

**SAN LUIS VALLEY REGIONAL HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday June 12, 2013
1:30 P.M.
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION CONFERENCE ROOM
Alamosa, CO 81101**

Present: Doug Clark, RiGHT; Mike Blenden, USFWS; Juan Altamirano, Alamosa County; Suzane Beauchane, USFWS; Charlotte Bobiki, Senator Bennett Rep.; Greg Spangler, City of Monte Vista; Patrick Steenburg, City of Alamosa; Linda DeHerrera, Conejos County; Paul Tigan, BLM; Matt Hardesty, DWR; Matthew Valdez, Costilla County; Ken Anderson, Saguache County; Marty Asplin, Town of Del Norte; Billy Elbrock, USBR, Kirk Navo, CPW; Terry Ireland, USFWS, Brenda Felmlee, Rep. Scott Tipton's Aide; Jenny Nehring, Wetland Dynamics; Cary Aloia, Wetland Dynamics; Stephanie Ferrero, CPW; Ralph Curtis, Self; Mike Gibson, SLVWCD; Rick Basagoita, CPW; Nathan Coombs, CWCD; Heather Dutton, RGHRP; Ruth Lewis, NRCS; Luke Hoffman, CPW.

RGWCD: Steve Vandiver, General Manager; Sandra Montoya, RGWCD; Bill Mangle, ERO Consultant; Ron Beane, ERO Consultant, Pete Ampe, District's Attorney.

Note: The RGWCD HCP Administrator (Sandra Montoya) was unable to run the meeting due to illness, and participated over the phone. In her place, Bill Mangle from ERO Resources (RGWCD consultant) facilitated the meeting.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Bill Mangle welcomed all those present and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Bill Mangle asked the Steering Committee to move Regular Business to item III and the Charter and Bylaws to item IV. Jenny Nehring asked to be added under monitoring. No one objected to any of the changes.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Bill Mangle asked everyone present if they approved of the March 13, 2013 Steering Committee Kick-off Meeting Minutes. No one had any changes or objections.

APPROVAL OF CHARTER AND BYLAWS

Bill Mangle gave a brief overview of the Charter and By-Laws. Mr. Ireland suggested in section I. D. third sentence of the bylaws, "good cause" be added. The charter and bylaws were unanimously accepted with the change by the Steering Committee.

NOMINATION OF OFFICERS

Bill Mangle asked for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair. Sandra Montoya pointed out that these two positions would be a larger commitment because these two individuals would be expected to attend each meeting which would be a minimum of two meetings a year. Patrick Steenburg from the City of Alamosa volunteered to be the Chairman and Juan Altamirano from the County of Alamosa volunteered to be the Vice-Chair. The appointments were unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Mangle asked for public comment.

Mr. Gibson asked if all the voting members for the Steering Committee have been appointed and if they are all sitting at the table. Bill Mangle answered yes that all had been appointed but not all were present. Mr. Gibson did not feel it appropriate to nominate a Chair and Vice Chair unless all the representatives were present.

Linda Deherrera asked if a letter was needed from each county for that appointment. Bill Mangle responded that an email would be sufficient from each county, municipality, or participating organization.

USEFWS REPORT

Bill Mangle asked for a report from the USFWS. Terry Ireland was on the phone and reported on the following:

In January the final critical habitat listing was released for the southwestern willow flycatcher. Mr. Blenden brought copies of a southwestern willow flycatcher critical habitat and Rio Grande water use Q& A. (Handout is attached to these minutes). Mr. Blenden added that this Q&A has been approved by both of their respective regional directors.

Mr. Ireland also reported that in July the USFWS is planning on releasing a proposal to list the yellow-billed cuckoo as threatened and a proposed ruling on critical habitat designation. Bill Mangle stated the listing of the yellow-billed cuckoo to threatened was anticipated and it is therefore a covered species in the HCP document. Mr. Ireland said that there are two segments along the Rio Grande that are being considered for critical habitat and six other segments throughout Colorado. The HCP provided was provided as a reason to exclude the San Luis Valley from critical habitat designation for the yellow-billed cuckoo.

Mr. Ampe asked for a time frame for the listing and possible critical habitat designation for the yellow-billed cuckoo. Mr. Ireland responded that it would take about a year to make a final decision for both the listing of the yellow-billed cuckoo and the critical habitat designation. For each there must be a sixty day comment period, a public comment period.

Mr. Vandiver thanked Mr. Ireland and Mr. Blenden for their efforts on the Q&A.

HCP HANDBOOK AND BROCHURE

Bill Mangle gave a brief overview on the HCP handbook and brochure. The handbook is a quick reference guide for the HCP. There will be a link for the handbook on www.slvhcp.com. The brochure is currently in draft form and is intended for counties and municipalities their staff and landowners in order to help provide some basic direction. Bill Mangle asked the Committee to provide feedback on the brochure by June 26th. One member suggested the addition of the breeding season of the southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo so that landowners could minimize work during that time.

UPDATE ON MITIGATION

Sandra Montoya gave a brief update on mitigation. There are two easements that are being assessed for mitigation credit and both of these easements should take care of the base mitigation credit. The fine details of the easement suitability form are currently being worked out. Right now efforts are being prepared to start the monitoring on both of the easements. There is an opportunity tomorrow for Steering Committee members to attend a brief monitoring/training exercise on one of the mitigation sites where there is a high possibility of viewing some southwestern willow flycatchers. Bill Mangle reminded the committee that one of the requirements of the HCP is to line up mitigation in order to offset covered impacts. There is a target amount of mitigation credit that needs to be covered and that target needs to be achieved within three years of the HCP implementation. The monitoring of each of the easements will help to demonstrate the quality of habitat for mitigation which will ultimately help to determine the quantity of habitat that will be counted for mitigation. Over time this group will provide direction and guidance pertaining to mitigation efforts. Discussion was held on the monitoring field trip.

MONITORING

BLM

Mr. Tigan gave a brief overview on the monitoring efforts of the BLM's MacIntyre/Simpson Property. There is a survey protocol for southwestern willow flycatcher monitoring and that survey protocol has been started. So far, the monitoring has revealed good results considering the 900 acre fire that took place earlier in the spring. The southwestern willow flycatcher habitat is divided into two sites the East and West sides. Historically the West side contained about 2/3 of the local southwestern willow flycatcher population while the East side contained 1/3 of the local population. The East side was the part that burned and the survey crew has spotted the birds in the burned area, although it will take a few surveys to determine site fidelity. In addition to the fire, the BLM has been experiencing water shortages on the MacIntyre/Simpson property which will make it hard to determine the limiting factor if the bird numbers are lower. There were some locations that had been recently watered and those locations did not burn as bad as other locations that had not had any recent water. There have been some photo points established on the burn site. This site will be a good reference to see what the impact is in the long term. Discussion was held on details of the fire.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Kirk Navo updated the Committee on the status of the monitoring for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The CPW has currently initiated discussions concerning monitoring on the State lands more specifically, the Higel and Rio Grande State wildlife areas. They have not

figured a strategy out yet but are planning on doing their monitoring starting next spring. Bill Mangle thought that it would be best to use the same method at the reference sites and the mitigation sites.

Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge

Mike Blenden updated the Committee on the status on monitoring for the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge. There are no plans for this year to do any monitoring. Right now a decision needs to be made as to the frequency of monitoring. Ron Beane stated that the monitoring on the mitigation lands includes setting up photo points. He suggested that the reference sites should set up photo points too.

Jenny Nehring Wetland Dynamics

Mrs. Nehring gave a presentation on acoustic monitoring and its potential for presence/absence surveys for the southwestern willow flycatcher. The user can set the program to record as long as they would like and the data is stored on an SD card. The user must program the software to identify the call. The cost for one of these units is about \$800.00 to \$1000.00 a unit and an additional \$500 for the software. There are several advantages to this technology including fewer disturbances to the birds and it is not weather dependent. The disadvantage of the technology is that it cannot determine the number of birds or the distance from the monitor.

Bill Mangle asked what the USFWS response was to how the acoustic monitoring can be used within the bounds of protocol. Mr. Blenden felt that the acoustic monitoring could be used for the presence/absence survey which could trigger the formal protocol. Further discussion was held.

LANDOWNER NOTIFICATION

Sandra Montoya updated the Committee on the landowner notification. Each of the counties is required to notify landowners within the 100 year flood plain on the existence of the SLVHCP. Sandra asked that each county provide her with a copy of the letter that was sent out and the date by June 26th, so that it could be included in the annual report. The first notification is required to be sent within six months of the completion of the HCP which would have been by May. There are a couple of Counties that have not sent out their letters one of them is already working with Sandra to get that achieved. Discussion was held on methods used to send out letters.

RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS RESTORATION PROJECT

Heather Dutton was present to give a presentation on the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project. Mrs. Dutton works with landowners and local State and Federal agencies to do river restoration from South Fork to the Conejos/Alamosa County Line just below the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge. The majority of work has been streaming civilization to riparian restoration projects all of which undergo section 404 permitting. Mrs. Dutton has just started working with irrigation and ditch companies to replace some aging irrigation infrastructure mainly major head gate and diversion dam replacement projects. These ag projects do not require a section 404 wetland permit but they are covered under the HCP and Mrs. Dutton wanted to coordinate her efforts with the Steering Committee. Bill Mangle asked her to keep Sandra Montoya in the loop to track any permanent covered impacts that might take place.

Bill Mangle said he added guidance in the HCP handbook as to what is and what is not southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo habitat for those that were not sure what the habitat looks like.

OTHER

Committee Member Reports

There were no committee member reports

SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday November 4th, 2013 at 1:30 p.m.