

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

Minutes of the Meeting held March 2, 2015 at the Kannally Ranch House, Oracle State Park

The following 47 members and guests attended the meeting: Charlie and Jeau Allen, Nancy Baumeister, Jim Bergstrom, Alex Binford-Walsh, Tab Bommarito, Jake Breedlove, Lon Brehmer, Bud and Alicia Bristow, Peter Else, Bob Evans, Deborah Gaines, Cathy Gorman, Enriqueta F. Guevara, Diana Hadley, Leslie Hall, Doris Haynes, Phil Hedrick, Suzanne Kelly, Peter Kresan, Diane Laush, Chuck LeFevre, George Leys, Jennifer Martin, Pearl Mast, Jim McPherson, Christina McVie, Mick Meader, Danielle Niebling, Sue Newman, David Omick, Elna Otter, Doug and Andrea Peacock, Bill Radke, Jennifer Rinio, Randy Serraglio, Gene and Maria Troutner, Rana Tucker, Gary Vinson, Fred Volland, Jared Vollmer, Jeannie Wagner-Greven, Michael Weasner and Scott Wilbor.

Peter Else, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:05. He reviewed our **Mission** “to unite conservation-minded individuals, groups, and agencies in the lower San Pedro region of AZ to protect a threatened riparian ecosystem and its supporting watershed.” He also reported that the Alliance now has **180 members**, consisting of **91 landowners** holding a total of **9500 acres** of fee-title land ranging from less than an acre to 960 acres. Three ranching members also control **71, 375 acres of grazing leases**. **89 supporters** include individuals, academics and researchers, and representatives from agencies and conservation NGO’s.

Peter continued with a review of the Major Goals and Objectives in our evolving Strategic Plan. The Major Goals or overarching landscape scale conservation aspirations are:

1. Maintain largely intact and un-fragmented landscape.
2. Gain national recognition for Lower San Pedro River Valley (LSPRV) conservation status.
3. Maintain free flowing river, active floodplain space, and recharge capacity.
4. Educate regarding LSPRV conservation attributes.
5. Build strong partnerships with agencies, conservation groups and other major stakeholders in the region.
6. Protect endangered or threatened species, and a thriving diversity of other species.
7. Promote broad landscape linkages, and water conservation practices, adapted to climate change to a high degree.
8. Promote best possible conservation practices among a broad range of landowners.
9. Build a culture of conservation, promote sustainable enterprise, and provide recreational opportunities.

Objectives and Projects were listed in two groups, those on which we have been active and those we have yet to address. Peter explained that much of our work is accomplished by ad hoc committees whose members communicate via email and he invited all present to become involved with any of these projects. The first group is:

1. Research important conservation issues, educate others and advocate for appropriate land use through comment packages, white papers, letters, petitions, litigation, etc.

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

2. Advocate for a neutrally-facilitated and inclusive watershed-wide conservation planning process, such as the Department of Interior's Landscape Conservation Design process, or a similar forum.
3. Continue to use cameras for wildlife and vehicle monitoring purposes.
4. Attend meetings and conferences and invite various groups to our meetings to promote collaboration.
5. Promote and support other habitat improvement projects.
6. Advocate for a voluntary USFWS-based conservation easement program and support other voluntary opportunities for easements.
7. Promote further development of our organizational capacity.
8. Recruit more representatives of sustainable enterprise into our organization and support their efforts to develop the local economy.
9. Reduce, manage, and monitor the impact of non-native plants and animals.

The second group of yet to be addressed objectives is:

10. Produce LSPWA film and multimedia projects.
11. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with willing landowners to facilitate collaborative research opportunities.
12. Develop a landowner registry/database/inventory and a pilot program of landowners willing to voluntarily establish cooperative resource management areas.
13. Facilitate local management of designated conservation lands through a registry of volunteers and available workers for pay.
14. Support natural resource monitoring and surveying by collaborating with agencies and NGOs.
15. Promote State Trust Land Reform.

Project Reports on some of our first 9 Objectives were presented.

1. Objective 1: Research, Education and Advocacy.
 - Mick Meader, Director, reported on the Comments submitted by the LSPWA on the Critical Habitat Designation Proposal for the Western Distinct Population Segment of the Yellow-Billed Cuckoo. He made the important point that critical habitat designation generally would not affect private landowners unless they were undertaking a project that involved funding or required a permit from the federal government. In addition to finding a crucial error that inadvertently excluded habitat on the lower San Pedro, we recommended that they include the Pima County portion instead of relying on their Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan to achieve protection. We also identified and recommended inclusion of

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

habitat on lower stretches of Aravaipa Creek and supported this with maps. Mick thanked fellow Director, Bob Evans, for supplying bird sighting data.

- Mick continued by presenting his research and handing out his two-sided information sheet on Riparian Mesquite Water Use. He was inspired by the recent passage of the ill-conceived AZ Senate Bill 1478, which allows Water Protection Fund monies to be spent for mesquite removal while preventing their use for planting mesquite for riparian restoration despite the Fund's stated purpose to maintain, enhance and restore rivers, streams and riparian habitat. Supporters of this legislation erroneously believe that mesquite uses almost double the water of alfalfa, our highest use crop whereas, in reality, the uses are the opposite with mesquite using less than half of what irrigated alfalfa uses. Even the removal of upland mesquite cannot be justified as improving water availability although there may be other good reasons to do so. Mick has a few copies of his full report for those with a particular interest in the subject. (see www.lowersanpedro.org for both versions)
- Lon Brehmer, Director, explained the Pinal County proposal to extend the Veteran's Memorial Highway by paving the road from San Manuel to the San Pedro and on to the county line for a cost of \$1 million, over one third of their road maintenance budget. The original purpose was dust palliation, which we support, but development interests may have expanded the scope. Local residents' support is mixed. LSPWA members have been attending county meetings, alerting staff to potential problems with the plan and voicing our concerns for habitat protection in an area designated Open Space in the County Master Plan. We are referring to this project as the "\$1 million Road to Nowhere" since Pima County will not pave their portion of the road in order to protect their conservation investments. We are hoping to convince the majority of the Supervisors of more rational alternatives, such as a more appropriate level of improvement and/or to spend these funds on road improvements in the more populated areas of the county.
- Peter introduced the idea of a Habitat Conservation Plan for Pinal County. Scott Richardson, FWS, is scheduled to make a presentation to the Board of Supervisors at their Work Session on April 15th. There may be political support for this because protecting the high value habitat identified by the County Master Plan in the eastern portions of the county could allow for incidental take in the Sun Corridor.
- Mick provided an update on the Sun-Zia Extra High Voltage Transmission Project. The BLM issued their Record of Decision this past January. Mick showed maps of the BLM preferred route through the San Pedro Valley where it would impact

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

multiple conservation properties and then continue across from Oracle to several substations along the I-10 corridor. He also displayed maps of several alternative transmission projects which, unlike SunZia, follow developed corridors. In order to receive approval, SunZia agreed to bury their line near the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) which added complexity and increased cost of \$500 million to the project. We are exploring the options of opposing their approval by the AZ Corporation Commission as well as a legal challenge to the EIS which would require financial support from our members and others. We also need to continue countering their deceptive marketing as a “green” project. Factors working against them are their ongoing lawsuit against Tucson Electric Power which must be resolved before they can proceed, the 60-day delay for review by the NM Land Commissioner, ongoing opposition in NM by ranchers and WSMR supporters, and the lack of a market for renewable energy from NM in AZ and CA because they can and will supply their own. However, SunZia may revert to their original plan to transmit power solely in AZ from their permitted natural gas plant at Bowie to the substation at Pinal Central.

2. Objective 2: Advocacy for a Neutrally-Facilitated and Inclusive Watershed-Wide Conservation Planning Process.

Scott Wilbor, Director, joined Mick and Peter in a presentation on the Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) process, which is the successor to the Collaborative Conservation Initiative formerly proposed for the Lower San Pedro River Valley (LSPRV) by the USFWS. The LSPWA, in cooperation with the Cascabel Conservation Association (CCA), initiated contact with the Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, by writing a letter in support of the LCD process and asking for the LSPRV to be included. This letter was incorporated in the successful grant proposal submitted by the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative to fund the process for the LCD which included the LSPRV. We will be informed of opportunities to participate, along with many other stakeholders, in the workshops during the planning process over the next two years. We were urged to support this process for the LSPRV by contacting Genevieve Johnson, gjohnson@usbr.gov, and Aimee Roberson, Aimee_Roberson@fws.gov.

3. Objective 3: Wildlife and ORV Monitoring.

David Omick, Vice-Chair, reviewed the project. He recognized Bill Radke, FWS, who provided funds for the 20 cameras. Some are still available as Kits with other necessary items for a \$50 deposit. David also showed us the Signs which can be posted particularly for those situations where OHV trespass is occurring. He introduced Alex Binford Walsh, who will be taking over as Project Administrator. For more information on the program please visit www.cascabelconservation.org. Peter showed some examples of wildlife captured on his camera and also video demonstrating how fast some OHV's travel in the river bed. Scott displayed his map of the watershed outlining key landscape linkages for

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lower-san-pedro.org

adapting to climate change that his research has identified through modeling. He has a signup sheet for those interested in using the cameras to monitor these corridors and collecting data to verify his models.

4. Objective 4: Collaboration with Other Stakeholder Groups, one example of many.

Jennifer Rinio, Oracle State Park Ranger, welcomed us to the Kannally Ranch House and informed us of the history of the Park, a former ranch which now serves as an Environmental Education Center. She invited us to attend “Dancing with the Stars” there on March 21st when they will celebrate their designation as an International Dark Sky Park. The only charge is the normal \$7 park entrance fee. Mike Weasner, Chair of the OSP Dark Sky committee that worked on the proposal for this designation, thanked Peter and Director Anna Lands for assisting with this work. He spoke about their public outreach mission and the economic benefit that has already been demonstrated by the large increase in numbers of park visitors for the events they have sponsored. Anna has proposed that we pursue designation by the International Dark Sky Association of the LSPRV as a Dark Sky Reserve.

5. Objective 7: Organizational Capacity Building

Cathy Gorman, Secretary, reviewed our growth and highlighted the areas that need improvement. More members becoming active volunteers would allow us to tackle more of our Objectives. We also need to take better advantage of our federal tax-exempt status which we achieved last fall. More donations would allow us to contract for some of the tasks that now occupy the time of our talented volunteers who could spend the extra time more fruitfully. Some immediate jobs we need help with are: a logo, improving and staffing our educational table, being the Webmaster and developing social media outreach, coordinating any one of our Objectives and exploring funding options, such as grants, for those Objectives that require it, such as the LSPWA Film.

Peter led the Discussion about how to tip the balance of our work from reactive to proactive.

He explained that over 500,000 acres in the watershed is protected because it is either federally designated or held as a conservation property. The LSPRV has become the mitigation depository for development elsewhere. However, we still lack a mechanism for watershed-wide conservation planning. What can the LSPWA do to set the table for a forum to address this? Mike Weasner suggested we call a Summit. Scott suggested the upcoming Riverfest as a forum for such a summit, either this year or in the future. Diane Laush related how the LSP Working Group, which consists of representatives of the mitigation properties, had ongoing discussions of how to reach out to other landowners and suggested that The Nature Conservancy could help. Cathy suggested that our Objective 11. *Develop a Memorandum of Understanding with willing landowners to facilitate collaborative research opportunities*, could be a mechanism to begin building a working relationship among the various individual, corporate, agency and NGO

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

landowners. The consensus favored Objective 11 and a committee was formed to work on it. Peter invited anyone interested in becoming more involved with the LSPWA to email lowersanpedro@gmail.com or call 520-487-1903.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:45 PM. We were invited to enjoy the refreshments in the Kannally Ranch House dining room and visit with our fellow members. We reconvened at 3 PM when Peter introduced our Guest Speaker, Doug Peacock.

Doug talked about his organization, Round River Conservation Studies, which he helped found in the early 1990's. They work especially with native peoples to protect wilderness with no help from the "big guys" who value fundraising and image while they forget their mission. Reading from *Walking It Off*, he recounted his time sharing a "caretaking" job with his friend, Ed Abbey, for the Defenders of Wildlife when they owned what is now The Nature Conservancy Aravaipa Canyon Preserve. Reading from his latest book, *In the Shadow of the Sabertooth*, about the wilderness experience of the first North American human colonizers, and how climate change influenced the Pleistocene extinction (evidence of which is right here, for example, at the Mammoth Site, in the upper San Pedro River Valley), Doug emphasized the value of wilderness for us as we face our own version of climate change.

For convenience, Board Decisions are sometimes reached in Virtual Meetings via Email. In order to formally approve and publish the minutes of such meetings since our last in-person meeting, they are included here.

Minutes of July 1, 2014

On June 29, 2014, Board Chair, Peter Else, asked for approval of a standard Corporate Resolution to allow him and Treasurer, Anna Lands, to conduct bank business, including signing checks, for the LSPWA at the National Bank of Arizona which is more convenient than our old bank and can also provide free business checking.

By July 1, 2014, all board members had approved the Resolution with one abstention by Jim Bergstrom.

Minutes of July 8, 2014

On July 3, 2014, Secretary, Cathy Gorman, after incorporating initial comments from Chair, Peter Else, and Director, Mick Meader, distributed the draft minutes of the June 24, 2014 meeting of the LSPWA to the Board for comments and approval.

By July 8, 2014, after incorporating a few changes, the minutes were approved by 10 directors with one abstention by Jim Bergstrom.

Minutes of July 15, 2014

On July 10, 2014, Board Chair, Peter Else, solicited approval for the LSPWA to sign on as partners with Audubon AZ for a grant proposal to the Natural Resource Conservation Service to

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

promote on-the-ground collaborative conservation with landowner partners based on studies conducted by Director, Scott Wilbor.

By July 15, 2014, following some discussion, nine directors approved this action, with one abstention by Doris Haynes and recusal by Scott Wilbor.

Minutes of August 8, 2014

On July 30, 2014, Board Chair, Peter Else, asked for approval of the Mesquite Water Use Fact Sheet produced by Director, Mick Meader, and reviewed by other Directors as well as outside experts, as an official LSPWA publication to be used for educational purposes including distribution. He also asked us to review the longer draft report and approve posting the final version on our website.

By August 8, 2014, nine directors had approved this action with two abstentions by Jim Bergstrom and Lon Brehmer.

Minutes of September 13, 2014

On September 5, 2014, Board Chair, Peter Else sent out an email update to the Directors covering five current issues or activities of the LSPWA along with requested action for each: proposed improvements to the road along the river south of San Manuel to the county line, proposed critical habitat designation for the yellow-billed cuckoo (YBC), our ongoing ORV/Wildlife monitoring project, the potential revival of our film project, and the upcoming Arizona Riparian Council meeting where Peter has been invited to participate in a panel discussion and Director, Mick Meader, will be displaying a poster on Mesquite vs Alfalfa Water Use. The LSPWA has also signed up to be a Sponsor of the conference and staff an educational table. The one action requiring board approval at this time was to allow the LSPWA to develop draft comments on the proposed YBC critical habitat designation for board review before submission. By September 13, 2014, ten of the directors had voted to approve this action with Elna Otter abstaining.

Minutes of September 19, 2014

On September 17, 2014, Chair, Peter Else, sent to the Board and a few additional affected LSPWA members a draft letter from LSPWA to appropriate Pinal County staff, the Transportation Advisory Committee members and the Chair of the Open Space and Trails Commission. The letter was our response to the county's improvement plans for the road which runs along the San Pedro River south of San Manuel to the county line. After suggested changes to the letter were incorporated, by September 19, 2014 the Board had unanimously approved sending the letter.

Minutes of October 8, 2014

On October 6, 2014, Chair, Peter Else, sent to the Board and a few additional interested LSPWA members a draft of our Comments to the USFWS on the proposed yellow-billed cuckoo (YBC) critical habitat designation. Director, Mick Meader, led the development of this seven page illustrated comment letter with assistance from fellow directors, Scott Wilbor and Peter Else, as

LOWER SAN PEDRO WATERSHED ALLIANCE

PO Box 576, Mammoth, AZ 85618

www.lowersanpedro.org

well as from Science Advisor, Phil Hedrick. By October 8, 2014, the Board, with one abstention by Jim Bergstrom, approved the comment letter with minor revisions.

Minutes of November 24, 2014

On November 22, 2014, Chair, Peter Else, sent to the Board, and a few additional interested LSPWA members, a draft letter from LSPWA to the Pinal County Transportation Advisory Committee members who were in the process of ranking potential road improvement projects. The letter was a follow up to our previous letter of September 19, 2014. After some discussion and editing, the final draft was approved on November 24, 2014 by all the Board members with Doris Haines abstaining.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine J. Gorman, LSPWA Secretary