

## ACCESS SUBPROGRAM

### ACCESS PROJECT

#### Project information:

Administrative work was conducted at the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Development Branch, 2221 West Greenway Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85023-4399; the Department's Regional Offices in Pinetop, Flagstaff, Kingman, Yuma, Tucson, and Mesa; and other statewide locations, as necessary. Fieldwork was conducted statewide.

Project personnel: Development Branch Chief, Project Leader with assistance from the Landowner Relations Program Manager, Access Program Coordinator, Conservation Stewardship Coordinator, and Landowner Incentive Specialist. Personnel of the Wildlife Management Division and Branches (Fisheries, Game, Habitat, Nongame, and Research), Information Branch, Education Branch, Support Services Branch, Department Regions, and other Department personnel as necessary provided additional support.

#### JOB 1: PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

Objectives: Administer the Heritage Access Programs (Heritage Access Grant-In-Aid, Landowner Respect Program, and the Adopt-A-Ranch program) to take a proactive role in establishing working relationships between the landowner/lessee, recreational user groups, land management agencies, and the Department and to react to specific problems or conflicts that arise. Inform and educate recreational users of public lands about the responsible use of public and privately held lands and access opportunities to those lands. Maintain the Access Database. Acquire and utilize current technology to facilitate and enhance all activities under the program.

Activities and Accomplishments: The Heritage Access project (Heritage Access Grant-In-Aid, Landowner Respect Program, Adopt-A-Ranch Program, and the Access Stewardship Program) was administered through the Landowner Relations Program (LRP). The project focused on establishing working relationships between the landowner/lessee, recreational user groups, land management agencies, and the Department. Access issues and needs were solicited and annually updated from Department personnel in regional offices statewide to determine priority access issues and Land Access Program needs. LRP personnel actively worked with regional personnel to provide and promote outreach, information, exchange ideas, and discuss regional access issues. A solicitation to Region V was generated for compilation of a list of all private landowners controlling access into public lands. This list will be incorporated into project outreach efforts with the NRCS to be used as potential cooperators for promoting, developing, and enhancing public access.

The project continued maintenance of the LRP database during the reporting period. The LRP database is current with 295 participants. This database continues to grow in concert with on-going efforts by Access personnel to mitigate land user conflicts that concern ranchers and private landowners.

The Access Program has been working cooperatively with the USGS to develop current maps with land status and topography for each Game Management Unit (GMU) in the state. The maps are generated through a compilation of information provided by Arizona State Land Department, BLM, USFS, and private landowners. During the reporting period, the project has produced three GMU maps, which were distributed through the Department's web site, private map stores, and the BLM Public Lands Information Centers throughout the State. The project used these and other maps made available through the Department's GIS program (Habitat Branch) to provide current information on land status, ownership, sensitive species and other critical needs for access related issues. These maps are used in planning and implementing programs across all areas, as well as for public meetings, Commission meetings, and display.

The project maintained and refined public communication processes by which access needs can be coordinated with the public. During the reporting period, project personnel participated at the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association Annual meeting, Arizona Farm Bureau Annual meeting, Wildlife Expo, and hunting clinics. Personnel presented on current issues and solicited participation in Adopt-A-Ranch, Stewardship, and Respect Programs to sportsmen groups and off-highway vehicle user groups.

Written and verbal information was received from the public regarding public access issues and concerns. The project responded through letters, site visits, and coordination with other agencies. The issues of major concern included hunter access in southeastern Arizona, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use on public lands near Apache Junction and on public lands near Chino Valley, and complaints regarding access across private lands near the cities of Wickenburg, Tucson, and public lands north of Phoenix. The Department's 1-800-VANDALS hotline continues to be a source for the public to report access problems or vandalism that could result in a loss of access if not addressed expeditiously.

The Department's Access Grant-In-Aid funded one project in FY 2003. The project addresses a variety of public needs regarding access into the Saguaro National Park in Tucson, Arizona. This project is ongoing and will be completed in FY2004.

## **JOB 2: ACCESS INVENTORY AND ENHANCEMENT**

**Objectives:** Identify, inventory, and monitor areas closed to access and determine where additional access is needed. Increase, maintain, or reduce public access as required, for recreational use in cooperation with federal land managers, State and local government entities, private landowners and recreational users.

**Activities and Accomplishments:** The project conducted inventories and monitored areas in an effort to identify areas closed to access and to determine where additional access is needed. LRP personnel coordinated with the State NRCS office to establish cooperative agreements for land management that incorporate Access Stewardship, and NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQUIP) funds to provide the necessary resources for improving ranch operations, provide public access, and implement wildlife habitat improvements.

The LRP personnel completed nine access agreements during the reporting period ensuring public access to over 200,000 acres of lands for the next two to seven years. Through informal agreements with landowner/lessees, the Ranch Respect Program provides informational and regulatory signage and accessories on 295 ranches statewide with a coverage area of over 12,000 acres. Access personnel facilitated and participated in 22 Adopt-A-Ranch activities on 20 ranches statewide. Efforts associated with these projects included 457 volunteers and over 4,300 volunteer hours. This is an ongoing project activity whereby volunteers work directly with the landowners, the Department, and with other appropriate land management agencies to perform regular maintenance activities on the "adopted" ranch, helping to mitigate problems that can be attributable to public access, such as repairing fence, posting signage, and collecting trash.

In conjunction with promoting good landowner relations, LRP personnel pursue new Stewardship Agreements statewide that can mitigate or improve the available access to public lands. Perpetual easements were pursued during the reporting period. Short-term Access Stewardship Agreements (varying from two to six years duration) have been established with the Hurtado, Rose Tree, Telles, Bennett, Baboquivari, Palo Alto, Santa Margarita, Holcomb, and Tusayan ranches. These access agreements will provide public access though private property to public lands. In addition, LRP personnel worked with land management agencies, private landowner, and other special interest groups to develop consensual methods for resolving public access needs. The LRP has worked cooperatively with the State Land Department, BLM, counties, municipalities, and private landowners to designate the Desert Wells Multi-Use Area southeast of Apache Junction. This area required closure of a large portion of State Trust Land to mitigate current land uses and damage while designating adjacent areas for the purpose of OHV recreation.

In an effort to reduce or otherwise limit inappropriate types of public recreational access to minimize impacts to wildlife and wildlife resources, the project presented five petitions for road closure to the Commission to prevent unnecessary environmental damage or mitigate conflict with recreational users and private landowners. The Commission at its January 2003 meeting approved the closures. The project also provided signs, brochures, gates, locks, and information kiosks to educate recreational users and the public about public land access and private land rights. The LRP provided informational brochures on all types of public recreation and brochures to explain unique areas for public recreation, route plans, and a synopsis of the Access Program. Through the LRP Respect Program signs have been provided to private landowners to educate the public on proper etiquette, private land boundaries, laws, hunting regulations, and an array of additional educational needs, including bilingual signs for the southern border GMUs to educate and inform people about respecting the private lands and livestock operations that are threatened.

**EXPENDITURES -- ACCESS SUBPROGRAM, FY 2003:**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
Personal Services	\$ 106,355
Employee Related Expenses	28,865
All Other Operating	367,897
Travel State	3,861
Non-Capital Equipment	5,753
Equipment	24,056
Mileage	3,640
Cost Transfer	21,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 561,427</b>

**Access Jobs:**

<b>Job</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
Job 1, Public Access Information	\$ 89,087
Job 2, Public Access Inventory and Enhancement	472,340
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 561,427</b>