

BARRY M. GOLDWATER RANGE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (BEC)
and
INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (IEC)

MEETING MINUTES

1. The meeting was held at the Arizona Game and Fish Office, Region V, Tucson, AZ on January 11th, 2023.

IEC members/representatives present:

56th Range Management Office (56 RMO) Director	Chas Buchanan
Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma Conservation Manager	Randy English
Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) – Region IV Supervisor	Mike Sumner
Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Sonoran Field Office	Katie White Bull
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (ORPI) Superintendent	Scott Stonum
Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma Range Department	Jeremy Pennell
MCAS Yuma Conservation Law Enforcement Officer (CLEO)	Richard Cerka
Yuma Sector Public Lands Liaison Agent (PLLA)	Byron Strom

BEC/IEC Admin:

56 RMO BEC Coordinator	Kevin O'Berry
56 RMO Environmental Sciences Management (ESM) Chief	Lisa McCarrick
56 RMO/ESM Biologist	Aaron Alvidrez
56 RMO BEC Administrative Liaison	Susan Neal

Public participants and guests:

Colo. State Univ. – Center for Env. Mgt of Military Lands (CEMML)	Jennie Anderson
CSU CEMML	Kyler McKee
Private Citizen	Dinah Bear
Friends of Cabeza Prieta	Bill Broyles
Private Citizen	Gayle Hartmann

2. Mr. English chaired the meeting, welcomed everyone, and announced that the purpose of the Intergovernmental Executive Committee (IEC) meeting was to facilitate the exchange of views and information regarding the management of the natural and cultural resources on the BMGR. Introductions were made.

3. Environmental Updates: Mr. Mike Sumner gave an update on the pronghorn noting that this time of the year is generally busy. They completed a couple of captures in December with the most recent being in Cabeza Prieta where they successfully captured 42 animals. Some of them were returned into their pens after ear tagging and vaccines. They were able to send six to Mexico to the Pinacate Reserve. This has been something they have been trying to do for quite a while. They did take some animals from Mexico in 2003 or 2004 and those were used in the captive breeding pen. He said they were released yesterday from the soft release pen and they seem to be doing well. The other 12 animals went to the Vekol Valley release pen. There is a doe there that they might be moving back to Cabeza tomorrow. She has a limp and there is concern

about her so they will capture her and evaluate her tomorrow to determine whether she needs to be moved back. In Kofa, they captured 13 of the animals in those pens and they were able to move a group of them to the east arm of YPG and they should be released soon, too. They also captured from the core population in Arizona three wild bucks that were placed in the captive breeding pen on Cabeza to introduce different genetics. Additionally, they did a range wide survey of the core population resulting in an estimated minimum population of 177. This is just the core population from that group south of Interstate 8 and west of 85. That number is up slightly from the year previous. This is surprising given some of the drought conditions and a noted lack of recruitment. Adult mortality is low and there was some improvement that they were not able to account for, but Mr. Sumner said that is largely due to all the participating agencies and recovery efforts supporting habitat measures, new water zone landscape, forage monitoring, and forage enhancement projects. He noted that they did not see a dip similar to what happened in early 2000 when the population really plummeted. They also surveyed the population in the Saucedo area and estimate that population to be about 29 animals. There has been a fair amount of predation in that area, so those numbers were good. The Kofa population survey will happen sometime this month. Mr. Broyles asked if the three wild bucks were captured for genetic reasons and Mr. Sumner confirmed that they were. Ms. Hartmann asked what they did with the bucks and Mr. Sumner stated there were put in the north and south captive breeding pens at Cabeza Prieta.

Mr. O'Berry discussed livestock incursions onto BMGR-E. He stated the 275-foot fence across the 10-mile wash was destroyed when the wash flowed and it has yet to be rebuilt. Some cattle have been seen in the restricted area west of SR85 south of the range 1 road exit as well as in Area B. They work with a local rancher, in particular Jimmy Leon, as they are typically his cattle. The feral cattle are usually much farther east closer to the Tohono O'odham Reservation in Area B. Also, work to build the 18-mile fence along the Area B southern boundary east of Highway 85 continues, and that will also help manage the cattle. Mr. Alvidrez noted that Game and Fish is working on that segment eastward along that boundary and that the partnership with the local ranchers is great. In Area B the biggest concern is that when it does dry up the cattle start tearing up the wildlife water sources. No burros have been seen lately. Mr. Broyles stated in the Air Force's defense that 10-mile wash has been a problem since 1940. Mr. O'Berry stated that our newest Fish and Wildlife service CLEO is exploring other options for that, such as an electric fence line.

4. Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) 5 Year Review Plan: The existing INRMP was finalized in 2018 and is due for the five-year update. Ms. Anderson and Mr. McKee with Colorado State University (CSU) Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands (CEMML) provided a project update. Ms. Anderson was the lead on the last update. She stated that not only are the BMGR East and West required to maintain a management plan for compliance, but under the Military Land Withdrawal Act a public report and several public meetings are also required as part of the process. They were awarded the agreement to begin helping BMGR again with updating the plan and creating a new public report and they have been doing a lot of data gathering. They have had their team, Kyler and Emily, go down to the range to find out what the priorities are and what updates are needed to the plan. They are trying to gather sufficient information to begin updating those documents and to create the public report. As part of this process, there are several public outreach meetings with one of them being the IEC meeting. Ms. Anderson noted that one meeting that is not listed on the handout is for a

meeting with the people who are tasked with reviewing the draft INRMP and providing comments. There will be a meeting for the regulators from the Arizona Game and Fish and US Fish and Wildlife so they will discuss what the priorities are. The stakeholder meeting will be in Tucson in January and then after that the next public meeting will be in May in Ajo at the International Sonoran Desert Alliance Learning Center and another one in Yuma at the county library in August and the date has not been settled yet. They will try to have meetings spread out across the region to help people attend and the format of the meetings is informal. They will be sending out postcards to everyone identified as a POC here or has interest in management of the range. There will be an announcement in the Federal Register that this INRMP update is happening and then newspaper announcements will be done. The compliance due date is on October 24th. Mr. Broyles asked if an analysis or report on how the military viewed the last five years as well as their accomplishments so they can read this ahead of time. Ms. Anderson stated the public report is supposed to be what they did over the last five years and then what they plan to do for the next five years so the draft report will be that analysis. The last public report should have a synopsis of what happened the previous five years and what they were doing this year. Ms. Hartmann raised the question of road maintenance, new roads, across the border traffic, border patrol traffic and would like a clear discussion as to what is being done about the damage to the roads. Ms. Anderson stated that there was quite a bit of discussion on roads that were closed during the last INRMP and that the BMGR was doing a study on the effects of dragging. Mr. Alvidrez stated that they will look at all the roads for public access areas as well as the restricted areas with the goal of consolidating all updates in the new plan. Ms. Hartmann stated that in the Camino area the road has gotten very wide and just keeps getting wider and wider and there has been discussion about trying to address it and she does not know if any of that has happened. Mr. English stated that they are still looking at ways to recover the recent damage to the Camino. Mr. O'Berry stated that roads were the biggest issue for the original INRMP back in 2006 and there is a lot of high-level agency discussion about that, but they find now in the management of the land that there are a couple of trails needed to access certain locations that are project locations. They are looking at adding some of those tracks into the official administrative road network on the east side and there are a couple of roads that Border Patrol has traditionally used. Mr. O'Berry provided a map of the areas highlighted in green as areas that were considered. Mr. Buchanan stated that there is continuing assessment of the roads. Mr. O'Berry stated that he sees roads as one of the major issues along with invasive species. Ms. Hartmann asked if there is an issue with buffelgrass out on the range and Ms. McCarrick stated that they are continuously monitoring it. Mr. Alvidrez stated that recent aerial imagery would be a great tool to look at the roads. Ms. Bear also brought up looking at the roads. She wanted to know if there is a plan for remediating and restoring the Camino as much as possible and some of the other roads that have been damaged. She asked about the NEPA compliance for the update. Ms. Anderson stated that NEPA was done when the INRMP was first developed and for new projects along the way. NEPA would only be required following the INRMP update for any new projects.

5. Agency Progress Reports:

a. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan stated it seems quiet, but that is deceptive. While the INRMP 5-year review progresses, regular projects continue within the INRMP so the invasive species actions that they are trying to take, the bird studies that are ongoing, the soil studies and the erosion studies are still ongoing. He noted that they are working on getting ATV training and

that Arizona Game and Fish is helping us out with that. They also continue to see the migrants coming across. Mr. O'Berry and Mr. Buchanan will be taking the 56th Operations Group Commander down to a meeting with the Tohono O'odham legislative council on Friday. The MOU with the tribe has lapsed, yet continues in good faith. They are on the verge of getting it updated and re-signed. Mr. Broyles asked if the weather stations are online on the internet and Ms. McCarrick stated that they are. He asked for an update on the long-range cannon project and Mr. Buchanan stated the project is quiet because they have heard little from Yuma Proving Ground over the past two years, awaiting the land withdrawal extension process completion. Mr. Broyles asked Mr. Buchanan if they have been approached by the desalination people about the route they are going to use. Mr. Buchanan stated he is aware of it but not officially. Mr. Broyles asked off the record if it can go on a highway easement along 85. He also asked about abandoned wells, and Mr. Buchanan stated three had been capped in 2022 and three more were planned for 2023. Mr. Buchanan stated that they will continue to assess the abandoned wells that are out there and then start addressing each one of them. He stated that there are criteria from Arizona Department of Water Resources and this is a statewide program that abandoned wells need to be appropriately abandoned instead of just being left open due to a danger problem. Mr. Broyles made the comment that some of the abandoned ones have caved in and some of the wells are 80-100 years old including on BMGR-West. Ms. McCarrick stated that they are doing a systematic approach on what they have out there, what is the condition of it, what level of survey they have done so far and what they still need to do. Mr. Broyles asked if the Sonoran Desert National Monument is working on this too. Ms. White Bull stated they are working on repairing wells and that they have scheduled three.

b. Lower Sonoran Field Office: Ms. White Bull stated they hired two wildlife biologists. One will be coming on board mid-February and the other one they have no official start date yet. They are currently riding our 45 miles of border fence between BLM and the Tohono O'odham Nation and repairing the holes. Ms. Hartmann asked about any plans for offices. Ms. White Bull stated they currently have no office and are currently building a campground and eventually will be building a visitor's center.

c. Arizona Game and Fish: Mr. Sumner stated they are expecting to have a new wildlife manager and they have two new commissioners, one appointed just recently and one appointed early last fall. They are working on assessing and prioritizing water in the region at the state level. This past summer highlighted even more how important some of these older systems are and they are reevaluating catchment designs and capacities with the goal of increasing efficiency in water collection.

d. ORPI: Mr. Stonum stated that they have a lot of projects going on. They also had several staff assist with the pronghorn surveys. He stated they will have a new wildlife biologist position coming open soon.

e. BMGR-West: Mr. English noted their most tenured range warden is retiring on January 31st, but a new selection has already been made and they hope to be a full staff soon. Mr. Pennell noted that the cost of inflation has really affected the ability to implement projects as material costs have increased. He noted that they had to cancel funded projects because the actual cost of implementation had quadrupled from the original plans.

f. Border Patrol: Mr. Strom gave both the law enforcement update and the agency progress report. He noted that they are very busy in Yuma although they are not the busiest sector anymore. Most of their manpower is being utilized in Yuma Station's area of responsibility where the majority of the apprehensions are also happening. Unfortunately, they have been experiencing some border violence. There was an officer involved shooting in December and last week there were two technology agents working along the Morelos Dam that were shot at. Thankfully, none of the agents were hurt in either incident. On the Barry M. Goldwater Range-West, from fiscal year 2023 to the present they have had 7,000 known entries and 3,000 apprehensions, including the Cabeza Prieta in Yuma Sector. He discussed the status of Camp Grip. They suspected a lot of drugs being smuggled through Wellton Station's area of responsibility. They had a significant seizure on the 5th of December where they encountered 40 kilos of meth in the Aguilas. They are continuing to see multiple breaches of the border wall on Cabeza Prieta between Monuments 180 and 175. As the breaches are cut, they are repaired, but they cannot keep up. There are some talks about autonomous surveillance (AST) towers that are going to go up on the range to help agents identify threats and help them to respond faster with as minimal impact as possible. That is still in talks right now with our headquarters, CBP Environmental, the Range and the Cabeza Prieta. The AST towers are mobile towers and they have about a 30 x 30 footprint. They have had some leadership changes. Chief Clem retired on the 31st of December. They have an interim chief. Her name is Patricia McGurk-Daniel. She comes from the San Diego sector. Yuma sector is the only southern border sector at this point without a horse patrol unit. They have funding in place now. They have a supervisor out of Wellton Station that has been trained. They are putting a unit together at Yuma sector. Ajo has had them for years. Agent Strom stated they have disbanded them because of the heat in the summer and that they can only work at night. They are going to try and figure it out in the Yuma sector. With the last bill that was signed into law there were some changes made to their retirement so with their TSP they can retire earlier now without penalty. They foresee a mass exodus here in the next couple of years of agents in the Yuma sector across the board. Ajo is giving a recruiting incentive. They are having issues recruiting especially in hard to fill spots. Mr. Broyles asked about the fate of Camp Grip and the boundary camp. Mr. Strom stated there are talks about demobilizing Camp Grip. They are aware of it and talking about it. It costs a lot of money to run the camp. Camp Grip has been there since 2004. Ms. Hartmann asked how Border Patrol knows they had 7,000 entries and 3,000 apprehensions. Agent Strom responded they have means to collect that data. He stated those figures are from October 1st through January 11th. Mr. Stonum stated that for Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, just for the month of December, they had just over 4,500 apprehensions. That includes the Highway 85 corridor. Ms. Hartmann asked about the statistics on rescues and Mr. Strom stated that on the BMGR they had four deaths this year and a lot of rescues. He noted there is a network of location signs done by the Missing Migrant Program around the sector within the BMGR and along the river corridor that are strategically placed that have cell service.

6. Public Participant Inputs:

a. Mr. Broyles asked about the flat-tail lizard habitat relocation and if it has been successful. Mr. English stated it has not been unsuccessful, but they are still working to do that. They have some hurdles and some money issues, but they are still looking.

b. Ms. Bear speculated about information on visitation over the winter on the range, and it is down because of the situation at the border.

7. Action Items Review:

a. For BMGR East, Mr. O'Berry stated they will provide Mr. Broyles the names of the abandoned wells and try to keep him apprised of that project.

b. Mr. Strom will provide the number of rescues for Border Patrol.

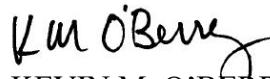
c. Explore different ways to advertise IEC meetings and the possibility of combining the IEC meeting the same day as the public meeting for the INRMP which is scheduled for May 17, 2023.

8. The next BEC-IEC will take place on May 10th, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. in Ajo.

9. Mr. English expressed appreciation to the public for their participation and inputs. The IEC meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.



SUSAN D. NEAL, GS-6, DAF
BEC Recorder



KEVIN M. O'BERRY, GS-13, DAF
IEC Coordinator