

ARIZONA ANTELOPE FOUNDATION, INC.

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Membership

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

This snapshot in time represents the many volunteers that make the mission of the Arizona Antelope Foundation a reality. This photo depicts the Hwy 284 Fence Modification Project volunteers on November 16 & 17, 2019, and is illustrative of the Altar Valley Herd Zone article on page 12. Photo courtesy of 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 19420, Fountain Hills, AZ 85269 or by email at info@azantelope.org.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope everyone is doing well and hope you enjoy our fall issue. The hunting season is on and we have had an email from one of our online clinic attendees with a photo of his successful hunt as well as the story behind it. He mentioned the clinic gave him some information that was valuable to the hunt and we will share that with you in the next issue. We certainly hope others had the same experience.

Even though government officials are afraid of the science and making a decision our conservation effort still goes on. We have been able to work around current restrictions and get a survey in which was successful. At this time our BLM folks in Vekol Valley are continuing to move forward for a Sonoran Pronghorn transplant. We also have a review in progress on projects requesting Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) funding. It looks like there are some good ones and I am sure we can use all of our raised funds for habitat improvement.

Glen Dickens has come out with our Southeastern Arizona Grasslands Initiative Grant Report and we continue sharing the results of two herd zones in this issue. We would like to thank a couple of our life members for their generous donations to our Foundation: Susan Morse \$ 250.00 and Arthur Pearce \$1000.00. These donations will go toward funding John Millican, our field manager, who is continuing work on the Grant project. He is a great asset especially for land owner relations and future project development.

The Foundation has made a \$10,000.00 donation to the Game and Fish for water hauling. With the lack of rain in this year's Monsoon we have worked on helping fill or supplement water catchments. Gas, maintenance, and time can make this a expensive proposition. With the lack of outside activity and current restrictions on agencies, that is about all I have to report for now.

The Wild Sheep foundation will be auctioning one of our Special tags this year along with the Arizona Big Horn Sheep Society. Let us hope for another good year.



Remember our board meetings are on the second Monday of each month and are currently being held on Zoom. If you contact our administrator at info@azantelope.org, she can forward you an invitation. If you have an interest in serving on the board just let us know.

Thanks for your continued support, Ken

Ken Meadors President

"LIBERTAS AD VAGOR"....
FREEDOM TO ROAM

Additional Grant Acknowledgements:

None of the grants accomplishments would have been possible without the AAF Board, volunteers, ranchers, agencies, and cooperators. In this issue we are highlighting our myriad of other funders and partners.

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Arizona Deer Association
Arizona Elk Society
Arizona Mule Deer Foundation
Arizona Wildlife Federation
National Wild Turkey Federation — Huachuca Gould's Chapter
Rocky Mountain Mule Deer Foundation
Safari Club — Tucson Chapter
Quail Forever — Southern Arizona Chapter
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Gregg Gibbons and Ed Ashurst – Ten X Ranch; Warner Glenn and Wendy Glenn-Kimbro – Malpai Ranch, and Travis Nevins – Geronimo Ranch

Sonoita:

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Therapeutic Ranch for Animals and Kids – Range Riders – Wulf Dieter, Caitlin Kelly, and Netzin Steklis

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Rafael Delara, Michael Giordano, Raquel Iragoyen-Au, Jorge Marin, Rachael MoreHla, Max Mazzella, James Pitts, and Allison Rosengren

SAN BERNARDINO VALLEY HERD ZONE 142,298 Acres

OVERVIEW

The San Bernardino Valley was historic pronghorn habitat, but by 1930, pronghorn were completely absent. In 1984 and 1986, the AGFD reintroduced 113 pronghorn from Marfa, Texas. Connectivity was not identified as a significant limiting factor based on valley-wide pronghorn distribution during surveys and substantiated by replacement of nearly 5 miles of pronghorn friendly fence by multiple ranches. However, two fence projects were completed to address north/south pronghorn crossings in two key zones. A total of 4.75 miles of fence were modified or replaced which increased overall connectivity by 10,000 acres. Water distribution and security was considered adequate but some improvement was needed in the central part of the valley. Four water projects were completed to address this need. Grasslands in this valley are primarily maintained by the rigorous scientific fire and grazing regimes practiced by ranchers from the Malpai Borderlands Conservation Group. Additionally, much of the herd zone's acreage are now under conservation easements held by the Malpai Borderlands Conservation Group. The San Bernardino Valley pronghorn population has met the grant's minimum herd population of 125 animals since 2015.

PROJECTS (see Map #1, page 8)

September 2012 - AAF Volunteer Fence Project at Malpai Ranch

An AAF Volunteer Fence Project, in which **3.1 miles** of fence were modified, was completed by 30 adults and U of A students. As a result of this project, pronghorn connectivity was improved on **4,000** acres of occupied habitat on the south end of the San Bernardino Valley. This travel corridor project helped to ensure unrestricted connectivity of the southern end of the available pronghorn grassland habitat (see Map #1, page 8, & Photo, page 10).

August 2013 - Malpai/IV Bar Headquarters Tanks Water Projects

Utilizing \$7.4K of HPC pronghorn and mule deer funds, 2 major dirt tank cleanouts were completed; one on the Malpai Ranch and a second on the IV Bar Ranch in the central plains of the San Bernardino Valley. Both earthen tanks are located where 25% of the valley's pronghorn occur seasonally and year long. After the cleanouts, the two tanks had the capacities to hold 8M and 5M gallons of water respectively (see Map #1, page 8 & Photo, page 11).

December 2014 - Ten X and Geronimo Ranches Fence Rebuild

Two miles of fence line were replaced in a key pronghorn zone between the Ten X and Geronimo ranches in 2014. Materials, in the amount of \$6.4K were paid for by the NFWF grant and all labor for the removal and reconstruction was paid for by the ranches. This project increased permeability of the area by **6,000 acres** and connected 2-key pastures for pronghorn (see Map #1, page 8).

November 2016 - Water Project Ten X Ranch

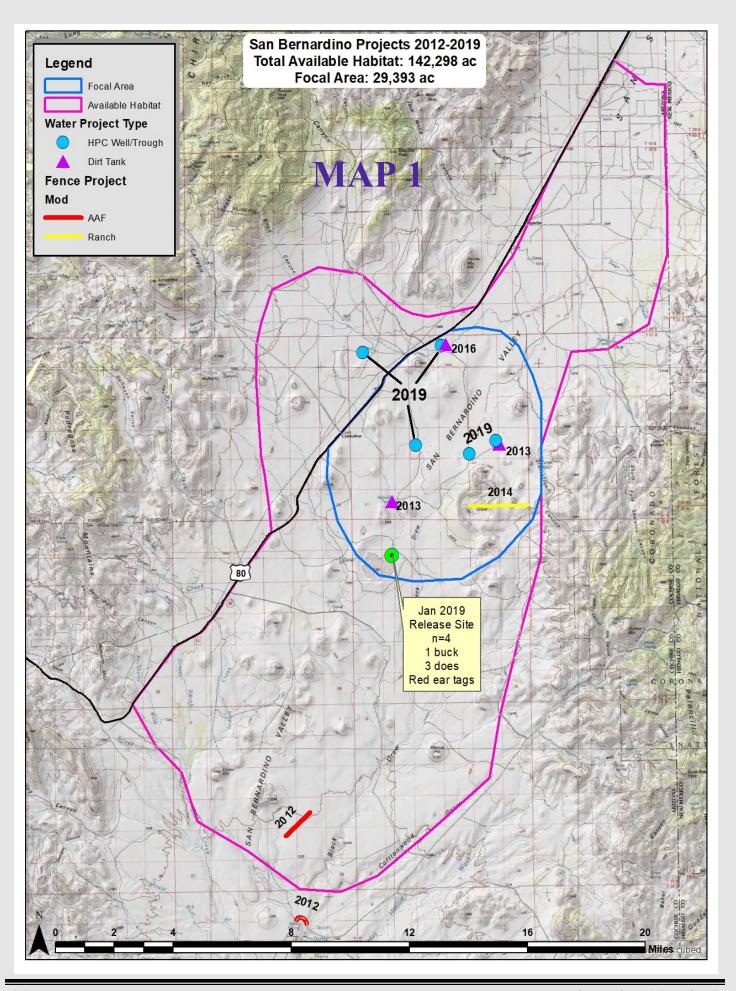
The AAF received an Arizona License Plate Conservation Grant in the amount of \$10,400. The grant was awarded to do a major dirt tank cleanout on the Ten X Ranch in the central plains of the San Bernardino Valley. The earthen tank is located in a high-density pronghorn zone. The tank will provide water to fawning pronghorn does in the months of April, May, and June. Work was completed in March 2017 and the tank filled with over 1M gallons of water during the monsoon rains of July-September (see Map #1, page 8).

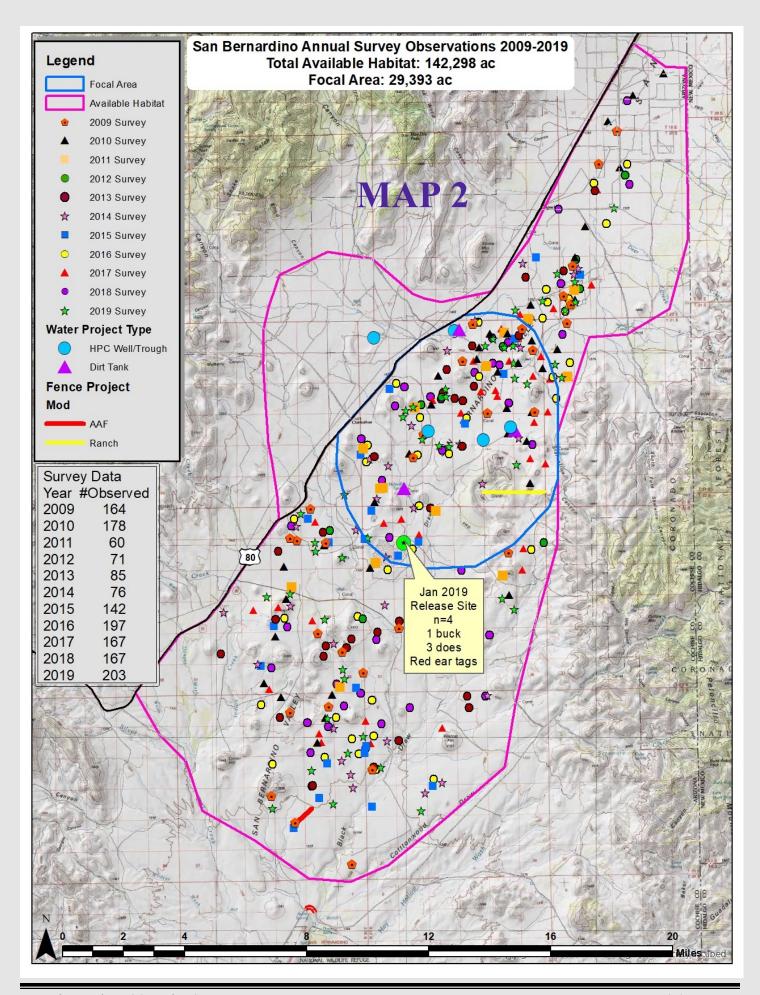
May 2019 - A Solar Well Upgrade in the Back Pasture on the Ten X Ranch

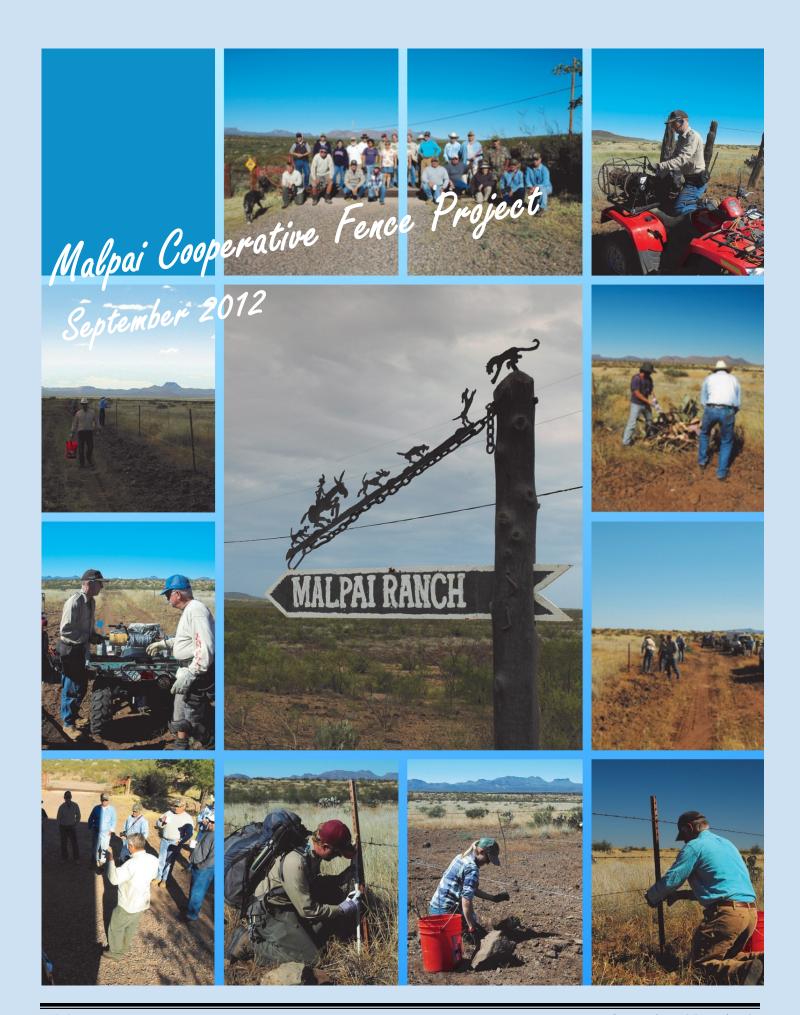
A solar well upgrade, funded by the landowner and pronghorn and mule deer HPC funds, was completed in the Back Pasture on the Ten X Ranch in the central plains of the San Bernardino Valley. The well is located in one of the highest resident pronghorn population zones and serves a critical role in piping water to 4 trough locations and providing water to fawning pronghorn does in the months of April, May, and June (see Map #1, page 8).

PRONGHORN POPULATION TRANSPLANTS, SURVEYS, & ENHANCEMENTS

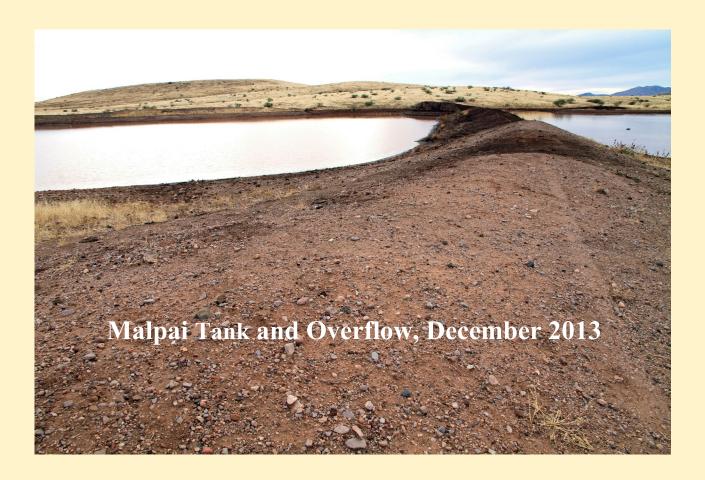
In January 2019, the AGFD captured 44 pronghorn near Prescott Valley, Arizona. Four of these animals (1 buck and 3 ear-tagged does) were released in the San Bernardino Valley. Survey data from the last 10 years has shown a resilient population number which generally meets the minimum grant population objective of 125 individuals. The AGFD's August 2019 aerial survey recorded 203 pronghorn, which was the highest number since 2004 (see Map #2, page 9). Following approved scientific protocols, the herd zone received seasonal pronghorn fawning enhancement coyote treatment in 2014, 2015, 2016, and again in 2019. With these treatments and good seasonal moisture, this herd has the capacity to remain above the minimum population objective of 125 individuals.











ALTAR VALLEY HERD ZONE 40,484 Acres

OVERVIEW

The Altar Valley was historic pronghorn habitat and pronghorn were last observed in 1933. In response, the AGFD transplanted a total of 192 animals to Altar Valley in 1945, 1987, and 2000. All of these transplants resulted in minimal survival success. Today, the pronghorn population in Altar Valley is struggling. The population is currently estimated to be fewer than 25 individuals and the AGFD's annual August aerial surveys indicate a downward population trend. Many factors contribute to this decline including long-term mesquite encroachment, travel corridor restrictions, predation, water availability, and long-term drought. The AGFD has renewed efforts with the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) and neighboring ranches to implement habitat improvement projects that will benefit these pronghorn in order to increase their population. From 2008 to 2018 improvements on the BANWR included clearing 4,635 acres of mesquite, adding 5 new permanent waters, and clearing 386 acres on the Santa Margarita Ranch. An additional 200 acres of mesquite were cleared on the BANWR using chainsaws and herbicide. Additionally, since 2015 the Friends of BANWR volunteer group have completely removed 180 of 200 miles of unneeded internal pasture fence. Also, four mature doe pronghorn, captured in Prescott Valley by the AGFD, were released in the Altar Valley in January, 2019.

PROJECTS (see Map #1, page 14 and Volunteer Photos, front cover)

November 16-17, 2019 - Altar Valley Highway 284 Boundary Fence Modification

A highway fence modification project was completed by 23 volunteers in the south end of Altar Valley (see photo front cover). Four miles of existing highway boundary fence were modified, 2 miles on each side of Highway 284, a few miles north of the BANWR main entrance. Prior to the actual workdays, the Arizona Department of Transportation removed mesquite and brush bordering the fence line for all 4 miles of fence boundaries. Fence modification was in direct proximity to completed or planned grassland restoration by mesquite removal. The project was designed and led by the AGFD's Region V Wildlife Program Supervisor, Karen Klima in collaboration with Rita Rutledge, Chairperson of the Friends of the Buenos Aires. The AAF's operating account paid \$190 for the project's camp food for volunteers.

The NFWF 8-year grant purchased all of the necessary materials for 4 miles of fence at \$3,700. The project added **6,500 acres** of pronghorn habitat connectivity (see Map #1, page 14).

December, 2013 - BANWR Installation of 5 Water Troughs

Five water troughs were added at separate locations in key pronghorn/mule deer habitat. The troughs are fed by a solar well and storage tank on the BANWR (see Map #1, page 14).

GRASSLANDS (see Map #1, Page 14)

December, 2019 - Altar Valley South Lagunita Phase 3 Grasslands Restoration at Santa Margarita Ranch

Utilizing contractors, the owner of the Santa Margarita Ranch completed grubbing of **372 acres** of mature mesquites on the west side of Highway 286 near the BANWR head-quarters entrance. The cost of \$50,000 included \$15,000 pronghorn and \$35,000 mule deer HPC funds. The project was in direct proximity to the November, 2019 Highway 284 fence modification project outlined previously, and adjacent to the current population of 25 pronghorn occupying the east side of the highway.

FIELD TRIP

January 31, 2018 - Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge-Altar Valley Field Trip to Review Grassland Pronghorn Restoration Project Efforts

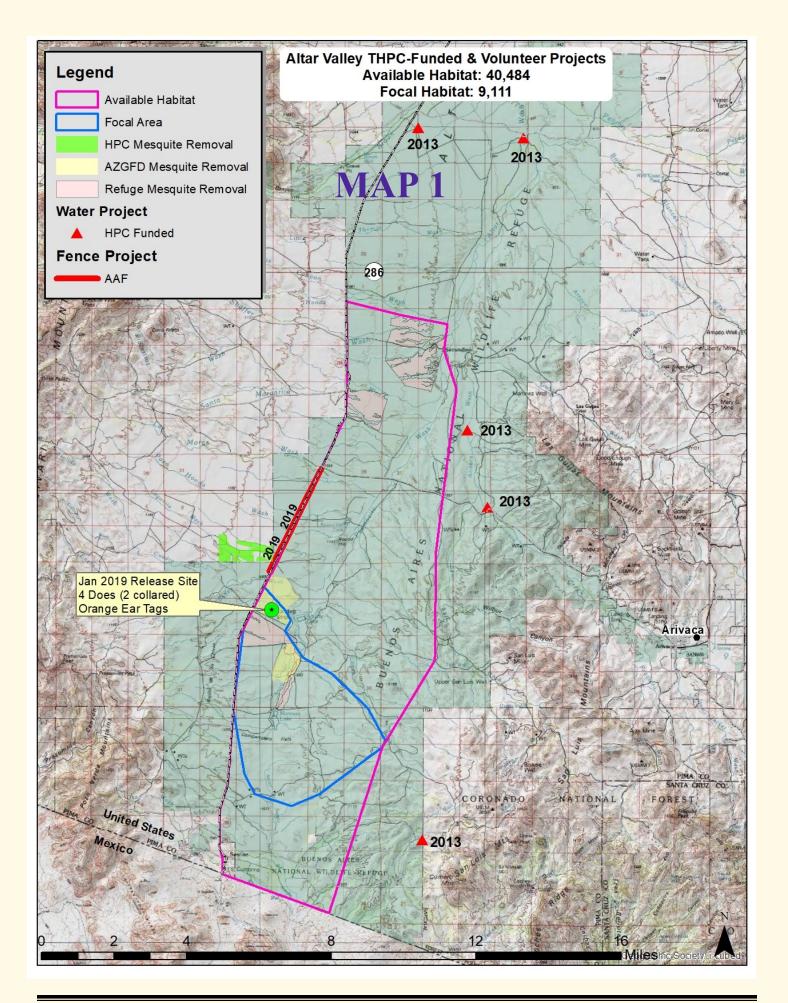
AAF Vice President and Project Manager, Glen Dickens, along with current and past AAF Board members Dave Brown, Tice Supplee, Ken Meadors, Al Sue, Gary Boyer, Joe Bill Pickrell, Connie Taylor and AAF's field and GIS managers John Millican and Rana Tucker attended an all-day field trip to Altar Valley and the BANWR. The field trip was organized by the AGFD's Region V Wildlife Program Supervisor, Karen Klima. In addition to AGFD and AAF representatives, the meeting included four lead employees/biologists from the BANWR, and Kerry Baldwin and Kyle Thompson, both Altar Valley Alliance representatives. The purpose of the field trip was to review areas that need treatment and removal of mesquite, as well as to review areas that had been restored in the past 5-7 years.

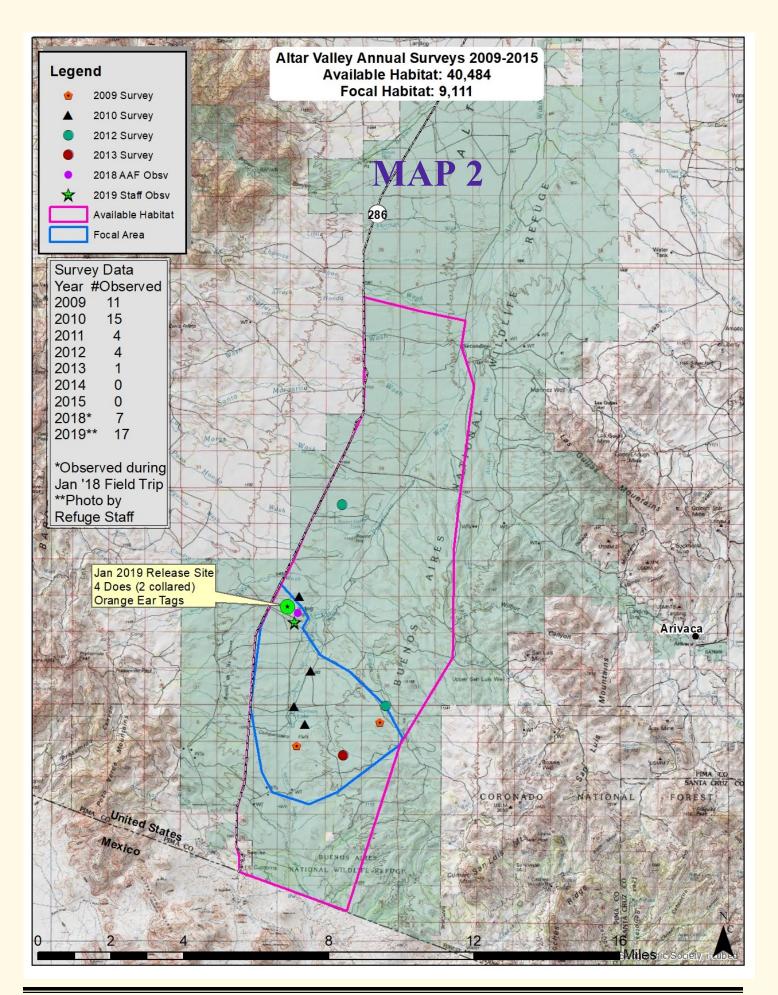
The group also reviewed and discussed the BANWR habitat management history including fire management, mesquite and fence removal, wildlife water development, and current pronghorn population status and distribution. Volunteers have removed over 180 miles of unneeded pasture fence and are planning for more removal in the coming years. Participants agreed that the efforts to restore pronghorn habitat to support a more viable population of pronghorn were worth the present and future efforts that may be required. The current population of pronghorn in this area is estimated to be fewer than 25 animals. Numerous issues will need to be addressed and resolved to provide the opportunity for future pronghorn population supplements.

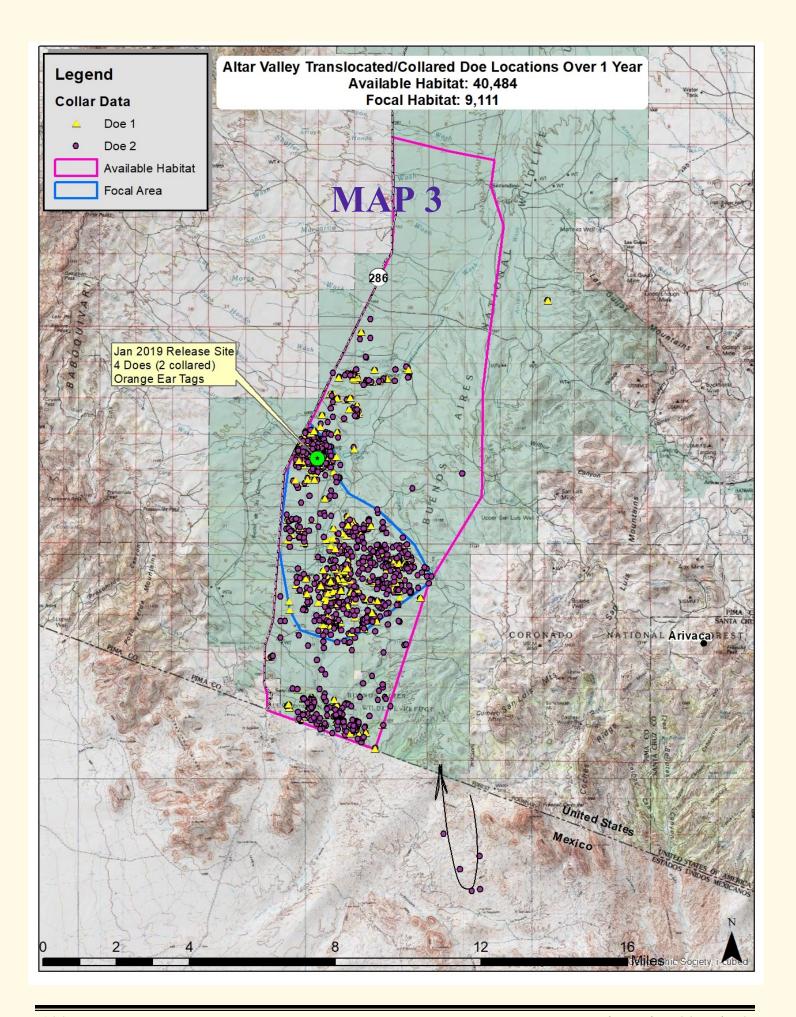
PRONGHORN POPULATION TRANSPLANTS & SURVEYS

January, 2019 - Four Pronghorn Captured near Prescott Valley, Arizona Released on the Buenos Aires Wildlife Refuge

Four pronghorn captured near Prescott Valley, Arizona were relocated to the BANWR. The pronghorn included 4 ear-tagged mature does, two of which were radio collared for monitoring seasonal movements and habitat use. The resident pronghorn herd numbered just 15 animals before the supplemental release. Since the 2019 fawning season, the fledgling herd is now estimated to have least 25 individuals (see Map #2, page 15). The 2-radio collared does have explored all of the current occupied pronghorn habitat and have integrated themselves into the remnant population. (see Map #3, page 16).







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Sonoita Plains July 18th Fawn Saturation Survey & Record Breaking August 12th San Bernardino Valley Pronghorn Survey By Glen Dickens AAF VP/Projects/Grants Mgr.

Sonoita Plains: On Saturday July 18, 2020 Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) personnel led by Regional Game Specialist Rana Tucker and volunteers from the Arizona Antelope Foundation conducted our 8th annual Sonoita Plains pronghorn fawn "Saturation" survey. This entails stationing as many separate observers as possible across all the occupied pronghorn habitat in a game management unit from the crack of dawn until 10AM and observing and classifying all of the pronghorn observed and their exact locations. This time of year is when pronghorn does are at their peak of fawning/nursery herd activity. Due to Covid-19 this survey took on added importance as the AGFD cancelled their usual aerial pronghorn survey to be conducted in the month of August.

This survey included both game management units 34A and B, east and west of Highway 83 and north of Highway 82 and 35A/B north, south of Highway 82. We had bluebird weather that morning and had good road conditions throughout the survey zone. We counted 218; 63 bucks, 115 does and 37 fawns for a 32% fawning success rate. Last year we had a 44% fawn success rate.

The 2019 survey netted 274 with 168 observed in 2018 (low count due to rainy weather and impassible roads), 243 in 2017 and 316 during the 2016 survey. What these numbers continue to reaffirm is that the Sonoita Plains population continues to hold its own at 250+ and function as a single metapopulation. When the grant efforts began in 2010, we observed just 81 animals fragmented into 3 distinct herd zones. This is very positive data and pronghorn are now observed over the entirety of the Sonoita Plains 100K acre grassland habitat.

In addition to the above population numbers we had 2-teams that surveyed the San Rafael Valley counting an additional 31 animals but with zero fawns observed. The AGFD aerial survey found 61 animals in 2019. This herd zone had just 9 pronghorn, 1 buck and 8 does in January of 2014 when the AGFD released 17 New Mexico transplant animals.

Camp was located in the Canelo Hills on the Coronado Forest. Friday night's Dinner was BBQ javelina served by yours truly and spouse and resident AAF photographer Betty Dickens.

Thanks go to all the following AGFD partners and volunteers that contributed to the success of this survey; -Representing the AAF Board: Terry Schupp, Connie Taylor, Steve Tritz, Kara Jensen, Robert Valesco, Joe-Bill Pickrell, Dave Cagle, Gary Boyer & guest, John Millican, and yours truly.

- -Representing the AGFD: Brad Fulk, Rana Tucker, Karen Klima, Noah Silva, Jeremiah Fountain, Sarah Gandara and Spud Hester.
- -Other volunteers included; Warren Adams, Betty Dickens, Darrel Tersey, Roy Hester, Alan Fausher, Lance Altherr, Mike Ebright, Fritz Sawyer, and Bret Blum.

<u>San Bernardino Valley:</u> On Sunday August 12, 2020, 7 personnel from the AGFD led by Field Supervisor Mike Richens and assisted by John Millican and Betty and Glen Dickens conducted the first ever saturation ground survey in the San Bernardino Valley in unit 30A. We had bluebird weather that morning and had good road conditions throughout the survey zone. We counted a record number of pronghorn 271; 69 bucks, 119 does and 84 fawns for a 71% fawning success rate!

When the grant efforts began in 2012 the total number of pronghorn observed was just 71 animals. In addition to improvements made on fences and water distribution (see the grants San Bernardino herd zone report included in this issue) this herd zone received fawn enhancement treatment by active coyote removal in 2014-16 and again in 2019-20. Field Supervisor Mike Richens stated after reviewing the final data that 30B likely has 300 pronghorn today. Success by all metrics!

AGFD staff participating in the survey included: Rana Tucker, Mike Richens, Devin Skinner, John Bacorn, Devin Skinner and Alex Smallwood. Thanks to the AGFD Tucson Regional Office for continuing/allowing these "civilian conservationist" efforts. The AAF looks forward to continuing these "on the ground" separate monitoring efforts in future years.





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Join (or renew) now and help the Arizona Antelope Foundation in its efforts to fund and provide the manpower necessary to finance pronghorn research, enhance and improve pronghorn habitat, encourage and assist in pronghorn transplants to historic habitat, and replenish existing herds. Your commitment will not only ensure that you will continue to be able to enjoy one of Arizona's most magnificent animals, it will also ensure that your children and your children will have the opportunity to be able to enjoy pronghorn. Contributions to the Foundation are tax deductible, as the Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization.

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