

January 20, 1987

Mr. Mike Spear  
Regional Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103

Dear Mr. Spear:

As you are aware the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team meet at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona on January 15, 1987. The minutes of this meeting will be forwarded subsequent to review by team members. A main topic of discussion at this meeting was the Draft Final Plan for the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR). In order to meet commitments for comments on this document I felt it necessary to relay the feelings of the Recovery Team on this topic to you separately.

First I want to express the appreciation of the Recovery Team on finding that the potential exists within BANWR for a possible reintroduction of Sonoran pronghorn antelope. In reviewing what literature is available on historic distributions and abundance of Sonoran pronghorn some issues need clarification. Published estimates of Sonoran pronghorn in this century have varied around 100 individuals. There is no literature suggesting dramatic increases or decreases to this number over the last 60 years. Historic accounts of distributions and abundances leave many questions and the eastern range of Sonoran pronghorn is certainly one. The fact remains however that dramatic impacts to the antelope population occurred before or near the turn of the century. With the completion of the current Sonoran pronghorn antelope study it was learned that Sonoran pronghorn are less tied to populations in Mexico than previously believed and a free interchange of antelope across the Mexico border does not occur. It is also significant to note that most recent estimates of Sonoran pronghorn numbers within Mexico has declined below 100 antelope. In bringing all this to light, the current population of Sonoran pronghorn antelope within the U.S. is disjunct from the Mexican population and numbers have not significantly changed in the last 60 years at least.

The main premise to meet recovery needs of this antelope as

outlined in the Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan is to expand the current population to 300 individuals or numbers determined feasible for the habitat. Obviously the current Sonoran pronghorn antelope study answered many questions on the status, movements, mortality, natality etc., but also leave unanswered questions. Such as what can be done to increase numbers to 300 or if this is even possible. The Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team feels that the only sure way to meet recovery needs of this antelope subspecies is through expansion of their current range. It is possible that current range conditions or environmental factors within the present distribution of Sonoran pronghorn will limit numbers to near 100 antelope. Hopefully future research can more accurately describe environmental resistance within the current distributions. However it is possible that population increases are not a reality in their present range. It is for this reason that the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team feels expanding the current distribution is necessary.

Because of the small and scattered population of Sonoran antelope it is not feasible to assume that 20 to 40 individuals are available for an immediate transplant to any suitable vacant habitat and the Recovery Team does not or has not supported such a thought. The real possibility does exist however to pen propagate this antelope. The Recovery Team is recommending such a project. Ideally an area could be set aside to receive up to 4 antelope for propagation. In order to enhance genetic variability a doe antelope from the Tule desert area, a doe antelope from the Growler Valley area and a buck antelope from Mexico could be captured and transported to such a breeding facility. Ultimately with future captures of 3 to 4 antelope in conjunction with continued breeding a suitable number of Sonoran pronghorn for release can be obtained. I would also point out that a breeding facility ideally would be located in habitat suitable for future release but this is not a requisite for such a facility. The Recovery Team feels that BANWR does indeed have the potential for such a breeding facility and may contain habitat suitable for future releases. The presence of Sonoran pronghorn antelope at BANWR would serve to enhance the nature of the refuge for supporting recovery of endangered species of U.S. fauna. The presence of a captive breeding herd of Sonoran pronghorn would allow researchers the opportunity to further investigate the physiology and anatomy of this unique antelope, greatly enhancing our understanding of Sonoran pronghorn.

I suggest that the issues of developing a breeding facility for Sonoran pronghorn and the suitability of future releases of

Sonoran pronghorn be addressed as separate issues for the BANWR. I would also suggest that a member of the Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope Recovery Team be granted membership on the Antelope Study Team being proposed for BANWR.

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

Sincerely,



Richard Romington, Team Leader  
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