



THE STATE OF ARIZONA
GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

5000 W. CAREFREE HIGHWAY
PHOENIX, AZ 85086-5000
(602) 942-3000 • WWW.AZGFD.GOV

GOVERNOR

DOUGLAS A. DUCEY

COMMISSIONERS

CHAIRMAN, KURT R. DAVIS, PHOENIX
EDWARD "PAT" MADDEN, FLAGSTAFF
JAMES R. AMMONS, YUMA
JAMES S. ZIELER, ST. JOHNS
ERIC S. SPARKS, TUCSON

DIRECTOR

LARRY D. VOYLES

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

TY E. GRAY



Why Arizonans Support SB 1361

Kurt R. Davis

Chairman, Arizona Game and Fish Commission

Anyone who owns a home recognizes the need to set aside money for ongoing maintenance and repairs to protect their most important investment. Without money to operate and maintain a home, a reasonable person certainly wouldn't buy another. Yet that's what the Arizona Game and Fish Commission is forced to do under the current stipulations of the Arizona Heritage Fund.

In 1990, Arizona voters concerned about protecting and conserving wildlife, created the Heritage Fund, directing up to \$10 million a year from lottery ticket sales to the Commission. Voters approved funding which allows the Arizona Game and Fish to recover threatened and endangered species, help Arizonans appreciate wildlife, educate children about the eco-system and create opportunities for outdoor recreation.

It also came with caveats and unintended consequences: the Commission must use 60 percent of its Heritage Fund dollars to acquire and manage sensitive habitat without money for upkeep. The Commission now holds 16 distinct properties and water rights to enhance fish and wildlife populations and habitats and provide for multi-use recreation. They are wonderful assets for our state, but again, while the Commission can acquire sensitive habitat areas and water rights, it's not allowed to use Heritage funding to operate or maintain these properties.

Like your home, operation and maintenance costs also continue to increase; O&M now runs approximately \$1 million dollars annually. This puts the Department—and wildlife conservation—in a tricky Catch-22: There's money for buying properties, but no money for upkeep. For an agency like AZGFD, which operates without any state general fund tax dollars, letting these habitat properties deteriorate is not acceptable. Instead, the Commission is now forced to take money from other important programs to provide O&M for Heritage properties. That is unacceptable.

Opponents of fixing the problem have never provided a viable alternative to cover the current need of \$1 million dollars annually and the new dollars that will be necessary for future properties. Doing nothing, ultimately forces increased fees upon sportsmen and women who already pay the vast majority of conservation. That is also unacceptable.

In addition, the failure to act forces scenarios such as no funding for Sonoran desert tortoise biologists. Without them, we wouldn't have known that Arizona's tortoises are thriving, nor could the department have demonstrated scientifically that this tortoise didn't

need to be listed as threatened or endangered, thus protecting billions in future economic development and jobs.

Since 2014, the Commission and the Department have studied this funding problem, and even convened a workgroup to recommend solutions. From this review, came the idea for a legislative remedy that gives the Commission the ability to spend a small amount—capped at 20 percent—of Heritage dollars on operation and maintenance of Heritage properties. This common-sense solution protects the Heritage Fund, respects the voters' wishes, while allowing the department to effectively operate and maintain sensitive wildlife and habitat properties for generations to come.

We urge everyone who supports wildlife conservation to support SB 1361 and allow our nation-leading wildlife agency to operate and maintain Arizona's Heritage Fund investments. Let AZGFD maintain these properties today, so they will continue to provide wildlife protection well into the future.