

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

MEETING MINUTES

1. The meeting was held at the Sonoran Desert Inn & Conference Center, 55 Orilla Avenue, Ajo, AZ on May 8th, 2024.

IEC members/representatives present:

56th Range Management Office (56 RMO) Director	Chas Buchanan
MCAS Yuma	Pat Barber
MCASY CLEO	Richard Cerka
AZGFD Wildlife Manager Units 39, 48 and part of 40B	Travis Clarkson
MCAS Yuma Conservation Manager	Randy English
Wellton Station PLLA	Valerie Marquez
Wellton Station WC	Pete Murillo
Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) – Region IV Supervisor	Mike Sumner
AZGFD Sonoran Pronghorn Project Lead Yuma Office	Russell Gardner
Ajo Station WC	Darryl Yauch

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
ISDA	M. Lorraine Eiler
Aguilas del Desierto SAR	Gene O'Meara
San Lucy District Council	Eleanor Ortega

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.

3. Environmental Updates:

Pronghorn Update: Mr. Russell Gardner, Sonoran Pronghorn project lead out of the Yuma office with AZGFD, stated the Cabeza pen had some heavy rain damage during January that allowed the herds to mix a little bit. The south herd ended up getting a little larger. The area out there received about 4-1/2 inches of rain between January and April. The first fawns were seen in the Cabeza pen on the 23rd in the north half and the 25th in the south half. They are up to 11 fawns in the north herd, and they have three in the south herd. They also had a predation issue in the south herd in the spring which was taken care of. Moving onto the wild groups, there were eight of the Organ Pipe group released back in January to the Organ Pipe Monument. They did have two mortalities in March and April of two does both three years old. One was

killed by unknown causes and the other was mountain lion predation. On the telemetry flight last month there were three fawns seen in Organ Pipe, and those fawns were not with the mortality does. On Area B, nine pronghorn were released in January, with no mortalities in that group. One fawn was seen with them in March. They have integrated into the other wild groups that were already there. The Vekol group is doing well. Eleven pronghorn in total were seen there in the last telemetry flight also in April. They were seen with one fawn as well in the Vekol group. On the Kofa side, the Kofa pen is doing very well, receiving 2-1/2 inches of rain in the spring. They have 11 fawns currently in the Kofa pen. They released 14 pronghorn this year with the wild pronghorn in the Kofa and YPG areas. They had one buck mortality in January also of unknown causes, but the rest of the herd is doing great. There was a telemetry flight over Kofa on the 29th of March and seven fawns were seen with those groups up there. They have also recently seen three fawns with the wild pronghorn near the Kofa pen (there is water adjacent the pen). The conditions are good and there seems to be good recruitment, so they are hoping that the weather remains favorable, and they get rain early to keep these fawns going. For the Cabeza, they also had some great help from their partners at the Fish & Wildlife Service and the Air Force. They were able to coordinate and get water hauled to Uken Tank. Uken was not damaged but unfortunately the rainfall did not create a proper pattern to fill the drinker naturally. They hauled 11.5 thousand gallons at the beginning of April, utilizing six water trailers and one 4000-gallon water truck. There is a new water put in on the Air Force side. It is water 584.

Mr. Buchanan added that the migration of the pronghorn that they see in the wintertime tend to float north into the north and south TAC impact areas so every morning they have their pronghorn spotters out there identifying where they are and then there are protocols where they advertise the location(s) to close targets in proximity. Lately, they have been clustered in both North and South TAC but from an operational perspective it is still relatively low impact.

Mr. McManus asked for any updates on what is happening with the herds in Mexico. Mr. Gardner stated they still have two collared animals in Mexico that are doing well. They have been in the vicinity of the release pen down there and have not moved very far from it, but they are still doing well. They are hoping they can get permission to fly surveys again, but as of last year they were not able to go for safety concerns.

4. Law Enforcement Update:

a. Wellton Station: Mr. Murillo stated they are having a big class of EMTs and they are getting ready to ramp up for the summer. Last summer was a very busy rescue season for them and so they expect this summer to be no different. They are putting out a new rescue beacon by Garcia Well.

b. Ajo Station: Mr. Yauch stated it is pretty much the same for them gearing up for the summer months. They also currently have an EMT class under way. They are still dealing with the same historical traffic patterns they have been dealing with. Mr. McManus asked if there have been any new decisions on increasing lighting along the border wall. Mr. Yauch replied he has not heard of any updates. Mr. Buchanan asked if there is any activity with respect to the border wall or is it just sitting as is (?). His response: it is just sitting "as is" for now. Mr. English stated he has seen some plans from Border Patrol headquarters implying they are going

to do some safety improvements to make things safer, for example making gates operational and some other things, but he is not sure of the extent.

c. AZGFD: Mr. Clarkson has noticed some traffic in the past along unit 40A and part of 40B. He has been doing some investigation on poaching that are ongoing and they are getting back into water hauling season. As of last year, they have hauled (he believes) over 100,000 gallons of water for wildlife in units 40A and 39 and part of 40B. They worked with the Town of Gila Bend to expand the town pond which took place this last year. Up until October there has been no fishing at the town of Gila Bend, but now they have fishing there. He is working with the Gila River Indian Community and the Tohono O'odham Nation as well. Mr. Charles Schwartz stated he is trying to start up the Ajo Sportsmen's Club in town. They work with the state, and they are pushing for water resources for the wildlife. Last year they hauled 47,000 gallons of water. They did two drinkers last year and just finished rebuilding the second one this year. Mr. McManus asked if they had any interaction with a humanitarian group called Humane Borders. Mr. Schwartz answered a little bit. Mr. McManus noted they do a fantastic job on maintaining water stations and they are focused on people, but he knows some of the people on the Board would be very interested in talking to him about wildlife.

d. BMGR-West: Mr. English stated Mr. Cerka just hired his final CLEO officer and they have a full staff of four. Mr. Cerka also put one of his subordinates in for an award and that person was selected as the installation employee of the quarter and then as the installation employee of the year.

e. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan stated he had nothing new to report on the law enforcement side. They are now up to two CLEO officers.

5. 25 Echo Project: Mr. Barber discussed that 25 Echo is a dirt road on the BMGR West that runs on the east side and parallel to the Gila Mountains. It is a high traffic road for the public, range operations and Border Patrol. Over time maintenance has caused the road to be below the desert ground in many areas. Since it is very wide and parallel to the mountain, the waters come off the mountains and it either pools or channels into the road. They are moving forward with a couple of proposals that were developed to rehabilitate/refurbish the road. Proposals are not approved yet, currently in higher echelon review. There is a plan to work in two phases. One is based on a lot of the comments to take a landscape view of it, fill in the data gap, make sure that anything they try to do is based on the geographic hydrologic data modeling of what will happen to the road if they go in and do work, then view the models to preplan the project of what they might do. The second project would be integrated with the first as a kind of an experimental design while they are doing that project. They may identify a couple of areas to go do some restoration that they can evaluate. The long-term goal is to get a solution that can be efficiently maintained and provide safe transportation. Mr. McManus stated it is good news because as they have all discussed before the adverse impacts of diverting that water along that huge stretch of roads would have a long-term impact if not fixed. One thing he would ask about is why there was not a study for the options of how to go about doing it. It would be positive to get that in front of the public and to see if it would qualify for NEPA. Mr. Barber replied the proposal is being reviewed and it has not been funded. Mr. McManus emphasized that they would be very happy to engage the other groups in promoting public support. Mr. English noted he is guessing the timeline of the phases of the study will probably line up close to some of the BEC-IEC

meetings so may be at the next one they will have clearer update and then at some point they will have an actual plan that the public could look at.

6. Erosion Control on BMGR East: Ms. McCarrick discussed they have a few different projects that they have been dealing with. Overall, they did develop a best management practice for road maintenance. They are integrating best practices, but it is an ongoing effort to try to keep the roads from getting wider, getting deeper, having a cut and then also getting washed out. Another project that they are still dealing with is the Range 1 road washout from a while ago. They did a lot of surveys and at this point are looking at how can they prevent it from getting washed out again. They have hired engineers to decide what could work, offering a few different ideas. They are hoping to have this wrapped into an environmental assessment that they can bring out to the public sometime this summer. At Aux 8, they have an archaeological site that they have been protecting for quite some time. Around 2015, wattles were placed to protect it. They have done a effectiveness study, relooked at the situation and consulted to determine what they could do to protect these sites and if they should be doing anything more. The conclusion, through consultation. Was to continue leveraging wattles as they did before (and they have done that). They have about 25% of the site protected by wattles. They are trying to budget to get the rest of the wattles in and do it in-house. The sites that were most at risk are protected now.

Mr. McManus asked if she could explain what a wattle is. Ms. McCarrick explained that it is a bunch of hay that is protected in a big roll and then you stake it down and when the water goes through it keeps it from undercutting and digging in so they actually act like a small ditch in the dirt right near an area where they want the water to go around instead of through and it lasts a pretty long time. She noted you will see it along the highways a lot of times up on the road sides to prevent erosion. Mr. Omera states he sees a lot of gravel out there and that it must be really expensive on Camino Diablo. Mr. English replied it is very expensive to maintain. Mr. Buchanan emphasized they are all now required to look at climate change and the effect on our environment. He noted that a lot of the problems they are seeing are a result of very intense storms and buckets of water, something the desert just can't handle. Mr. English highlighted that since climate change is a big issue they are able to obtain climate change funding. One project that he brought up was the current wildlife waters were not built with the storage capacity needed to hold water all summer in the current climate. One of the projects that he came up with and got funding for was to work with Game & Fish to see if they could address some of the issues with the capacity of the water tanks. Mr. Sumner stated that their hauling liabilities all seem to be tied to volume. If they can get these larger capacity systems built and filled up, they can weather those drier periods and the next big storm will fill it up. They have had systems that have collected upwards of 1600 gallons or more in a single storm event. They also have a list of catchments that they are hoping to redevelop and create new capacity as well as make two or three new pronghorn waters in areas where there currently are not waters available. Mr. English notes it benefits everyone because the less they must haul water to Sheep Mountain with a helicopter the less they are clogging airspace.

Mr. McManus stated as an aside one thing that would be very useful is a consolidation of the rain data that the BMGR has had over the years. He emphasized that the summaries of that data over the long period that it has been collected would be very informative for establishing what is happening to rainfall in this region. He noted it would be great if they can get that consolidated and available so people can take a look at it and may support a lot of the work that has been

discussed. Mr. English said he would get with Lisa because Mr. Chris Black is the one who has been historically housing the data. Now that BMGR East and BMGR West have stations using satellite connection, the data is uploaded real-time to a website that he believes is available to the public and Lisa affirmed it is. Mr. English stated that you should be able to see the current data, but as far as getting the historical data he will have to work with Chris.

7. Agency Progress Reports:

a. BMGR-East: Mr. Buchanan gave the update that operationally they are holding steady and continuing to produce pilots. The forecast is for them to at least lose one F-16 squadron this year, but they will backfill with another F-35 squadron. From a natural and cultural perspective, one of the things that they are concerned about is the invasive species particularly stinknet as it migrates. They don't want to see it migrate, but it is hard to stop. He is worried about it being a fuel for the wildland fires. They have talked before about the humanitarian effort to put a cell phone tower on wheels down near Uken Tank. He just talked to Mr. John Hunter and he is still pursuing the project. It is residing with the Air Force in their real estate office. Mr. Buchanan does not know whether they are going to allow placement of the Cell on Wheels on their land. Operationally they don't see it to be an impact. There is a benefit from the humanitarian standpoint as it will provide coverage in an area that has no coverage. They are still working on that, but he does not have any estimated time of when the Air Force would give an answer.

b. BMGR-West: Mr. English emphasized they finalized their INRMP with the BMGR update and he believes it is posted on the MCAS Yuma website.

c. Border Patrol: No updates.

d. AZGFD: Mr. Sumner noted they will be adding an officer to one of their vacant districts coming December. He stated there have been a couple of sightings of stinknet in the Yuma area. One of the other things they are doing with the Marine Corps funding is to put these remote sensing devices on most of their waters down there, especially the ones that are hard to get to and to hike to. It will give them real time water volumes and it will also collect rainfall data for them at those sites so they can determine how effective the systems are or if they need to make changes to do a better job at collecting rainwater. The Yuma Region has been a source of population for a lot of sheep translocations around the state and to other states as well for bighorn sheep. They are looking at other factors and making decisions in terms of what data will drive them to move sheep from one location to another. One of those has to do with disease exposure and as a result they are doing a lot of disease sampling in these areas.

8. Public Participant Inputs:

a. Ms. M. Lorraine Eiler stated she invited San Lucy District Council Eleanor Ortega because of the issues with trespass cattle. Mr. Buchanan responded that most of the cattle that they see is on their side of the BMGR East which would be the southeast corner of Area B. He has not seen nor heard of any issues this year. What they worry about with the cattle is them harming the endangered Acuna cactus in the area or the water catchments.

b. Mr. McManus emphasized among the larger environmental community their focus is on

border issues and there is increasing concern about a return to lighting the border wall. The amount of lighting that he has been reading about is that if it is ever put in would have a huge impact on wildlife in the region. He noted about holes being made in the border wall that are constantly being repaired. Mr. English stated they have concerns about the lighting too because their pilots have to fly with night vision goggles, and they can't do that with light shining in their face.


c. Mr. O'Meara with Aguilas del Desierto SAR brought up about search and rescue work. He noted it is mostly recovery work as people are walking through the desert and one of them gets sick and gets left behind. He noted there is no government organization that goes out there on behalf of the families of people that have disappeared. He states that their group has been pretty good, and they appreciate support from the government when they can get it. He states that the Air Force has been fantastic in their support.


9. Action Item Review:

- a. Weather station brief and a consolidation of the data.
- b. Update on 25 Echo project.

10. The next BEC-IEC will take place on September 11th, 2024, at AZGFD in Yuma.

11. Mr. English expressed appreciation to the public for their participation and inputs. The IEC meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.


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


CHARLES E. BUCHANAN, GS-14, DAF
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