

October 2014

Why Gila County Needs Federal Representation?

Since 2006, Jefferson/Bose (Bose) has provided support and advice to guide Gila County in our requests for funding and policy assistance to the federal government. Over the past 8 years, Bose has facilitated requests for infrastructure funding that have brought \$24,903,300 in forest restoration, wildfire prevention, and road construction to Gila County. In addition, the potential cost savings that will be available to the County as a result of the 2008 SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections bill may total in the millions; the legislative change reduced the County's local share from 20% to 5.7%. To date, the return on investment (ROI) is \$40 in federal dollars for every \$1 in fees. And as valuable, although more difficult to quantify, are the policy and regulatory changes that the County has sought, directly and in cooperation with like-minded partners. Policy changes at the US Forest Service and legislation now under consideration to change federal funding of forest restoration and wildfire prevention are evidence of the impact the County can have when engaged in Washington.

With over 96% of our land base under federal control, Gila County must maintain clear and strong connections to the federal decision-makers who control, ultimately, the economic fate of our citizens and businesses. Be it land management decisions in our national forests, species protection approaches applied to our mines, wood products companies, and ranches, or the Resolution Copper land swap legislation – just to name a few – federal bureaucrats in the Administration and on the Hill, make decisions on a regular basis that directly impact our safety and our ability to help create the economic health our citizens deserve.

Gila County has retained federal representation since June 2006. As the Supervisor with the greatest focus on how federal decisions impact our County, I have worked closely with our lobbyists from the start. Over the years, together we have educated many, many federal decision-makers and partners. We have told Gila County's story, and through that education process, have developed and gathered advocates on the proverbial "inside" who help the County secure resources needed to protect the public safety and economy of Gila County.

Given the dynamic nature of the federal government, people move in and out of jobs in cycles – many times determined by election outcomes. As a result, the need to educate both administrative and legislative staff is constant. And it is also cumulative. As discussed below, issues take time to ripen. While I have told our story of Gila County's need for the US Forest Service to better manage its lands so to minimize the ever-growing threat to our lives and property from catastrophic wild fire consistently and constantly since the February Fire in 2006, that story has provided the justification of a number of varied initiatives from opening the flow of direct funding for thinning the WUI and other NEPA-ready areas in the Tonto Forest, to policy changes of how the Forest Service "borrows" fire prevention funds to suppress major fires, thereby creating a vicious cycle of grossly underfunded wild fire prevention activity.

Diligence, and continued diligence, is required for long-term success, and the citizens of Gila County deserve that success.

What Issues Now Require Active Federal Representation?

Maintain the flow of federal wildfire prevention funding to the Tonto Forest. Catastrophic wildfire presents the greatest threat to the people of Gila County. The potential devastation from a catastrophic wildfire would impact every citizen in the County, including those who may not be directly touched by the fire. 70% of the tax base for the entire County is in the heavily forested north. Even if Globe/Miami, Hayden/Winkleman, Young, Tonto Basin, etc., are not physically touched by a major fire, Gila County's ability to serve all the people of Gila County would be diminished significantly. While the Tonto Forest had received a one-time \$1,000,000 funding for a small fire break around Pine through a Congressional earmark in 2001, it was the opening of the funding faucet in 2006 as a direct result of the County's lobbying program, and the continued constant contact in support of funding that has kept a steady stream of fire prevention funding into the Tonto even since. There is much competition for this funding from all over the West. It is critical to preserve our program of active support for the US Forest Service's recommendation and Congress' enactment of funding authority to allow the funds to continue to come to the Tonto.

Federal Road Project Authorizations and Funding. In addition to turning on the Tonto Forest fire prevention funding, the other early big win for Gila County was the technical correction to a funding formula change to the SAFETEA-LU surface transportation legislation. Because of Arizona's high percentage of federally-controlled land, projects in Arizona, along with a number of other western states with significant federal land holdings, were eligible for a sliding scale. Federal surface transportation projects are generally cost-shared 80% federal and 20% local. Under prior sliding scale formulas, Arizona projects were eligible for a 5.7% local share. Because this sliding scale requirement did not apply to Arizona in SAFETEA-LU, we needed legislation to correct this intentional oversight. We worked closely with our lobbyists and our congressional delegation to correct the sliding scale application which was achieved in the SAFETEA-LU Technical Corrections Act of 2008. This is another issue that must be closely monitored as Congress considers a comprehensive reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program. In addition, we have regular meetings with relevant congressional offices as well as with Department of Transportation officials to explore options that will direct more funds to the County for the on-going forest road projects (Young Road, Control Road, and Houston-Mesa Road) as well as the Tonto Creek Bridge. Such options include expanding the new Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) established in MAP-21 and establishing set-asides for rural projects, and when the time is right to bring back earmarks in some form.

Natural Resource/Environmental Policy Changes that pose high costs risks to Gila County. For ease of discussion, I have laced together several legislative and regulatory issues that directly threaten the economic viability of many in our County. None are new, but all of them have been very active this year, and will be active in the next session of Congress (see below).

Regarding the forests: I have been shouting from the treetops for years that 1) the federal government needs to encourage industry thinning, under NEPA-approved prescription, of the forests because there is not enough money in the US Treasury to restore and maintain the health, functioning, and productivity of our federal forests, but there is in the economy, and now we are debating how to make

4FRI successful which will allow industry to come back to help the forest and the economy; 2.) the critical need for a re-programming of the federal response to fire that DOES NOT include first strike response to fire (a fire must reach a certain level of 'involvement' before federal resources are legally brought to bear); and 3) fire "borrowing" (whereby restoration project monies are 'swept' into fire fighting efforts – and never replaced) must stop.

We have had more meetings than I can remember on 4FRI at this point, and the County is now regarded as an "honest broker" of sorts which has opened the doors to influence next steps in implementing this nationally recognized large landscape restoration effort. And, finally this year, there are dually federal fire funding bills in the Senate to address and correct both first strike response funding and "fire borrowing."

This year, I again testified on Gila County's novel approach to first strike response resources in lieu of federal action, on 4FRI and was invited to testify on fire borrowing, but had obligations here that prevented my personal participation, but I did submit testimony. I also testified on how federal land management impacts climate change. So I submitted federal congressional testimony 3 times this year.

Implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) presents a major threat to our citizens that live off the land, and to our County's proud heritage. The Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) rulemaking on the Wolf poses a very serious threat to Gila County, as well as others in the rural West. And the FWS's Wolf action is just the point of their ESA activity that threatens the viability of ranching in our County, as well as other land-based activities. FWS is also looking at the jaguar, the ocelot, and the Gardner snake as well as a slew of plants and other critters. Given how FWS has ignored our position on the Wolf, I am not confident that we are well positioned to deal with these other species. I have been working with our lobbyist to date for advice on next steps, as well as to educate our congressional delegation. But I believe that we need to escalate our activity at the federal level in Washington to block the application of FWS's new approach for the Wolf and try to get 'ahead of the game' on these other species.

Another regulatory issue that promises to present economic development issues is the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed rule to greatly expand the definition of "navigable waters of the US," the effect of which is to greatly expand the regulatory jurisdiction of federal permitting by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The House passed a bill this month to prevent this proposed rule from being implemented. The combination of this rule with the ESA actions would be a powerful bar to future development in Gila County of all kinds.

Coming Political Realities – What can it mean for Gila County?

The 2014 mid-term elections, as we all know from the chronic campaign ads assaulting us daily, are soon approaching. The House is expected to remain in control of the Republican Party, with perhaps a small increase in the majority. The Senate, however, is expected to shift from Democratic to Republican control, if the pollsters are correct (there are 5 races that are very close and will determine the outcome, including LA which is not expected to be decided on November 4, but in a December runoff).

There is a strong possibility that President Obama will be dealing with a Republican House and Senate, a situation that would greatly reduce the opportunity for the President to successfully implement his legislative agenda in the final two years of his term. What I am told we should expect to see in the next Congress (2015-2016), is that the Administration will shift its focus to its regulatory agenda and work to finalize the change it seeks through regulation rather than through legislation. This is especially concerning to me because most of our problems are viable in a regulatory-only environment, which means that we will be facing new rules and regulations for the next two years with limited opportunity for our congressional delegation to block that activity. We will need to seek effective paths to make our voices heard as we work to protect and promote the people and property of Gila County.

We must build on the very strong foundation that we started constructing in 2006. We must continue to maintain existing and develop new contacts, create effective messaging to fully educate our contacts into our advocates, and to find partners to leverage our efforts whenever possible. The next couple of years will present us with both challenges and opportunities that we need to be fully armed to address. I believe, more than ever, we need to maintain our D.C. presence.