

Recreation Working Group
Meeting Notes
February 7, 2022
Via Zoom

Participants:

Robert Adams, Judy Begay, Deana Bindley, Gerrit Boeck, Lisa Bolton, Matt Eberhart, Marcie Ellis, Michaela Gold, Carol Harder, Tim Holt, Liz Krug, Matt McGrath, Kit Metzger, Nicholas Mustoe, Rob Nelson, Cynthia Nemeth, Harry Oberg, Ellen Parish, Brian Poturalski, Bob Prosser, Nate Ragan, Veronica Stepanek, Sasha Stoltz, Tempy Wessel, Dave Wessel, Nat White

Ellen opened the meeting at 11:00 with a welcome and a round of introductions.

Video: Harry Oberg: I have a PowerPoint that Supervisor Michaels would like to share with you. This video from Deana Bindley shows OHVs in the Sedona area on bare ground doing donuts and driving on roads while creating significant dust. We have issues on the forest. Vehicles are faster, heavier, more powerful, can hold more occupants and are having more accidents, including the fatal accident on the Mogollon Rim shown below.



In the photo above, an OHV drove off the rim at high speed starting a wildfire which had to be controlled before people could access the accident scene.

Robert Adams, former Sedona mayor: I have been involved in this issue since 2010. I've been involved in a citizen engagement process to discuss OHVs however nothing meaningful has happened except an increase in traffic, noise, and impacts to the forest. I live in the Bow and Arrow community in Sedona and we are concerned about how people get to trailheads. We are also concerned about Bow and Arrow basin. In this basin there is tree mortality combined with a high amount of flammable material in the neighborhood increasing the risk of wildfire. OHVs have to travel about a mile through the Bow and Arrow neighborhood to get to a trailhead. These vehicles have loud sound systems and park in the neighborhood leaving trash. Primary concerns are noise, trash, threat of fire and increased traffic. I have looked at various Forest Service (FS) documents that contain language that points to various restrictions given certain impacts.

In order to understand the FS perspective, I have read numerous document including the 2018 Coconino National Forest Plan and Amendment 12. I found information that points to possible restriction of vehicles if it is determined that impacts would justify it. We have been advocating for restricting access via gates or permits.

One more consideration.... We think there should be a designated OHV area so that impacts could be mitigated in a larger area while being confined to a smaller area.

Oberg: The challenge is that if people are restricted in one area then they will just go to another area.

The current situation is unsustainable. We could have a legislative bill that requires vehicles to be trailered to trailheads. The FS has closed some areas such as Perkinsville along the Verde River for two years to allow for recovery. I have talked to AZGFD personnel who are also interested in getting something done. Emphasis on Education, Enforcement and Engineering. I have also talked to people from State Lands and BLM where visitors have caused damage and cut fences. If collaborative work is done with various stakeholders then perhaps a bill could be put forth next year.

Adams: This is such a huge problem. Each area is going to require a different strategy to mitigate the problem. The FS should sit down and write down a list of strategies. The FS appears ready to have those discussions and that's a good thing.

Oberg: Here in Yavapai County, people definitely don't want access restricted but understand the need for education, restoration, and enforcement. Some challenging areas could be established along with some recommended trails for OHVs. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

Marcie: Oak Creek Canyon impacts: Adams mentioned Amendment 12 (a 1998 amendment to the 1987 Coconino NF forest plan concerning the Sedona and Oak Creek area) which states that monitoring should be focused on Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species. The focus now seems to be letting everyone in. Noise is bad for species. The impact on the environment is bad. We have had trespass issues onto private land from OHVs in Oak Creek Canyon.

Discussion is needed at all levels. Taxpayer dollars are involved but not all taxpayers recreate with OHVs. Why are we fixing up trails, picking up trash, instead of preventing it to begin with? We are entirely in support of efforts to mitigate impacts.

Bindley: We get a lot of OHVs where I live resulting in significant environment damage. Numerous trees have died due to dust created by OHVs. Tree death by dust has been confirmed by a professional arborist. We have about 50 videos on YouTube - SaveBearMountain. OHVs are traveling 50-60 mph down the roads (as measured by a radar gun). Prevention should be the priority rather than mitigation. This is not going to get better. There is significant noise, even at night.

Marcie: OHVs don't provide safe access to forest lands. The FS focus is to enhance visitor experience. The Sedona area is combination of residents and visitors. It is not a national park. A good place to live is a good place to visit. Resident experience should be a high priority.

Adams: OHV users have a different mentality – of experiencing quiet. They are overwhelming the experience for others. Other organizations are willing to help with resources to help with this problem.

Lisa: Sasha from the National Forest Foundation (NFF) is here to talk. Reminder that the 2nd part of today's meeting will be a conversation with focus groups. Anyone welcome to join.

Sasha: From talking with Waste Management, it sounds like they are interested in doing things around trash and cleanup. I could help carry this forward. Her PowerPoint: NFF is a nonprofit chartered by Congress to help restore forest and grasslands and bring people together. NFF operates through the Northern AZ Forest Fund an investment model which allows downstream entities to invest in upstream restoration projects that improve watersheds. They work mostly in the Verde and Salt River watersheds. When we connect on recreation issues, there is usually some watershed or restoration benefit. NFF can help pay for costs that protect our watersheds. An annual report is available.

NFF strategies: strike teams (Youth Conservation Corp), funding approaches through stewardship funds (opt in or opt out for priority projects) and outreach (new users via social media). In southern Arizona we work with the Sonoran Insiders program which includes social influencers that use Instagram to share their experiences in the outdoors along with volunteer opportunities and restoration methods.

NFF has worked with Coconino National Forest in past years on some priority areas that include Forest Roads 535 and 237. NFF also helped with trail rehabilitation and clean up after Pickin' in the Pines, a large annual bluegrass music event.

Dumpster challenges and opportunities: Strategic placement of dumpsters might get visitors used to dumpsters that won't be there all the time. This could promote other bad behaviors if

dumpsters are left for a long time. However having a big push early in season allowed people to start off in clean area. Waste Management is interested in specific events. For potential funding, NFF would need an idea supported by FS and stakeholders.

Other funding sources: NFF matching awards - 1:1 private dollars matched by NFF. There is also a Polaris endowment and other funding possibilities as well.

Ellen: We will have sub-committee updates during the second hour of this meeting.

Marcie: Another point: We have noticed more scavenger birds due to trash possibly. I want to praise group for incredible work. Is anyone going to schools to educate about trash, especially, to lower grades? It doesn't seem this is happening as much now as it used to.

Lisa: Upcoming events: Next RWG first Monday March 7th 11-12pm. We are shifting to 1 meeting per month on the 1st Monday.

Network for AZ Trails monthly meeting is Feb 28 – update on SCORP process.

Diablo Trust annual meeting will be Friday Feb 25th at Elks Lodge – 9-12:30. We will hear updates from ranches, Diablo Trust, RWG, some presenters – Matt Caldwell, Sasha Stoltz, and Todd Madeskska. Following presentations there will be a breakout session, allowing more time for conversation than what happened at recreation summit.

Part two of this meeting starts at noon following a brief transition. Thank you for attending this portion of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned around 11:55.