



NEWS RELEASE

Hunters raise nearly \$500,000 for Arizona's wildlife

Special tags for big game hunts generate impressive funding

PHOENIX - The 2008 Arizona Big Game Super Raffle (AZBGSR) was held July 19 in Phoenix and nine lucky ticket holders walked away with a special big game tag and a chance at a hunt-of-a-lifetime.

However, the real news is what happened for all of the residents of Arizona. The raffle generated more than \$475,000, which will go directly on the ground to benefit Arizona's wildlife.

"The final tally for all nine tags was \$478,860, and although down from last year's record high of \$557,641, this year was a tremendous success, given the current economic conditions," says Charlie Kelly, president of the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle.

Every dollar raised for each species by the raffle of these special big game tags is returned to the Arizona Game and Fish Department and managed by the Arizona Habitat Partnership Committee (AHPC) for that particular species. With input from 12 local habitat partners across the state, as well as the input from the organizations involved the fund raising, they collectively determine which projects will provide the most benefit to each species represented.

The number of projects funded through this program is extensive. In 2007 alone, there were more than 85 projects approved. The types of projects run the gamut, from hauling water to water catchments during drought years, all the way to contracting helicopter services for the catching and relocating the iconic desert bighorn sheep, to increase their range and population. Other projects include grassland restoration, fence removal, research and others. And, when these dollars are matched with other fund sources, the benefits to wildlife are multiplied many times over.

One of the most noteworthy projects that many Arizona travelers have benefitted from is the "State Route 260 Project." While complex, it was a comprehensive package between the department and ADOT to reduce the amount of wildlife-related collisions along a 17-mile stretch of Highway 260, just below the Mogollon Rim just west of Payson. The many changes made to that section of the freeway resulted in an 85-percent reduction in wildlife-related collisions in the first year, while increasing the ability for wildlife to cross the highway and link habitats.

Ron Thompson, coordinator for AHPC, had this to say. "The amazing thing about this program is the amount of money being raised by such a small minority (approximately one percent) of the state's population," he said. "What excites me is the thought of getting more conservation and outdoor groups involved working as one collective group. With even greater funding, options on the table could include conservation easements and the protection of open spaces - where not only wildlife will benefit, but a gain, the citizens of Arizona and its traveling guests."

The AZBGSR started in 2006. The tags that are raffled off are granted by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission as Special Big Game Tags. The tags are publicly awarded to soliciting organizations each year. The big game tags raffled included one each for pronghorn antelope, black bear, buffalo, Coue's whitetail, desert bighorn sheep, elk, javelina, mule deer, and turkey.

The uniqueness of the special tags is that the hunting season is year-round with very few limitations on hunting areas, allowing tag winners the time to pursue a trophy animal, many of which are only found in Arizona. The raffle winners for the following tags were:

* Antelope - Cal Sutton, Peoria

* Bear - Dwight Callahan, Gold Canyon

- * Buffalo - Ryan Ashton, Saint Johns
- * Coues Deer - Brian Williams, Christiana, Tenn.
- * Elk - Robert Dunn, Yuma
- * Javelina - JC Amberlin, Kingman
- * Mule Deer - Jerry Elliott, Gilbert
- * Bighorn Sheep - Scott Krieg, Glendale
- * Turkey - Mark Griffith, Mesa
- * Swarovski optics package - Richard Wilson, Phoenix

So, the next time you see a herd of elk near Flagstaff, or antelope in an open plains of Prescott, or if you're lucky to spot a desert bighorn sheep peering down from a cliff in the desolate desert, remember to think of hunters as conservationists, as the majority of wildlife conservation and management of game animals by the Arizona Game and Fish Department is made possible by funding generated from the sale of hunting licenses, hunt permit-tags, and matching funds from federal excise taxes hunters pay on guns, ammunition and related equipment.

To learn more about the Arizona Game and Fish Department's conservation efforts, visit www.azgfd.gov/conservation.

To learn more about the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle, visit www.arizonabiggamesuperraffle.com.

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