

## March 2019 AZT Administrator's Report

I apologize for the lateness of this report. I wanted to include the results of a couple of meetings I had this week. Also, I regret that I will not be able to attend the board meeting because I have other commitments. I will be at the LOST/Arnett Canyon Trail dedication Sunday and hope to see some of you there.

- We received our national trails funding in a different way this year and this is causing concerns that the program is being de-emphasized. Originally, this funding was earmarked for each national scenic and historic trail by Congress. When earmarks went away the Forest Service Washington Office continued to send the funding to the regions as separate line items with budget direction for each trail. This year it was combined with our general trail maintenance fund and left to the discretion of the regional foresters as to how to allocate. With our national priorities heavily focused on forest health and production, this flexibility in how the funding can be allocated is causing great concern for trail administrators, the Partnership for the National Trails System, and individual trail organizations. In this region we currently have strong support for the national trails and the funding was allocated as usual. I did not attend Hike the Hill due to time constraints after the government shut-down but I know this was heavily discussed there.
- On March 20 I spoke to the Coronado National Forest Leadership Team about protocol for incidents affecting the AZT. I emphasized the need for advance notice and prevention of situations such as the one that occurred earlier this month when the southern terminus of the trail was shut down in the middle of peak season for people beginning their northbound trips from the border. This was for a prescribed burn that did not impact the trail but it was closed for a day on Coronado National Monument for safety reasons. Thanks to fast action from Matt, the word got out and many people started a day early or delayed their trip until after the burn. The fire management officer on Coronado NF has offered to help put together a protocol for such incidents and I plan to work with other forests and agencies to apply this trail-wide.
- On March 20 I also met with Lisa Atkins, the State Land Commissioner, and several of her staff; our State Liaison, Ericka Luna; Regional Recreation Director, Francisco Valenzuela; and Regional Forester, Cal Joyner, who called in to the meeting. I had attempted to set up a meeting in December before the government shut-down but did not receive a response from my contact there who was apparently on paternity leave. Matt recently asked me to write a letter in support of the Teacup Realignment (Passage 15) but our protocol is to check in with the state liaison and she opted to help me set up a meeting. The Commissioner requested the regional forester's participation so this was unexpectedly elevated. Our support for Pinal County's proposed right-of-way amendment needed for the realignment was listened to but dismissed and various

reasons were given. With the intense scrutiny ASLD is now directing towards any type of recreational activities or rights-of-way, I am not optimistic they would have approved it under any circumstances, but at least we provided as much support as we could in terms of the importance of having the trail in the optimal location to avoid conflicts and preserve national scenic trail values. I do feel we initiated a better working relationship overall and clarified the role of the Forest Service as the administering agency for the AZT, as there are new faces there since I last met with ASLD staff.

- Funding was sent to the forests this year for support for the Temporal Relocation and Oak Tree Canyon Trailhead on the Coronado NF, several projects on the Tonto NF including emergency trail repair in the Mazatzals, gate money and miscellaneous support for the Coconino NF, and funding for trailhead fencing replacement materials on the Kaibab NF. All of this funding needs to be spent this fiscal year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> party consultant on the Temporal project will need to be able to engage forest staff before September 30 so they can use the funding provided for the time they spend on the project. Otherwise, it will need to be diverted elsewhere.
- Funding planned for the ATA cost share agreement is \$160,000, an increase of \$41,263 over last year's funds which became available in August of 2018. The agreement has been assigned to someone for processing and this is a big step. In spite of a more efficient process, there has been attrition in our Grants and Agreements office and once again the capacity to process agreements is causing delays, in addition to impacts still being felt from the government shut-down. It has taken some time to get someone assigned and I am hopeful it will now be processed soon.
- You have probably all heard by now that Hudbay's 404 permit for the Rosemont Mine plan of operations has been approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This is the final permit need for them to proceed with the project, however, lawsuits are expected to delay it.
- The Mansfield Canyon mine clean-up project that required the closure and detour of a portion of the Temporal Gulch Passage is on schedule. I do not have an estimate on the end date yet.
- Work continues on the comprehensive plan. I will be in touch with Matt to discuss the best way to have ATA review.