

Southern Arizona RAC Meeting Notes – 19 October 2021

In attendance:

Permittees/Organizations

Ault	Zander	zander@chefzanderault.com
Caldwell	Patti	sweetacacia@hotmail.com
Strauss	Alan	alans@email.arizona.edu
Winfield	Joe	jwin1957@msn.com

Conservation/Recreation Org

Franklin	Kimberly	kfranklin@desertmuseum.org
Guiterman	Eli	ejg@guiterman.com
Quigley	Mike	mike_quigley@twos.org
Zugmeyer	Claire	czugmeyer@sonoraninstitute.org
Dhruv	Suzanne	suzanne@ironwoodtreeexperience.org

Public/Elected Officials/Tribal

Girard	Michele	mgirard93@gmail.com
Hoerig	Karl	karl.hoerig@pascuayaqui-nsn.gov
Mouras	Theodore	tedmouras@mindspring.com

Dewberry	Kerwin	Designated Federal Official	kerwin.dewberry@usda.gov
Backer	Dana	Coordinator	dana.backer@usda.gov
Soto	Celena	Note taker/ Facilitator	celena.soto@usda.gov

Absent: Mac Donalson

This meeting is held virtually, via TEAMS platform, due to the CoVid19 pandemic. The virtual meeting link is: [Meeting Link \(https://shorturl.net/wxC\)](https://shorturl.net/wxC).

The meeting started with introductions from Kerwin Dewberry. Michele Girard also thanked the members for their attention, time, and commitment to this process and explained the basic agenda of the day. Dana Backer discussed specifics regarding small group break out rooms and the technology associated with the virtual meeting platform. Groups A, B, and C were then opened in subgroup meeting rooms for discussion and ranking of projects, by counties per the guidance and direction of the Act. Each group was provided a spreadsheet with their group members' scores and overall average by County. The goal of the break out was for each group to come to a group consensus on a priority rank of the proposals within each county.

GROUP A Meeting Notes:

Members Present: Zander Ault, Joe Winfield, Alan Strauss

Group did not have a quorum for Maricopa and Pinal counties due to 1 member recusing themselves because of involvement with applicant submitting proposals and 2 individuals not reviewing the county proposals that were submitted in the second round (Maricopa and Pinal). The group moved onto the next several counties for discussion and ranking. Group members discussed pros and cons, negotiated amongst themselves, defended their individual ranks and came to a consensus on the overall ranks.
Break

Patti Caldwell joined the group at this time.

One of the participants took 30mins during a break to review the 5 proposals and the group came back together. Finished the review and ranking on Maricopa and Pinal counties.

GROUP B Meeting Notes:

Members Present: Kim Franklin, Mike Quigley, Claire Zugmeyer, and Suzy Dhruv (Eli Guiterman was able to join the group after the break and participate.)

Group members discussed pros and cons, negotiated amongst themselves, defended their individual ranks and came to a consensus on the overall ranks. Pros and cons regarding decisions made also offered feedback with statements for applicants in a general sense of projects not ranking as high due to inability to scale (or no budget plan submitted to display opportunities to increase/decrease funding in any amounts). Notion that proposals are pushing an issue from one location to another making the proposal not rank as high as one that may offer a solution desired in the community. Monies awarded would not bring actual change, just a plan that would create another issue that would need funding to implement. Youth engagement was an ideal component and had similar work submitted by the same organizations taking place on private lands. No monitoring plan was submitted in some instances. A value-added submission had high community involvement. Other projects were working in the back country that would not have other opportunities to be utilized by more of the "public". The project submission that had an HOA match was a value-added component. Another project submission was for an excellent trail that is more often used by a smaller set of the public. Other submissions were scored in a reflective way of their expense, the fact that they were off forest, that effectiveness was not displayed and there was no plan B, and that sustained work would be needed over time to include monitoring and maintenance. Discussion was robust and valuable to reach a consensus amongst the small group.

GROUP C Meeting Notes:

Members present: Ted Mouras, Karl Hoerig and Michele Girard.

Group C's initial scores prior to the meeting were quite consistent. The three members in agreement, for the most part, on the proposals they gave high ratings. Projects that included local partners, multiple benefits, matching funds, and provided educational opportunities were favored. Projects that did not benefit the public in general were not scored as high as those that benefited youth and local economies. Group C was concerned about the high per unit cost of some of the projects in relation to limited benefits and factored this into their rankings. Concern was expressed that many projects did not provide adequate monitoring plans and that more detailed budgets would have been helpful.

LUNCH BREAK

The priorities from each group were tallied onto a spreadsheet and averaged. This was the starting point for the afternoon's discussion.

All morning participants were present except for Eli Guiterman who had a work commitment that he could not get out of.

50% of RAC projects need to be funded in roads/trails decommissioning and watershed improvement. Projects did not need to be tracking in this category because most, if not all of the proposals met the watershed improvement criteria. All projects submitted met the legislation criteria.

Committee members, with guidance from the committee chair, deliberated as a group the priority ranking of proposed projects by county.

Michele brought up the idea to go back to the project submitter to recognize what conflicts are for reducing projects when they have stated that they are scalable.

Kerwin wants to ensure that the forest (Coronado or Tonto) is aware of the dollars they will receive as well as the commitment to get back to the proponent to inform them of funding decisions, project submissions strengths and weaknesses, and next steps. Returned funds will be re-awarded to proponents that were not fully funded or proposals that fell below the funding cut line.

Of note, the committee can make the decision what they want to do with monies left if there are any after votes for funding (i.e., placing more funding to a project or partially funding another project to totally allocate the dollars received). Funding also can be split at a level discussed and decided by the committee. Much discussion was had, and votes were taken for full or partial funding of projects and the impacts it may have on submissions. Ted did raise his reservations and questions about the scoring level for groups A&B in relation to what he knows about the area Sonoita Creek and Patagonia Lake proposals. Other members were asked for their subject matter expertise when appropriate.

Alan feels that the Patagonia project did not rise to the level for funding. AZ Land and Water Trust being in partnership carries weight. Diversity funding was a sub-group goal. Alan has opposition to Patagonia project due to the proposal being too weak with no monitoring plan. The discussion of spreading the wealth was not a focus in group A; focus was more on the merit of submissions. Less concern about funding of projects as opposed to the merit of submissions. Borderlands Restoration is pointed out that they are in that area of the state and are job creators which could lead to why their projects are receiving funding. Also discussed are the long-term financial investments as well as immediate impacts that can be realized, economic impacts, and following a model working with youth being valuable and desirable.

There are projects that still need NEPA. Once the decisions are made; the DFO through the Forest Supervisors will return to Line Officers to confirm that the funded projects can be accomplished. Currently, NEPA status is not going to factor into ranking discussions due to the complexity it brings to the deliberations.

Questions were raised if either of the trails have more need for restoration over the other? That is unknown. Ted states environmental impact is a high priority. Questions regarding the potential for success of the Cottonwood project.

The private/public partnership model is desirable in ranking and funding discussions.

Committee Chair holds a vote of members for recommending the following projects and funding amount:

Southern Arizona Resource Advisory Committee
 Recommendations to Designated Federal Officer Kerwin Dewberry

October 19, 2021

MARICOPA						
Project Title	Applicant	Location	Lead District	Requested	FUNDED	Difference
Building a future with saguaros	Tucson Audubon Society	Federal	Mesa	\$ 94,292	\$ 74,945	-\$19,347
Bush Fire Replanting Project	Natural Restoration	Federal	Mesa	\$ 43,055	\$ 43,055	
Lower Sycamore FR 1847 Piperail Project	Forest Service	Federal		\$ 70,000		
				\$ 207,347	\$ 118,000	

PINAL						
Project Title	Applicant	Location	Lead District	Requested	FUNDED	Difference
Building a future with saguaros	Tucson Audubon Society	Federal	Santa Catalina	\$ 134,156	\$ 134,156	
Arizona Trail Remote Rainwater Collector	Arizona Trail Association	State	Mesa	\$ 44,113	\$ 44,744	+\$631
Picket Post Trail Head Expansion	Forest Service	Federal		\$ 180,000		
				\$ 358,269	\$ 178,900	

SANTA CRUZ						
Project Title	Applicant	Location	Lead District	Requested	FUNDED	Difference
Wild Chile Botanical Area Native Vegetation Restoration	Borderlands Restoration Network	Federal	Nogales	\$37,131	\$37,131	
Pyeatt Ranch Erosion Control for Babocomari Watershed Health	AZ Land and Water Trust	Federal/Priva	Nogales	\$53,491	\$53,491	
Enhancing the Connectivity of the Coronado National Forest Through Watershed Restoration and Community Engagement	Borderlands Restoration Network	Federal/Priva	Nogales	\$199,882	\$108,866	-\$91,016
New Generation of Freemont Cottonwoods on Sonoita Creek	Tucson Audubon Society	Town/Private	Nogales	\$90,662	\$90,662	
Patagonia Lake Cattle Exclosure and Riparian Vegetation Recovery	Tucson Audubon Society	State		\$36,572		
Old Baldy Trail Resoration	Wild AZ	Federal		\$73,172		
Sycamore Canyon Water Gap	Forest Service	Federal		\$150,000		
				\$640,910	\$290,150	

PIMA						
Project Title	Applicant	Location	Lead District	Requested	FUNDED	Difference
Enhancement of Santa Catalina Mountain Water Sources for Wildlife	Sky Island Alliance	Federal	Santa Catalina	\$33,849	\$33,849	
Sabino Canyon Recreation Area Erosion Control and Enhanced Infiltration Project	Watershed Management Group	Federal	Santa Catalina	\$26,243	\$26,243	
Santa Catalina Cobblestone WUI Invasive Treatment	Forest Service	Federal	Santa Catalina	\$25,990	\$ 12,658	-\$13,332
Grasslands Again; A Borderlands Restoration Project	Primero Conservation	Private		\$49,600		
Santa Catalina Foothills Survey and Inventory – Phase I	National Forest Foundation	Federal		\$20,125		
Cross S Improvement Project	Forest Service	Federal		\$140,000		
				\$295,807	\$72,750	

COCHISE						
Project Title	Applicant	Location	Lead District	Requested	FUNDED	Difference
Enhancing Wildlife Habitat and Water Source Security in the Huachuca Mountain Foothills	Sky Island Alliance	Federal	Sierra Vista	\$67,944	\$67,944	
Youth Harvest the Rain Across Cochise County	Borderlands Restoration Network	Federal/Priva	Douglas	\$221,418	\$ 154,056	
South Fork and Crest Trail Restoration	Wild AZ	Federal		\$73,214		
Jackwood Mechanical Brush Control	Forest Service	Federal		\$75,000		
				\$437,576	\$222,000	

After-Action Review.

The Coordinator and Chair asked questions of the group regarding a). What went right? b). What didn't go so right? c). What can be done to improve?

Relative to last time the RAC convened, in person discussion was more desirable. The virtual format was required because of pandemic protocols, but when the group is in a room together there is space for break time chats, temperature checks, and basic connection that may be lost in the virtual format. Spreadsheet work was helpful and aided in a visual display of consensus. The notion of pre-planning was moot since most had to work as their schedules allowed when they could devote their time to reviewing proposals. Giving proponents a chance to answer in person or to "defend" their project submissions was useful last go round. Last time there also seemed to be better District Ranger (Line Officer) participation. The time commitment felt like it was less last time. This time, there was better preparation beforehand that made the process smoother. The small group discussion was valuable. There was an abundance of emails that sometimes made it hard to keep track of. Compressing emails and reviews is ideal. Having access to project submissions, spreadsheets with initial scoring before the meeting was beneficial – last time it all took place the day of and was a challenge. The project submission deadline should be decided on and kept. To accomplish a full review and then add projects to the mix was challenging. The centralized BOX folder and spreadsheets were beneficial to allow for self-paced reviews. All things considered, the virtual set up worked. Communication, via email, was valuable. Smooth process in today's meeting was due to the up-front time investment. Members commended the Chair for being available, willing, and on task to "talk out" the issues.

Areas of improvement – potential for breaking the BOX folder into subfolders of A, B, and C for scoring so that groups are better in tune with their counterparts. A couple of recommendations for revision of the proposals for the next round: include a line for organization that is making the proposal, so we don't have to figure it out from the content and include a required budget justification. Clarification of what the values statement means so there is consensus on the "ranking". Scalability of projects being lined out an identification if a project is multiyear or single year in nature. Maps would be helpful. Can we do better to personally invite smaller groups to submit proposals? Of note, outreach was heavy, but the same outcome occurred. Powerhouses that are familiar organizations who are aware of processes to request funding and write proposals continue to submit. Workshops or introductory sessions may be of benefit at some point. Of note, tribal organizations may not have capacity are some obstacles to be mindful of when it comes to groups who submit project proposals. In regards to project implementation and follow-up, the RAC can be as involved as it wants to be in seeing the Secure Rural School Title II projects come to fruition and recipients being held accountable for what they proposed to implement/monitor. The Chair raises if there is a desire to sign acknowledgement sheets at the start to clarify deadlines, commitment, etc. What is a good time frame to begin this process next year should Congress re-authorize the Act and funding mechanism? An issue raised is that the members of the RAC appear to be the same organization type of folks, time after time, and when new members are participating there isn't as much of a level playing field for knowledge of projects or areas. Weighing in and sharing points of view are helpful and welcome (in the larger discussion and small groups). Peers are learning from peers. A desire for maintaining engagement throughout implementation phase and sharing of the outcomes is needed. That did not take place after the last RAC. One item that is unneeded is that the Coordinators do not need to advertise in local newspaper; can just do social media and website but must do Federal Register publishing.

Next Steps – work with the Forest Supervisors and Line Officers on implementation/monitoring. Potential for project field trips and "go-sees". Fill 2 vacancies on the Public/Elected Officials/Tribal

group (outreach from the current members is much appreciated). The Coordinator will put all documentation in the BOX folder: the notes, After Action Review, Group make up, and final funding decisions. A Chair needs to be identified for the next RAC effort.

Thanks to all for their meaningful participation. Meeting adjourned at 1623.

Michelle M Girard
Signature of RAC Chair

11/2/21
Date