

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 10th, 2024.

IEC members/representatives present:

56th Range Management Office (56 RMO) Director	Chas Buchanan
Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) – Region IV Supervisor	Mike Sumner
AZGFD	Jill Bright
Ajo Station PLLA	Paul A. Herrera
BLM Lower Sonoran Field Office Manager	Tyler Lindsey
Acting SD Monument Manager and Assistant Field Manager	Matthew Drahnak
Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma Range Department	Jeremy Pennell
ORPI Superintendent	Scott Stonum
UCFWS-ES Tucson	Julie McIntyre

BEC/IEC Admin:

56 RMO/ESM	Lisa McCarrick
56 RMO BEC Administrative Liaison	Susan Neal

Public participants and guests:

Friends of the Sonoran Desert	Roger McManus
Private Citizen	Dinah Bear
Private Citizen	Gayle Hartmann
Center for Biological Diversity	Laiken Jordahl
Juan Diez de Bonilla	Del Mar Environmental and Construction Services, Inc.
Nayeli Diez de Bonilla	Del Mar Environmental and Construction Services, Inc.

2. Mr. Pennell 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.

3. Environmental Updates:

a. Pronghorn Update: Ms. Jill Bright stated the pronghorns were released from the two pens in December. From the Cabeza pen nine pronghorns went to the Saucedo herd east of 85 on the BMGR, eight to Organ Pipe and from Cabeza five went to YPG and then from the Kofa pen another nine so 14 in total. Everything went well as there were no injuries or problems. They typically hold them for about three weeks to let them acclimate and to make sure the drugs are wearing off and that there are no injuries. The Organ Pipe herd got released on the 3rd of January and the Saucedo herd got released on the 4th of January. The YPG group released themselves at the end of December after the rain. The pen area got a bunch of rain about two

and a half inches. The fences came down and they managed to get out a couple of days before Christmas. They now have collars and they are all doing well. The group from Organ Pipe moved about six miles northwest and has remained in a group. The Saucedo herd has mostly remained together and there is one buck that goes on and off by himself. The YPG herd is in the vicinity of the pen and four or five of them have made their way back to King Valley. They did a survey of the Saucedo herd in November. They saw two groups totaling 18 animals. Their estimate over there is 20. They surveyed the Vekol area. They missed all the pronghorn there but with telemetry they think there is 16-18 in the herd. Ms. Bright stated this year normally they would have done the Sonoran survey in Mexico, but they did not do it over concerns for security down there. In the Yuma office, she was the pronghorn specialist. She was promoted to the territorial program manager. Russell Gardner is now the pronghorn specialist. At the Cabeza pen, they lost their specialist there and one of their techs, so they have one of three people out there now. They are in the process of trying to hire people. At the Kofa pen, they have one technician there. They are trying to get all the positions filled. Mr. Buchanan asked about the Kofa release if they were released to YPG. Ms. Bright stated the pen is on the east arm of YPG and they just came out of there. Some of them are out in Kofa now. Mr. McManus asked about how the Mexican pronghorn are doing. Ms. Bright answered she has not really heard very much about it. She stated last year they moved six pronghorns to the Pinacate and they were all collared and four of them died and two of them got poached.

b. Livestock: Mr. Buchanan gave an update on trespass livestock. They do not allow for grazing on the BMGR and they continue to monitor the livestock. Most of it that they see is down near the southern border near I-85. The livestock get in there and they like the grass. There is no water there, so they come back out and go somewhere else for water. It is a continuing battle as it can be a safety concern especially if they are standing in the middle of a road. They are continually working on repairing the southern line fence, but the real issue is if someone makes a break in the fence. Mr. O'Berry's yearly project was to repair the fence, but he is not with the BMGR anymore and every time he tried it failed. Mr. Buchanan says it is something they just continue to monitor. They also still deal with the rancher down there. South of Area B is a public access area. Some livestock comes up from the Nation and they will get into and trash some of the water catchments. This is concerning because that is the area of Acuna cactus. They are still waiting to onboard the next CLEO who has already been hired but he is just not there yet. One of their tasks is to help with the trespass livestock.

4. Law Enforcement Update:

a. Ajo Station: Mr. Herrera stated the border at the port of entry was recently closed due to humanitarian problems because of the cold weather. It was just recently opened. The numbers have been up and down. November's numbers are 242,418 across the southern borders and that is up about 10,000+ roughly from last year. The numbers are moving up and down. On the south side the violence is going up. Ms. Hartmann asked if the port of entry was closed this morning and if it was for anything significant. Mr. Herrera stated it was closed for 15 minutes this morning. He stated he does not have the full breakdown, but it looks like it had nothing to do with anything on the American side, but it was all southside violence. It was close enough to the port that they did deem it a safety hazard and they shut it down. Ms. Hartmann asked about what section were the 242,418 occurred and Mr. Herrera stated it was all along the southern border. December's numbers should be coming out soon.

b. AZGFD: Mr. Sumner gave an update that just adjacent to the range along the I-85 corridor they are seeing an increase in reports of poaching activity, and they continue to investigate those. Ms. Hartmann asked about poaching of what and Mr. Sumner stated deer primarily. Mr. McManus asked if the migrants are coming through where the water and the roads are located. Mr. Herrera stated they are crossing all over and not being consistent. Mr. McManus asked if the migrants are not necessarily invasive but asylum seekers. Mr. Herrera stated they are getting both.

c. ORPI: They meet daily with Border Patrol as it has been a hot zone for a while now. This has been going on with the asylum seekers since the spring so they are getting close to a year now. Mr. Stonum stated that they are happy to see the numbers are going down. Over the last several weeks through November and into December they were seeing up to 2000 people a day just within the 5-10 miles in either direction of the port of entry all through the new wall sections. Humane Borders just reissued their annual permit for water stations. Six water stations have been added along the border where the asylum seekers often turn themselves in. They have had a lot of coordination with Border Patrol at their field stations within Organ Pipe for getting shelters up and port-a-potties. They have also entered an agreement with ISDA for garbage pickup where a lot of refuse was accumulating. They have seen a lot of activity interior to the park with load-ups including at their campground. He noted they concentrate a lot of their safety messaging and traffic control on Highway 85.

d. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan stated they are getting their second CLEO here in the next month. He agreed that with the border closing the traffic was nice along I-85. They are paying attention to Spot Road which is their fence line. Hunting on the range is only allowed in certain areas as Area B is not open for hunting.

e. BMGR-West: Mr. Pennell stated that obviously with the nice weather now and the recent influx of winter visitors in the Yuma area, they have had to enforce the regulations on the range. They are also in the process of hiring a new CLEO. Their agents have been getting the word out about the new permitting system and have been busy replacing signage.

f. BLM: Mr. Lindsey gave a brief update on BLM noting they are having problems with overstays past the 14-day limit. They are trying to stick to their regulations which is 14 days and then go 25 miles to another BLM parcel. All those people want to move, but they are not asking for any help. They just want to live on the land so that has taken up a lot of their attention. Mr. McManus asked if he could provide any update on the Ajo plan and Mr. Lindsey replied that he has no update, and they are waiting on Congressional action which is currently in negotiation. Mr. Hartmann asked if people are refusing to leave or what exactly happened. Mr. Lindsey answered that these people may not be able to leave, or they may not have anywhere to go. They are trying to provide some wraparound services, requesting nonprofits, social workers, things of that nature to see what they can do.

5. 25 Echo Project: Mr. Pennell gave the update on the 25 Echo project. They have looked at the funding that was available and Mr. English really wanted to implement something on the ground with this initial shot at funding. When they were scoping the project out and then working with contractors it became quickly apparent that they did not really have the right data.

They knew that this would be a big project and that it would take a phased approach going forward. Mr. Pennell wrote a scope of work and submitted it to their contract people. He asked them to design and collect all the data he needs for them to then pursue additional funding to implement. He also wants the road to meet the military training mission and to restore hydrological integrity across the landscape. The road needs to be able to support Border Patrol's mission and it needs to be able to support the 10,000 recreator traffic that they have out there every year. He asked for the road to be as low maintenance as possible and to make it look as primitive as possible.

Juan and Nayeli Diez de Bonilla with Del Mar Environmental and Construction Services, Inc. were awarded the contract to come up with a design to get them moving forward. The period of performance for this project is 730 days from the date of the award which was September 1st so roughly two years and the purpose of this meeting is to gather input. Nayeli Diez Bonilla presented pictures of the road showing that it is a dirt road running through the Cabeza Prieta and there has been increased usage over the past couple of years, especially Border Patrol. The road has gotten a little deeper because of grating and a little wider as well. The deepening and widening of the road have had adverse hydrological and environmental effects, such as when it rains it floods. The restoration objectives for this project are twofold. First, they want to restore the washes and preserve the natural ecosystem and the historical water routes. They also want to preserve the access that is provided by this road and to be able to have two vehicles driving side by side on this road. There are also some design features or goals they want to keep with enhancing of the native vegetation and reduce carbon pollution. Mr. McManus asked if they are looking to have it be a two-lane road and she answered yes. Their goal is to have the road look as primitive as possible while matching the existing photography on both sides of the pathways using ideally existing on-site materials so there are some dirt piles from the grating that are available. They want the road to blend in on both sides. The design should also be durable so it should be able to withstand military training and 10,000 annual recreational visitors for public use and any Border Patrol use. They also want it to be low maintenance. For design, they will do an evaluation and a feasibility study for the entire 30 miles of dirt pathways that lead to this road. They will do a detailed analysis on any different alternatives to reach the desired end state of returning the flow across the dirt pathways so exploring as many options as possible. They will create a phasing plan with costs for each phase properly adjusted for inflation so they stay on budget and then quantifying the environmental impact of the dirt road so getting an estimate of how much water is being diverted from the natural pathways, how much drier it is on one side of the road as compared to the other and then using these numbers they can calculate how much carbon is being sequestered or not being sequestered due to the drying out of the vegetation. At the end they will have a lot of lessons learned from this project which can be applied to the entire road network. She showed a map of the road down the middle with the mountain range and the ephemeral washes in blue and yellow. They went out in November 2023 using drones and they surveyed this road. She presented the photos taken where they showed the main issue was this wash is a lot greener on the west side of the road as compared to the east and that is a direct result of that water flooding the road instead of continuing on its natural path.

She asked the public for any input. Mr. McManus asked about one of the priorities that they mentioned was removing the birds from the site and if they anticipate they will secure old flow between the washes and the arroyos from one side to the other. Mr. Juan Diez de Bonilla stated that would be the purpose. He stated they need to elevate the road because of the areas are like

2-3 feet below on either side of the road so they will have to import, fill and would have to look at the major washes and try to attack those first to raise the road. This will be part of the phasing portion. Mr. McManus asked in the final analysis how the future shape of the water flow will be. Mr. Diez de Bonilla stated they will raise the road and as you come up to the road there will be a crossing of those dry riverbeds. There will be a swell and then at the bottom of that swell will be the right height/elevation on either side of the road to keep that water flowing. There will be gradual slopes coming down the road and the water hopefully will stay there. Mr. Pennell added their portion that they are working on is the design phase so the input from this group and then they also have a team of hydrologists and solar technicians all looking at the broader landscape perspective and how this applies. There is a big push in the Navy and Marine Corps to implement nature-based solutions. Ms. Bear asked if they will be formalizing an EA. Mr. Pennell answered when it comes to implementation, they will make sure they have everything in place. Ms. Hartmann asked about the timing and when they will have it done. Mr. Pennell stated the funding they have now is just for the design and planning of the road. Ms. Hartmann is very pleased that this is moving forward. Mr. Pennell stated it is his hope that the design techniques that they come up with and the lessons learned will be applicable to all the land management. Mr. Stonum offered his one strong recommendation would be that assuming a great design is developed and implemented and that there is a great new road that works with nature is that it can get ruined in one day by an untrained grater operator. He recommended that a well-constructed SOP should be developed for anybody operating heavy equipment to how to maintain the road. Mr. McManus asked about appropriations for the implementation. Mr. Pennell answered that they are just looking at the options available to the Marine Corps and what funding avenues they would have to pursue. Mr. Buchanan stated he is very interested in what they are doing. He is very interested to see how they assess the wash crossings and then asked what the right way is to do maintenance on a road. Mr. Pennell is hoping that by tackling a lot of these design characteristics that it then becomes cheaper for somebody else to go do it because they would have most of the design, they would just have to be made applicable to where they are operating. Ms. McIntyre noted one of their wildlife refuges near the border, the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge, that had a natural river that used to have running water and they tried to build a road over it. They put culverts in and then they packed down a lot of soil and it seemed stable and great and what happened was they had a huge flood event and all that soil got washed half a mile downstream and clogged all the other fish habitat areas. Her concern is that they need to look at some of these areas during a storm and see how the strong hydrological forces can really move the soil more than you might expect. Ms. Hartmann noted in recent years there have been a number of efforts to resolve erosion problems by building a check dam or very small- scale kind of activities like a higher watershed and it might be something to look into. Mr. McManus noted they should look at what research activities are initiated to follow up on some of these questions and that with wild climate change they are seeing some scary considerations with regards to desert fauna. Mr. Buchanan asked how much maintenance was done on that road and what sort of problems were seen. Mr. Pennell stated that construction was usually necessary after a rainstorm but not a lot of heavy maintenance. Mr. McManus stated they needed Border Patrol to be integrated into the process since they use the road a lot.

6. Agency Progress Reports:

- a. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan stated operationally it is normal. The President did sign the

NDAAs for 2024 which included the withdrawal extension language the way they had hoped it to be as there were two different versions by the House and Senate. The language was fixed and the BMGR stays withdrawn for 25 years and they are good now until 2049. The 5-year formal INRMP review is wrapped up and it is out for final signatures for the BMGR portion of it. The Regional Airspace Optimization Plan still being worked on. It is an EIS to address multiple different airspaces within the state of Arizona. That second round draft is out for them to look at. They have a public draft coming up soon. RecAccess is working very well. They are redoing the safety video. Mr. Buchanan gave an update on the Cell on Wheels that a humanitarian group wants to put down in the STAC near Uken Tank. That is still being held up by the real estate office because they think this is a commercial sale endeavor to make money and it is not. It is really donated cell for humanitarian reasons. He also discussed the status of the cell tower on top of Childs Mountain. That effort is still ongoing. It is sitting with the Air Force mainly because overall they want to reduce the footprint up there for the Cabeza and Fish and Wildlife Service, but there is still a need for some infrastructure up there to include providing cell service for everybody. That endeavor talks about getting rid of two towers and building a commercial tower and then everybody gets on the commercial tower. The issue on the Air Force side is that is weird because they don't normally do that and they have their own stuff. Mr. Buchanan is trying to find the office that helps them say whether or not they can do that. At the wing, they don't see a real problem with it so long as they have the assurances of access, security and deconfliction. Ms. McCarrick stated that this is stinknet season. They are going out currently for surveying. They currently are hiring for an archaeologist and planner. Ms. Hartmann asked if the majority of the F-35's would be assigned to other bases and not Arizona. Mr. Buchanan responded that is correct. The Air Force picked Luke as the premier training base for the F-35. Ms. Hartmann asked how does Davis-Monthan come into play. D-M has been around a long time and has been A-10 centric. Most of the A-10's will be leaving D-M this year and then Luke will lose basically a squadron of F-16's this year.

b. BLM: Mr. Lindsey gave a brief update that they are doing the road maintenance off Vekol Valley Road in February. They are working with the Tohono O'odham Nation on some cattle trespass at Ryan's Tank in South Vekol. He introduced Mr. Matthew Drahnak as the Sonoran Desert Monument Manager acting currently replacing Ms. Katie White-Bull. They have many vacancies.

c. Fish & Wildlife: Ms. McIntyre gave the updates. They listed the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl as threatened, and they are in the process of moving forward with proposing critical habitat. She does not have a date. They still have it in the Tucson office right now. It needs to go to their regional office headquarters and that usually takes up to a full month so late March at the very earliest. They never know how long their headquarters office might want to hold onto that.

d. AZGFD: Mr. Sumner stated they are working to fill the many vacancies. In terms of water projects, they are looking at some of their older sheep waters that are made out of fiberglass that have been on the landscape for a long time and they are concerned they will see some catastrophic failures on those. They are looking at ways to replace them. Mr. Buchanan asked if he knows the status of the water catchments and he said it is still spotty. The fields are looking pretty good. They have had a few catchments that have not filled up. The catchment on

the BMGR that is filled specifically for pronghorn that is north of the interstate caught a lot of water and is full due to the storm.

e. ORPI: Mr. Stonum stated now they are losing their botanist. They entered into an interagency agreement with Customs and Border Protection for mitigations and studies which all of the affected DOI agencies and forest service have done recently for parks and public lands that were impacted by border construction. That means about three million dollars roughly for Organ Pipe and Coronado and that covers a wide range of things from wildlife impact studies, invasive weed control, archaeological site stabilization and some other random topics along those impacted areas and that is in addition to work that CBP will be doing to do the direct restoration of sites like the laydown yards, well sites and things like that were impacted. For Organ Pipe, a lot of that is going to be controlling noxious and invasive weeds along the border. They replaced the liner at the Quitobaquito pond. It is finally full and has an outflow. He has not heard anything new regarding the Rocky Point desalinization plant other than the proponent submitted their right of way application to BLM. BLM is still waiting to get some final pieces on cost recovery before they would go into the EIS stage. There was only one potential route identified which is up by the I-85 corridor. This has all been put out in the press over the last 6-9 months ago. The last status report received from BLM was that they received the application but they did not have the pieces from the proponent they need to go to the next step.

f. Border Patrol: Mr. Herrera stated they are currently adapting to what is being thrown at them. They are currently hiring with a bonus.

g. BMGR-West: Mr. Pennell gave the spring WTI dates of March 20th through April 20th. On the natural resources side, they are implementing some of their normal recurring projects so supply funding for the flat-tail horned lizard occupancy study. They have funded Game and Fish for the Sonoran Pronghorn recovery. They implemented a two-year inventory study to look at bats across the BMGR-West. A couple of years ago they implemented funding the game and fish to implement a distribution and demography study for a new undescribed species known as the Mohawk Dunes fringe-toed lizard and that is wrapping up. They are looking forward to getting the information. Since they went live with RecAccess there has been 6,409 accounts and 6,358 permits issued.

7. Public Participant Inputs:

a. Ms. Dinah Bear asked if there could be more meetings through Zoom or Teams as everyone cannot always make the meetings. She asked for an update on Camp Grip. Mr. Herrera stated the last word he received was they are going to shut it down.

b. Mr. Laiken Jordahl asked about the status of the border wall lighting and if it is operational. Mr. Herrera stated that he would have to get back with him on that because he does not have an answer for that.

c. Ms. Hartmann stated she is very pleased with the Camino Restoration Project starting and is looking to see how it proceeds.

8. Action Item Review:


a. Mr. Pennell asked if anyone has any input on 25 Echo to email him.


b. Request to have meetings that can be attended remotely with proper technology. Mr. Buchanan stated that the venue and the connectivity have a lot to do with having a good meeting on both sides.

c. Mr. Lindsey for BLM offered to host one of the BEC-IEC meetings because they have a new office in Phoenix, Arizona where they have integrated sound.

9. The next BEC-IEC will take place on May 8th, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. TBD.

10. Mr. Pennell expressed appreciation to the public for their participation and inputs. The IEC meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.


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


CHARLES E. BUCHANAN, GS-14, DAF
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