

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

MEETING MINUTES

1. The meeting was held at the Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center, Cholla conference room, Ajo, AZ on May 10th, 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
Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma Range Department	Jeremy Pennell
CPNWR Manager	Rijk Morawe
PAIC Ajo Station	Joel Garcia
UCFWS – Assigned CLEO BMGR	Angelo Gonzales
USMC LEO	Lauren Allmon

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/Public Affairs	Darlene Seltmann
56 RMO/Natural Resource Planner	Chris Black
56 RMO/Wildlife Biologist	Emily Ernst
56 RMO/Archaeologist	Adrienne Rankin
56 RMO BEC Administrative Liaison	Susan Neal

Public participants and guests:

Aguilas del Desierto SAR	Gene O'Meara
Cellular Rescue	Mike Mekelburg
Friends of the Sonoran Desert	Roger McManus
ISDA	Aaron Cooper
Private Citizen	Gayle Hartmann
Private Citizen	Rick Martynec
Private Citizen	Sandy Martynec
Ajo Resident	Scott Warren
CEMML	Emily Howe

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 noted they are just coming out of a really good spring. Forage conditions are starting to dry out but still a long way from where they were last year about this time. They have had a couple mortalities at the Cabeza pen. A 2-year-old doe died with no predation that they could see, and a fawn may have been stillborn, but they are not sure. There was also a mortality at the Kofa pen from a fawn that found its way out of the pen and got separated from the doe. A coyote got into the Cabeza pen around February and seems to have made its way out and has not returned, and a bobcat that made its way into the Kofa pen and has since made its way in and out a few times. No predations from either of those events occurred that they are aware of. There are some new fawns in the wild herds. The buck that had moved west of the Gilas was hanging around the foothills area and the golf course in that area and made its way back down to the border, bounced around back and forth and returned to Mohawk Valley. Farther east on the Vekol side they had four bucks from that recent release this past winter that had moved east onto tribal land and then have since returned to join up with the other wild animals there. There were two mortalities there attributed to mountain lions, one at the interstate and one south of the soft release pen in the Vekol Valley. They just completed a couple water redevelopments just south of Ajo on BLM lands. Rijk Morawe stated a couple of the does released on the Pinacate had died, one likely from a capture and one possibly from a poaching event. The population estimate for the Cabeza unit is about 211 animals, with a target population of 225. The estimate for the Kofa subunit is 212, with a target of 150, so it is pretty good out there. The Saucedo estimate is 37 animals, with a target of 150. In Mexico the Pinacate estimate/target is 102/150, and for the Quitovac 450/449. He discussed possible wildlife corridors that would connect animals from the south to the north. They have been looking at some wildlife crossings over Highway 8. Roger McManus asked what the relationship is with the pronghorn efforts here and in Mexico. Mr. Morawe stated they are still interfaced, and it is all about the resources. Mr. McManus also asked if there are any plans for exchanging animals. Mr. Morawe stated there are no plans that he has heard of.

4. Law Enforcement Update: Joel Garcia, PAIC at the Ajo Station, stated they have seen increasing migrant encounters. They have made some adjustments in their operations to ensure that they have transportation in order to process them. He stated the Ajo Station does not have any intent to release anyone in Ajo. With the end of Title 42 they are standing by to see what the flow will be. Lauren Allmon noted for BMGR West they are seeing an increase in groups ranging anywhere from between small family size units all the way up into the 40's. She expects those numbers to rise as Title 42 is lifted and they are currently in the process of working with other agencies in the area to make sure that is handled properly. She stated that most of the crossings are coming through Monuments 198 and 193. Ms. Hartmann asked if staff was out there at the border where people are crossing. Ms. Allmon stated that Border Patrol patrols in that area. Ms. Allmon states that their major mission is conservation law enforcement. Ms. Hartmann stated in the past there have been time periods when the Border Patrol would mostly stay well north of the border itself, but with the increased number of people she assumes that border patrol staff is currently on the border. Most Ajo Station manpower is dedicated to encountering migrants right at the port of entry and the checkpoint in order to process them and transport them. The majority of migrant encounters are at or around the border.

5. Cellular Rescue Proposal on BMGR-E: Mr. Buchanan discussed a proposal from a group out of California to install a temporary cellular phone tower in the Growler Valley.

Mr. Hunter proposed the idea to put some tactical cell phone towers out in the desert to cover dead zones. They are going through the environmental process of where the towers will be located. Originally, they wanted it at Uken Tank. Through their analysis, they have moved it a little bit to the west to provide distance from the water and feed stations to avoid any sort of disturbance or interaction with the pronghorn. The technology is solar powered. It is connected via Starlink so no other infrastructure is required. It is somewhat of a test case to see how it would work. What they found through their research is most migrants are traveling with cell phones, but they cannot use them because they don't have any cell service, so this is an attempt to give them that cell service. They anticipate having the environmental work done in the next two or three weeks and then give them the go ahead to put down there. They are trying to determine which carrier they are going to use. Mr. McManus asked about the environmental work. Mr. Buchanan stated they are considering a categorical exclusion. He said they will put up a fence around the tower.

6. BMGR-E invasive plants observations/treatments: Emily Ernst, wildlife biologist, highlighted the different plants that are invasive to the BMGR-E in a pamphlet and noted that stinknet from the Phoenix area is working its way to Tucson and has been spotted along the SR-85 corridor. They are working with AZGFD to deal with invasives on the range. They are pulling the stinknet as that is the best way to stop it from spreading and they are trying to keep it off the range. They have not had much expansion of buffelgrass on BMGR-East, though it is still seen along the SR-85 corridor. They are still working with ADOT to spray along the highways. They also have AZGFD going out to the public use areas and doing surveys to see where the invasive plants are located. She notes that if you go on GIS cloud you can see how the invasive plants are being treated. Mr. Pennell stated they will have a buffelgrass pull on the 20th. Ms. Hartmann brought up the bitter cucumber as being a new invasive. Ms. Ernst noted they have focused on buffelgrass and stinknet lately. Ms. Ernst mentioned the stinknet.org website where sightings across Arizona can be reported. This enables the potential opportunity for land managers to attempt to pull it to prevent spread.

7. Integrated Natural Resources Mgt. Plan (INRMP) 5 Year Review Progress/Timeline: Mr. Buchanan stated they are in the process of their formal five-year review. There is an annual review, but every five years they do a formal review which includes the public in looking at the major programs they are currently focused on along with future plans. Mr. Alvidrez stated there is a 30-day public review on August 11th and an additional meeting in Yuma at the Yuma County library on August 24th. Postcards have been sent to interested parties with meeting dates and information on how to comment.

8. Agency Progress Reports:

a. BMGR-West: Mr. English noted they are moving the permit program to a new website, RecAccess, and will no longer be using iSportsman. It is a similar web-based system. They think it is going to be more user friendly. They are still working on the details. They are hoping it will be working by July 1st and are working to get the message out to the public. They will have signs out at the boundaries on the range.

b. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan stated that operationally things remain the same. Ms. Seltmann, public affairs, noted she has a newsletter that will be published quarterly or semiannually.

c. BLM: Ms. White Bull stated they had collected two tons of trash out of the Table Top area.

d. US Fish & Wildlife: Mr. Morawe stated they are striving to consolidate radio infrastructure on Childs Mountain to one tower up there. He discussed refuge manning, trash removal, and fire restrictions and reporting.

9. Public Participant Inputs:

a. Mr. Mekelberg of Ajo commented that he heard of a scam where some groups are warning migrant crossers that it is illegal to carry currency across the border. They then attempt to retrieve any money left by migrants as they cross the border.

b. Mr. McManus asked about the status of the berms on the Camino. Mr. English stated they are still looking at options for additional restoration along the Camino. They are trying to get funding from DoD and other sources. There is some climate change money floating around they may be able to leverage for this.

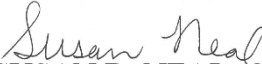
10. Action Item Review:


a. Mr. O'Berry noted they were trying to make a push, post-pandemic, to reinvigorate the IEC meetings. There were times that they had 30 or more public participants at these meetings. They will continue efforts to advertise the meetings. Mrs. Hartman noted that they had more people show up for the meetings in the past and she does not understand why the numbers have gone down.

b. The next INRMP meeting in Yuma will be on August 24th, 2023.

11. The next BEC-IEC will take place on September 13th, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. in Yuma AZGFD.

12. Mr. English expressed appreciation to the public for their participation and inputs. The IEC meeting adjourned at 5:29 p.m.


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


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