which the property was acquired

Skinner asks if there are any other documents or items to make relevant.

Chair Davidson asks to take a step back and clarify where everyone is at with this item and if Deputy Director Keegan has any questions.

Keegan states he has no questions right now. He reports meeting with NAPAC members at Picacho Peak, reading through some of the documents provided, and discussing the issue with Collins. At this point, it needs to come down to what we as an agency are doing with these natural areas properties and if we are going to choose to manage them or not. Some serious internal discussion needs to take place. The importance of natural areas and land management is clear but what is not clear is who is the best to do it. I have had some brief conversations with the Director about a natural resources manager or coordinator

Chair Davidson asks if current requests on the Natural Areas - like the one for grazing on San Rafael – will be on hold while ASP evaluates the vision for the areas? She asks how that decision might be made in the near future since the vision is unknown?

Keegan says the short and long term objectives do not always match. There is a push for an annual type of review but being evaluated we will have to make a decision but we want to have input from you guys and we want to have that discussion.

Collins mentions the Appleton-Whittell report NAPAC put together about the longer-term options for the property.

Pape begins presenting the Appleton-Whittell report based from the October 13, 2015 visit NAPAC conducted. Pape gives some background on the Collins explains that since there is so little un-grazed grasslands in the southwest the Appleton-Whittell land serves a reference point. Various members chime in mentioning that the property is a Globally Important Bird area, future economic benefits, and the global research interest.

Casavant says if we decide that ASP is going to move forward with a vision for the natural areas then addressing the “who” could be fairly easy. Who ever we have down there will be critical for any management plan. Cultural resources as well need to be blended with ecologic programs.

Skinner asks if there is anything else on Appleton-Whittell to discuss. Collins mentions that they do have some further detail on how the research ranch is funded through Audobon.

Keegan asks about location. Pape says Elgin, AZ between Serra Vista and Tucson. Davidson asks in a longitudinal sense the distance between Appleton-Whittell and SRSNA? Pape says Appleton- Whittell might be a bit higher in elevation but the lands would have different soil and reference types.

Skinner moves the conversation to other topics concerning SRSNA. He mentions that after NAPAC visited SCSNA concern was brought up by Randy Furnish, Chief of Field Operations at ASP.

The vulnerability of the roof on the house is brought up and it is determined that Casavant will send Keegan the contact information for the suitable vendor he had sent Paul Govino. Keegan states he will follow up on that issue because it is something that can be easily fixed.

Skinner discusses the Picacho Peak meeting and some of the “needs” Keegan identified including inventory of neighboring land owners for possible partners and to establish a statewide natural coordinator. Collins states that she has a list of neighbors for the area.

Skinner asks about the need for a Request for Proposal (RFP) and asks if Humphreys would accept less than a 10-year permit? Skinner asks about the communication with him?

Keegan replies that it is typical for everyone to have an opportunity if the agreement is for more than a year or if it is higher than \$50,000. This will inevitably come into the conversation. Everything I’ve heard and read about Humphrey’s is that he is responsible rancher and he would be a very good partner but no decision has been made yet.

Davidson continues that it is necessary to keep in mind the conundrum that opening up the bidding process would have. ASP would assumedly require the partner to come to ASP with an agreement with Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to address the endangered species and right now Humphrey’s is the only person who has gone through that lengthy/costly process.

Skinner notes the December 4, 2015 meeting with Collins, Fisher, Weedman, Casavant, and himself to draft some comments for the HCP. Fisher notes that a final copy of the comments submitted was sent to all members prior to the meeting. We focused on

limiting the comments to specific items to the draft HCP not the appropriateness of grazing. Collins says we also set aside comments that would be appropriate for a lease agreement if that becomes the chosen route. Collins mentions how grateful she was for the help of the members during this process.

Davidson asks about the turnaround for a final? She asks Skinner to ask Doug Duncan of FWS if there is any follow up directly to ASP on a government-to-government relation basis.

Skinner mentions that the SNA is covered in HCP and would ASP be a signatory. Collins says this is addressed in the comments. Keegan says all activity that will have an impact on our land needs to have our approval.

Skinner notes that there were two HCP drafts. The first did not include ASP land and the later one did. Davidson asks if there was ever a conversation that leads to Humphrey's deciding to include the ASP land?

Collins says there was a conversation with the previous Executive team. They discussed if there was to be a long term lease these would be the responsibilities. Keegan says that is his understanding as well.

Skinner mentions the 2014 teleconference conducted while the HCP was being pursued. Conclusion that ASP was to come up with management plan for the area and ASP was able to replace the standing HCP pertaining to the natural area with the development of another HCP to address the overall management plan. Collins says that is also in the comments that at some point there is an intention to develop a management plan and ASP would submit an HCP.

Davidson asks about a decision-making timeline? Keegan says he needs to prepare what I want to propose to the Director. It's a big issue.

Collins asks if coming up with an aerial site map for the property would be useful? Keegan says he would love for that to happen. Davidson mentions that the management framework should be used.

Davidson asks if the decision tool is going to be used for the new lease? Collins says that she did recommend using the decision tool if a lease was how they were going to move forward.

Collins says that this could be SRSNA working groups task moving forward. A site map could be created to start the conversation with operations about how to get people to places and to educate them without trampling the land. Davidson suggest connecting with Appleton-Whittell to see if there is a researcher interested in the cross connection between resources and recreation and could maybe provide some input.

2. NAPAC will consider recommendations for Verde River Greenway State Natural Area (VRGSNA)

Keegan reports on the Rockin' River open house ASP conducted. ASP was asked to put on legislative tours for the parks. Around 40 people showed up for a day at the ranch and discussed the history, conceptual plans, tours, and river water rights. Attendees included mayors and county supervisors of the surrounding area, friends groups, and other stakeholders concerned with development. ASP has passed along the cost estimate and proposal to various departments. We hope this kind of development helps establish a sustainable model for the agency by altering the current cash flow in a more favorable direction. Hopefully in January the legislators will have good news for us and then we will go back to the conceptual plans and get into the details.

Collins mentions the 2009 resources management plan for Rockin' River. It had zones for sensitivity and the conceptual plans are in line with those zones. Davidson mentions the importance and future conversation that will need to take place about the season of use because of the endanger species.

Davidson continues to discuss the mapping effort the VRGSNA working group was tasked with. The meetings included zoning and listing the natural and cultural resources, partners, existing development, stakeholders, and the pressures on the various properties along the river. Keegan says that kind of inventory is much needed.

At this point Keegan has to leave the meeting and the NAPAC members pull out and discuss the maps that were created.

Davidson says at the follow up meeting for this working group we need to discuss the multiple properties within these identified zones and we could map the sensitive areas like the Jail Trail so that we better manage.

Fisher says the important thing coming out of this meeting was the understanding what the park managers wanted. They would want to use this as a tool to help them communicate with the public where the development or recreation can or cannot be.

Davidson explains the group began by zoning out the different properties that made sense in terms of management issues, potential pressures, and the kinds of recreating that may occur there. The overall map shows that there is a huge extent between areas which George manages all of it. From a resource management perspective, developing these maps can be used as a tool to give legitimacy to decisions regarding development or recreations proposals.

Davidson says that it became clear that cultural resources and endangered species are dispersed everywhere. A refined inventory of these and FWS involvement will be in the future. ASP might want to look at a broad HCP for active management.

George and Max were talking about having some stronger guiding documentation that gives them scientific reasons of what and how it would impact the area.

Davidson points out that on each map the cumulative needs for every property is needed. For instance, a carrying capacity study which using the Forest Service's management recreation system would be a good model to maybe use.

It is decided that at the next meeting we will bring the maps and draw on them for more detail.

3. NAPAC Will Consider Recommendations for Sonoita Creek State Natural Area (SCSNA)

Weedman begins by letting the members know Lauchstedt and himself were meeting tomorrow to continue the fencing inventory plan. I have a draft data collection form to fill out as we are walking and finding fence lines. I've had a conversation with GIS folks about how to best import info into GIS so its usable/shareable when this is all done. Before mid January or early February we will get plan/approach out to everyone to weigh in on any flaws or advice.

Fisher says during last NAPAC meeting the Friends of Sonoita Creek (FOSC) expressed interest in helping with this effort. We had a meeting with the ASP volunteer coordinators and with the help of Weedman and Lauchstedt we can get a plan of attack and split the job with Friends group members.

Collins says that the intent is to map where fencing repairs are needed to propose a cost estimate to operations and resolve some of the issues regarding trespass cattle.

Weedman says another element of this planning effort is different access point and permission to those points. The logistical planning is also needed.

Collins says that we are trying to control the trespass cattle issue not only with keeping them out and repairing the fences but also holding individuals to there lease agreements. She reports on the follow up with the AZ Land Department to discuss the 2011 letter regarding trespass cattle. The last we know is John Patton conducted a site visit and met with Colt but received no report. The Acting Assistant Director of the Natural Resources Division was contacted and he said there would be a more comprehensive site visit-taking place by the end of the year.

Collins also reports on the effort to hold a stakeholder meeting. ASP has been in communication with Tahnee Robertson working with Southwest Decision Resources, which is a competent and valuable resource for a facilitated meeting. We are hoping to have the meeting in spring but have some meetings prior to figure out what ASP hopes to get from the meeting.

Weedman asks about any movement on the AZ Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) and ASP Coalmine Springs Intergovernmental Agreement. Collins says there was some discussion with John Windes to get a meeting scheduled in August but nothing since then. Weedman says Emily from ASP was indicated to take the lead. Collins says that is probably the reason why there has been no movement because she has been out since October. Collins says she will bring her replacement up to speed.

Weedman informs the group about the reorganization of AZGFD. The wildlife areas region is now being placed under the Habitat program management. John Windes will have direct oversight of the land, which was formerly a different person. Hopefully Windes will be a bit more responsive with the IGA. Collins states she will re introduce this issue.

Fisher says she sent all the members the final Rapid Stream Riparian Assessment (RSRA) produced by the FOSC. They will present this at the next NAPAC meeting.

Fisher also reports on the question brought up during the Sonoita Creek site visit in October. There was a question on the water release schedule from the lake and how it affects the stream. A conversation with Bob Sejkora mentioned a study conducted twenty years ago which came up with the rational release schedule based on downstream needs. At the next NAPAC meeting we will invite Bob to discuss the study in more detail.

Lauchstedt says she sent Fisher the press release about the endangered species in the Santa Cruz River which hasn't been found for 10 years because of issues with Nogales water plant fish couldn't live there.

Pape says that when he did the Riparian Assessment down there that was during time pump shut down and just not getting water in that section for that short of time took those mature willows to the ground. They were not killed but stressed by a lack of water there is apparently shallow to bedrock down there and it critical for yellow-billed cuckoo which is something to consider now that it has been listed.

Lauchstedt reports she conducted yellow-billed cuckoo surveys this year from the east end of the lake to the damn down to the confluence. I can provide a report for that.

Skinner asks if the working group will be taking inventory of presence of cattle and destruction of habitat? Lauchstedt says that that kind of information can be included on the data sheet. Weedman mentions that our GIS folks have been trying to put together a geo-database or geo-dictionary schema related to fences for other reasons. They suggested to field test this and Weedman hopes that it is usable for everyone to use and that they could build a collectors app that can be put on a smart phone that they can collect it all with and then you get back to the office and download it to a geo-database. In the off chance this doesn't work I can go out with a pencil and map.

E. REPORTS – Committee and Staff Reports May be Verbal.

1. Fisher reports that we discussed all the items within the discussions above.

F. MEMBER'S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS

Weedman asks if any members heard anything about an update on the navigable determination of the Verde River. No one knows what happen but he asks if anyone has confirmation on it to let him know.

Skinner mentions Tuscon Audobon Society interest in nest boxes for blue birds on the SNA. Collins asks for more information to present to operation staff.

G. PROPOSE MEETING DATES

It was determined that working groups should meet and then have a full on NAPAC meeting.

Doodle poll for February meeting.

H. ADJOURNMENT – 4:26 pm