

## **Cochise County Extension Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** December 2, 2024

**Location:** Cochise County Conference Room, Willcox, AZ

**Chairperson:** Moiria White

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### **Call to Order**

Chairperson Moiria White called the meeting to order at 3:07 PM and welcomed attendees.

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### **Approval of Minutes**

- **Motion:** Alan Seitz moved to approve the July 8, 2024, meeting minutes.
  - **Seconded:** Ron Bemis.
  - **Outcome:** Unanimously approved.
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### **Attendance**

#### **Advisory Board Members Present:**

- Moiria White (Chair), Ron Bemis (Vice Chair), Amber Morin, Dennis Moroney, Jason Zibart (via Zoom)

#### **University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Personnel Present:**

- Kim McReynolds, Carol Holden, Haley Chappell, Connie Forsyth, Tricia Dunham, Evelyn Whitmer (via Zoom), Jan Groth (via Zoom), Ashley Wright (via Zoom)

**Guests:** None

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### **New Business** (Carol Holden)

#### **Sierra Vista Office Changes**

- The current lease for the modular building (\$24,000/year) ends in July 2025 and will not be renewed due to lack of use. (Typically, only 1–2 employees are present each day.)
- Will consider renting room 503 for the Master Gardener space/meeting room. Will have basic office supplies including a copier/printer. (\$200/month).
- Estimated savings: \$20,000/year, which will support program expansion.
- Employees will have Willcox as their duty station, with remote work options for Sierra Vista staff.

#### **Bisbee Water Wise Presence**

- Office returned to the City of Bisbee due to non-use and inadequate facilities.

#### **Douglas Location**

- A small space under the stairs in the Cochise County complex may become an official UA Extension office. Basic office setup for two employees. Would like to furnish and put UA Branding to make it an attractive space for the community to meet with extension program personnel. **Cost:** Free.

## **Water Data Research Workshop with ASU**

- Planned January workshop in collaboration with the AZ Water Innovation Initiative Program at ASU. This group has access to new hydrological data. They want to put on a workshop in mid-January to help people access the new information and better understand it.
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## **Personnel Updates (Carol Holden)**

### **Open Positions:**

- Assistant/Associate Agent, Commercial Horticulture (candidate interview pending).
- Extension Assistant, 4-H (on hold due to hiring freeze).
- Water Wise Community Outreach (grant-funded, not subject to freeze).

### **Resignations:**

- Berlynda Schaaf (Admin Assistant, Sierra Vista).
  - Jenny Simon (Community Outreach Specialist, Early Childhood).
  - Casey Fogle (Parenting/Financial Literacy Specialist).
  - Trevor Lauber (Water Wise Outreach).
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## **Community Updates**

### **Moiria White (Chair):**

- The Coronado club has grown to approximately 35 kids and continues to expand. There is a need for more leaders to accommodate growth, but new volunteers are incoming. Would like to see a new 4-H club in Willcox to balance participation across the valley.

### **Amber Morin:**

- Collaboration with the Association of Conservation Districts secured a \$5 million NRCS Partnership Grant. \$2.5 million was allocated to conservation easements. Remaining funds to support restoration efforts like fencing, waterers, and fuel breaks.
- Facilitated connections between Sulphur Springs Water Alliance, and Quantified Ventures who helped the Cochise Conservation Recharge Network and San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Adaptive Management Committee get some additional grants. That group along with San Pedro is on its way to successfully attracting the region's experts on water to attract grants for recharge projects.
- Announced Scott Feldhausen's retirement from the BLM Gila District; a replacement is pending.

### **Ron Bemis (Vice Chair):**

- Engaging with farmers to discuss and adapt to upcoming AMA regulations.
- Collaborating with NRCS on their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which supports economic diversity to promote sustainability and better land management.
- While his area received significant rain, other parts of the county remained extremely dry, causing cattle to leave the county.

**Alan Seitz:**

- Actively working with Sulphur Springs Water Alliance (SSWA), Lincoln Institute, and ASU on what to do about the water situation. However, with the governor's implementation of the Active Management Area (AMA), SSWA's role moving forward is uncertain. Collaborating with homeowners and growers to get information out there. Highlighted legal complexities and state-level negotiations regarding water use regulations. A regular AMA is not going to fit but will have to figure it out.

**Jason Zibart:**

- Announced Gary Kartchner as interim CEO of NCCH, expected to bring growth and stability.
- Program for locally grown produce for schools and hospitals in Benson concluded due to Southwind Farms grant expiration. Plans to secure additional funding and recruit a food insecurity coordinator for Willcox and Benson. Goal: Source food from local producers and work with food pantries.

**Dennis Moroney:**

- The drought is impacting his operation. Abbot Canyon spring, which has been historically reliable, has dried up for the first time in 23 years. Reduced sheep herd from 350 to under 100 and has been selling cattle weekly since August due to forage shortages. Compared the current drought to the severe conditions of the 1920s when ranchers had to take their cattle to Texas and Mexico due to the drought. This is not unprecedented but has not happened in his lifetime.
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**Faculty Updates****Haley Chappell (4-H):**

- Hosted a skillathon at the Cochise County Fair with belt buckle prizes, which was well attended. The auction featured a record number of animals this year, marking the first time the cap per species had to be implemented. There was a significant increase in goat and sheep entries. However, the year proved challenging, as there were fewer buyers compared to previous years. Despite this, several larger buyers stepped up, making considerable purchases to ensure every child was able to sell their animal.
- Purchased swine and beef tagging simulation kits for use across the county.
- The hunting skills workshop, led by Steve Fenn, took place on November 9th and was a great success. One of the kids' favorite activities was the "Caveman skeet shooting," where they threw rocks at clay targets.
- Upcoming Activities: Wreaths Across America, Large Stock Activity Day, Small Stock Activity Day, Communications Day. In the process of establishing a new 4-H club in Benson to meet growing interest.

**Jan Groth (Master Gardeners):**

- Preparing for the "Cocoa in the Garden with Santa" event on December 10th.
- Monthly workshops are starting soon and Master Gardener classes are starting January 27th.
- Volunteers are in the garden daily, and attend the Farmers Market to distribute seeds from the seed library.

**Carol Holden (CED/Community Development):**

- Working on resources and training for small non-profits to improve their financial and operational systems. Applying for a grant to establish a watershed group, will find out soon if grant was awarded. Starting to do some research on the economic impacts of crop changes to conserve water.

**Kim McReynolds (Range):**

- **Education and Outreach:** Coordinated the Lehmann Lovegrass Workshop at Robbie and Pam Sproul's ranch in September, which attracted 33 participants from various agencies. George Ruyle and Flavie Andoin contributed to this successful event. Participated in the Willcox STEM event in August, showcasing native wildlife with hands-on displays of small and large mammal skulls and hides to engage and educate attendees. Designed and installed raised garden beds at the Willcox office. Some beds were planted with vegetables and herbs, while others demonstrated simple landscaping techniques for small spaces and container gardening. Set up two cattle displays provided by the Mohave County Cooperative Extension and the V-V Ranch at the Cochise County Fair. Mohave County is working to create new interactive displays featuring sheep, goats, and chickens for next year's fair.
- **Rangeland Monitoring:** Conducted rangeland monitoring on private and state lease ranches in the southern part of the county. Maintained and monitored remotely placed rain gauges to collect rainfall data. Worked closely with Cochise County Engineering and Natural Resource personnel at Bella Vista Ranch which is being used as a recharge project. Work at this site includes implementing range management strategies and developing erosion control methods.

**Evelyn Whitmer (FCHS):**

- Held the National Extension Association meeting in Tucson. Served on committees. Has been invited as Collective Impact keynote speaker at multiple universities. Expanding the Curious Quails program and planning duplication in other counties. Received additional funding to enhance food access in Cochise County under the AZCHOW/NIFA grant.

**Ashley Wright (Livestock/Waterwise):**

- YQCA training with Haley for 4-H Youth and a BQA training for ranchers.
- Applied for Women of Ag Mental Health Grant, will find out soon if it was awarded.
- Upcoming Events: Preparing for the Equine Symposium at the new Al-Marah Equine Center in January 2025. The beginning Farmer/Rancher workshop series has been moved to the spring of 2025. New publications will be coming out on "Why A.I", chickens, and FDA-Approved products for 4-H Animals.
- Water Wise: Planning more youth programming with the potential to provide even more classes than last year. Water Wise Community Outreach position (currently vacant) is grant-funded and not affected by Spending Authority, should be posted soon, and will be based out of the Willcox office.

## Old Business (Carol Holden)

- **Budget Update** The University of Arizona's budget situation continues to evolve rapidly. In July, the University's CFO and Provost implemented a Spending Authority cap across all departments, including Cooperative Extension, despite Extension having its own line item in the state budget. While the primary goal was to avoid layoffs, the restrictions have made it difficult to replace vacated positions. Positions already approved, such as the Cochise County Horticulture role, remain funded.

Of the \$2 million in unrestricted funds distributed across the state, Cochise County received approximately \$14,000. Each program within the county was allocated around \$1,000 for the fiscal year. Although existing funds remain in the accounts, they are effectively frozen under the "cash on hand" policy. Fortunately, the county is not facing a financial shortfall for this fiscal year, as county appropriations provide \$3,500 per faculty member to cover travel and operational expenses. Additionally, grant funds remain unaffected by the restrictions.

Efforts to reduce costs have included decisions to not renew the Sierra Vista office lease, which will save \$20,000 annually, with plans to redirect those funds toward program expansion. The sale of two unreliable vehicles has been completed, and two more unused vehicles are slated for sale, further reducing insurance and maintenance expenses.

To advocate for increased flexibility, Dean Burgess and Ed Martin have requested agents compile a list of the negative impacts resulting from the Spending Authority. This information will be presented to the CFO and Provost to argue for exempting Extension funds from the spending cap.

Despite these challenges, faculty have shown resilience and creativity in adapting their programming. To save on costs, many have relied more heavily on social media and virtual outreach rather than in-person events, ensuring that essential services and resources remain accessible to the community.

- **Financial Outlook – Fiscal Year 2026** (Carol) – Ed Martin is saying it looks hopeful and hopes the FY26 will be better. The situation is fluid and changes day to day, week to week.
- **Meat Lab Update (Carol)** – Hoped to open mid-January. Construction issues have put the project behind schedule. The Spending Authority caused a cut in operations by 1 million. Pay for personnel and operations for reopening. Have to figure out how to pay. New projected opening date is March if they can figure out how to pay for personnel and operations. Plan to go to the CFO and Provost to request a Spending Authority increase.

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## Future Agenda Items

- Hydrologic Study interface with ADWR – is UA working with ADWR on consumptive use of various crops. Are they working with hydrologists?
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## Adjournment

- **Motion:** Alan Seitz.
- **Seconded:** Amber Morin.
- **Time:** Meeting adjourned at 5:06 PM.