



WINKELMAN NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Tonto Forest Plan Revision Coordination Meeting July 28, 2015 Draft Minutes

Date: July 28, 2015

Location: Farm Bureau, Gilbert, AZ

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m.

Board, Advisors and Staff

Bill Dunn, Francie Meyer, Walter Meyer, Gary Vinson, Carol DuBois, Chris Postel

Other Districts

John & Pamela Griffin, Terry Wheeler, John Fowler, Therese Hicks (Tonto NRCD) and Trever Hall (East Maricopa NRCD)

Agencies

Tonto National Forest: Kenna Belsky (Acting Forest Planner) and Robert Madera (Biologist)

Discussion of Tonto Forest Plan Revision Coordination

The meeting will be recorded and will be available for review. The Natural Resource Conservation Districts purpose, origins, resources, and powers were discussed. First organized in 1941 under state laws, the 30 districts (another 10 are tribal) are the local experts on natural resources in terms of land, soil, and water. The Districts are the gateway to natural resource management in the community.

The Coordination with federal, state, and county agencies is defined by statute (FIPMA). This coordination process enables the Districts to receive early notification with an opportunity for input on their local natural resource issues or concerns. It is a legal requirement of these agencies to consider the Districts local policies or plans and should be part of the agency's plan.

The Tonto Forest Plan Revision began in 2014 and has 3 phases or steps:

- Assessment, on resources (vegetation, socio-economic impact, ecological)
- Revision
- Monitor/Implementation

The Plan is behind schedule and has had 8 community meetings. The Assessment should be published in early winter 2015 and would be available at TontoPlan.org. They have received plans from the local and county governments. The following topics were discussed:

- How do you determine if good science is being used? A combination of peer review and Tonto National Forest regional specialists. Socio-economic impact has less data; so, this part has more grey areas.
- Kenna worked on the Coronado Plan; so, the Tonto Plan will be organized similarly, with land use zones.
- What are the Plan Goals? The forest is divided into management areas and each area has goals. Could goals be defined in terms of soil, water, and watershed?
- The revision step will define "needs for change." Each resource has a desired condition; for example, restore priority watersheds.
- The "New Rule" is being used to divide the forest into management areas and should improve the process.
- After completing the Assessment phase, goals will be set and the Revision phase will start (NEPA).
- How will feral horses be addressed? Currently, feral horses are being removed and have a burro area.
- During public meetings, public comments have little factual basis or science, how are they weighed? Tonto would incorporate what comments are relevant and things that Tonto can control while balancing multiple uses and sustainability.
- Talking to natives was referenced in the Federal 2012 bulletin. The local ranchers/farmers have yet to be contacted and do have knowledge of the older riparian areas.
- Does the last Plan get evaluated, what went right or wrong?
- With the new planning rule, will more flexibility (ability to add a fence without NEPA, EA, etc) be built into the plan? The "Range" will be its own separate entity. Unknown if flexibility can be worked in due to land ownership concerns.

- The forest is divided into “Ecological Response Units” (ERUs) for analysis and planning purposes. ERUs are broken into a local scale (map on the website) and an ERU guide is also on the website. The new planning rule is also used to define the “Major Land Resource Areas” (MLRUs).
- Some tasks are being contracted out, such as air quality and recreation.
- The plan is scheduled to be completed in 4 years but hope to complete it 3 years.
- The Plan format is similar to the Coronado Plan. Also, the Kaibab Plan is almost done.
- The planning horizon is for 10 years with the new rule using adaptive management.
- Is long term rest & recovery being studied? Consider looking at Dan Dagger’s “Dutch Women Butte Study.”
- In terms of monitoring, what practices are being used? Look at Land Management Planning Handbook on the website. Send WNRCD Utilization paper to Kenna.
- Does the Tonto Forest think that over grazing is happening, but may be due to other factors than cattle?
- The Coronado Forest range staff work together with the ranchers. The Tonto Forest range staff have different forest objective for grazing due to differences by district. Tonto Forest now has a range officer.
- Need to balance resource output versus recreation.
- Tonto is consulting with Fish & Game to address endangered species.
- Next meeting will be scheduled after Assessment phase is completed

Gary Vinson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Carol DuBois seconded. Motion carried.
The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 pm.

Minutes Submitted by: Chris Postel, Winkelman NRCD Clerk

Date: July 28, 2015

Approval of Minutes: _____

Date: _____