

Table Mesa Recreational Plan Core Strategy Team Meeting #3

*Deer Valley Community Center, 2001 W. Wahalla Lane, Phoenix
Tuesday, February 17, 2009 6:00-8:30 pm*

Those in attendance who signed the attendance sheet numbered 47 persons.

Welcome and Opening Comments Current Concept Map with Participant Proposals

Facilitator Teresa Makinen opened the meeting by welcoming the participants, reviewing the evening's agenda, and introducing the project team. She then presented the current concept map with participant proposals to date.

Additional Participant Proposals on Alternatives

Teresa asked if there were any additional proposals that any of the participants would like to provide. The following information was provided:

- The rock crawling trail "Annihilator" should be considered for opening up for access to a spring area for daytime use only.
- The single track emphasis area has too many road closures.
- In single track area some of the dead end trails could be connected. If trails connect more people will stay on trails.

Several participants stated this was the first meeting for them, and they would like a brief synopsis of what has occurred to date. Teresa asked all the participants if we could take a moment to provide an update, to which they agreed, and Teresa provided this information on the process to date:

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Hassayampa Field Office will release this summer its master land use plans for the entire field office. Certain decisions have been achieved through the public process within this master plan that do set decisions for the specific smaller area of Table Mesa. The master land use plans are the big (parent) document, and from this, the BLM creates a specific Recreation Plan and Travel Management (routes) for Table Mesa.
- Nothing is final at this point.
- Working from the master plans, most recent travel or route designations, having discussions and field tours with shooting organizations, Az. Game & Fish and OHV users, from among others, the BLM staff created a conceptual map. The map was shown at each meeting. There are areas where shooting is current taking place that do not meet standards or laws and some of these are proposed

closed (red dots – even if just one shell was located there). The map also shows larger green dots that are proposed areas for open and further developed shooting slots for up to 40 slots, long and short ranges. Steve stated the goal of this process is to encourage safe shooting in safe shooting areas. We understand that shooters want to be next to roads.

- The idea for routes and trails is to develop loops for traveling in and out rather than turning around and go back the same way; to keep trails out of the riverbed and washes; to create staging or camping areas for trailers or campers; to close routes or trails that do not lead anywhere or that harm the environment. The lines in the color red are proposed closed; the lines in the thicker green are new roads being proposed.
- Orange dots represent facilities proposed; camping, restrooms, etc.
- It was asked if any lands were available for land swaps? Steve replied that the RMP that was finalized last summer states that the whole area is designated for retention. The RMP up for revision in 15 years. This could change if there were an Act of Congress directing a land exchange.
- It was asked if there would be any fees for use in this area? Steve stated that the idea of fees has been brought up a few times by participants.
- Is there any liability for BLM in developing designated shooting areas?

Steve Cohn replied that BLM is still looking at whether developed shooting areas are feasible. There are some example areas around the country but this is still a gray area of policy. He went on to state that we hear the area has safety issues, so we can do nothing or we can be proactive. There is also a high liability knowing about the problems and not being proactive enough. The public had these comments:

- Resource concerns cause closures.
- There is a need to monitor the area and put out informational signs.
- The route designation process is happening nationwide in BLM.
- Will the next focus area be divulged before this same process takes place for other areas? Steve stated that at this time no decision has been made as to the next area of planning for BLM.
- We'd like to know what the next area is so we can be more prepared and go out and look at the area in advance.
- We heard you say something about the next area possibly being Wickenburg at a previous meeting. Steve stated that BLM will try to let the group know what area is next for the planning process.
- How many areas in the section are designated for travel trailers? Tom replied that there is a flat staging area served by an improved road to the river, with an additional staging area and existing campsites.
- When are we going to find out if the roads we proposed to keep open will be kept open?
- I'm concerned about a concentration of shooters in the designated safe shooting areas – that may be more unsafe.

Teresa asked for any other proposals. One participant, Greg, gave a powerpoint presentation on areas and trails/roads he proposed to keep open. Greg's information included the following:

- Concern over the compatibility between the map BLM is using for this planning exercise and *Garmin* maps. He stated that the BLM maps are hard to coordinate with GPS.
- No use for southern area due to the many trail closures.
- Many historic and well worn trails are in the area.
- Pipeline road great access.
- Short trail overlooking Gillette should be kept open.

Teresa thanked Greg for a well thought out presentation. Other participant's comments include:

- What about access across private property? There are currently no existing signs in area concerning private property. What will these signs look like? Steve replied that BLM is working with private property owners to acquire access easements in some instances. BLM will assist private property owners with the posting of signs. BLM has to look at roads that go to and from private property.
- Additionally, law enforcement has a hard time due to lack of warning signage.
- Property owners have a *right-of-way*. This does not legally permit multiple access roads to property.
- Existing situation roads cross private and State lands.
- Leave it like it is and let the owners post signs.
- Is this area open to hunting?
- What about vehicle access to recover game? Tom stated that the RMP does not permit motorized game retrieval at this time. There are programs however for the disabled.
- AZGFD looking at this issue.
- A statement was made that BLM should consider the authorization of big game retrieval by OHV. Tom stated that the RMP does not allow this activity so the decision is already made.
- It was said that there was a bill going through the legislature to change this situation.
- Much like the closures for the *Bald Eagle Area*, could trails be seasonally opened for hunting?
- As far as lead contamination: I read a requirement that best science available must be used to show lead migration to Lake Pleasant.
- I checked with a City of Phoenix chemist and the lake water is running less than 5 ppb lead when the EPA Action Level for lead contamination is 15 ppb. Lead has been washing into Lake Pleasant for 10 years. Therefore, no action is required in response to lead contamination.
- How much lead is there in the water?
- Are there differences in lead concentration between the northern and southern areas?
- Is lead contamination a hazard to people?

- No one has told us about the science saying that lead is migrating to the lake. Steve stated that AZGFD has said that if the area is to be developed there must be no issue with lead. Designated shooting areas concentrate lead.
- As far as shooting in washes, BLM is keeping silent.
- The lead issue is irrelevant.
- There are gold mines in area.
- Are there lead mines in area?
- Is the lead problem coming from shooters or lead mines?

Teresa asked for any additional proposals for the area:

- Just to the west of a designated shooting area there is a great shooting area in a wash.
- There needs to be a designated shooting area for long guns and clay pigeon shooting.
- Fence in ranch / mine / well with chain link.
- Proposed route around Doe Peak. The area is popular with deer hunters.
- Need jeep access to area.
- A connection to BLM trails needs to be made in area.
- I have been out to the area several times and I cannot figure out where I am.
- I fear concentrating shooters will reduce safety.
- A safe shooter can safely shoot in a questionable area.
- What is the process to get a closed road re-opened? Steve replied a proposal is sent to BLM and BLM evaluates the proposal. However, once the road closure decision is made for this area, it will probably not open for some time to come. This is an effort to establish area now. Adjustments can be made as process goes along. This is the process where we decide red/green – open/closed. None of these roads were created for recreational purposes for over 100 years. BLM wants to manage area for recreation. BLM wants to look at area in regard to opening other trail/roads. Now is the time to bring any routes forward.

Thoughts on How to Manage the Area

Teresa reviewed the Four E's of Recreation Management. (Engineering, Education, Enforcement, and Evaluation (Monitoring)). The following comments were provided by participants:

- Need to add Science to the Engineering section.
- Formal monitoring – What is that?
- What has been done now in regard to monitoring of area? Teresa replied that the area is currently unplanned, so there is no monitoring. The idea is to get a plan in place and then conduct monitoring. The *Four E's* apply to a planned area. Steve added that the area is now seen as having limited uses with a plan to switch to designated uses.
- BLM must use good science to close a road.
- No road closure designations are done as of now.
- Closures are for a planning concept only.
- BLM can leave roads open and wait for someone to ask that they be closed.

Next Steps for the Process

Teresa then reviewed the Table Mesa Recreation Plan process timeline. All participants received a copy of this timeline on the back of the evening's agenda.

- A normal EA process is not as open as this process.
- Need a bigger meeting space for the June 30th meeting.
- Why was this area chosen to be studied and who chose it? Steve Cohn replied that he chose the Table Mesa Area to be studied due to the intensity of use and interest in area. BLM is now requiring that all trails have to be designated. BLM has 1 million acres to plan. At the end of March BLM will run the area through a EA exercise. With the goal of a FONSI (*Finding of No Significant Impact*). Without a FONSI, the process might need to move into an EIS.
- Many constraints dictate whether open or closed.
- If you come back will you explain the closures?

Steve Cohn added that the BLM's goal is to end up with a plan that generates no appeals—a plan that is at least as good or better than when started. Recreational shooting will be accommodated by BLM as possible. BLM is working to keep public lands in the public hands.

- A participant representing Public Lands provided a statement to the group and in written form for BLM, regarding shooting. The statement included that Public Lands is impressed with BLM trying to combine differing activities safely together.
- He also asked how can he propose safe shooting areas if he does not know where he is at?
- BLM made an offer to accept GPS coordinates.
- It was noted that BLM was light years behind on technology issues.

After some discussion about maps and the ability to compare BLM maps, the project team stated they will attempt to provide additional data on the map, perhaps lat/long or section numbers.

- BLM needs to look at connectivity to other areas as the Table Mesa area is not self contained.
- There is a need to look beyond this area to the Boulders area to Table Mesa to Crown King.

Teresa Makinen stated that BLM is having meetings with sister agencies regarding their planning, so the intent is for that information to work through in the discussions.

- There needs to be spurs off the Black Canyon Trail for multi-user motorized use.
- A comment was made that the process BLM is using is the exact same process seen used before except the Hassayampa Field Office of the BLM is being a lot more open with this process.
- BLM is following this process nationwide.
- There is a need to get the proposals on the map or forget about re-opening.
- What is the criteria for trail closure?

- There is a need for due diligence in closures.

Steve stated that if suggested options are declined, an explanation will be provided. However, as users, we need to think of the area in terms of a "Recreation System".

The public asked/commented:

- Where are the new roads?
- There will be residential developed in this area on the private property parcels on the east and west.
- I propose we move all the shooting away from Table Mesa Road.
- There is a strong incentive to get this plan right to prevent a shooting moratorium.
- Reality is that there will be residential in this area.
- I found out about this meeting by accident.
- Are there any signs in the area saying that the area is under study?
- Information about the Table Mesa area is hard to find on the BLM website.
- Builders should put up money for a signage budget.

Teresa stated that the Table Mesa Recreational Plan process has received more press, radio, internet, and blog communications than many public processes. In addition, about 500-600 people have been involved in all the meetings that have been held. However, we'll see if we can get a sign out in the planning area.

- What is the budget for the project? Teresa replied that we are in the planning phase, and without a plan there can be no budget. Steve added that the plan is like a menu that you can order off. Some activities will go to BLM for funding others will look to partnering for funding.

Participant Proposal for Organizing the Area

Teresa stated that Ben has asked for time to provide a presentation on organizing the area.

Ben gave a presentation on forming a volunteer enforcement assistance group. He asked for those interested in forming a group to help organize the area submitted their names to Ben on a sign-in sheet at the end of the meeting. He added that paramedic skills of volunteers would be helpful. The following comments were provided by participants:

- There is no cell service in area.
- Cell service can be established on some ridge tops.
- This can be as simple as driving around helping out and keeping eyes open.
- This has to be a cooperative agreement with the powers that be.
- CB radios, FRS could be used to communicate.
- How can this group be implemented?
- This group will not prevent but monitor area.
- Could this be tagged on to the OHV Ambassador effort?
- Could BLM put a cell tower out there? Steve noted that BLM could provide some equipment and resources to this group.

- Will this area be part of Phoenix residential area?
- There is a need for law enforcement and consequences in area.
- BLM working on coordinating with other agencies.
- Another component is citizen participation.
- I called the BLM card number and got a fuzzy response.
- The pipeline construction is creating more dust than trail usage.
- What law enforcement entities are in area?

Closing Comments

Steve thanked all for their time and attendance. He went on to say that BLM learns the most from meeting like this one. Steve apologized due to the fact that is planning process can not address just a single issue. Further, that he did not want to prevent anyone from further interaction with BLM. Steve stated that Ben's idea was critical. That if Ben could pull this group together that they would have considerable influence on area discussions. It is still earlier enough in the process that such a group representing many interests could be used as a sounding board.