

Recreation Working Group  
Meeting Notes  
May 17, 2021

Attendees: Bob Prosser, -T- Ranch/Diablo Trust  
Kari Roberg, AZ Department of Tourism  
Kit Metzger, Flying M Ranch/Diablo Trust  
Becki Ross, Rancher  
Matt Eberhart, AZ State Parks and Trails  
Nate Ragan, AZ Game and Fish Department  
Tim Holt, AZ Game and Fish Department  
Sasha Stortz, National Forest Foundation  
Jed Botsford, US Forest Service  
Ellen Parish, Diablo Trust  
Lisa Bolton, Diablo Trust  
Stephen Williams, Diablo Trust  
Alix Skelpsa, AZ Department of Tourism  
David Wessel, Diablo Trust  
Bridget Roth, US Forest Service  
Stephanie Teskey, AZ Department of Agriculture  
Jacqueline Thomas, AZ State land Department  
Joey Dahms, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Wolf Gumerman, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers  
Gerrit Boeck, Coconino County Sheriff's Office  
Nick Mustoe, US Forest Service  
Matt McGrath, US Forest Service  
Linda Wadleigh, US Forest Service  
Mandy Roesch, US Forest Service  
Diana Kessler, Flying M Ranch/Diablo Trust

Ellen opened the meeting by stating that the recreation working group is not a Diablo Trust group, but is open to all who have an interest in finding solutions to recreational issues. Everyone's input is vital.

Lisa stated that the webinar would be recorded for the benefit of the note taker.

Ellen provided background on two Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) rallies that were held recently at Mormon Lake. The first was for vendors of OHV equipment and was sponsored by Arizona Off Road Promoters. The second was sponsored by an Oregon group called HooptieX. Its main event was a timed race with all types of vehicles entered. This group is noted for the good will it generates by its trash cleanups, as it hauls tons of trash from the areas it uses. Matt Eberhart was in attendance for both events and recorded 490 booth visits in two days. The most prevalent question from booth visitors was, "Where can I ride?" He distributed brochures that contained that information. He also interacted with the Forest Service and Coconino County Sheriff's Office representatives who were present and informed them about his agency's law enforcement grant opportunities.

Tim Holt gave a power point presentation entitled "OHV Management – Northern Arizona", which emphasized education and enforcement. He stated that a Memorial Day OHV saturation patrol was conducted in cooperation with the Forest Service and Coconino County Sheriff's Office. The purpose stressed safety and prevention of off-road cross-country travel. The Wednesday prior to the OHV patrol, a littering law enforcement patrol was conducted on the Red Rock District of the Coconino National Forest. Before and after documentation was used in the enforcement effort.

The breakdown of OHV funding by agency is as follows: ASP&T 42%, AGFD 25%, ADOT 30% and ASLD 3%. Michael White, AGFD's OHV Coordinator, is looking at potential revisions to how the AGFD's program is conducted. There are seven full time OHV enforcement officers at AGFD.

Tim presented a series of "the worst of the worst" slides demonstrating rangeland and wildlife habitat damage by OHVs on Forest Service and State Trust land. The aerial photographs were taken by AGFD fixed wing aircraft while on patrol. The photos provided graphic evidence of route proliferation and widening, and spaghetti road networks near dirt stock tanks and large group campsites. Unsupervised juveniles were the major cause of this damage near the large group campsites. Berm jumping was documented at an AGFD waterfowl project, as was OHV track building with picks and shovels at a desert location. The lack of a land ethic and education was suggested as the reason for this behavior.

Tim offered that this power point presentation would be shown to the meeting of the Northern Arizona Limited Jurisdiction Justice Court Officials in Page this week. The overturning of a recent case in which parents were cited for failure to supervise their children, who caused OHV damage, was the impetus for the education of Justices of the Peace, as the Justice Courts are where such citations are presented by law enforcement officers. Generally, juveniles under 16 can operate an OHV on public land and parents cannot be held responsible. The legislative side is complicated and a legislative change is needed. A similar education effort is needed regarding the no camping within one quarter mile of a livestock water. This is subject to interpretation depending on where the next closest viable water source is, and the Court's determination as to what is a "reasonable" distance.

Matt asked if the meadow areas are federal, private or State Trust in ownership, and if fencing along the roads to prevent cross country travel would be possible. Tim responded that the land status was Forest Service and State Trust land for the meadow areas and desert areas, respectively. And, that fencing was possible when a wildlife friendly fence is constructed.

The terms Glamis Camp and Cluster Camp was used to refer to the group camps. Nate informed us that the Glamis Camp term had its origin in California where recreationists were used to camping and riding on the sand dunes without restrictions. What changed the use pattern was the distance to travel, the expense, the congestion, the crowds and the impact of Covid restrictions. The new pattern is to head to northern Arizona in the summer and the desert areas in Arizona in the winter with your friends and OHVs. Recreationists now think that the National Forests are similar to Glamis...open land.

Matt observed that California has designated State of California OHV recreation areas with a variety of tracks, obstacles, jumps and trails. He feels that if designations are made for play areas riders will make their own. Jed stated that the Forest Service could apply for a grant in association with the Southwest Conservation Corps, who would do the work, but that this

would be an added workload. Clearances would be needed and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) could be a logjam. Bridget stated that long term maintenance is needed once fences go in and this is an issue for the Forest Service. In addition, fencing and other engineering controls need thought and planning. NEPA should be inclusive and not disenfranchise other recreational users. Fencing is one tool.

Dave asked is there was a way to quantify the level of damage. Tim responded that AGFD has not done this.

Bob reminded the group that there was more than just the off-road damage. There was damage to the roads themselves that will take hauled material and culverts to rectify. Travel management planning ended dispersed camping and embraced designated camping. This changed the culture of campers and made the road system the trail system. The volume of users has increased and it is time to take this increase into account. Roads need to be added to the discussion. Jed said he was not sure how to answer those comments. Planning is based on opportunity and what can be provided. The current use is not considered. Bridget stated that a road maintenance permit is needed. These permits are issued to entities, not companies, and allows for maintenance to the degree that the permit allows.

Wolf suggested advertising enforcement saturation patrols in the hope that it would reduce violations. Tim related this to boating enforcement and press releases about DUI. It is being done. He spoke from experience that the recreation community is texting one another that enforcement is taking place when officers are seen on patrol.

Mandy sked if the registration fees for OHVs could be raised and the proceeds dedicated to road and trail maintenance. Matt responded "no." Grant funding is used for that purpose. He needs people to apply for the grants he has to offer as he is long on funds, but short on applicants. Non-profit organizations and 501(c)3 non-governmental organizations can partner with the Forest Service through a Memorandum of Agreement and manage the grant. ASP&T has three trail crews under contract that can do the work. They are "on call" contractors who can provide quotes about costs. OHV decal dollars can be used to pay for archaeological clearances. Fencing projects are more difficult due to the need for such clearances.

Dave asked if a programmatic approval could be done for trail work or fence work. Jed responded that NEPA varies depending on the project and location. Programmatic or Categorical Exclusions are decided based on complexity. Projects that are phased in through a number of years are to be disclosed in the NEPA document. Bridget stated that NEPA communicates to the entire suite of users. She suggested the group bring in other voices now to help identify a proposed action.

Lisa presented a series of slides that summarized the lessons learned from the previous Recreation Work Group meetings. All of the minutes, power point presentations and other information presented at prior meetings is available through the Diablo Trust website. As for Next Steps, Kit suggested creating several small groups to deal with such items as enforcement and education, having permittees mapping damages areas via a smart Phone. David suggested a NEPA subgroup.

Ellen reinforced that others are looking for help with recreation issues, too. She encouraged each of us to reach out to contacts we might know from other user groups, such as birders, equestrians and vendors. Vendors have a stake in keeping the forests open.

Next meeting: June 7, 2021.