

Northern Arizona Recreation Working Group
Meeting Notes
June 7, 2021 10:30 a.m.

ATTENDEES:

De Anna Bindley	Sedona Resident
Lisa Bolton	Diablo Trust
Jim Driscoll	Coconino County Sheriff
Matt Eberhart	AZ State Parks & Trails
Heather Green	Diablo Trust
Tim Holt	AZ Game and Fish Department
Ellen Parish	Diablo Trust
Kari Roberg	AZ Office of Tourism
Nate Ragan	AZ Game and Fish Department
Bridget Roth	US Forest Service
Mandy Roesch	US Forest Service
Sasha Stortz	National Forest Foundation
Alix Skelpsa	AZ Office of Tourism
Wendy Lotze	AZ Trail Association
Scott Gold	Forever Resorts, Mormon Lake Lodge
Brian Poturalski	US Forest Service
Carl Taylor	Diablo Trust
Bret Axlund	Coconino County Sheriff's Office
George "Wolf" Gumerman	Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Amy Tinderholt	US Forest Service
Benny Aja	Coconino Farm Bureau, Coconino NRCD
Carol Harder	Clear Creek Pines, Unit 2
Stephen Williams	Diablo Trust
Stephanie Teskey	AZ Department of Agriculture

Ellen reported on a conversation she had with Lucinda Andreani from Coconino County regarding the trash situation. There is an increase in private companies which are providing trash pickup service for Heber, Forest Lakes, Mormon Lake and Payson. This provides an option for national forest visitors to deposit their trash when leaving the national forest.

Scott Gold of Forever Resorts, which manages the Mormon Lake Lodge, informed the group that his company has an agreement with Coconino County for providing transfer stations for users of the nearby national forest. The days and hours of operation are limited and he would like to expand that service. People do not want to haul their trash home due to limitations for disposal at their residences. He has 16 8-yard dumpsters on his property in addition to the transfer station. This service operates at a loss financially but he wants to continue it.

Scott sees his role in the private sector as trying to mitigate the impacts of recreation occurring on private land from adversely impacting the adjacent national forest. He has been dealing with this for 27 years and predicted an increase in outdoor recreation of 3-4 times what it was prior to Covid. He informed us that the demand for recreation vehicles has risen to the point that folks are paying for RVs two years ahead of delivery. Used RVs are selling for 1 ½ their value. Cabin fever took a strong hold on the public and they are willing to pay in advance for a full season rental in a RV park. The public will camp close to the private amenities that he provides so that they have easy access to food, gas, ice, etc. Scott provided a definition of outdoor recreation and provided numerous examples. His staff has to provide for public safety, sanitation, waste disposal, parking and noise control for the events sponsored at Mormon Lake Lodge. Scott informed the group about the “restroom matrix” which deals with loading capacity depending on the number of guests and the duration of an event. He tries to inform his guests about expected behavior on adjacent national forest land. He has used volunteers to hand out informational brochures, make public contacts and break up fire rings at campsites on adjacent national forest land.

Scott has a consulting business helping entities write grant proposals dealing with National Park concessions. He wants to stay involved with this group.

Wendy Lotze of the Arizona Trail Association addressed recreation impacts and issues regarding the Arizona Trail. She acknowledged a dramatic increase in non-motorized trail recreation. More fire rings and trash were noted in the past two years and related to Covid as a driving force in folks wanting to get outdoors. Incursions by motorized vehicles were noted on trail sections closed to motorized use, as well as an increase of motorized use on trail sections where it is allowed. Barriers of natural materials are removed from the trail. “Super Gates”, massive metal gates, are used to replace the natural materials. Maintenance on them is a losing battle. Trail Stewards, Trail Ambassadors and Trail Angels are used for trail maintenance, making contact with the public and providing information in a non-confrontational manner about the rules and how to improve sustainable use.

The Network for Arizona Trails is a group of passionate advocates who share ideas and solutions across jurisdictional boundaries on statewide recreational issues. A recent summit identified different Working Groups. “You know what you guys should do is...” ideas are moved forward through the Working Groups. Monthly Zoom calls are held. Current thought is being given to the idea of the creation of a state Office of Outdoor Recreation. Different state models are being looked at, and thought is being given as to how to structure the enabling legislation. Sharing resources and positive interaction are important in this process.

Kari Roberg from the Arizona Office of Tourism followed up on Wendy’s presentation in regard to a breakout session from the summit dealing with the need for education about recreating responsibly. The “Don’t Trash Arizona” program from years past will be dusted off for ideas and revamped. Academics who have conducted studies on signage, and engagement education in a welcoming way, will be consulted. REI and roadside billboards can be used for getting the message out statewide.

Lisa addressed the next steps. Using one on one contacts is important. There is an emerging need for education the agencies' frontline staff about the issues. The following Working Groups were identified: signage, geo-fencing, enforcement, and mapping of road usage and types. We are looking for group leaders and participants. Ellen offered that this is not a Diablo Trust Recreational Working Group, but a community and a state working group. We need more input from OHV vendors, organized OHV groups, camping clubs and equestrian groups. Learning from each other and sharing ideas is key to success.

The next meeting is: June 21, 2021. Monday. 10:30am – 12:00pm.