

Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team  
Minutes of the January 15, 1987 Meeting

The January 15, 1987 meeting of the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team was called to order at 10:00 A.M. at Luke Air Force Base Arizona (attendance roster provided).

Introductions were made and a short discussion of the last meeting and minutes were presented by Richard Remington team leader.

This meeting of the Recovery Team was called to discuss two items. These topics are (1) Final Report on the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Study, where do we go now and (2) Draft master plan for Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) and the potential for a penned propagation project of Sonoran antelope at BANWR. Discussions and recommendations of the Recovery Team for these two items are presented in detail below.

(1) Draft Final Report on Sonoran Pronghorn Status in Arizona.

Mr. James DeVos Arizona Game and Fish Department project supervisor was requested to discuss the findings of the study and how the study had addressed objectives. Subsequent to Mr. DeVos's presentation it was apparent that data on home range, seasonal habitat selection, mortality, and natality have been adequately addressed. It has been shown that free interchange of Sonoran pronghorn across the U.S. - Mexico border does not exist. Therefore the U.S. and Mexico populations can not be addressed collectively although generalities of the U.S. population (seasonal habitat preferences etc.) may be consistent.

Although the current study has answered many questions on the general life history of Sonoran pronghorn the Recovery Team does not believe that adequate data exist to meet recovery needs as outlined within the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Plan. The population estimates of the U.S. Sonoran pronghorn antelope has remained relatively unchanged for some 60 years. The Draft Final Report as submitted states "There is also no clear means of increasing the population except by habitat protection." There is no definitive explanation of environmental resistance which suppresses populations to the approximately 100 individuals occurring since the turn of the century even in the wake of good fawn survival (at least during the years of this study).

In lieu of this the consensus of the Recovery Team is that three specific programs are needed which will address, in time, recovery needs of the Sonoran pronghorn antelope. These recommendations include:

(1) Maintenance of radio telemetry collars on a representative portion of the population on a range wide basis to aid in annual surveys. Survey efforts prior to this study produced few antelope observations. To adequately census populations telemetry is undoubtedly the most cost-effective method. With the completion of the current study no systematic censusing of the population has been proposed. Without range wide censusing there can be no determination of whether recovery efforts are being met or if the population is beginning to decline. It is of utmost importance that the U.S. population be adequately and annually censused. The use of radio telemetry collars over such a wide expanse of habitat coupled with problems of access, lends itself extremely well to the use of satellite telemetry. Not only would maintenance of radio collared pronghorn provide continuing data on movements and produce best annual census methods, but it would also allow for further development in logistics of satellite tracking.

(2) Begin an intensive inventory of the forage base within specific pronghorn antelope home ranges. It must be determined if forage quality within Sonoran antelope annual and seasonal home ranges provides adequate nutrition to support population expansion. Of the environmental resistance factors present within the current distribution of Sonoran pronghorn the quality of available forage on a seasonal basis can be quantified. By determining the quality of forage available to Sonoran pronghorn versus their caloric needs we can determine if recovery efforts can be met within their current distribution. This study would consist of monitoring two antelope, one with a localized home range versus an antelope with a wide home range. Collections of preferred forage within seasonal use areas would be made at least 4 times during the year, preferably on six occasions. Forage would be analyzed for water content, caloric value, mineral and ash content, etc. Forage value would be evaluated based on literature on the needs of antelope. This study should continue for a minimum of three years.

(3) Intensive investigations of fawning chronology and mortality within a localized antelope herd. The specific timing of fawning; periods of greatest fawning mortality and specific micro habitats used for fawning have not been adequately described. This study would consist of capturing and radio collaring six to eight pregnant does within a herd of limited

home range and with generally free access (eg. Cameron Charco herd). Vaginal inserts would be implanted in pregnant does. During parturition inserts would be activated allowing immediate location of the fawn. Fawns would then be instrumented with telemetry collars and be consistently monitored during their first week and periodically after. Any mortality could be specifically identified and immediate access to fawn carcasses for indepth necropsy would be possible.

Coupled with this study would be an intensive investigation into the presence and impact of predators within antelope ranges. This study would consist of establishing scat transects for coyotes and other predators. In addition coyotes and bobcats would be collected within specific fawning habitat to document antelope predation throughout fawning months. Bobcats and predators will be collected for stomach content analysis to document degree of antelope fawn predation within specific study areas. Such scat transects and predator collections would be located within antelope fawning habitat and preferably within the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument for ease of access.

These studies, as outlined, have many significant additional advantages. Each antelope captured for any of these studies will provide data on standard measurements and blood can also be taken to continue disease investigation and subspecies status. Each Sonoran pronghorn antelope handled adds significantly to data available on this unique subspecies.

The second agenda item of this meeting was involved with commenting on the Draft Master Plan for Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. The Recovery Team believes strongly that all available historic ranges or habitats should be evaluated for potential to support satellite populations of Sonoran pronghorn antelope. The Recovery Team also believes that propagation of Sonoran pronghorn supported by individual supplements for the existing population, is the only viable method of obtaining a population suitable for release. Future study teams investigating the potential of the BANWR to support pronghorn should have representation from the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team. A separate letter was forwarded to the Regional Director outlining the position of the Recovery Team on the Draft BANWR Master Plan (see attachment).

As the potential exists at BANWR for pen propagating Sonoran pronghorn, all such avenues for propagation must be investigated. In light of the success met with breeding programs

at the Phoenix Zoo the Recovery Team recommends that discussions be held with the Phoenix Zoo for an additional propagation program. Such a program involving two propagation locations will allow for exchange of pronghorn for genetic integrity and will undoubtedly shorten time frames in propagating a herd suitable for release. Penned antelope will allow detailed studies of the physiology of this unique subspecies. If such propagation programs become a reality all areas of historic range and/or habitat must be evaluated for potential to support a free roaming herd. The Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team will begin such an effort as soon as commitments for propagation can be reached.

In summary the Recovery Team requests that the Regional Director solicit proposals from the current study team for these studies as outlined. In addition the Recovery Team recommends that the Regional Director lend support for propagation of Sonoran pronghorn at the BANWR. The Recovery Team also recommends that direct lines of communication be open with the Phoenix Zoo to pursue a propagation program.

In closing the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team believes strongly that closer ties be made with the Republic of Mexico to involve necessary agencies and individuals with our recovery efforts. The team suggests that the final report of the Sonoran Antelope Study be translated to Spanish along with all other pertinent studies, etc. and sent to the proper Mexican authorities. We also recommend that appropriate individuals from Mexico be given formal invitations and encouragement for attendance to all further Recovery Team meetings. The team also recommends their participation be sought in propagation programs and that release sites within Mexico be evaluated along with those within the U.S.. Basically the Recovery Team believes more direct communication must be opened with the Mexican government. Personnel from the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument could assume this role for the Recovery Team if appropriate and with the support of the Regional Director.

I hope you find these minutes and recommendations of value. If I or any member of the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team can be of any further assistance please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

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In Attendance

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