



PRONGHORN

4th Quarter 2023
Volume 29 Number 4



ARIZONA ANTELOPE FOUNDATION, INC.

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AAF Mission Statement:

The Arizona Antelope Foundation is an organization dedicated to the welfare of pronghorn antelope. The Foundation's Mission is to actively seek to increase pronghorn populations in Arizona through habitat improvements, habitat acquisition, the translocation of animals to historic range, and public comment on activities affecting pronghorn and their habitat.



ON OUR COVER

The Sonoita Plains in November 2023.

Photo by Betty Dickens

Pronghorn is a quarterly magazine for the members of AAF. Letters, comments, news items, articles, pictures and stories are all welcome and will be considered for publication. Address all such items to:

Lenée Landis, Pronghorn Editor, PO Box 1191, Mesa AZ 85211 or by email at info@azantelope.org.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2024 Wow!! Where did 2023 go? The Arizona Antelope Foundation is off and running for 2024. Another year, new adventures, and more conservation projects. Each year the AAF sets a plan to complete a minimum of five conservation projects. We are successful most years with this plan.

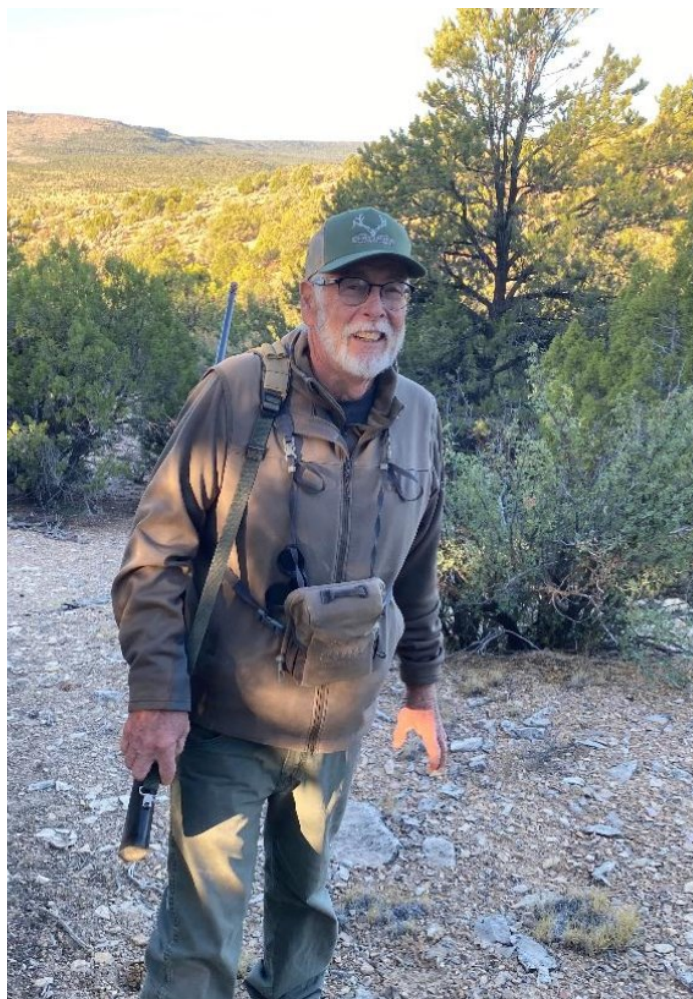
In 2024 we have six projects on the books. Additionally, we participate in activities such as Camo at the Capitol and hold an annual hunter's clinic for the people that draw tags. Add in a couple of other informational clinics and it makes for a busy year. We have had many willing volunteers at each of our projects and the AAF is grateful to all of you for donating your time and abilities.

For those of you who have not yet joined us on a project, we would welcome you anytime. All the projects are coordinated with the Arizona Game and Fish. Through this partnership we can put the money on the ground where your dollars do the most good for antelope. To volunteer for one of our projects, you need to log onto the AZGFD website and sign up for the volunteer opportunities. It's a simple and necessary first step in the volunteer process.

The next important step in the volunteer process is to go back onto the AZGFD website after each project and register your hours. (See page 9 article for more info.) Your donated hours support grant programs that fund the Arizona Game & Fish. Please help us to obtain the most we can in grants by completing this process. See below for this year's projects. Please check our Facebook page for exact dates.

With the six conservation projects and funding for other prevalent needs that require funding in 2024, we have a lot on our plate. The funding for the AAF is driven primarily by the online raffles and supported by the membership dues. While we had a very successful year with the raffles in 2023, our revenues were down. We had a good uptick in membership driven by Board member Paul Pavlich; so that is good news.

As the raffle is our primary source of revenue, we asked our raffle ticket buyers and members what they would like to see more of in the way of raffles. And yes, we have listened. This year you will see more hunts and hunting-related items, plus a few other items that have been requested. We hope that by responding to these requests we will see our revenue increase. So please support the raffles. Remember, you "can't win if you don't play".



We want to continue to increase the membership in the AAF. We ask that you, our members, continue to spread the word about the work the AAF does and its importance in the conservation community. Talk with your friends and family about supporting the Arizona Antelope Foundation.

Be safe,
Terry Schupp

"LIBERTAS AD VAGOR"....

FREEDOM TO ROAM

2024 Project Calendar

March - Vekol-Valley
April - 18A
May - Big Lake
June - San Rafael Valley
August - Interstate-17
September - 18A

SONORAN PRONGHORN CAPTURE AT CABEZA PRIETA DECEMBER 12-13, 2023

BY JAMIE WATKINS, AAF BOARD MEMBER

Sonoran pronghorn, a subspecies of pronghorn, have evolved to survive the harsh desert environment. Unlike the common (American) pronghorn typically seen in grassland prairies, the smaller Sonoran pronghorn roam the sandy, rocky desert of the Southwest and feed on vegetation such as chain fruit cholla and the new leaves of an ocotillo after the summer rains of a monsoon.

The Sonoran pronghorn experienced a catastrophic population decline after an extensive drought in 2002. This led to the Sonoran pronghorn recovery efforts, including a captive breeding program developed at the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in 2003. Updates on the captive and wild populations can be found in each issue of *Pronghorn*.

Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) was on the invitation list for the December 2023 captures, and I was able to spare a couple days to provide support during the capture at the Cabeza Prieta pens on Dec 12 and 13. The goal was to move up to 24 pronghorn from the Cabeza Prieta pens to holding pens to release them into the wild. Each pronghorn slated for release would receive either a GPS or VHF radio collar and ear tag while those being sent back into the captive breeding pen would receive a replacement of non-working collars, a new VHF collar for breeding females, and new color-coded ear tags for the 2023 fawns. All animals would receive vaccinations and have blood and fecal samples taken.

After loading camping gear to my truck late afternoon Dec 11, I headed to the predesignated campsite about a mile east of the pens located within the refuge. Accompanying me were two NAU Forestry students studying Wildlife Ecology. One, an AAF volunteer and prior AZGFD summer intern, was looking for additional experience in the field while the other would be experiencing his first capture and field work. We arrived at the camp site after dark, checked in, and pitched our tents before calling it a night.

Day 1: Tuesday morning met us with a pre-dawn gathering of individuals at a large canvas tent set up with a row of tables and kitchen where breakfast was being served by the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club. Just after dawn, we piled into trucks and headed to the south pen where 46 pronghorn were being held in the bomas (earlier lured in by delicious alfalfa).

Just inside the pen near the entrance of the forward boma, tables were lined up where GPS and VHS collars were being unboxed and medical supplies were being set out. Meanwhile, shade canopies were assembled over each of the three processing stations. A processing station consisted of a small table, two sawhorses supporting a specially designed stretcher placed over a small trench, and a canister of oxygen.

After the set-up was complete, the teams met for instructions related to their job function. I was placed in one of the teams as a “temperature monitor”, tasked with continuous monitoring of a pronghorn’s body temperature. I would alert the team’s veterinarian if the body temperature rises above 104 degrees and ensure the data recorder has the initial and final temperature noted on the pronghorn’s data sheet.

With many years of knowledge and best practices baked in, the operation is very well laid out and plays out as follows:

The sorting team moves two to three pronghorn to the front boma and communicates which animals have been sorted. Each pronghorn within the bomas has its own flashcard, kind of like a baseball card, which includes information as to its sex, if it’s a fawn or adult, ear tag color and number, collar color, and destination. The card for the sorted pronghorn is pulled from the stack and handed to a data recorder who ensures the pronghorn receives the proper markings (tags and collars) and veterinary treatments as per the animal’s destination.

The veterinarians gather the necessary injections, and the marking team prepares the tag and/or radio collar.

2. Next up, the net team, muggers, and wallflowers form a tight line, three abreast, at the boma entrance. The net team takes the middle of the line with the intermingled wallflowers and muggers on either side. They scrunch up super close and the door is quickly slid open. As the door slides open, the line charges into the boma as tightly and quickly as possible. The wallflowers and muggers dash in, hugging the inside walls of the boma to create a human barrier to prevent the pronghorn from colliding with the wall. Meanwhile, the net team holds the long drag net to create a smaller space within the boma so the muggers can hand-catch the pronghorn. The instant the last person in the line makes it into the boma, the door is slid closed and you can hear the quiet commotion of pronghorn hoofs and human boots shuffling within while dust swirls around and fills the inside of the boma. The bleat of a startled pronghorn ends with a defeated groan as it is subdued. Within seconds, the sorted pronghorn are caught, lifted from the ground, and immediately blindfolded.
3. Once all the animals in the boma are secure, the stretcher teams move in to place the pronghorn on a stretcher, legs dangling from four holes cut in the fabric, and transport them to the processing stations. The stretcher is placed on sawhorses so the pronghorn's hooves cannot reach the ground.
4. This is where I dive in, literally, with my thermometer. I provide the data recorder with the initial temperature while the veterinarians begin to draw blood, provide sedation, oxygen, vaccinations, vitamins... the works. Fecal samples are also taken. The marking team fixes an ear tag (if the animal does not already have one) and places a new radio collar around the animal's slender neck. During this time, I call the body temperature as it begins to rise or advise if it is holding steady. If any animal reaches 104 degrees, the veterinarian decides if water is needed to bring the temperature back down. Processing assistants are available to begin dousing an overheating pronghorn with cold water to keep the temperature from rising. The trench under the suspended stretcher collects the water as it cascades from the pronghorn's body. A short few minutes pass and the animal is ready to move to the trailer. A final temperature is noted on the data sheet and the stretcher team whisks the animal out of the pen and to the awaiting trailer.

The first couple of rounds are a little rough, but after some feedback and on-the-job experience, everyone gets in their groove and the process is repeated until all 46 pronghorn from the bomas in the south pen are processed. For some of the lucky ones that are released back into the comfort and safety of the pen, they are processed directly in the boma while being hand-held by the muggers. Once processing is complete here, the muggers carry the animal out of the boma being careful to keep kicking hooves off the ground, the blindfold is removed, and the pronghorn is gently lowered until its feet touch the ground and they bound away.

Just after 1:00pm, the last pronghorn is loaded to a trailer and the team begins breaking down the stations and packing up supplies so they can be brought into the north pen for the next day's operation. There's nothing left for me to do so I find my passengers and we drive back to camp where we can relax until dinner.

Day 2: Folks begin to gather Wednesday morning and after breakfast, we take to our vehicles and head to the north pen where 24 pronghorn await in the bomas.

The tables and processing stations are set up in a similar fashion as the day before. The procedure for today is the same as yesterday. However, there are a few assignment changes and I'm switched over to double as a wallflower and processing assistant. Cool! I get to join in the fray and see first-hand the excitement that occurred in the bomas I was so curious about the day before!

After the sorting team moves a set of pronghorn to the forward boma and the flashcards are handed off to the data recorders, the wallflowers (that's me), net team, and muggers line up at the boma door.

Second in line to the left of the net team was my starting position. We scrunch up, the door slides open, and we're off! Hugging the left inside wall of the boma, I rush in to reach my position and get a quick glimpse of the action while the net team dives center-right and quickly closes off any escape paths in my direction. A fawn buck launches straight up in the air into an awaiting net and is caught mid-air by one of the muggers. Another animal is already being suspended from the ground by two other muggers. By the time I am at the back of the boma, the pronghorn are already subdued, being masked, and detangled from the net. It was crazy fast and there is dust and bits of alfalfa choking the air. The door opens and the stretcher team, data recorders, and veterinarians enter the boma and look for their assigned pronghorn so they can start on their tasks. I follow mine out, ready to assist (douse an overheating pronghorn with water, if needed).

This process repeats until the final three pronghorn are in the forward boma. Lined up at the boma entrance, Tania (AZGFD) turns her head and mouths "Tiny Tim" and I crack a smile, remembering the name of the small buck fawn who resides in the north pen. The door slides open and we all rush in to our positions and as quickly as I get to my spot at the rear of the boma, all three pronghorn are already subdued. I look for the purple ear tag of Tiny Tim and our NAU Forestry student familiar with the little fellow grabs my arm and spins me in his direction. I already have the mask in my hands and slip it over his long, slender muzzle, over his large eyes, and behind his ears.

Over these two days, 70 pronghorn total were processed with nine (7 bucks and 2 does) being released to the Saucedo site at Area B, eight (4 bucks and 4 does) being released to the Organ Pipe National Monument, and six (3 bucks and 3 does) being released to the Yuma Proving Ground east arm pen. I did manage to ask how they decide on where to release the pronghorn and learned one of those deciding factors comes from having active collars on animals in the wild herds. Knowing the whereabouts of a collared pronghorn provides the location of the herd so the biologists have a better starting point for aerial surveys. The lifespan of a GPS collar is typically 2 years and a VHF collar is around 5 years so releasing the pronghorn to these locations will provide a fresh batch of collared pronghorn (and genetics) to the wild herds.

Everyone helps to break down the equipment and load it to the awaiting trucks and trailers. We head back to camp and our two NAU students and I pack our gear back into my truck, give our thanks for the invite, and start back down the dirt road regaling in the past two days and the joy of being a small part in the recovery efforts of such a beautiful animal.

Photos courtesy Jamie Watkins





AZGFD AND ADOT PRESS RELEASE ON I-17 OVERPASS FUNDING

In the 2023 third quarter issue of the Pronghorn I wrote about AAF's first work project for the future I-40 Overpass. Since that time the Transportation Department's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) announced that Arizona will be receiving \$24 million for it's Kelley Canyon Wildlife Overpass Project. This project is located along 17 miles of I-17 in northern Arizona. This is only the beginning of an exciting new chapter for wildlife corridor improvements and traffic safety in not only Arizona but in 16 other states. We await more funding soon for our other sorely needed overpass projects. Arizona Antelope Foundation will be there to lend our support and helping volunteer hands in these endeavors. Yours in conservation, Gary Boyer

Joint News Release of Dec. 5, 2023 from Arizona Game and Fish Department and Arizona Department of Transportation

Award of \$24 million comes from Federal Highway Administration

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), in partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), sought the grant through FHWA's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program for improvements along 8.4 miles of I-17 between the Munds Park traffic interchange, about 25 miles south of Flagstaff, and the Kelly Canyon traffic interchange to the north.

"I am grateful to the Federal Highway Administration for supporting Arizona's commitment to protecting its residents, visitors and wildlife," Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs said. "Many drivers use I-17 as a gateway to some of Arizona's most popular treasures, including the Grand Canyon. While helping keep those travelers safe, this project will support elk, deer and other wildlife that make Arizona so special."

The I-17 wildlife project is one of 19 nationally to receive funding through the first round of \$110 million in grants from FHWA.

"We are pleased to announce the first round of grants under the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program to projects that will significantly reduce the number of collisions between motorists and wildlife," said Federal Highway Administrator Shailen Bhatt, who traveled to Arizona to make the announcement at Sunset Point along I-17. "These roadway safety investments will ensure that motorists and wildlife in Arizona get to their destinations safely and are a win-win for safety and the environment."

In addition to the wildlife overpass, which is planned for milepost 327.4 in the Willard Springs area, the project also will include new 8-foot-tall wildlife fencing tying into existing culverts, ramps to help wildlife escape fenced areas and double cattle guards at interchanges. It will connect with an AZGFD project that will retrofit wildlife fencing along 6 miles of I-17 south from Munds Park that directs wildlife to two existing large bridges. The nearly 15 miles covered by these two safety projects accounted for 58% of crashes involving wildlife between 2018 and 2022 between Stoneman Lake Road and Flagstaff. In this 31.7-mile stretch, around three-quarters of all crashes between vehicles and wildlife involve elk, which can weigh up to 1,100 pounds.

The area between Munds Park and Kelly Canyon is one of three priority areas proposed by the state for new wildlife overpasses because of higher potential for collisions involving wildlife and important movement corridors identified through research. The other interstate freeway locations identified as potential sites for wildlife overpasses are I-17 near the Kachina Boulevard interchange about 6 miles south of Flagstaff, and Interstate 40 west of Parks. AZGFD has funded design plans through ADOT for these overpasses as they remain top priorities for both wildlife connectivity and safety. ADOT and its partners continue to seek funding for projects at these other two priority sites. Locations for these projects were identified through studies conducted by AZGFD, including GPS telemetry and wildlife-vehicle collision hotspot identification

Identified by the federal, state and Coconino County governments as a high priority corridor for elk movement, the 8.4 miles of I-17 through the Willard Springs area currently has no bridges and only one road culvert suitable for use by elk and deer. The wildlife overpass will be 100 feet wide designed for use by elk, deer, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, black bears, mountain lions and smaller animals.

To read the entire press release, you will find it here: <https://www.azgfd.com/2023/12/05/federal-grant-will-fund-i-17-wildlife-overpass-near-flagstaff/>

NEW ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROGRAM TO ARIZONA'S WILDLIFE

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has changed their volunteer program. This article provides the importance of documenting your volunteer time on this new program, how to get entered into the new system, get registered for specific AAF events, and document your travel and working hours.

When our AAF members step out in the field to either remove a fence or modify a fence to increase wildlife mobility, our boots on the ground labor immediately improves pronghorn mobility across the landscape. There is a secondary benefit from these projects if those donated hours are correctly recorded with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Documenting the hours volunteered on approved projects on the AGFD Volunteer Program contributes as a state matching of funds to pair up with federal monies granted for wildlife improvement projects. Every hour of labor and travel time donated is worth approximately \$35 in state match. In turn, that state match contribution is used to add eligible federal funds at a 1 to 3 match. In other words, every \$35 of state match can add \$105 of federal grants. Your efforts out there reap benefits not just directly with your fence work, but also with bringing in additional federal money to fund other eligible wildlife management actions. These projects can include wildlife water construction, wildlife research projects, and habitat improvements such as removing invading exotic plant species. That fact of match dollars makes it critical for all AAF members who come out on projects to be registered with the Arizona Game and Fish Volunteer Program before going in the field so your hours worked and driving time can be correctly documented. We are in the digital age, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department can no longer accept our traditional sign-in sheets we have used for many years. Once you get registered with your home computer or smart phone in the volunteer program, it is straight forward how to register for an approved event and document your time worked and driven. Use of the Volunteer Website has significantly increased the Department's audit-compliance and reporting accuracy for federal grants – which directly supports wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation across Arizona.

Megan Young is the designated AGFD Volunteer Program Manager. If you have any issues with getting registered on the volunteer program system or other related issues, she can be reached at her email myoung@azgfd.gov or her phone at (623) 236-7311. She has been very helpful to some of our members who needed some one-on-one guidance registering with the new program. The AGFD has a direct link to the Volunteer Program, <http://volunteer.azgfd.gov/azantelope/> and click on the “New Volunteers Start Here” icon on the left side of the page to get registered with the Volunteer Program. We also placed the visual tutorial depicting the AGFD Volunteer Program sign-up process and how to enter your volunteer hours on our website. Visit azantelope.org to find those tutorial PDFs which are titled, “How to Sign Up & Sign Volunteer Registration Form” and “How to Report Volunteer Hours”.

Once you are registered with the Volunteer Program, it is rather straight forward how to sign-up for an AAF project. When the AAF sends out a notice for an upcoming project, you then can get back on the Arizona Game and Fish Volunteer Program website, locate that specific project, and register online to attend. Please, note you should complete the project registration prior to the stated deadline so we can better prepare with food ordering and predicting our work force number.

Once you have completed the project, you can record your donated time. Please log your volunteer hours within 7 days of the project date so your efforts will be eligible for the match money. Once you have worked through the system a time or two, the new Volunteer Program is quite user friendly.

The Arizona Game and Fish is extremely grateful for their volunteers. We are a crucial part of helping this agency conserve and protect not only pronghorn, but also more than 800 species of other wildlife.

CROZIER RANCH FENCE MODIFICATION PROJECT

OCTOBER 6, 2023

BY DAVE CAGLE, AAF SECRETARY

On Saturday October 6, 2023, we conducted a focused fence modification project within a known pronghorn travel corridor on the Crozier Ranch located west of Peach Springs and south of Highway 66 in Game Management Unit (GMU) 18A.

Since April 2021, the AAF has been coming up to Unit 18A once or twice a year to either remove or modify livestock fences for the benefit of pronghorn and other wildlife. These fence improvement projects are just a piece of a large landscape sized multiple year program to improve habitat conditions on several levels. This expansive program is now in its fifth and final year. On average 1 to 1.5 million dollars have been spent annually on the ground to reduce juniper tree cover, increase grass and forb availability, increase permanent water distribution, improve antelope fawn survival and increase wildlife permeability across the landscape. Since the program's inception approximately 14 miles of livestock fencing has been improved allowing easier pronghorn crossings and five miles of woven wire has been removed. A large portion of this prior fence work was completed by your AAF volunteers in action. Additional habitat improvements either implemented or planned in GMU 18A include reducing encroaching juniper tree cover and other vegetation over approximately 40,000 acres. As you can imagine, such a large scale and expensive program entailed bringing together many agencies, wildlife conservation groups and especially landowners.

Bright and early Saturday morning there were 15 agency personnel and eager volunteers in camp ready to hit the ground running. Local Wildlife Manager Troy Moody had selected the specific worksite with assistance from the Crozier Ranch manager. The project fence was located in a low saddle between two pastures which were routinely occupied by pronghorn. Fence modification would increase pronghorn mobility across both occupied habitats. After doing the safety talk, project background, and group photo for the magazine, we drove approximately 20 miles to the project site.

We had no weather-related issues and enjoyed a great bluebird day in the field. In summary, a total of 0.75 miles of livestock fencing was modified that day so pronghorn could more readily cross under the fence. Specific work included removing the bottom barbed strand that was approximately 8 to 10 inches above the ground, replacing it with a smooth wire strand at 16 to 18 inches above the ground, and repairing the existing livestock fencing where needed. As a post project note, the Crozier Ranch manager, Clay Overson stated he was impressed with the quality of fence work our little gang of volunteers completed and looks forward to having us do future projects on his ranch.

Dinners were served on Friday and Saturday nights with the meals provided by Chefs Mary and Bill Keebler and they hosted Saturday and Sunday morning breakfasts as well. Thanks Mary and Bill!

Thanks go out to several groups of folks that contributed to this successful project:

-Representing the AAF Board:
Gary Boyer, Darrell Tersey, Jamie Watkins, Ken Meadors, Joe-Bill Pickrell, yours truly.

-Game & Fish personnel: Troy Christensen, Troy Moody, and Erin Butler

-Other AAF members and volunteers: Mary and Bill Keebler, Alex Watkins, Jim Wooddell, Marsha Halcrow, Johnny Johnson, Dave Adams, and Joshua Eager.

Thanks, everyone for your efforts!



Article photos courtesy Jamie Watkins



Crozier Ranch Crew
October 7, 2023

STATEWIDE HABITAT PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE: 2023

DAVE CAGLE – AAF SECRETARY

The Habitat Partnerships Committee Program (HPC) continues to develop and produce a plethora of wildlife habitat improvements across Arizona, and 2023 was no exception. Born over 30 years ago as a tool to address increasing elk populations and develop solutions to reduce resulting conflicts with the livestock industry, the HPC has evolved to become a western states model that builds partnerships and funds a wide variety of wildlife habitat improvements. Each of the six Arizona Game and Fish Department regions hosts at least one local HPC. Membership is often comprised of Game and Fish, land management agencies such as the National Forest Service, involved landowners, and sportsmen. These local folks know the resident wildlife and habitat issues like no one else. They develop and propose habitat improvement projects, which are compiled with the rest of the state's local HPCs. These project proposals are annually reviewed and ranked on a statewide level. Your AAF board members assist with the project scoring, and annually meet with the HPC Coordinator to discuss the pros and cons of each antelope benefiting project.

Primary funding for the HPC is provided by the revenues derived from either auctioning or raffling a total of 30 Special Big Game Tags issued by the AGFD Commission. A total of three tags are annually issued for each of the 10 big game species residing in Arizona. Non-profit wildlife organizations in turn market these tags with 100 percent of the proceeds being returned to the state. There is a separate fund established for each big game species, and those funds can only be spent on the management to benefit that species. This year was a record with a total of \$3,980,560 available across the 10 big game species. The antelope account had \$197,960 for 2023. Understand the antelope fund is not chicken feed, but that amount of money does not go far when large scale habitat projects like juniper tree removal utilizing heavy equipment and water developments are built from the ground up. Luckily for Arizona's antelope, many of the deer and elk focused habitat projects funded also improve antelope habitat. Grassland restoration and water developments benefit numerous wildlife species, not just the target species. Big game funds are commonly blended to stretch those dollars resulting in more funded habitat projects benefiting our state's wildlife resources.

One big game tag issued in 2023 that stuck out in my mind was a mule deer tag. It was marketed by the Mule Deer Foundation, and was auctioned at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah. The successful bidder spent \$725,000 for that one tag! No, I didn't accidentally add a zero to the figure. That is an enormous amount of money destined to be placed on the ground for mule deer and other wildlife species. I certainly hope that the successful bidder had a memorable mule deer hunt.

In summary, a total of 37 projects were approved in 2023 for funding, and once the partners financial match promised in the project proposals is added with the big game tag funds, almost \$8 million will be dedicated to improving habitats across Arizona. Of those 37 projects, 15 will directly benefit antelope. Most of those 15 projects emphasize grassland restoration efforts.

The AAF strives to strategically conduct our fence modification projects to maximize wildlife benefits, and the HPC program's projects often mesh with our mission to expand quality wildlife habitat. We have obligated our volunteer work force on several instances to conduct our projects where HPC funded wildlife habitat improvements are implemented. A current example is our multiple year commitment of work projects conducted in and around Game Management Unit 18A. This unit was previously identified as a statewide priority to reverse long-trending wildlife habitat declines, and has been a HPC funding priority for the past five years. Over \$5 million has been spent monitoring animal movements, reducing juniper cover, adding permanent waters, and improving livestock fences. The AAF labor dedication of removing woven wire and modifying existing fences further contributes towards the landscape goals of more closely realizing the wildlife potential in Unit 18A. The AAF board looks forward to 2024 and beyond to continue supporting and partnering with the HPC program.

Successful Raffle Hunt—Mike Torres



I'm Mike Torres and I was the lucky hunter who won your raffle last spring for a guided antelope hunt in New Mexico. This hunt was conducted on a large private ranch in south central NW, by Bucks and Bulls Outfitters. The lodging was excellent as well as the food. The guides were very experienced and did a good job. There were 5 hunters on this Aug. 26-28 hunt, and we all took nice bucks in the high 70s to mid 80s.

I always try to buy a few raffle tickets to support the Conservation Organizations like the Arizona Antelope Foundation, and it certainly paid off for me.

Needless to say, I am going to buy more of your raffle tickets again this year.

Thank you for a great hunt!

Mike Torres



SONORAN PRONGHORN UPDATE



RUSSELL GARDNER, AZ GAME & FISH
OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2023

Captive Breeding Cabeza Pen

The Cabeza pen remained relatively dry heading into capture season this year, leading to another round of successful boma trapping. During the trapping 46 of the 47 pronghorn were caught in the South herd, and 24 in the North herd. It was discovered during captures that a fawn and an unmarked doe had gone missing from the North herd, making the herd count 32.

The annual capture and release operation took place for the Cabeza herd on December 12 and 13, 2023. We processed all 46 pronghorn in the South herd on the first day, a new record! Fifteen pronghorn were released from the South herd, 7 (2 females, 5 males) in Area B of the Saucedo subunit and 8 (4 females, 4 males) in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Eighteen fawns were given ear tags and returned to the pen, and all animals were given vaccinations prior to release or return to the pen. Blood and fecal samples were collected from as many animals as possible.

Of the 24 pronghorn processed in the North boma 7 animals were released, 2 males were taken to Area B to join the animals from the South herd, and 5 (2 females, 3 males) were taken to the holding pen on the east arm of YPG. Ten fawns were given new ear tags, and all animals received vaccinations before being released or returned to the pen. Blood and fecal samples were collected from as many animals as possible in this herd as well.

A 2023 fawn in the south herd that had been handled during captures separated from the herd in the days following her release back into the pen. She had not been observed on camera or during scoping sessions from December 20 to 26. Pen biologists walked transects and located her on the morning of the 26, still alive but lethargic and apparently walking with a limp. She was not seen on camera or in person after that time, and was discovered dead on January 8 on the third attempt to locate her on foot. Her remains indicate she likely died in the week of January 1. Predation was not suspected. Though this doe did not show any abnormal signs of stress during handling, her death was likely related to her recent capture.

The Cabeza pen staff have been working to take down the boma shade cloth now that captures are done, and are also continuing their maintenance and repair efforts with pen infrastructure. The coyote that had been in the pen since October was successfully captured in a cage trap in early December, and was released into the Childs valley several miles from the captive breeding pen.



Rainfall was good in December, with the NE and SW corners of the Cabeza pen receiving 1.25” and 1.1” of rain, respectively. There was 0.92” recorded at Charlie Bell, 1.26” at Knucklehead, and 1.02” at the Area B Holding pen. (Cabeza capture photo credit: Vallen Kim/USFWS).

NORTH HALF		SOUTH HALF	
Adult Females	10	Adult Females	11
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	1	Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	10
Adult Males	5	Adult Males	3
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	9	Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	8
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, TBD)		Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, TBD)	
TOTAL	25	TOTAL	32
Total Pen	57		

Kofa Pen

The Kofa herd is doing well. The pen had begun to dry out slightly in November and December, and the herd was responding well to feeding in the boma. Pen staff trapped 28 of the 38 pronghorn in the boma. Processing for the Kofa herd took place on December 19, 2023. Nine pronghorn (4 does and 5 bucks) were taken to the YPG pen to join the 5 pronghorn from Cabeza, making a total of 14 pronghorn for release onto YPG. Twelve fawns were given ear tags and placed back into the pen. All animals were vaccinated, and biological samples were collected from as many animals as possible before they were released or returned to the pen.

There were no major injuries during the capture, but two does that were returned to the pen had lacerations that required stitching. One of these does was the 2016 doe born in Cabeza that was discovered injured upon arrival at the YPG holding pen in 2019. She was subsequently darted and brought to the Kofa pen. So far she seems to have recovered well from her handling, and was given a new yellow VHF collar to aid pen staff in keeping track of her.



The King Valley experienced exceptional rain at the end of December, with 2.3” recorded at the pen, 2.43” at south release, 2.39” at Dogleg North, 1.84” at Dogleg South, and 3.1” at Clancy. These rains recharged the drinkers at the pen, DLN, DLS, and Clancy. (Kofa capture photo credit: Tonya Ramey/AGFD).

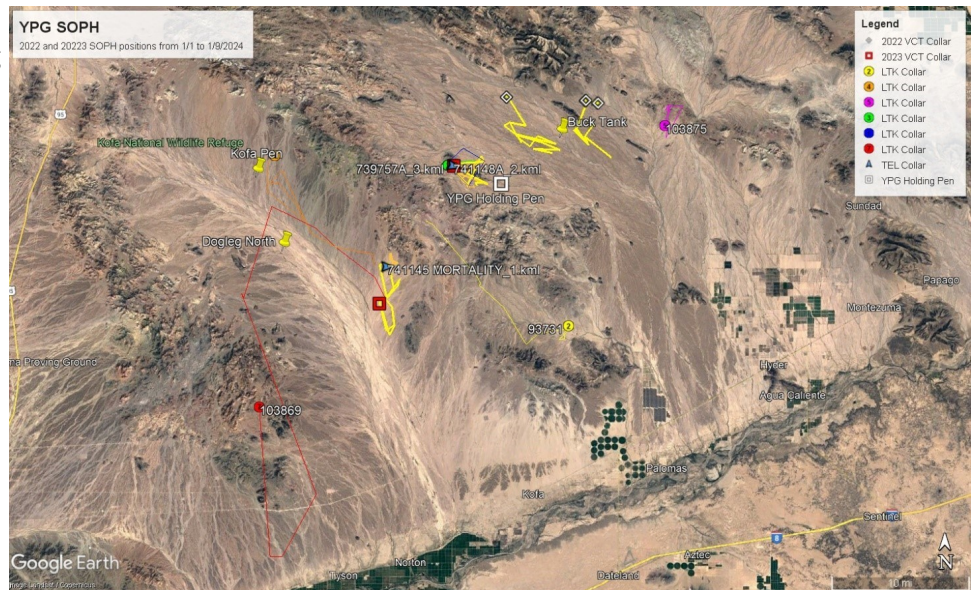
Kofa Herd Composition

Adult Females	11
Yearling Females (<i>b</i> 2023)	4
Adult Males	4
Yearling Males (<i>b</i> 2023)	10
Fawns (<i>b</i> 2024, TBD)	
TOTAL	29

Wild Pronghorn Cabeza/ORPI/BMGR Herd Eight pronghorn were released from the ORPI holding pen on 1/3/24. A huge thank-you to ORPI staff and those who helped them to monitor, set up and take down the holding pen there. The release went smoothly, with the animals leaving in a single group. They are still together, and as of 1/7/24 they had found an area that is holding their interest about 6.5 miles NW of the holding pen.



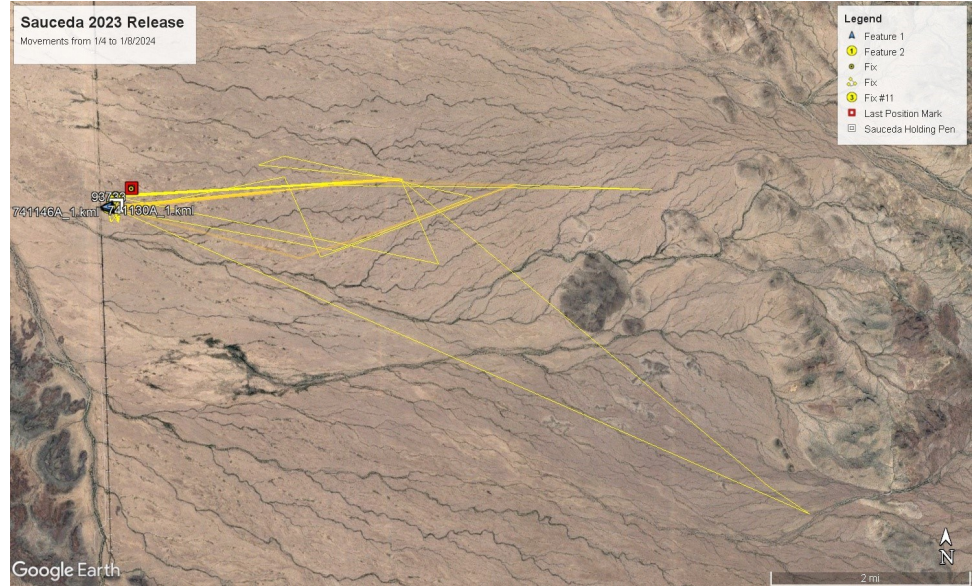
Wild Pronghorn Kofa Subunit: YPG received extensive rainfall on the evening of 12/22/23. This heavy rainfall, combined with high winds, worked together to damage both the East and West fences of the YPG holding pen. The YPG staff member who was monitoring the SOPH that day was stranded out on the proving ground overnight in the extensive flooding that followed. The pronghorn remained in the holding pen during the storm, and were still present the following day. Repairs were started on the East end of the pen, and the pronghorn became spooked by the sounds of the repairs and jumped out over a low portion of the SW fence that had been damaged by wind. They had been in the holding pen long enough that the effects of the drugs had time to wear off, and had been behaving normally in the days prior to their escape.



The pronghorn split into two main groups after leaving the pen. A group of 6 (3 bucks, 3 does) have been wandering in the area just west of the holding pen. A group of 5 (3 bucks and 2 does) entered king valley. Two bucks have split off and are now near DLN and the Kofa Pen. The two does have remained together, but we lost a 2022 buck to apparent coyote predation near Frenchman. His collar went on mortality 1/3/24, and was recovered 1/4/24. Only the collar and some hair remained of the buck.

A lone 2016 buck went NE toward the eagle tail mountains, and a lone doe wandered up to the NE and is now South of the holding pen. One of the 2022 bucks has a collar that stopped transmitting GPS coordinates after leaving the Cabeza pen. We have not received any location data from the collar since that time, though the VHF beacon was working properly. From collar data it does not appear that this year's released SOPH have crossed paths with last year's releases.

Wild Pronghorn Sauceda Subunit: During surveys on November 26, 18 pronghorn (one group of 12 and one of 6) were detected. There was only one remaining working collar in this herd, and the majority of animals seen were wild-born, including at least 2 fawns. All pronghorn observed on the November survey were North of the Sauceda Mountains.



Seven bucks and 2 does were brought to the Sauceda holding pen from the Cabeza pen, and were monitored by AGFD, USAF, and USFWS staff until their release day on January 4, 2024. All but one buck left right away and headed east, while the lone buck lingered in the holding pen for a half hour or so before leaving and heading SE. All 9 animals had returned to the holding pen as of the evening of 1/7/24, and are now back in one group. I'd like to give a huge thank you to everyone involved in the monitoring, setup, and take-down of the Sauceda pen.

Wild Pronghorn Vekol Valley Herd: This area also remains in fairly good condition. The Vekol Valley was surveyed on November 27, 2023. Weather conditions were poor, and all pronghorn were missed on transect. Using telemetry equipment 16 pronghorn were located, one group of 10 and another of 6. There have been no recent mortalities in the Vekol herd. Collar data shows that the pronghorn are still in two distinct groups north of the holding pen and near the interstate. A map of their recent movements is included.



Water Projects:

Nothing new to report

Forage Enhancements:

Nothing new to report

Other Projects:

Pinacate Pronghorn.

One buck and one doe remain of the pronghorn released in Pinacate. They have spent the last couple of months in the vicinity of the holding pen, with the buck having made some forays to the North and West

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