

From: Lower Sonoran RMP
Subject: Fwd: Future of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park

From: santansam1@q.com [santansam1@q.com]
Sent: Friday, November 11, 2011 1:36 AM
To: Garber, Emily H
Subject: Fwd: Future of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park

Ms. Garber,

Thank you for meeting with us yesterday and explaining what is being considered. I sent the following out this afternoon. I hope my depiction is accurate. If not, let me know and I will send out a correction.

Gordon

From: santansam1@q.com
Sent: Thursday, November 10, 2011 2:10:18 PM
Subject: Future of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park

Once again the future of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park depends on your vision and participation.

Before reacting, please read the following through and **then** engage your organization and or send your comments to Emily Garber, Lower Sonoran Field Office Manager for the Bureau Of Land Management before November 25th. Emily_Garber@blm.gov

As you know BLM owns the vast majority of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park. Several of you participated as members of the stakeholder committee in the creation of Maricopa County Park's plan for our Park's future and remember not only the end product, but also the long and arduous process of resolving differences and creating a unity of intent. The future of "The Park" is being revisited. Many of you are already aware that BLM is very seriously considering "disposal" of the land it owns in the San Tan Mountain Regional Park. Some of you have asked me "what do we do?", or offered up suggestions reminiscent of the "Old Days". But this is not the old days. No longer do we need to be loud, to be heard. We need only to demonstrate a collectively shared vision that is wise, viable and adaptable to changes in laws and circumstance. (sounds easy if you say it fast.)

Of those of you that have asked how we might best proceed, I've requested patience. I've asked that we hold off comments and action until I could meet with Maricopa County and with BLM to get a handle on what is really going on. Yesterday, Sandie and I met first RJ and Teresa from Maricopa County Parks and found commonality in our intentions for the creation of a park district as an effective and economical way to both fund the park and to manage the park though the creation of a governing board made up of representatives from Maricopa County, Pinal County, the San Tan Foothills and hopefully Queen Creek. Importantly there is also a shared vision of maintaining the San Tan Mountain Park as a pristine desert mountain experience, readily accessible to an urban population, but with the integrity of the natural nature of the park experience protected from urban encroachment by perpetuating the surrounding buffer of large lot zoning.

The four of us then met with a group of 6 (I think) most impressive, knowledgeable and focused representatives from BLM. They are focused on getting this right. They are knowledgeable of changes to federal laws and

regulations and the potential consequences of such changes. They are knowledgeable of this parks history and of the competing values of the disparate communities of interest they are mandated to resolve; resolve amicably if possible, but resolution is their job and they will do that job. They are impressive to me, because I know that if I had to know the things they know in the detail they are required to know it and was charged with resolving the disparity of interests they are required to resolve, my head would explode, no doubt about it.

My reasons for wanting to meet with BLM were: 1) To learn; who are these people, what exactly are they doing, why are they doing this, and why now and why here? 2) What do I do, and what do I ask others to do?

What I learned was 1) They are good people with a hard job.

- 2) "Disposal" will be considered only to a governmental or nonprofit entity.
- 3) There is a "do nothing" option, but there would be legal difficulties that would complicate protecting, and possibly jeopardize park integrity.
- 4) BLM requirements will continue to be applied in event disposal occurs.
- 5) Legally, there are things that could be proposed that would be contrary to our intentions for the park's future, but legal is far from the only criterion, meaning wisdom and political considerations carry weight, or put more succinctly "applying ain't necessarily getting" and that appreciating the concept doesn't preclude vigorous objection to specific proposals if such do not comply with our intentions for the parks future.
- 6) This is being considered here and now because the current agreement with BLM expires in 2013.

Bottom line for me personally is that we have, repeatedly and over many years expressed a vision for our park as clearly as we could. This vision is in place now in the form of an adopted park plan. We are moving forward toward creating a park district to see specific implementations of that vision continue to be made. We should all be very thankful for the partnership and support of Maricopa County Parks and especially for BLM's dedication to doing the right thing. These are good people, keep the faith.

I will submit my vision of the future San Tan Mountain Regional Park to BLM today. I ask that you do the same as soon as you can, and ask your friends and those in your organizations to also submit their vision. I will ask BLM to distill a collective vision from what is submitted and to use all their knowledge, experience and dedication to protect that distilled vision, to protect the park plan that provides for tangible implementation of that vision and to do nothing that will hinder the creation of a park district.

I am submitting the following. I include it here as an example only. You certainly will have your own vision and will likely be less verbose.

The San Tan Foothill Community's Vision for the Future of the San Tan Mountain Regional Park and how that Vision can be Realized

Located in close proximity to both current and future regional urban centers, the San Tan Mountains afford people of southeast Maricopa County and northern Pinal County a convenient and unique opportunity to experience the uncanny spiritual balm of an unspoiled desert mountain environment and a convenient means to regularly enjoy a uniquely refreshing, easily accessible enrichment of an otherwise manufactured urban routine.

Low impact use is the key to sustaining this park, this treasure, this emblematic banner of the San Tan Foothills way of living daily life connected to a natural rather than a manufactured environment. The continued existence of this alternative recreational opportunity is assured not only by the fact that the mission of this park has been collectively established, universally endorsed and vigorously protected by Maricopa County, Pinal County, the surrounding cities and towns, public agencies, non-profit organizations, the Gila River Indian Community, and the citizens of the San Tan Foothills Community, but also and in no small part to BLM's continued influence. To assure the integrity of the park experience for all and for all times the BLM must never relinquish its influence. The BLM is the stabilizing anchor needed to prevent "drift", and as this park is to the community that surrounds it, the BLM is the glue that binds disparate stakeholders to each other.

San Tan Foothills Community which surrounds the park has necessarily established itself as a permanently rural and equestrian community in order to provide the requisite demographic buffer between the urban component of the larger community and that community's cherished pristine park. Access has been preserved to the park without negatively impacting the residents who live nearby.

The Town of Queen Creek and Pinal County have united to jointly maintain, support and defend the rural and equestrian character of the community functioning as the transitional buffer to the San Tan Mountains Regional Park. The ability of the San Tan Foothills Community to function as this necessary buffer has been achieved through stringently stipulated very low density large lot residential development, by prohibiting development that would diminish the dark skies or bring nonresidential traffic beyond the narrow strip of properties adjacent to the Hunt Hwy, and by carefully integrating the built environment into the hillsides to maintain the pristine character of the mountain slopes natural washes and environmentally sensitive areas. Wildlife corridors, and archaeological sites have been protected from disturbance through innovative planning and acquisition. Flooding and subsidence issues have been successfully mitigated through the development of strong policies and standards. Commercial development is conditional on community support and extensive community

stipulation and is only considered for the narrow strip of properties adjacent to the Hunt Hwy., excepting only that Resort development may be considered if supported by the neighborhood most affected and it can be demonstrated that it would forward the expressed goals of the San Tan Foothills Community, compliment the surroundings, and conform to the existing standard stipulations for the area. Additionally no Resort will bring more traffic than would a residential development of corresponding size and further any contemplated ancillary, or complimentary development such as a convention center will also conform to all these standards, will also require neighborhood support and will not be a private commercial enterprise. To receive consideration, proposed resort activities are required to be consistent with a pristine desert environment. For example: A golf course would be inappropriate. In all developments, open space requirements and stipulating that native vegetation be utilized exclusively are required to maintain the Sonoran Desert character. Land split development must also be required to conform to the community's standards.

To fully achieve this vision it is necessary to rethink the park's funding and management. A park district needs to be implemented. In close proximity to the park are residents of the San Tan Foothills (5,000 people), San Tan Valley (80,000 people) and Queen Creek (25000 people). The park district should include all these areas (110,000 people). If capital expenses are tied to impact fees, Friends of the Park events and voluntary donations, and if the operational budget were substantially increased to \$500,000 and if 4 people/household is assumed the tax per household would be about \$18/yr. Admittedly, this is off the top of the head stuff, but it is likely realistic. Park management would be directed by a governing board made up of representatives from Pinal and Maricopa Counties, Queen Creek, San Tan Valley and the San Tan Foothills and guided by BLM requirements.

Gordon