

Recreation User Group
Meeting 25
August 12, 2020
MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Attendees

Representative	Organization
Fred Gaudet	Arizona Trail Association
Greg Waterman	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club
Bill Scott	Sun City Anthem Hiking Club
John Bricker	Tonto Recreation Alliance (TRAL)
Rich Smith	TRAL
Jim Schenck	LOST & Superior Community Working Group
Mila Besich	Mayor, Town of Superior
Todd Pryor	Manager, Town of Superior
Erik Filsinger	Queen Creek Coalition
Jerry Stevenson	Mountainbrook Hiking Group, Gold Canyon Coordinating Committee
Erik Filsinger	Queen Creek Coalition
Chris Burkhart	Meadow Ranch Hiking Club
Sheryl Cormack	Tonto National Forest, Globe District recreation
Jason Scow	Tonto National Forest
Mary Morissette	Resolution Copper Mining
Rick Schonfeld	WestLand Resources
John Godec	Godec, Randall & Associates (GRA)
Debra Duerr	GRA
Mark Flint	Southwest Trail Solutions
Doug Oliver	FloSolutions
Tom Hawk	Imerys

Welcome and Introductions

John Godec welcomed everyone. The RUG was happy that Erik Filsinger from Queen Creek Coalition was able to join again today. Sheryl Cormack of Tonto National Forest reported that they have a new Globe District Ranger Adam Bromley is acting in this capacity but is only on a 120-day detail. The Mayor of Superior noted that there are currently 69 COVID-19 cases and the community has experienced 6 deaths. One of these was a member of the Community Working Group, Roy Chavez.

Update on Tonto National Forest Review of RUG Plan

Sheryl Cormack, Tonto National Forest

There is no recent update on the review, which is still with third-party consultant for evaluation.

Presentation on Climbing Resource Inventory & Mitigation

Doug Oliver, FloSolutions

John Godec told the group that Doug Oliver had made a similar presentation to the Community Working Group in June and it seemed very appropriate for the RUG.

Doug Oliver said that the climbing inventory was done in 2017 in support of the EIS. This assessment found 800 documented climbing routes and 1100 boulder problems. He reviewed the status of the main areas as affected by Resolution Copper Mine. These are known as:

- The Pond and Atlantis will have permanent access provided. There is also an agreement with REI as they like to promote this activity.
- Devils Canyon – FR 2338 remains open, no changes are proposed to access.
- Oak Flat/Mine Area – Much of the area can remain open but current access is from Magma Mine road, so that will need to change. A new trail has been drafted that avoids the Apache Leap Special Management Area (ALSMA) but needs to be field checked. It would be about 1 mile long. RUG members had the following questions:
 - Could those trails be used as hiking trails?
 - Probably not. Because of the terrain it would be difficult to build them to conform with Forest Service hiking trail specifications.
 - Erik Filsinger noted that his group used an approach of building ‘climber access trails’ about 1 foot wide that go off the city trails in McDowell Sonoran Preserve.
 - What about motorized access on FR 315?
 - FR 315 goes into the mine subsidence zone, so you couldn’t access this area from there.
- Apache Leap – Access can be provided by the cross-canyon road that will be kept open to access monitoring wells, or it can also be accessed from the top.
 - Filsinger reminded the group that Resolution funded a study for Queen Creek Coalition for a loop trail around Apache Leap that went around the base and met up with the Legends of Superior Trail. The concept was engineered by Okanogan Trails, but has been postponed because of possible legal challenges regarding ALSMA.
 - Oliver doesn’t think Apache Leap is actually climbed that much because it’s difficult to get to.

Lower Devils Canyon and Refuge – The plan is to just maintain the road to its current level 2.

- It was noted that Lower Devil’s Canyon is very popular for climbers, so altered access is a concern.
- TRAL representatives pointed out that the area south of FR315 is also a popular OHV route and is very challenging. They felt it would take some effort to improve it to a level 2, but Mary Morissette said this is possible if expensive.
- The ‘top half’ of FR315 was supposed to be closed, but TRAL has worked with Resolution on it and wants to understand what’s being planned.
- Is there a possibility of using FR2466 to get down there?
 - It’s possible but it would be a much longer drive for climbers, who like FR315.

A RUG member asked why the Florence Canyon area on north side of US60 was excluded from this analysis. Oliver said that the rock there is too 'crumbly' for climbing.

Oliver discussed possible mitigation for bouldering. He noted that, unfortunately, the Oak Flat bouldering is right over the subsidence zone. They looked at other areas and consulted with local climbers. An area known as Inconceivables about 5 miles south of Superior looks very promising. Resolution is currently building an access road into the Inconceivables that would be a level 2 road, about 2.6 miles long. Part of it is drivable and the rest needs to be developed. The access is similar and not too much longer than current access from Oak Flat. The Inconceivables is only about .5 mile from SR177, but there's a private ranch in between (Grenlan Ranch) that prevents direct access.

Oliver thanked the RUG and invited members to contact him or Mary Morissette if they have any questions. The mayor said this is really exciting and it's nice to see it all coming together.

Imerys Discussion of Campground & Trails

Tom Hawk, Imerys

Tom Hawks, manager of the Imerys facility, joined the RUG meeting to let the group know about some serious concerns that the company has about the concept and location of the proposed Castleberry Campground. He said that until about 6 weeks ago they were unaware that there was an intention to put a campground at Castleberry, right at the access to their quarry. He said the campground, as proposed, is 850 feet from the highwall. They use the same access road (FR 989) for hauling, and there have been accidents in the past when OHVs pay no attention to haul trucks. They have also experienced equipment vandalism in the quarry in the past. He noted that people continue to collect Apache tears in the quarry, and Imerys is very concerned that campers will start exploring around the area, trespassing on their property and creating a public safety hazard. They occasionally perform blasting and fear that there may be flyrock that could put campers in harm's way if something went wrong. A seismograph is set at entrance to Martinez Ranch. Although there is some barbed wire around the mine it does not go all the way around. These issues have gotten more critical since they started to mine again. Hawk emphasized that their main concern is public safety and ensuring that no one gets hurt.

Godec asked if increased fencing and signage would help. Hawk said those who are interested in getting in will get in, using wire-cutters, etc. A RUG member suggested that it might be possible to fence the boundary of the campground; Mary Morissette said that Resolution is looking at doing this at their cost. It might also be possible to install some more vegetation screening and buffer. It was suggested that branding and access from the Arboretum could focus people's attention that way, which could drive hikers in that direction (west). Constructing a road from the Arboretum to the campground would require that a contract be in place with Boyce Thompson Arboretum before they can talk about that. A member wondered whether ADOT would consider re-opening the old Perlite Road to provide alternate access. It was pointed out that Superior's Airport Improvement Plan requires rerouting that road already. Since Perlite Road is on a small strip of land between the town and Boyce Thompson Arboretum over Forest Service land, this might require environmental analysis under NEPA.

Several RUG members pointed out that collecting Apache tears has been a big recreational activity for a long time, and three sides of the Imerys property are not fenced off. Installing a fence around the entire property was again suggested. The group wondered if there is a way to provide access to rockhounds to collect Apache tears, e.g. set aside a certain area or time. Hawk said the Imerys does that every quarter now, on a supervised basis, and also allows Apache people to collect on request. Hawk noted that part of the problem is that they are being referenced on social media as an abandoned mine, which they are not.

All agreed that as the area gets used more for recreation, these problems will get worse. It was suggested that this might be another reason to partner with the Boyce Thompson Arboretum to help manage access and information. Funding the placement of a security guard at the campground entrance was mentioned as a possible mitigation. Hawk concluded that if there are ways to mitigate these problems, we should do that. Keeping activities to the north, controlling access, fencing, and a security guard are all considerations that might help. Sheryl Cormack told the group that the Forest Service has gotten a grant for OHV patrollers for this winter, and she hoped this might help with this situation. The Forest Service also needs to follow up with Imerys about an easement on southern edge of the property to continue the FR4 reroute; she felt that their new attorney is amenable to this. Hawk suggested that it might even be possible to look at some other parcels of Imerys property holdings for the campground.

Some general observations from RUG members were that the problems of trespassing preceded the campground and have been growing, so they need to be addressed with or without a Castleberry Campground. It was felt that the campground could become a resource and ally in educating visitors about the need to stay away from the mining area. Typically, recreation users are responsible and want to respect resources and private property. The campground will increase the ratio of this demographic to the people who are cutting fences and vandalizing, as well as provide pressure for good behavior, if only in the form of more eyes on the area.

Mayor Besich noted that we've learned how important it is to have Imerys included in these discussions, and she apologized for assuming that they had the right information. Going forward we all need to be on the same page, including the Arboretum.

Godec noted that we have always asked the RUG for suggestions about who else should be included in this group. He asked Mr. Hawk if he would like to be part of the RUG, and he said that he definitely would like to be included. Other possible members who were suggested were the Martinez family and Bill Dunn, the ranching permittee in this area. The Town of Kearny may be interested, and there bicycle shop owners in Santan & Casa Grande who could be contacted.

Activity & Planning Updates from TNF, RUG Members, Resolution Copper

Tonto National Forest Scoping for Golf Course OHV Improvements

A public scoping letter from Tonto National Forest was distributed to RUG members inviting comments on a proposed parking/staging area for OHVs near the Superior golf course. The Forest Service has received a \$205,000 grant to pay for the staging area and 2 seasonal

patrollers. They hope to get it operational by this winter. Sheryl Cormack reported that internal scoping is completed, and they are now going through public scoping. Any comments are welcome including positive, negative, and effects on the golf course, but she urged commenters to be specific about offering reasons for support or opposition. RUG members felt that this proposal fits into what's going on with the RUG program and Resolution offsets. It would cut down on indiscriminate OHV travel by gathering users in one area, and would be good for the economic development of Superior.

- The group asked the facilitators prepare a draft letter for RUG review. Comments are due 9/10.

Signage Around Pinal City (ADOT funds)

Sheryl Cormack reported that additional funds from their ADOT grant will be used for installation of rock art at Picketpost trailhead, and extra message board, and other signage. They were hoping to use the rest of the funds for signage around Pinal City, but that money has been reallocated; they would need another \$5000 to do that. RUG members were pleased with these decisions.

IMERY'S Easement / Arnett Trail, Trail Signs

After some discussion about this issue the group decided to postpone further discussion until Imery's representative were able to join in.

Superior Economic Development and Tourism Studies

The Mayor gave an update on the branding study. They have partnered with Local First Arizona in cooperation with Arizona Tourism. A "tag line" has been developed: Community Elevated. They have extended a contract with Dog Cat Mouse Media (of Bisbee) to do social media promotion and develop a new tourism-based website. They have set up *visitsuperior* accounts on Facebook and Instagram. An assessment of how much the town was spending on marketing and promotion of Superior through several sources showed that this was about \$60,000 per year. The focus of this campaign will be on print and digital marketing.

A wayfinding study will be required to put any signs on US60, which will allow more directional and information signs to be installed. The town reported that they have issued a Request for Qualifications to develop a wayfinding plan, which will hopefully include signage for the Legends of Superior Trail (LOST).

A trails map focused on LOST and Boyce Thompson Arboretum is also being prepared. The Mayor mentioned that the Arboretum has experienced the highest visitation ever during this period of COVID-19 pandemic. The RUG wondered if this has had any impact on Superior tourism. This isn't known, specifically.

The town also has a state grant to remove invasive species, and the Town Manager wondered if they could apply for permission to use these funds on Forest Service land. The worst area is Castleberry, full of the invasive trees of heaven.

- Sheryl Cormack will inquire about this.

New Parking Lot for FR4

There is no recent news on this.

Management of Castleberry Campground

As the RUG is aware, there is a desire to work with Boyce Thompson Arboretum on their potential management of the campground. The Mayor had a brief discussion with the Arboretum director. They haven't had any formal discussions with Resolution Copper yet, which will be needed before the Arboretum Board is comfortable with pursuing this idea. The town prefers to see the Arboretum be the managers rather than Pinal County.

Completion of Picketpost Circumference Trail, Parking Lot Expansion

Nothing specific is being done to expand the parking lot now, as it is not a priority. However, there is an informal parking area close by that may suitable.

LOST Old US60 Segment Parking Improvements

ADOT will build a parking lot. They are also planning to replace the Queen Creek bridge, which might affect access to the upper canyon. The parking lot has been approved, and there is a signed contract. A RUG member asked if the contractor could stop parking their trucks where they block trail access.

Status of Bronco Creek Exploration Proposals in RUG Area

The Mayor confirmed that Bronco Creek proposals will be removed from the land exchange parcels. The company appears to be focusing on other locations at this time.

Endowment Funding for the RUG Trail Plan

This has not been developed yet. Resolution needs to determine out how much it's going to cost.

Next Steps, Next Meeting

The RUG wants to start meeting every month. Members think it's very important to keep these discussions going and resolve some of these issues, particularly before the Final Environmental Impact Statement comes out. Therefore, the group agreed to meet again on September 9.