

Apr 12, 2011

Gila College's five districts' population now badly lopsided

Redistricting process will shift power to north county unless committee draws strange lines

BY PETE ALESHIRE
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Huge population differences that have developed in the past decade in the five Gila Community College districts will force a dramatic shift in boundaries, according to recently released census figures.

Those changes could well shift the balance of power decisively north on one of the most deeply divided and contentious elected boards in the county.

The largest community college district now has more than 30

percent more residents than the smallest district, well in excess of the 10-percent maximum gap courts have accepted in the past.

Currently, the boundaries of chairman Bob Ashford's District 4 in Globe include 8,972 residents — a 5-percent decrease from 2000.

By contrast, the boundaries of board member Tom Loeffler's District 1 in Payson now include 11,670 residents — an 8-percent increase in the past decade.

On the face of it, the big population gains in the north county would argue for a shift in power by the time the redistricting smoke clears on a board marked by fierce political struggles.

However, the shifts in minority populations will complicate any new boundaries, especially with a likely review by the U.S. Justice

► See **Population**, page 12A.

Population shift to northern Gila will affect college districts

From page 1A

Department, charged with protecting the rights and political clout of minority voters.

Currently, the voters of northern Gila County are divided into District 1 and District 2, which has 11,342 voters and is represented by Larry Stephenson. Those two districts now include 43 percent of the county's population.

Stephenson and Loeffler have become increasingly estranged from the board majority in the past year, mostly on issues concerning GCC's contract with Eastern Arizona College, which negotiates GCC's budget and provides accreditation in return for a 25 percent overhead charge on everything GCC spends.

Loeffler has even called for an investigation by the attorney general's office into the board majority's alleged violation of the open meeting law and a decision in December to suspend all of the board's rules and bylaws, including term limits for the chairman.

The population shift to the north could result in north county board members gaining control of the board, which has until now remained firmly in Ashford's control to the point that he won't let dissident board members even put topics on the agenda.

Currently, northern Gila County voters dominate two districts, the San Carlos Apache Reservation dominates District 5 and the voters of Globe and Miami are adroitly divided between the undersized District 4 and the crucial District 3, which includes the Tonto Basin and serves as the swing vote between north and south.

The concentration of Hispanic voters in the Globe area and Native American voters on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation will likely play a big role in the task of actually drawing those boundaries.

Arizona is one of 16 states that must submit its redistricting plan to the Justice Department, which rejected the first draft of the Arizona plan in 2000 and in 1990. The Justice Department determined that Arizona's plan would have marginalized and diluted the political power of minority communities in Maricopa and Pinal counties in 2000.

The Justice Department guidelines favor nearly equal populations in each district, but also seek to create districts in which minority candidates have a chance of winning if they run for election.

Generally, that means the Justice Department will only approve a plan that keeps minority communities in the same district as much as possible — especially if the district will have

at least 55 percent minority voters.

Currently, Districts 1 and 2 in the north have only a smattering of Hispanic and Native American voters — perhaps 10 percent between the two groups.

District 3 has a total of 22 percent Hispanic voters — mostly residents of Globe and Miami at the far southern end of the district.

On the other hand, District 4 has a 34 percent Hispanic population, plus 3 percent Native Americans.

District 5 has a population that's 20 percent Hispanic and 20 percent Native American, thanks to the inclusion of the San Carlos Apache Reservation and a concentration of Hispanic voters in Winkelman and Hayden.

The key to the balance of power in the revised districts will depend on the boundaries of District 3, which currently includes Miami, part of Globe, Roosevelt Lake, the Tonto Basin, Gisela and Young.

Ideally, each district should have 10,719 residents.

The redistricting committee could even out that population easily.

The most obvious shift would be to take about 1,500 residents from Districts 1 and 2 in northern Gila County and shift them into District 3.

Line drawers would then have to compensate for that shift by moving about 1,000 residents in the southern reaches of District 3 into Ashford's District 4 — which is about 1,400 residents too small.

Finally, the line drawers could shift about 500 residents from District 5 to District 4, taking care not to break up the San Carlos Apache Reservation.

But would such a shift run afoul of the Justice Department?

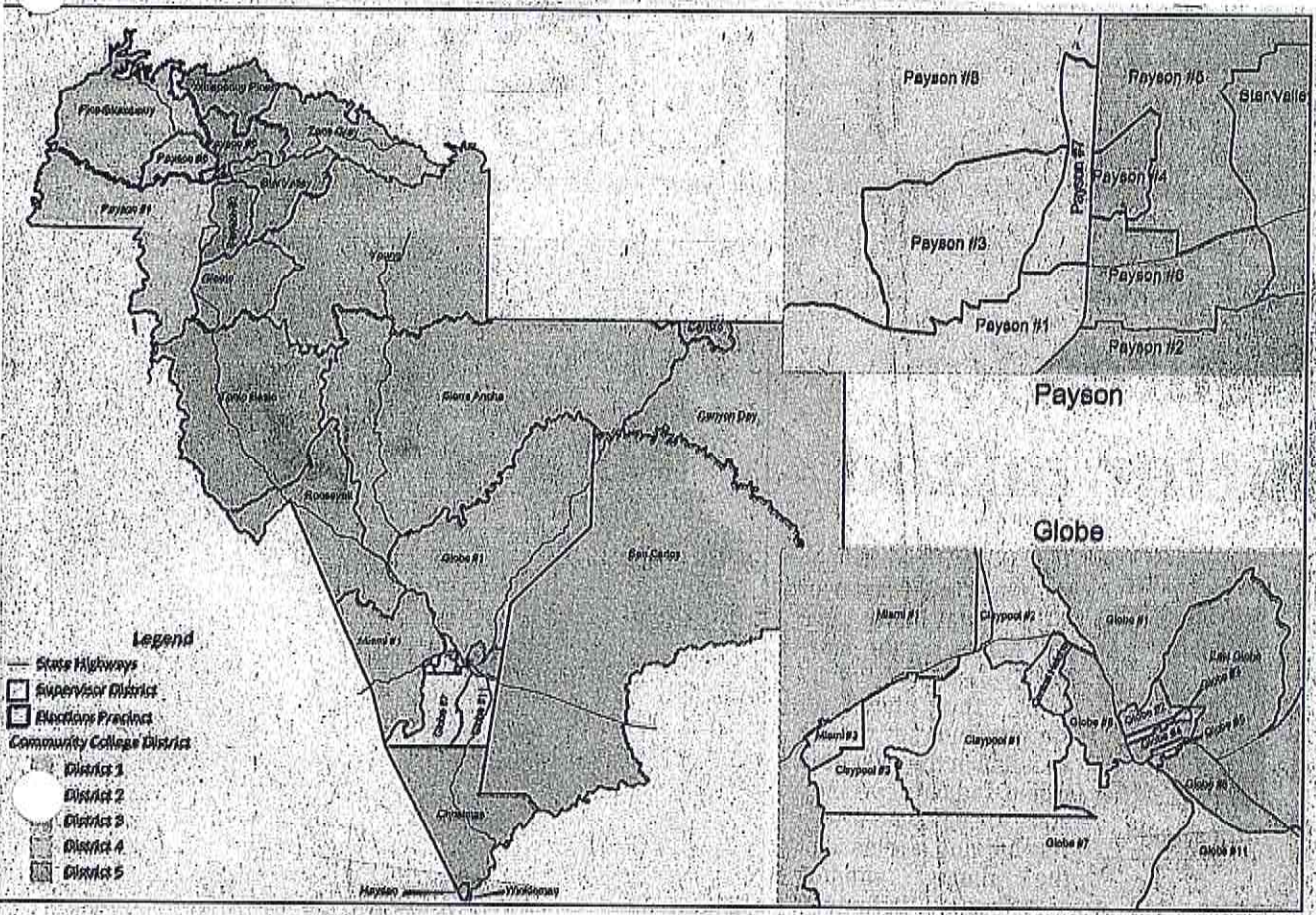
Maybe not — especially if the shifts ended up increasing the number of Hispanic voters in District 4.

Currently, southern Gila County's Hispanic residents are scattered among three districts — none of which has a Hispanic board member. The percentages of Hispanic voters in each district range from 20 to 34 — all well under the Justice Department's preference for a 55 percent minority district, when possible.

Of course, fierce political struggles no doubt lie ahead for the citizen volunteers on the county's redistricting commission — which currently has six members who live in the north and six members who live in the south.

All have said they will settle on lines that are fair and balanced.

However, so far the committee hasn't been able to actually elect a chairman.



Huge population differences that have developed in the past decade in the five Gila Community College districts will force a dramatic shift in boundaries, according to recently released census figures. Those changes could well shift the balance of power decisively north on one of the most deeply divided and contentious elected boards in the county.

4/12/11 Article display

Redistricting public input begins in June

BY TERESA MCQUERREY
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Gila County's Redistricting Advisory Committee is tentatively scheduled to start getting public input on redrawing the boundaries of the supervisor and community college board districts next month.

At the May 10 meeting of the committee, Linda Eastlick, director of elections for the county, provided members with a timeline for their tasks.

"No action was taken on the timeline, it's just a guide," Eastlick said.

She added that in order to get the redistricting plan reviewed by the Department of Justice, the process needs to stick to the schedule as closely as possible.

Before Gila County can have new districts for voting in 2012, the DOJ must approve the proposal.

Schedule of activities

The following is the schedule

of activities Eastlick presented to the RAC:

- First round of public meetings on district boundaries — the weeks of June 6 and June 13
- RAC works on public input, delivers recommendations to consultants for review — June 15 through July 15
- Second round of public meetings — the weeks of July 18 and July 25
- Submission of proposals to consultants — August
- Consultants create DOJ submission — August and September
- Review of boundary plans by college board and supervisors — September
- Plans submitted to DOJ — Sept. 21

Once the plans are in DOJ hands, officials there have 60 days to review and either approve as submitted or make recommendations for revisions.

The goal is to have the final new boundaries approved by the DOJ by Jan. 15, 2012.

Gila County's redistricting map tool available online

BY TERESA MCQUERREY
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Everyone has a say in how the boundaries for the supervisor and community college districts will be redrawn in Gila County.

Not only will residents be urged to attend upcoming public meetings, but those with access to the Internet can also soon go online and draw boundary lines on county maps.

The county's Web page for the Gila County Redistricting Advisory Committee will soon have a link to a tool with which to draw supervisor and community college district boundaries.

As explained by Tony Sissons

at the May 10 redistricting meeting, the page will have easy-to-follow directions on the left side of the page.

There is no cost to use the tool and submitting proposed district boundaries is optional.

Linda Eastlick, director of the county elections department, said the tool should be available by this week.

To find the map tool, go to the county Web site: www.gilacounty-az.gov, and under the department listing, click on "elections."

On that page, on the left side, choose "redistricting" and that will take users to the redistricting page, where the map tool will be located.

Archive for Tuesday, June 21, 2011

Archive for Tuesday, June 21, 2011

County sees few district changes

By Michele Nelson

June 21, 2011

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At a crowded public meeting on redistricting Thursday in Payson, county officials reported that the district lines that have upset many north county residents for years can't change much.

Some 40 people listened to the county elections officials insist that federal rules protecting the voting rights of racial minorities will prevent any significant change in district boundaries for the Gila County Board of Supervisors or the Gila Community College Board of Directors.

The county's presentation alarmed many northern Gila County leaders, who hoped that the county's redistricting committee would come up with district lines that fairly reflect the shift of county population to the north. The county has held a series of public sessions on redistricting, but only the north county session has drawn a crowd.

Currently, south county voters dominate in two of the three board of supervisor seats and three of the five college board seats, although a majority of voters live in the north. The population tallies shifted to the north once again with the release of the 2010 Census.

Key participants included Payson Mayor Kenny Evans, Vice Mayor Michael Hughes former Payson Mayor Cliff Potts, Star Valley Councilor Paty Henderson, President of the Gila Republican Party Don Ascoli and residents from Payson, Pine and Strawberry. They listened to the presentation on the public process to provide input in drawing new district lines based on the 2010 census given by director of elections, Linda Eastlick.

"This district will be watched by the Justice Department to make sure the majority-minority voting blocks are respected," said Eastlick.



Cliff Potts Redistricting Committee member

She suggested that the federal government will likely reject any redistricting plan that reduces the percentage of minority voters in any existing district. She also said the committee cannot draw new lines that will put an incumbent in a different district.

That will constrain any district plan, since Gila County Supervisors Shirley Dawson and Michael Pastor live a few blocks from one another in Globe.

Arizona is one of a handful of states that got in trouble with the Justice Department a decade ago for drawing district lines that diluted the political power of minority communities, violating the voting rights act. As a result, the Justice Department will review redistricting plans statewide this year.

The Justice Department's insistence on protecting minority voting blocks could come into conflict with a constitutional mandate to guarantee each district has nearly the same number of voters. Previous court cases have found that districts can meet the constitutional standard so long as the population of the largest district remains within 10 percent of the smallest district.

Historically, drawing voting district lines in creatively tortured twists and turns has helped political parties and candidates gain and retain power. It has also allowed those convoluted lines to suppress minority voters, for instance splitting up minority communities among several different districts dominated by white voters.

In the official packet of information created by the county it states, "Federal law requires that the U.S. Department of Justice approve all redistricting plans in Arizona ... If the Department of Justice decides that Gila County's redistricting plan is discriminatory, they will not allow Gila County to use the discriminatory redistricting plan."

During the public comment section of the presentation, former mayor Cliff Potts said, "I have concerns about the whole process."

Potts went on to say, "The current make up of District 2 and District 3 marginalizes and disenfranchises whole towns (Star Valley), whole tribes (Tonto Apache) and whole communities (Tonto Basin and Gisela) of people that need fair representation."

Northern Gila County leaders believe that as Payson's population grows, the limitations stemming from the majority-minority voting block federal guidelines will force more precincts in northern Gila

County to get whittled away and divided between the two southern board of supervisor districts. As a result, no significant pool of north county voters can emerge that could influence an election. This will continue to cause an imbalance in representation, even though the majority of the county population lives in the north.

"There needs to be a way to have at least one of the supervisor's districts represent a relatively equal population of citizens from both northern and southern Gila County so that the interests of southern Gila County do not always trump our one supervisor's vote," said Potts.

Currently, there's a 30 percent population difference between the largest and smallest Gila Community College districts. The two north-county dominated districts have much larger populations, but far fewer minority voters than the three southern districts.

The three county supervisor districts, by contrast, don't have huge differences in population. Preliminary figures show that all three remain within 5 percent of the targeted average.

However, the minority populations differ markedly in the three districts.

Supervisor Tommie Martin's northern district has a minority population of about 10 percent, including 8 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Native American.

Supervisor Shirley Dawson's district has a 33 percent minority population, with 15 percent Native American and 15 percent Hispanic.

Supervisor Mike Pastor's district also has a 33 percent minority population, including 29 percent Hispanic and 4 percent Native American.

6/21/11 / "Our View," this article is located beneath article titled: "School Board struggles to make tough choices."

Redistricting: Political sham?

Advocates for fair county and college district lines got a dose of bad news at last week's open forum. Gila County elections officials used the meeting to lay the groundwork for a redistricting that leaves north county voters disenfranchised, although the region now has most of the voters and the great majority of the assessed value.

County officials said their hands are tied: The federal Department of Justice won't accept district lines that decrease the percentage of minority voters in any of the three supervisorial districts or the five Gila Community College districts. Moreover, the county can't draw district lines that would result in supervisors Shirley Dawson or Mike Pastor living in the same district — although they live a couple of blocks apart in Globe now.

Our response? Hooey (that's the cleaned-up version.)

Gila County's redistricting process this time around must take care to safeguard the interests of the voting rights of the residents of the San Carlos and Tonto Apache reservations — and the substantial Hispanic populations of Globe and other south county towns.

However, the district lines must also respect the constitutional rights of every voter to have an equal vote by living in districts of equal population.

The north county deserves fair representation. For years district lines have tilted to the south and have slighted the legitimate interests of north county voters, who pay the majority of the county's taxes, but receive far fewer services.

The disparity is especially egregious in the Gila Community College District, where the dictatorial chairman Bob Ashford's Globe-based district has 30 percent fewer residents than the largest district, which lies entirely in north county.

County officials spent most of their time at a public forum trying to convince the skeptical north county audience that their hands are tied: They can't change the percentage of minority voters in any of the districts and still win Department of Justice approval.

We believe that is a misreading of the law and of the county's own redistricting history. In fact, it sounds suspiciously like an excuse to adhere to the political status quo — even if it disenfranchises north county residents.

We hope that the county will dig deeper and let the redistricting committee consider all the alternatives — instead of turning the process into a political sham.

We also hope that the board of supervisors, which must ultimately make the decision on district lines, will act in the interests of the whole county — instead of their own, personal political interests.

Archive for Friday, June 24, 2011

Archive for Friday, June 24, 2011

Northern Gila County will be slighted again

June 24, 2011

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Editor:

The citizens of northern Gila County are being set up to be slighted again in the Gila County Decennial Redistricting of the Supervisorial and College District Boundaries. The Board of Supervisors is 2 to 1 against northern Gila County. Without our objection, the problem will continue. We have long witnessed and endured the disastrous imbalances evident on the community college board. We have seen the admitted "confusion" on the Globe supervisors in relation to the request for support for a university in Payson. Our progress as a region is hampered by this unfair representation.

The last two redistrictings, over the last 20 years, have set up the unbalanced representation between northern and southern Gila County. Through the current redistricting process, we have a slim chance to rectify this inequity.

The county is again using the same consultants as they did 10 years ago, that ensured two votes on the board of supervisors for Globe and southern Gila County.

This time around, it should be incumbent upon these consultants to find a way to rectify the sins of the past that will allow northern Gila County equitable representation on the board of supervisors and the college board.

So far in the current process, only obstacles to that correction have been set forth by the consultants. The limitations they espouse relate to preserving minority voting rights in District 2 and District 3 without consideration of the 90 percent non-minority citizens in District 1.

The consultants need to help us figure out how to get one man, one vote to count for something in Gila County, not to justify the status quo.

The Globe-based county elections staff, deny the redistricting process should address the disparity of northern and southern Gila County interests. We, the citizens and voters need to insist that this process addresses the fair representation of northern Gila County.

The current makeup of District 2 and District 3 marginalizes and disenfranchises whole towns (Star Valley), whole tribes (Tonto Apache) and whole communities (Young, Tonto Basin and Gisela) of people that need fair representation, when their interests don't align with Globe.

There needs to be a way to have at least one of the supervisor's districts to represent relatively equal populations of citizens from both northern and southern Gila County so that the interests of southern Gila County do not always trump our one supervisor's vote.

I see the point of protecting the block of Indian and Hispanic votes, yet, no matter how important race voting blocks may be, it does not justify, for even a minute (let alone 10 years), depriving any citizen of their constitutional right to one man, one vote representation.

Cliff Potts

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supporting the Tonto Apache plan.

Meanwhile, the independent redistricting committee will meet tonight (Tuesday) to discuss the latest plans.

Most of the debate so far has centered on the lines for the three county supervisor seats. However, the independent redistricting committee and the board of supervisors must also redraw the lines for the Gila Community College Board, where the five district populations have gotten far more unbalanced than in the supervisor districts.

The Tonto Apache plan released last week now seems likely to emerge as the chief alternative to the consultant's suggestion the supervisors approve only minor boundary changes. The Tonto Apache suggest moving their District 2 precinct (Payson 2) in its entirety, which includes Gisela. The shift into District 3 "unites the representative Apache Tribes in Gila County — the Tonto, San Carlos and White Mountain — within District 3 to give us a true Apache tribal vote and strengthens our actual ability to elect," said the Tribal Council in its July 12 memo.

The Tonto then suggest moving Hispanics from District 3 into District 2, which would include precincts Globe 7, Christmas, Hayden and Winkleman. Such a move would result in a strong minority Apache voting block in District 3 and a strong minority Hispanic block in District 2, wrote the Tonto Apache Tribal Council.

The Tonto Apache plan would reduce the Hispanic and Apache voting block in District 3 from about 56 percent to more like 40 percent — even though it would increase the Apache total. And that could run afoul of federal guidelines.

Redistricting consultants for Gila County say Gila County shows a pattern of "significant racially polarized voting." Therefore, argue the consultants, the Justice Department will likely reject any plan that reduces total minority percentages in Districts 2 and 3, which now have large enough voting blocks to elect minority supervisors.

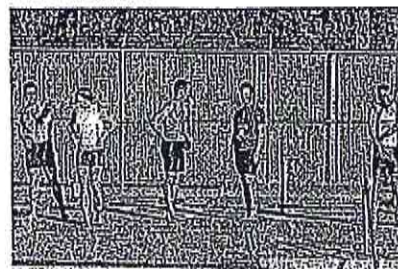
A memo written by the county's redistricting consultants suggests creating a new, separate precinct for the Tonto Apache and then moving that precinct to District 3 with the San Carlos Apache, according to the memo written by Bruce Adelson, of Federal Compliance Consulting.

However, the Tonto Apache Tribal Council complained such a move would separate them from Payson and Gisela.

The conflict comes down to whether the federal voting act recognizes the difference between different minority groups — like Apaches and Hispanics. The Tonto Apache maintain that they would rather be in a district with a large Apache voting block, even if the combined total of Apaches and Hispanics didn't account for a majority of voters.

The Tribal Council said, "We believe the Intent of the Voting Rights Act is to strengthen the ability of individual minorities to elect candidates of their choice, rather than risking reverse discrimination by combining different minorities and masking actual voting ability with artificial, inflated co-mingled numbers."

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July 22nd

New college district's plan might shift power to north

BY PETE ALESHIRE
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

The county-appointed redistricting committee this week quickly agreed on several new maps that would craft new Gila Community College District boundaries, in sharp contrast to the extended wrangling about new boundaries for the board of supervisors.

Any of the three new district maps seem likely to shift the center of political gravity on the conflict-ridden board to the north, in line with the population changes of the past decade.

Consultants hired by Gila County said none of the proposed district maps for the five-member community college board faced the racial complications that have bedeviled the effort to redraw the three county supervisor districts.

All three of these maps look very fair and reasonable, said GCC board member Larry Stephenson, who attended the Tuesday committee meeting to get a first look at the proposed

college district maps.

The committee decided to forward three proposed college district maps to the Gila County Board of Supervisors, which will choose among the alternatives next month.

The committee's No. 1 choice would produce two districts based entirely in North County, two districts in the south and one huge swing district centered on Tonto Basin, with the bulk of its population in North County.

Currently, the college board is bitterly split between two North County board members and three South County members.

The board members have been divided on tuition, class offerings, the district's contract with Eastern Arizona College, the benefits of seeking independence and the most galling details of running meetings and setting agendas.

However, even if the new district lines shift political power to the north, the college board with

► See **College**, page 10A

its six-year terms won't have an election based on the new districts until 2014.

Long before that election takes place, the district will have to decide whether to move strongly toward independence, renegotiate its accreditation and management contract with EAC and work out the details of the college's relationship with the proposed Arizona State University campus.

None of the proposed maps seemed to create problems with protecting the voting rights of the Hispanic and Native American residents.

That stands in sharp contrast to the dominant role of race in adjusting the boundaries of the three supervisorial districts. The consultants on Tuesday reviewed a slew of maps and said only a map that kept the current boundaries almost unchanged would likely win the approval of the Justice Department.

That conclusion stemmed in large measure from a determination of a "racially polarized" voting pattern in the three districts.

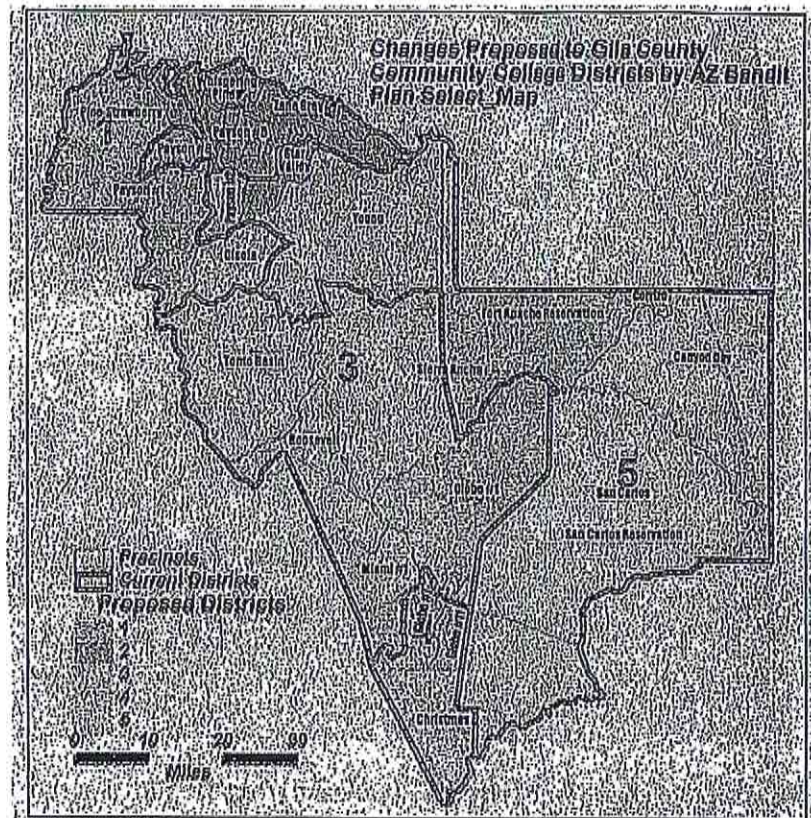
However, the last-minute submission of a map proposed by the Tonto Apache Tribe prompted the committee — and the consultants — to tinker with four of the maps submitted before settling on specific maps to recommend to the supervisors.

By contrast, the discussion of the community college district maps went smoothly, in part, that reflected the much greater flexi-

bility of breaking the county into five districts instead of three. In addition, the community college district lines had to change dramatically, since the largest district had 25 percent more people than the smallest district. Court cases suggest all the district should be within 5 percent of the average.

The leading map would produce two south-county districts dominated by minority voters. District 5 would include the San Carlos Apache Reservation and 60 percent of the voters would be Native American.

District 4 would include Globe, Windeman and Hayden. The population would be 38 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Native American and 54 percent white.



ferred map is in the middle, the next most preferred map is far left with the third alternative on the far right.

District 3 would stretch all the way from the outskirts of Globe, across the Tonto Basin and Young, to finally pick up a bit of Payson and Star Valley. That district would end up 74 percent white, 21 percent Hispanic and 3 percent Native American.

District Two would shift south slightly and include Star Valley, bits of Payson, and various unincorporated communities, like Tonto Village, Kohl's Ranch and others.

That district would be 88 percent white, 9 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Native American.

District One would remain relatively unchanged and would include most of Payson, Pine and Strawberry.

It would have 89 percent whites, 8 percent Hispanics and 2 percent Native American.

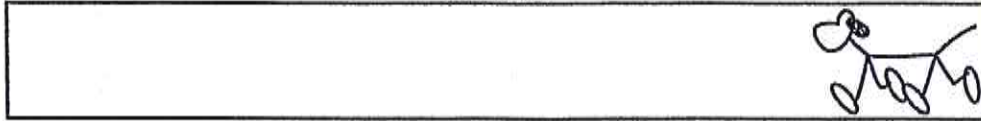


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Archive for Tuesday, July 26, 2011

Archive for Tuesday, July 26, 2011

Payson council supports Tonto Apache redistricting plan

By Pete Aleshire

July 26, 2011

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The Payson Town Council last week unanimously supported a plan put forward by the Tonto Apache Tribe to draw new district lines for the three county board of supervisor seats.

The Star Valley council is also expected to support the plan. That would make the Tonto Apache plan the North County favorite — and one of the few plans that might survive consultant's fears that any significant change in the current boundaries will upset the Department of Justice, which will review any proposed redistricting plan to determine if it blunts the political clout of minority residents.

"As we have battled our way through redistricting, we find there are conflicting rules," said Payson Mayor Kenny Evans, referring to federal guidelines that say districts should have nearly the same population but boundary changes should not reduce the total percentage of minority voters in certain districts. "Someone is going to have to say which rule we follow."

The Payson council's action came on the heels of the latest meeting by the county-appointed committee charged with recommending new maps to the board of supervisors.

That committee wrestled with the complexities of the consultant's finding that because the county shows a pattern of "racially polarized voting," the Justice Department will likely object to any change in district lines that will reduce the percentage of minorities in District 2 or District 3.

Since the majority of both Hispanic and Native American voters in the county live in South County, that view would likely guarantee district lines that would enable South County voters to continue to dominate two of the three county districts — although more than half of the

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QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Would the transfer of violent inmates to county jails destroy the local system?

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- No
- Undecided

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membership balanced between North and South County residents grappled with the complexities for several hours last Tuesday, July 19.

Committee members considered a dozen proposed maps that tried to make the populations of the three supervisorial districts as nearly equal as possible, without making it harder for minority voters to elect candidates with which they agree.

That included the submission of a map by the Tonto Apache Tribe that would shift their Payson reservation into District 3 to join with the portions of the White Mountain and San Carlos Reservations already in that district. To balance out the shift, the Tonto Apache map would move Hispanic voters now in District 3 south of Globe into District 2.

That map would slightly increase the clout of Apache voters in District 3 and significantly increase the share of Hispanic voters in District 2, while leaving District 1 in North County overwhelmingly white.

However, it would also reduce the combined total of Apache and Hispanic voters in District 3 from about 50 percent to about 44 percent, which could run afoul of key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, according to statements by the two consultants hired to advise the committee.

The consultants said the only map that didn't appear to have problems with the Voting Rights Act was a version that left the current district lines almost unchanged. The populations of the three districts right now don't vary by more than 10 percent from smallest to largest, which means the county would not necessarily have to change the lines to satisfying the rules concerning one-man, one-vote.

Four maps will be studied

The committee members last week settled on four maps for further study, including the map submitted by the Tonto Apache Tribe.

The committee asked the consultants to figure out whether creating new precincts would make it possible to adjust boundaries without significantly reducing the minority percentages in districts 2 and 3. The consultants will report back to the committee this week.

The committee has already settled on three alternative maps for the community college districts.

After the consultants work the submitted supervisor maps over, the committee will pick maps to recommend to the supervisors.

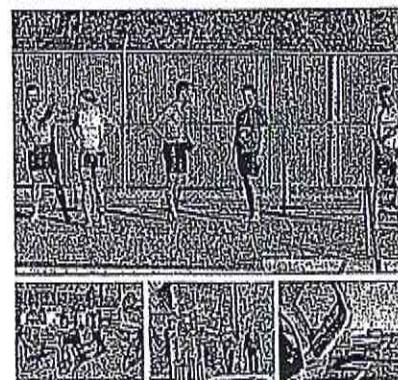
The board of supervisors during the first week in August are expected to pick one map for the supervisorial districts and another map for the community college district. The county will then hold a round of public hearings on those proposed maps.

Final maps go to Department of Justice for review

The maps adopted by the county supervisors will then go to the Department of Justice for review. Arizona remains one of a handful of states whose district maps must go back to the Justice Department to ensure they don't violate the Voting Rights Act. Arizona remains on virtual redistricting probation because the Department of Justice determined that many of the boundaries lawmakers drew in Maricopa and Pima counties diluted the clout of Hispanics there in violation of the voting rights act.

The state approved the Department of Justice's rejection of its redistricting plan a decade ago. A judge upheld the state's plan and

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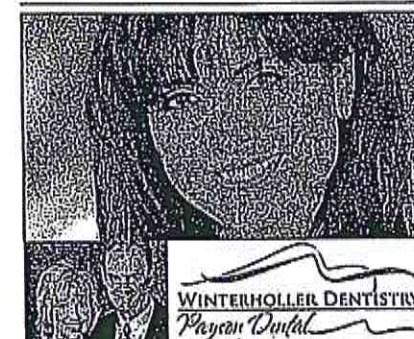


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current district lines never did actually receive the Department of Justice's blessing, said Mayor Evans.

The consultants' initial presentation to the redistricting committee last week suggested that none of the proposed maps for the community colleges seem likely to raise red flags at the Justice Department.

That initial presentation also made it sound like any change in the boundaries for the supervisorial districts that reduces the percentage of minority voters in districts 2 and 3 will trigger questions.

However, in later discussions the consultants conceded that the request of the Tonto Apache Tribe will likely raise novel legal issues that have not been settled by previous court cases.

The key question lies in whether the Justice Department will lump together Hispanics and Apaches in deciding whether a particular plan dilutes their voting rights.

Racially polarized voting patterns

The consultant also took pains to try to explain the finding of a racially polarized voting pattern in past supervisorial elections.

Several committee members objected to the findings, pointing out that although Supervisorial District 2 has a majority white population, the district has historically elected Hispanic supervisors — most recently Supervisor Mike Pastor.

"That proves that we don't vote based on race in Gila County," said one committee member.

The consultant struggled to explain the statistics behind the finding of a racially polarized voting pattern. Several committee members have demanded the detailed statistical analysis, but the consultants have said the analysis is "work product" and therefore confidential. However, they did talk in general terms about what constitutes "racially polarized" voting.

The analysis refers more to variations in voting from one precinct to another than to the outcome of the election districtwide.

For instance, each district has many different precincts, each with different percentages of minority voters. A district is considered "racially polarized" if a Hispanic candidate gets a higher percentage of the vote in the mostly Hispanic districts than in the mostly white districts.

Imagine for a moment that a Hispanic candidate gets a 55 percent of the vote in a mostly white district but 80 percent of the vote in a mostly Hispanic district. That statistic would support a finding that the district shows a pattern of "racially polarized voting," even though a majority of whites might support the minority candidate.

Initially, the consultants suggested that the Justice Department would automatically reject such a change — and would give no credit for a corresponding increase in minority representation in an adjoining district.

However, after the meeting the consultants conceded that the argument the Tonto Apaches raise is a novel issue and that "there's no telling" how the Justice Department might view such a shift.

Moreover, the consultants said in the past the Justice Department has given great weight to formal plans submitted by Indian tribes.

The consultants promised to come up with refinements of the four county supervisor maps preferred by the committee. Those refinements will likely do jigsaw puzzle shifts of some of the nearly 5,000 census tracts in the county, instead of restricting the moves to the roughly 167 precincts.

That fine-grained adjustment could result in new maps that make only minor shifts in minority populations.

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Archive for Tuesday, August 2, 2011

Archive for Tuesday, August 2, 2011

District maps approved

Committee punts political football to supervisors

By Michele Nelson

August 2, 2011

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The committee charged with drawing up new district boundaries for the board of supervisors decided on Friday to toss the smoking political ember back into the laps of the supervisors.

The Redistricting Committee on July 29 voted to submit six maps to supervisors without ranking their preferences, three each for the community college and supervisorial districts.

"We're not going to rank the maps, we'll let the supervisors rank them," said Robert Sanchez, chairman of the committee.

The three proposed maps for the five Gila Community College Districts spurred little debate. All three would shift political clout decisively to north county in accordance with recent population changes.

However, the maps for the three county supervisorial districts provoked much more discussion, mainly due to the map submitted by the Tonto Apache Tribe that would both alter minority percentages and shift the balance of political power to the north.

The committee debated whether reducing the number of minority voters in one district and increasing them in the neighboring district will run afoul of the federal government's interpretation of the Voting Rights Act.

"The Tonto Apache map is outside of the DOJ (Department of Justice) requirements," said Sanchez.

A lengthy discussion over the map submitted by the Tonto Apache Tribe bounced back and forth due to the unique situation the Tonto Apache map created. Committee members said that never before has a minority group specifically requested to be moved into a new district while moving members of a different minority group out of that district.

"I believe what the Tonto Apache has put together the DOJ has never seen before," said James Feezor, who drew up one of the alternative maps approved by the committee on Friday.

"We are looking at placating 250 tribal members and you're screwing District 3 in terms of equalization voting," said Robert Dalby.

"We're not going to satisfy everybody," said Sanchez, who added that the minority percentages and population balance in Feezor's map were "almost ideal."

Both the Tonto Apache's map and the map proposed by Feezor would likely shift political power on the three-member board of supervisors to the north. Both maps would move some north-county voters from District 2 to District 3. This would effectively create a north county District 1, a mostly south county District 2 and District 3 that would lean north, but also include most Native American voters in the county.

Both the Feezor and Tonto Apache maps would move the roughly 200 Tonto Apache residents from District 2 to District 3. But the Tonto Apache wanted to also shift Hispanic voters from District 3 to District 2, which could reduce the overall minority percentage in District 3 from about 52 percent to about 44 percent — even as it increased the minority percentage in District 2 by a roughly similar amount.

The Feezor map addresses the Tonto Apache issue of moving the Tonto Apache Tribe into the same voting district as the White Mountain and San Carlos Apaches, but does not displace as many Hispanics as the Tonto Apache map. Nor does the Feezor map move Gisela into the same district as the Tonto Apache, a request the tribe made due to those lands being ancestral lands, said the committee.

The challenge for the consultants and the supervisors will be to submit a map that will allow Hispanics to continue electing their candidate of choice, while keeping the intent of the Tonto Apache Tribe intact, said Linda Eastlick, director of Gila County elections.

The final supervisor map the committee discussed was the Tom Moody map, which features only minimal changes in current district boundaries.

"The tribes aren't together, but the derivation of the population is good. This is a different map from the other two. This map says to the board of supervisors, 'We appreciate our Native American population, but here is a different map,'" said Sanchez.

After this comment, the committee voted to move forward on the three supervisor maps as submitted.

ARIZONA SILVER BELT

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2011

Redistricting Committee to present district proposals to Supervisors Aug. 16

BY LINDA PEARCE
Staff Reporter

GILA COUNTY — The Gila County Redistricting Advisory Committee (RAC) will be meeting with the Board of Supervisors at their Aug. 16 work session to present three possible scenarios for the supervisor districts and three community college district proposals.

RAC has been working since March, studying population shifts, voting precincts and various other considerations required by the Department of Justice in order to winnow the submitted

possibilities down to only three. The public was invited at several meetings throughout the county to present their ideas in both the supervisor districts and the community college districts. Citizen suggestions are represented in the final proposals.

The Tonto Apache Tribe wrote the committee a letter and presented their own plan which requested they be included with the Whiteriver Apaches and San Carlos Apaches in District 3.

See Redistricting, A3

Redistricting Committee to present district proposals to Supervisors Aug. 16

Continued from A1

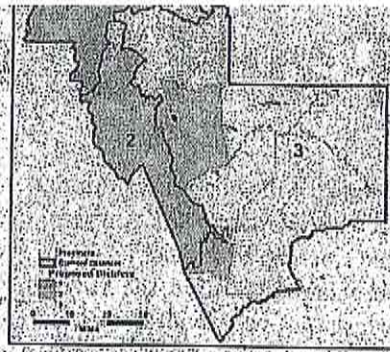
District 3 is a majority-minority district that must be kept pretty much as is for the Apaches to be represented. That plan is shown as Tonto or TAT01.

RAC member Tom Moody (TJM01) presented one of the winning plans but it does not include moving the Tonto's. His plan was submitted before the Tonto's made their request. However his plan has the smallest deviation, 1.02 percent. Deviation is the difference between the ideal population per district and the total population as presented. The Tonto plan has the largest deviation of 3.04 percent.

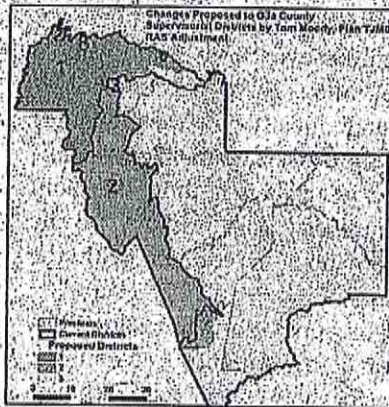
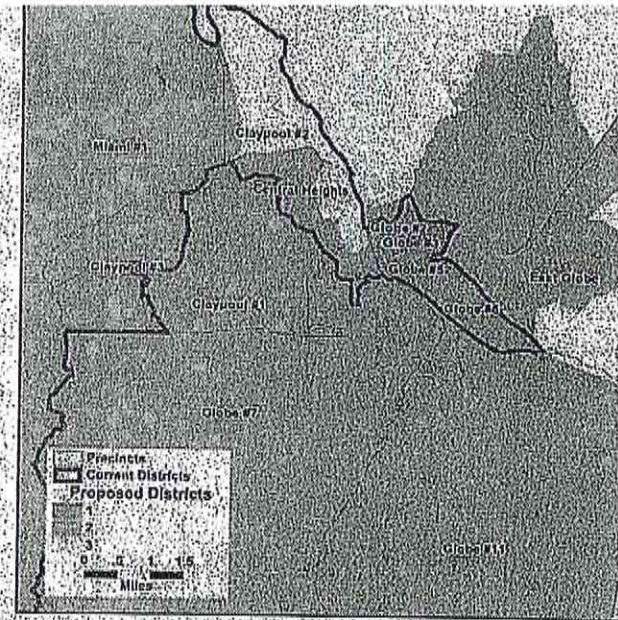
The third plan was submitted by Kristine Freezor. This plan includes moving the Tontos where they want to be, plus it equalizes the populations in almost all districts. The deviation is 1.66 percent. However, for some strange reason it jumps over Globe and puts Claypool 2 and Central Heights in District 3, (the reservation) but puts East Globe which borders the reservation into District 2. There doesn't seem to be much logic to that.

One thing that should be kept in mind, is that although the figures are equal now, the growth is going to be in District 1 which is most of the northern part of the county and District 3 which includes the Apaches. The Tonto's have plans on the drawing board for more housing on their reservation. District 2 has very little room to grow population wise, mostly because of the forest, lake and mines.

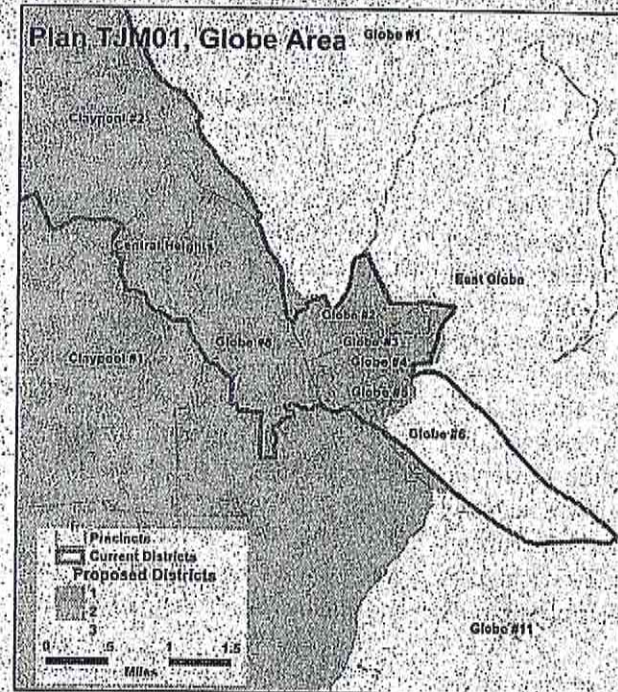
The supervisors will hear these proposals at the Aug. 16 work session which begins at 10 a.m. The entire redistricting committee is expected to attend either in person or by ITV.



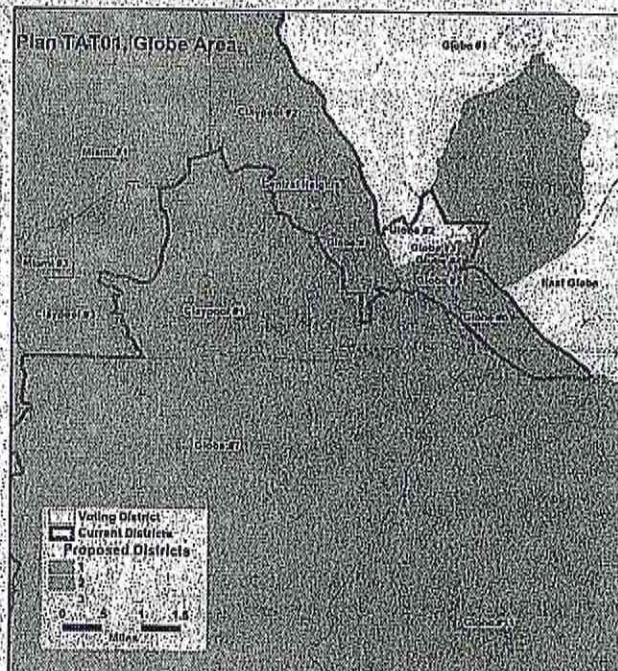
FREEZOR



MOODY



TONTO



August 3 display

EXPLANATION OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Shown on this page are three illustrations per proposal. The first shows the bold line of the districts as they are now and with the proposed changes. The second focuses on the affected areas that will be changed here in the southern part of the county. The third shows the bar

August 3 2011

