

Table Mesa Recreational Plan Core Strategy Team Meeting #1

*Deer Valley Community Center, 2001 W. Wahalla Lane, Phoenix
Tuesday January 20, 2009 6:00-8:00 pm*

Those in attendance who signed the attendance sheet numbered 25 persons.

Welcome and Opening Comments

The BLM noted that many email notices were returned as undeliverable and asked folks to reenter or verify their email addresses. Some participants voiced concern that they had not received email notification. In addition, for future meeting information, a project website has been created where we will post meeting information at:

www.TableMesaRecArea.com

To begin the meeting, Teresa Makinen thanked those in attendance for coming. She noted that we wanted to explain what we heard in the previous public meetings held in November. In addition, she noted that there will be three to four Core Strategy stakeholder meetings refining the Plan; this meeting tonight, a meeting in two weeks on February 3rd, and again in another two weeks on February 17th. She then introduced agency staff in attendance, and introduced Steve Cohn, head of the Hassayampa Field Office, for comments.

Steve Cohn stated that the BLM went back and reviewed the public input from the November meetings, which included comments, maps, inventoried trails and shooting areas. All this information was drafted into a Draft Conceptual Map with Emphasis Areas to be presented and discussed tonight. This draft map would show proposed shooting areas, roads and trails and facilities.

A Review of the Process to Date

Teresa Makinen then reviewed the process to date stating that the BLM held the two meetings in November, and then compiled that information along with the maps and met together as a group to discuss the results of the meetings. All the maps and information from the November meetings were literally posted in the conference room at BLM, and staff discussed and reviewed the public input (maps). In addition, the BLM met with partner or sister agencies to discuss the issues and concerns related to the area and how it may impact their area plans. That conceptual plan is what we have here tonight for your thoughts.

Tonight is the next step in this process and we're hoping that all those here tonight will come to the next two stakeholder meetings so that we have a consistent group of

individuals, with an evolving discussion as opposed to individuals checking in and out of the discussion. This is a progressive discussion with tonight being a look at the draft conceptual map, and we expect everyone to do their “homework”, which will be to take a look at the map and help us understand what you like about the plan and what you think we could do to improve the plan.

Reviewing the Plan Components

Tom Bickauskas then reviewed the draft maps, one of which included “emphasis areas”, which were areas that would have specific types of uses. In respect to establishing shooting areas on the draft map, Tom said, the first priority was safety and then mitigation of resource damage, and preventing conflict with any other activity.

Teresa asked Tom to explain the “emphasis areas”. In the previous meeting people did not know exactly where activities should take place. On the map these Activity Zones were shown as shaded areas. Rock crawling areas in the north central sections of the planning area, a single track area south of the rock crawling area in the northern area of the planning area, a trails zone in the central section, and with a shooting zone south of the trails zone in the central section. In the southern section are deer and tortoise habitat with no access from State Lands. However, access for the Black Canyon Trail through State lands will be maintained. Facilities, such as an undeveloped Trail Head off Table Mesa Road are scattered throughout planning area as noted. Tom stated that a major component of the plan is to preserve the Agua Fria River, and the desert tortoise habitat.

Comments and questions in regard to the proposed draft safe shooting areas:

- How many acres for each proposed shooting area?
- How many positions for each area?
- There is a need for a nose-to-nose parking lot with space delineations.
- Who is deciding what is safe shooting?
- What are dimensions of *pocket ranges*?
- Shooting spaces that would accommodate working out of the back of a truck were suggested.
- Will there be a Range Master?

Tom provided a couple shooting range concepts and explained that BLM wants to provide shooting areas where there is the opportunity to partner with other agencies. In planning for this area, habitat and wildlife were major considerations. Shooting is part of our hunting heritage and BLM wants to provide the confidence of safety to those using the area.

Tom went on to explain the proposed designated shooting areas. He said that today three of those sites provide safe shooting. Tom stated that he and BLM and Game & Fish staff inventoried the shooting sites and completed a checklist for each site to

identify whether the area should be considered a "safe" shooting area. He stated these checklist forms are available for anyone that may wish to see them.

A place was designated a shooting area in the planning area if any evidence of shooting (including finding just one shell) had been found upon site survey. As for the location of the proposed safe designated shooting areas, factors that went into their inclusion on the draft map included little use of the area, good access, abatement of the impact of lead on Lake Pleasant, preservation of the Agua Fria River and the preservation of wildlife habitat. Tom also noted the many proposed closed shooting areas indicated with a red dot.

- Who will use shooting areas farther off the main road?
- 4x4 people will not drive all the way to the shooting areas; they will just pull off and shoot where ever.
- We do not want to save the area for 2-wheel users.

The question was asked if BLM has funding for this plan. Tom stated that it will take a number of years to build the plan out, and BLM does not know the budget year to year due to the congressional funding process. And BLM continues to look for funding partnerships. Teresa Makinen added that this plan is the first step to doing anything "on the ground". It takes a plan before BLM can seek funding.

Arizona Game & Fish stated that lead from shooting activities, by law, must be contained on the shooting properties or it will be classified as an EPA regulated contaminant. Lead is a recyclable on site and a contaminant off-site. The lead will be contained through an engineered detention basin. BLM used standardized methodology to evaluate the lead issue not just random assignment. In the planning for this area, we are trying to serve as many as we can.

- User must have permit to use State Trust Lands.
- What standard was used to evaluate the amount of lead from shooting that is said to be going into Lake Pleasant?
- Lead will go into Lake Pleasant and when it does it will be a health hazard.
- How do we know lead is getting into Lake Pleasant?
- There is a need to see lead issue as scientifically evaluated rather than a result of "Chicken Little" emotion.
- Why is there a proposed safe designated shooting area near future housing development on private lands?
- Housing will be developed on the private lands (Moore's Gulch) to the north of the Power Line Road to be accessed from an easement connecting to Table Mesa Road. I will do everything in my power to prevent shooting areas near the private lands of Moore's Gulch to the north of the Power Line Road. Future development in the private lands (Moore's Gulch) will be high end homes that blend into area on 5+ acre lots.
- Shooting ranges must be ¼ mile from housing.
- A berm could be put up against easement road for safety.

- This draft plan has combined shooting areas to show the safe (green on the draft map) shooting areas.
- Goal is to provide shooters road / vehicle access - drive to target shooting.
- When houses do go up in the private parcels, there will be problems.
- Where is the green dot located on the ground?
- In planning these shooting areas safety and resource damage were mitigating factors.
- Plink where you want.
- Hunting activities will be out there near the future homes.
- Do you think plinking is dangerous to other users?
- Shooting has to be organized.
- This recreational area will attract many.
- The red dots show all shooting areas that are being used now proposed to be consolidated into four safe designated shooting areas.
- Plinking should be allowed.
- Real estate development in a recreational area is all about location, location, location.
- Some do not see a problem with a shooting range near private property and homes.
- Users want shooting but no range master.
- Appropriately 30 shooting sites have been consolidated into 4 shooting sites—Is this enough?
- Alcohol users are less responsible.
- Was a usage census taken to see if a total of 4 shooting locations were enough for all users?
- Will there be room for the growth of shooting activities?
- Ben Avery Shooting Range is always packed and needs more shooting spaces.

Tom stated the proposed draft plan actually increases shooting space. There will need to be parking at the 40-space shooting ranges. A safe shooting range can be created on ten acres.

Tom Bickauskas then went on to explain proposed trails, roads and closures in the planning area. Including Table Mesa Road, Azco Mine Road, Die Hard Road, a semi developed crossing of the Agua Fria River, a new Trail Head south of Rock Springs and Terminator.

Tom stated that BLM wants to improve the desert tortoise habitat. The Recreational Management Plan starts with a million acres or more and we are now planning for a small section and asking what is the best way for people to do what they like without interfering with natural resources or other activities. In desert tortoise habitat, for every one mile of road created, three miles of road must be closed by regulation.

Comments and questions in regard to the proposed draft trails and roads:

- Why are roads being closed?
- You are closing the exit for rock crawlers.

- The route inventory process was open for 5 years.
- How can we get what we want when you are closing roads at the outset?

Tom stated that BLM wants to preserve the Agua Fria River, which means the driving in the Agua Fria River needs to stop. And, remember, this is a Draft Plan.

- BLM is picking on 4 wheelers for other stuff.
- Do not kill what we already have going.
- This will usher rock crawlers onto private lands.
- This suggested rock crawling trail takes the exit away from the trail.
- Die Hard, a riparian area, will remain open.
- BLM pulling away stuff people do not use.
- "How can we plan for something if trails already closed?"
- Stop bad users.
- Do not penalize rock crawlers.
- If people are coming from Black Canyon City using the Agua Fria River—stop them there.
- Die Hard not as good habitat for desert tortoise.
- Do we have to take a BLM person with us to create our own trail?
- How does BLM create a road or trail?
- Need to find way across river.

Teresa stated that in a future meeting we will need to look at how to sequence the plan area development so that it fits into the user's and BLM's needs. Tom added that the big ticket items for BLM to protect are the desert tortoise habitat mitigation, wildlife areas, and riparian areas.

- Can BLM people come on a field trip to area?
- In reference to rock crawling activities, BLM looking at collateral damage to tortoise and rocks.
- Desert Tortoises are a *Special Status Species*.
- Where there is an established trail there is no desert tortoise habitat.
- If people do not go off established trails there is no desert tortoise habitat damage.
- Is everything desert tortoise habitat?
- Desert tortoise survey plats exist.
- Can there be seasonal trail in desert tortoise habitat?
- Depending on the weather, there can be desert tortoise active in the winter months.
- Desert tortoises normally hibernate.
- BLM cannot regulate trail usage by temperature.

Tom Bickauskas went on to describe the planning area proposed draft user facilities. Including improvements to Table Mesa Road, information kiosks, developed trail heads, day parking, boundary fencing, camp grounds, staging areas, road to Agua Fria River, restrooms, loop trails and tot lots.

Comments and questions in regard to the proposed draft facilities:

- The pink area is for single track users—it has less desert tortoise habitat.
- Loop trails around Doe Peak were looked at—this is hunting and wildlife habitat.
- Black Canyon Trail is non-motorized.
- We need more of a legal definition of *Desert Tortoise Habitat*.
- Can we have a presentation from an English [common language] speaking scientist?
- Rock crawlers are urged to do their homework for the next stakeholder meeting to provide alternative rock crawling routes in the planning area.
- A formal definition of desert tortoise habitat and applicable laws need to be posted on project website.
- How far do cattle come down?

Tom stated that BLM is dealing with the cattle separately from this process.

- Designated trails for designated use.
- Where money for facilities is coming from leads to the vision process.
- More campgrounds and picnic areas are needed along river.
- A need to recognize participation of sister agencies with input.
- We need accurate maps to find alternatives.
- We cannot work around sensitive areas without accurate knowledge of area.
- Desert tortoise habitat is everywhere.
- We cannot come prepared without accurate maps of the area.

Next Steps for the Process

Teresa closed by letting the group know that this is just a starting place and asked the group to trust that we are going to continue the discussion. She reminded the participants of the upcoming stakeholder meetings in two and four weeks. There were additional complaints about the meeting email notification, and Teresa reminded the group of the project website and asked that they look at that site, and in fact, feel free to link their individual organizations to our website.

Teresa suggested keeping up with the project website for future meeting information. She asked the participants to do their homework and bring back better or improved concepts for the plan. She asked the group to tell us what would be better than the draft plan and how we can do it.

Closing Comments

Steve Cohn asked the group to stay engaged. He noted that no one is going to get everything they want but will get enough of the things they like and value to see the situation improve for all. Steve also asked that the participants go out and get information to present ideas at the next meetings. Also, the BLM is open to going along

on field trips to the area. For the next meeting Steve will try to arrange a presentation from BLM biologists on Desert Tortoise Habitat.

Teresa thanked the group and the meeting ended.