



## SB 1441 Wildlife Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Fund

### SEMIANNUAL REPORT

#### I. Executive Summary

Laws 2006, Chapter 372, (Senate Bill 1441 wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement fund; appropriation) requires the Arizona Game and Fish Commission to submit a semiannual report on the work, goals, objectives and funding of the wildlife habitat and restoration enhancement fund. The study must be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the chairpersons of the Senate and House of Representatives Appropriations Committees and provide a copy of the report to the Secretary of State and the director of the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records.

SB 1441 appropriated \$3,500,000 to the wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement fund to be spent by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) as administered by the Commission. *The bill was effective on September 21, 2006 and the monies were not received from the General Accounting Office until October 19, 2006.* The projects outlined in the bill are as follows:

1. Anderson Mesa grassland restoration.
2. Kaibab winter range habitat improvement.
3. Yuma region water redevelopments.
4. Wildlife water redevelopments north of the Colorado river.
5. Pinetop region deer habitat restoration project, including the Chitty Creek habitat restoration project, the Pigeon habitat restoration project and the Sheep Wash ecosystem improvement project.

Project	Dedicated Funding	Expenditures to Date
Anderson Mesa	\$649,552	\$35,565
Kaibab	\$376,125	\$10,750
Yuma	\$750,000	\$37,782
North of Colorado River	\$750,000	\$64,472
Pinetop Region	\$920,180	\$0
Swing monies awaiting dedication	\$54,143	\$0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$3,500,000</b>	<b>\$148,569</b>

## II. Project Work, Objectives and Goals

**Project Title:** Anderson Mesa grassland restoration

**Project Work, Objectives and Goals:** This project plans to improve 5,500 acres of wildlife habitat through use of Agra-axe, chain saw, seeding, herbicide, wetland fencing and burning. Archeological surveys will be completed on over 10,000 acres of federal lands. So far we have completed 1097 acres of treatment and have awarded the contract for the archaeological surveys. All work in the Anderson Mesa area will be continuation of projects on both Coconino National Forest and the State and private land complex, the Flying M Ranch and the Bar T Bar Ranch. This work is being performed primarily to benefit pronghorn antelope.

**Funding:** Expenditures to Date (12/15/06): \$35,565 Dedicated Funds: \$649,552

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**Project Title:** Kaibab Winter Range Habitat Improvements

**Project Work, Objectives and Goals:** This project would improve deer habitat on approximately 6,800 acres of a 24,000-acre deer habitat restoration project through use of Agra-axe, chain saw, re-seeding and herbicide. Archeological surveys would be completed on an additional 4,300 acres in preparation for juniper push renovation work.

Currently, 2,500 acres of this 24,000-acre project has completed archeological clearances. Another 2,500 acres, scheduled for fall 2007 seeding, are currently being surveyed with clearance anticipated by May 2007. An additional proposal, under this project, has a survey underway to complete archeological clearances on 4,300 acres of push renovation work allowing work to start in spring 2007.

**Funding:** Expenditures to Date (12/15/06): \$10,750 Dedicated Funds: \$376,125

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**Project Title:** Region IV (Yuma) water redevelopments:

**Project Work, Objectives and Goals:** The project would redevelop existing wildlife water developments that were either in a state of disrepair and were not functioning as designed or those that were originally designed with inadequate water storage to sustain use by wildlife between rainfall events that recharges the system. In turn, these developments become water-hauling liabilities (both monetarily and manpower resources) for the Department.

Prior to final budgets being loaded, Department personnel established a priority list of water developments that were candidates for redevelopment. Priorities were based upon the wildlife use/need, water-hauling liability, and practicability of obtaining the necessary environmental compliance documentation within the established construction timelines. In Region IV, there are thirty-five (35) projects scheduled for completion.

Various sportsmen clubs such as the Yuma Rod and Gun Club will contribute their resources and manpower.

**Funding:** Expenditures to Date (12/17/06): \$ 37,782 Dedicated Funds: \$750,000

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**Project Title:** Region II (North of the Colorado River) water redevelopments

**Project Work, Objectives and Goals:** Region II has four (4) new catchments and 36 redevelopments that are on the list for completion.

Department personnel established a priority list of water developments north of the Colorado River that were candidates for redevelopment. Like the Yuma project priorities for both areas were based upon the wildlife use/need, water-hauling liability, and practicability of obtaining the necessary environmental compliance documentation within the established construction timelines.

**Funding:** Expenditures to Date (12/15/06): \$64,472 Dedicated Funds: \$750,000

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**Project Title:** Pinetop Region Deer Habitat Restoration Projects including the Chitty Creek habitat restoration project, the Pigeon habitat restoration project and the Sheep Wash ecosystem improvement project

**Project Work, Objectives and Goals:** To restore approximately 48,400 acres of deer habitat within three landscape level project areas, Chitty Creek, Pigeon Creek, and Sheep Wash in southern Game Management Unit 27, on the Clifton Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The Chitty Creek project would improve 14,000 acres of deer habitat through the application of prescribed fire and vegetation thinning. The Pigeon Creek project would improve 21,000 acres of deer habitat through the application of prescribed fire and vegetation thinning. Sheep Wash restoration, an ongoing project involving three geographic areas of focus in a 31,000 acre ecosystem area, would receive funding to initiate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and provide for the implementation of woodland thinning to improve 13,400 acres of deer habitat specifically in woodland grasslands and Ponderosa pine stringer canyons. Although improving deer habitat is the primary purpose for SB1441 funding of these projects, many other wildlife species including elk, bear, turkey, Mexican spotted owl, and

potential Gila trout habitat, as well as participating livestock permittees will benefit from the successful implementation of these projects.

**Chitty Creek** restoration involves treatments along the Mogollon Rim. Understory thinning has been planned on over 900 acres of summer range in both Ponderosa pine and Spruce fir habitats, and prescribed fire on 14,000 acres in all summer and winter habitats. Thinning has been ongoing using other available funding sources. Prescribed fire treatments were planned and on the verge of implementation in October 2006, but significant (3'+) rainfall closed the window for effective burning thereby requiring postponement of Phase I prescribed burning to October 2007. The East Eagle grazing permittees have been very supportive in resting the project area pre and post treatment and their contribution is shown as reduced revenue from livestock sales from the project area over a 3 year period.

**Pigeon Creek** restoration will involve application of prescribed fire on approximately 21,000 acres and approval for natural fire use at meaningful landscape areas of up to 36,000 acres. Planned fire entries will occur in April 2007 for blacklining, and May 2007 for effectiveness to reduce tree and shrub canopy, reinvigorate shrub species, and invigorate herbaceous production. The Pigeon grazing permittee provided for the initiation of the restoration effort by agreeing to remove all livestock for a period of years to allow for fine fuels buildup and applied fire. In addition, the permittee refurbished 16 earthen tanks in 2005, and has obtained grants for reconstruction or new construction of fencing to improve livestock management when the allotment is restocked after recovery occurs.

**Sheep Wash** restoration involves the entire sub-unit watershed on four allotments, Pigeon, Mesa, Double Circle, and AD Bar/Hog Trail. Funding from SB 1441 will enable NEPA analysis of 2 separate areas for mechanical thinning in various forest and woodland habitats and some landscape level treatments, which are planned to begin in April 2007. The Sheep Wash project is separated into three focus areas, Mallett (Upper Sheep Wash), Mesa (middle), and NO Bar (lower Sheep Wash). As displayed in the following table, a significant amount of restoration work has been completed on the Mesa portion of Sheep Wash, ongoing since about 2000. All grazing permittees are and remain very supportive of restoration efforts, and understand very clearly the benefits of resting from livestock grazing for full restoration recovery.

**Funding:** No work is proposed between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup> due to anticipated winter weather conditions.