

Diablo Trust Recreation Working Group  
Meeting Notes  
April 19, 2021 10.30 am

Present: Lucinda Andreani, Bob Prosser, Judy Prosser, Kari Roberg, Kit Metzger, Diana Kessler, DeAnna Bindley, Becki Ross, Wolf Gumerman, Jim Driscoll, Matt Eberhart, Nate Ragan, Tim Holt, Steve Cassady, Nick Hall, Sasha Stortz, Jed Botsford, Rick Shore, Diana Kessler, Ellen Parish, Lisa Bolton, Heather Green, Carl Taylor, Stephen Williams, Alix Skelpsa, David Wessel

Ellen opened the meeting with introductions and a welcome.

The next agenda item was a presentation from Lucinda. She said recreation has increased over time, with impacts from OHV users and others. We are not alone as impacts have occurred over a number of years throughout the intermountain west. We should look at Federal, State as well as local opportunities and approaches to deal with recreation impacts. There are specific opportunities now to put systems in place to better manage recreation. For example, Utah initiated a fee system attached to vehicle registrations to better manage OHVs. Although no system is perfect, this system focused on enforcement, education, communication, and working with land management agencies. We could work with the recreation industry for education e.g. trash and behavior. She suggested working with other communities who have been dealing with this for longer periods and to look at joint funding of multiple programs. This could possibly assist with maintenance of ranch roads. She also suggested working at the intermountain west level.

Ellen asked if Lucinda had access to the Utah program. Lucinda said Jonathan Sheffield is the contact and she will connect Ellen and Jonathan.

Matt said he (AZ State Parks) works with state and Federal programs and he can look into what is working in other areas as well. Funds are available through State Parks for motorized and non-motorized objectives. They hold grant workshops about every 2 months. Grants are focused on education, ground disturbances, and protection for cultural resources and wildlife habitat. Some grants need to be tied to official trails or trailheads.

Bob gave the next presentation and commended Lucinda for outlining the issues at hand. He provided a look back in time to gain perspective on road issues. During the 1960's-80's, the Forest Service invested time and money into designing and surfacing Forest Service roads because they were needed for timber operations. This resulted in a huge volume of roads but the Forest Service was never really in the road business. BarTBar has about 65 miles of road in a road maintenance agreement however little surface work has been done since around the 80's and there has been significant erosion and use since then. There is a need to prioritize, maintain and surface these roads and time is of the essence. Covid has been a tipping point. Non-holiday use is high and causing damage but big weekends and elk hunts bring even larger numbers. Carrying capacity needs to be set but how? Should there be a carrying capacity for recreation just as there is for livestock? This is bound to be confrontational but is there room for everyone at the same time? Ten years ago, when a recreation plan was developed for the Diablo Trust area, there was no idea what the recreation use would be now.

Lucinda added that once the timber industry left, the County stepped in but there was little funding except from the Secure Rural Schools Act. Revenues are now being collected from the Great American Outdoors Act. Phase 1 dollars are being distributed to already identified projects however there might be potential in phase 2 to identify where the next round of funds go. Perhaps some funds could be dedicated to re-surfacing. County has developed two new cinder pits, as a source for re-surfacing materials. All it takes is money. Some dollars are being distributed to the Forest Service with a focus on the Stoneman Lake area and Kaibab NF.

Lisa added that in the last active outdoor season, fifteen livestock were struck by cars. She wondered how many wildlife animals were hit. Captain Shore, Chief Livestock Officer, said that livestock officers can do a road kill assessment so rancher can get reimbursed if they find out who killed the animal but there are considerations relative to which statutes can get enforced and jurisdiction of the road where the collision happened (forest roads vs. county roads etc.). There are also issues of camping within 1/8 mile of a water (State Law states ¼ mile). This affects livestock and wildlife watering. Becki mentioned that they asked the Forest Service to close an area to illegal camping around Juniper Tank (in the Sedona area) for 3 weeks while the cattle are in that pasture. Forest Service response has been slow. Consequently, cows are under-utilizing the portion of the pasture with higher people use and over-utilizing the pasture portion with less human activity. Judy mentioned that the AZ Game and Fish Department unit manager for the BarTBar area has been quick to respond to similar issues. Becki said she would follow up with the counterpart in her area.

Kari started the next presentation with some data from a recent survey of overnight use. The survey used hotel data occupancy and found 54% occupancy during Covid compared to 67% occupancy pre-Covid (October-December 2020). Some of the main visitor activities were visits to national and state parks as well as hiking and backpacking. Additional data is on website or from Kari. Ellen asked how do they get their messages to recreationists? Kari replied that they have a customizable tool kit that uses social media, digital advertising, and major outlets such as Outside Magazine. Alix added that they have webinars they could share. Ellen said we would be happy to share their webinars and information on the Diablo Trust website and that economic impacts are important considerations. Jed mentioned the Leave No Trace program has a non-motorized emphasis and that the Forest Service has additional program tiered to motorized use.

Kit and Diana started the next presentation describing recreation conditions on their part of Diablo Trust. The nine-mile main access road is not surfaced and connects to the 211 road. In the season, camping along the road is like an aluminum fence with multiple vehicles, RVs, fire pits, and garbage. Each campsite is about 2 acres in size and knapweed is being established and distributed. Forty of these camps are in the first 6 miles. The main use period is about April 1-Dec 10 with holidays and weekends drawing bigger crowds. This camping corridor becomes a movement barrier for cattle and wildlife. Some people speed yet on same road there are kids – creating a safety issue. There have been three cattle hit by vehicles. Because the campground at Kinnikinick Lake has been closed, people drive their vehicles with boats back and forth from camp to lake sometimes multiple times a day. There is increased use before a hunt when people go and check their webcams. People could disperse if there were more places to camp. One pasture is no longer used due to recreation use. State and private lands has lighter use, mainly in winter and fall. Possible solution is to develop some common-sense information about rules on dirt roads that could be put in Game and Fish or other publications. Would like to see some dollars for road maintenance come to Coconino County such as is being

done with agreements with Maricopa County. It could help to have a central place for garbage so that garbage around camps would be reduced. Ellen mentioned that the hours and location of local transfer stations at Mormon Lake and Happy Jack could be better advertised and perhaps there could be free dump days. Lisa asked if this information could be attached to existing signs such as the campfire restriction signs put up by the Forest Service. Judy said that the Forest Boundary sign could be a place for information. Also the intersection of Forest Roads 211 and 82 could be a good place because there is room and no existing sign. Tim mentioned that using a term other than transfer station would be good because many people have garbage picked up from their homes and are not familiar with the term.

The last presentation was DeAnna on the recreation situation in Sedona. There is massive tourism along with big rental companies, ATV rentals and lots of damage. There has been a shift to individual vehicles rather than group use on the roads due to Covid. Issues: dust, noise, erosion, increased risk of fires, and off-road use. Some of the private businesses are trying to organize to deal with the problem. It's been slow working with the Forest Service to resolve issues. 2020 has been worse compared to previous years. Neighborhood access has been reduced in some areas causing people to use non-restricted areas even more. In one day, 320 vehicles were counted on the road. There is increased use on holidays. An arborist has looked into the dust issue and confirmed that dust is killing hundreds of trees. Other concerns are noise levels and the effects of dust on visibility and resident health. Even though some of these roads are maintained 4 times a year, it is still insufficient. People using OHVs off-road are creating donuts around trees and causing resource impacts. DeAnna thinks many people are renting vehicles while on vacation and are not concerned with or have little information about effects of their use to residents and resources. She has a Save the Mountain video on YouTube. Lisa asked what have been the most effective tools? DeAnna said she has had limited effectiveness with talking to rental companies and there has been little enforcement mainly because there are so few officers.

Lisa and Ellen thanked the group for their participation and asked the group what they needed from Diablo Trust and who else can we involve? Jed suggested adding an OHV community representative and having someone to spread the word within the dispersed camping community. Matt said that State Parks has started a dealership group and he can reach out to those groups. Lisa and Heather asked if it was legal to add a sign to already existing Forest Service sign and what would be the procedures for getting signs up. Jed said he could look into it re: procedures, needed agreements, etc. and would probably need the number, GPS location, and content of signs. There might be Forest Service design standards to use. Matt said State Parks has \$10,000 for OHV related grants but there are sideboards for grant approval relating to location and existing markers. Judy asked about adding more information to signs like noise, speed limits – in addition to transfer station information. Jed said he would look into it. Ellen said maybe we could have some more information at next meeting.

Wolf Gumerman said Backcountry Hunters and Anglers has an existing program for OHV signage which has been used mainly on BLM lands. He will share examples with the group.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm