Quorum having been established, Chair Lundin called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. on November 13, 2020.

Commissioners present were Michael Lundin, Enrique Serna, Carol Kovalik, Jan Johnson and Richard Barker. Damion Alexander and Peter Chesson attended virtually. Victor Rivera, Anita Kellman and Robert Owens were absent.
Staff present were Robert Padilla, Matt Smogor, Joe Barr, Neil Stitzer, Ron Odell, Robin Hadden and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to approve the January 20, 2020, minutes. The motion passed.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION/ACTION REQUEST

1. Rillito Racetrack (Robert Padilla): Mr. Padilla informed the commission that Rillito Racing had paid in full 2020 racing related fees to Attractions and Tourism as well as reimbursed NRPR for utilities incurred during the abbreviated racing season. Regarding the memo that was sent out by County Administration, the Board of Supervisors will vote on December 1, 2020, to transfer contract management to NRPR as well as merge the PCNRPRAC with the Fair Horse Racing Commission. Mr. Padilla informed them that he has sent a copy to Rillito Racing President, Ed Ackerley, but he has not received any response. Mr. Padilla informed them that NRPR wants to know whether racing will be cancelled, similar to other high profile special events like the Gem Show and the Tucson Rodeo. Mr. Padilla informed them that the Pima County Health Department (PCHD) has recently issued new guidance for special events. For any event with an expected turnout of 50 or greater participants the special event proponent must first obtain a permit from the PCHD. The PCHD permit requires specific details as to how the event proponent will implement physical distancing measures, masks, etc. In certain cases, the PCHD is recommending restricting foot traffic by 50% or even more. For this reason, Mr. Padilla informed them that it would be hard for them financially. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether it was possible to eliminate this year’s part of their contract and allow an extension. Mr. Padilla informed her that that decision was up to County Administration and the Board, and while it may be favorable to get an extension due to COVID-19, they are not in compliance contractually as they currently owe $300,000. Chair Lundin asked whether that contract would be transferred to
NRPR from Attractions and Tourism and Mr. Padilla confirmed that it would be on January 1, 2021, providing the Board approved. He also informed them that the racing revenues, in the event there was a racing season, would be transferred to NRPR. Commissioner Kovalik asked how this information would be transferred to new board members in light of the elections. Mr. Padilla informed her that this commission could send Mr. Huckelberry a letter regarding the current state of racing. Commissioner Serna said that should be left up to the incoming Board. Chair Lundin said that would only arise if the Board requested input from the commission. He also said that since the contract ended at the end of June, it would be more appropriate if this issue was taken up in March 2021.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC: Ronnie Reyna (Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission) spoke to the commission regarding the PCFHRC. He proposed that the FHRC be a subcommittee of PCNRPRAC so that the horsemen feel they have a voice. Chair Lundin asked whether this decision is final and Mr. Padilla informed him that it was up to the Board, which will make a decision at the December 1st meeting. Chair Lundin said that they will await that decision. Commissioner Kovalik asked how this could be melded and Commissioner Serna told her that after the December 1st meeting, there would probably be a lapse before the new board convenes in January. Chair Lundin said they would have more information at the next commission meeting and can make a decision about how to move on.

2. Nomenclature regarding naming of parks (Peter Chesson): Commissioner Chesson made a presentation (attached) regarding the importance of park nomenclature on the management of the parks as well as public perception and public behavior in the parks. During his presentation he emphasized the conservation and biological importance of the parks, especially along riparian and edge areas. Commissioner Serna said it was a great presentation that laid out the biology and conservation aspects of trail development as well as the different stakeholders in the process. Mr. Padilla asked Mr. Neil Stitzer, Trails Coordinator for his input. Mr. Stitzer provided a definition of ‘Trails Parks’ from the Pima Regional Trail System Master plan. Regarding Commissioner Chesson’s claim that trails change hydrological patterns, he stated that all new trails are sustainably built and basically have no effects on hydrological patterns. Regarding the complaint that trails lead to habitat fragmentation, Mr. Stitzer informed him that trails parks are open space and will be used by people regardless of whether NRPR builds trails or not, thus it is the responsibility of NRPR to manage the land for recreation and create sustainable trails to focus use on trails. With regard to the Enchanted Hills Trails Park, it was pointed out that many of the trails were old roads that have been repurposed to create single track trails, and the old roads not in use are being restored and revegetated. Commissioner Chesson remarked that his concerns were that it was a natural resource area and while some areas may call for higher densities, moving forward, maybe the public needs to be more informed. Mr. Stitzer asked about what Commissioner Chesson had in mind and he replied that maybe some more educational signage would help, and further efforts taken regarding dogs off-leash, for example having law enforcement involved. Mr. Stitzer informed him that NRPR has been working on these issues with additional signage and volunteers at parks like Sweetwater, which has helped. This could also be implemented at Painted Hills as well. Regarding enforcement, NRPR does not have enforcement capabilities and given the big picture, law enforcement may not be willing to respond. Chair Lundin asked whether NRPR has any new plans for new trails or parks, or properties that the county is looking to acquire and Mr. Padilla replied in the negative. Chair Lundin said that Commissioner Chesson raised some interesting questions, but considering NRPR is both natural resources as well as parks and recreation, there was a fine line between that. Mr. Padilla reminded them that in summer 2017, the NRPR Director, Chris Cawein gave a presentation to the commission about our planned strategic approach
for trails located within TMP. There is much urban pressure to provide recreation areas within TMP. If NRPR doesn't take the lead and build sustainable trails others will create social trails which have a more detrimental impact to both wildlife habitat and ecological conservation. As a result, NRPR is trying to be responsible stewards of the land and build sustainable trails, mainly on the outskirts of the park and leave the central core region alone. Commissioner Chesson remarked that the foothills are rolling hills country and just focusing on the core did not provide a balance of habitat elements and by focusing on species of concern and not the broader use of the ecosystem. Chair Lundin informed him that he brought up interesting points and it was up to NRPR to implement them in the future, while weighing the recreation and conservation aspects. Commissioner Kovalik thanked Commissioner Chesson for the insight provided.

3. Update from the NRPRAC Loop Sub-committee (Damion Alexander): This topic was tabled for the next commission meeting.

4. Canoa Ranch update (Matt Smogor): Mr. Smogor gave a presentation (attached) on the Historic Canoa Ranch and the progress made from when he took over in 2018. Regarding the lake, Commissioner Kovalik asked whether it was spring fed or pump. She was informed that it was pumped. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there would be more vegetation around the cienega and was informed that there would eventually be more trees providing a shade canopy for the wildlife. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether more ramadas would be installed and was informed that NRPR was waiting to see how the habitat developed before discussing that possibility. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether there were any rest stops around the perimeter of the cienega and was informed that there were a few benches. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there was an entrance fee and was informed not yet. Commissioner Kovalik asked about additional restrooms and was informed that there was one located in the central historic compound, including one at the lake. Commissioner Kovalik listed the improvements made and asked that from a financial perspective, how the Ranch was faring and hope that all the monies allocated were used since from a revenue perspective, this year was a loss. Commissioner Kovalik hoped some monies were being set aside so as to have a fall back for at least 2021. Mr. Smogor replied that fortunately in the past they have had events that have generated revenues that have been used to supplement the budget and moving forward NRPR will have those events again. Mr. Padilla informed them that the lake and the cienega were funded by RFCD, along with a 7 acre pollinator garden. Both those are irrigated by water from the lake. A grant of $150,000 from the Bert Martin Foundation partially funded the visitor house rehabilitation along with departmental funds that were set aside for this purpose. With respect to future maintenance needs, Mr. Padilla reminded them that for the past three years, the County Administrator had allocated funding for deferred maintenance. Due to the pandemic, the current fiscal year budget was reduced by $1.5m. NRPR was under the impression that these cuts were temporary in nature but was recently informed by the County Administrator that they were in fact permanent. One of the cuts were for aquatics since the pools or splash pads were not open. Mr. Cawein has written to the County Administrator requesting to restore not only aquatics funding but funding for six critical positions. Mr. Padilla informed them that he would update them at the next meeting. Commissioner Kovalik expressed her fear of no meetings in the near future due to the pandemic and Chair Lundin indicated that the meetings could be held virtually. Commissioner Serna asked whether Canoa Ranch was open all week and Mr. Smogor informed them that yes it was open seven days per week and that in 2018, the ranch had 20,000 visitors, last year was about 60,000 and this year was about 80,000.
CALL TO THE PUBLIC: Commissioner Kovalik wanted to mention that the personnel at Agua Caliente were a great help to the Cub Scouts meeting. She said that she did not have any information whether the gentleman who saved a life at Brandi Fenton had been recognized. Finally she said that she was very glad to have served on the board for the past two years and would like to thank outgoing Supervisor Miller and welcome the new Supervisor-elect Rex Scott.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S):
- Update on Rillito Racing
- Update from the NRPR Loop Sub-committee
- Update on Agua Caliente
- Update on FY 21/22 Budget

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m.