

BLM & other agencies told about pronghorn

About 50 people were on hand when Bureau of Land Management personnel provided an update on pronghorn management activities on Thursday, January 22.

The Ajo Block of BLM lands was closed for the first time during pronghorn fawning season from March 15 through July 15, 2003, and some of the people who visit those lands were unhappy with the restrictions. BLM personnel held the meeting in an effort to explain pronghorn management which was the reason for the closure.

Other federal lands in the area had been closed during the fawning season of the endangered Sonoran pronghorn in previous years, but BLM personnel agreed that since closing its lands may mitigate dangers to the endangered Sonoran pronghorn, they would restrict entrance during this season each year.

At the meeting Teri Raml and Tim Hughes, both of BLM, explained what actions BLM has been taking in the recovery plan for the pronghorn. They said BLM has primarily been monitoring the animal, but because of the dire need for action recently, they have joined with the other agencies in proactive measures. They are trying to reduce fragmentation of the pronghorn range by removing fences or installing less invasive ones, conducting rangeland health assessments to identify watershed conditions and livestock grazing conditions that might negatively affect pronghorn, and taking conservation measures such as enhancing forage plots and fence modifications to keep livestock from the pronghorn fawning area. BLM has proposed closure of the Cameron Allotment.

Tim Tibbitts of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument discussed measures being taken on the monument toward recovery of the pronghorn. He said they are mapping vegetation, identifying migration patterns, and

other research measures to learn as much as possible about the species. Emergency measures to mitigate impacts on the animals include road closures especially during fawning season, providing water, and reduction of illegal traffic through the monument.

John Morgart of Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, who is the coordinator for the Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Team, said the refuge has been providing water sources, creating forage enhancement plots, and reducing restrictive fences. In addition, they have been involved in development of a captive breeding plan to produce a viable herd.

The first efforts to relocate Sonoran pronghorn from a larger herd in Mexico took place last week. The effort was called "a qualified success." While some pronghorn died during the newly-developed relocation process, two ewes were successfully relocated to the captive breeding facility on the wildlife refuge.

All speakers emphasized that they are working with the other agencies in the US and Mexico as a team to provide consistent management practices in their efforts to produce a viable herd of Sonoran pronghorn.

Some members of the audience who commented following the presentations said they believed the BLM closure during the fawning season was unnecessary and unfair to those who wanted to use the area for recreation. Some said they believed the relocation of pronghorn from Mexico should have been handled better. Some said they thought the closing of the Cameron Allotment was not a fair or reasonable solution to the problem. Some expressed outrage with BLM for apparently trying to keep people off BLM lands because they think pronghorn are more important than people.

Comments heard following the meeting included support for the federal agencies working to recover the pronghorn and out-

rage at the selfish attitudes of the people and lack of sensitivity toward the endangered animals. Some also thought the people could be more open to the recovery efforts since the closure of the area was only for a three-month period each year. Many expressed appreciation for the way the negative comments were handled during the meeting.

BLM representatives remained in the area, visiting various areas used by residents and becoming familiar with the Ajo Block as part of the planning process.