

**SAN LUIS VALLEY REGIONAL HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday November 17, 2014
1:30 P.M.
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION CONFERENCE ROOM
Alamosa, CO 81101**

Present: Doug Clark, RiGHT; Charlotte Bobiki, Senator Bennett Rep.; Greg Spangler, City of Monte Vista; Paul Tigan, BLM; Marty Asplin, Town of Del Norte; Terry Ireland, USFWS; Jenny Nehring, Wetland Dynamics; Cary Aloia, Wetland Dynamics; Stephanie Ferrero, CPW; Wendi Maez, Saguache County; Joel Humphries, BLM; Marianne Dunne, Alamosa County; Karla Shriver, Rio Grande County; James Heath, DWR; Suzanne Beauchaine, USFWS; Ken Anderson, Saguache County.

RGWCD: Steve Vandiver, RGWCD; Greg Higel, RGWCD; Chris Ivers, RGWCD; Bill Mangle, ERO; Peter Ampe, Hill and Robbins.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Doug Clark welcomed all those present and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Clark asked for discussion on the agenda. Karla Shriver moved to approve the agenda and Marianne Dunne seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Clark asked for a motion to approve the March 20th, 2014 and April 14th, 2014 meeting minutes. Terry Ireland moved to approve both sets of minutes and Mrs. Shriver seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Clark asked for public comment.
There were no comments.

COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS

Chris Ivers asked for any county impact logs. Bill Mangle reminded everyone that the counties are supposed to keep records of permanent impacts and turn them into the HCP coordinator. Discussion was held on what needs to be reported. Mr. Mangle explained that any covered activity that may have impact or will have a permanent impact on habitat should be reported.

USFWS REPORT

Mr. Ireland stated that he does expect the counties to report their activities. Mr. Ireland reported on the listing of the Gunnison's sage grouse and the not warranted status of the Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

Mrs. Shriver asked if restoration activities should be reported and tracked. Discussion stating only mitigation credits and permanent impacts need to be accounted for.

Mr. Ivers asked if Mr. Ireland was going to continue to be the HCP contact, Mr. Ireland confirmed that he will remain the contact.

UPDATE ON MITIGATION

Mr. Ivers stated that three new parcels were monitored this past summer. There were four detections on one easement, which has very good habitat. He went on to say that if all of the parcels are approved there will be 470 acres of mitigation credit, which will meet all the projected mitigation requirements, so long as those parcels are maintained. He stated that going into the future he would like to get mitigation parcels in Saguache and Costilla counties as well as using restoration projects.

Mr. Mangle reminded everyone that mitigation parcels may come and go, so we want to maintain a larger pool of mitigation parcels. He also stated that there is value, in terms of partnerships, in spreading the mitigation parcels throughout the valley and in different projects. Cary Aloia asked if mitigation acres were reported together or separated for each species and if the whole property was counted or just habitat. Mr. Ivers stated that they were reported together and only willow and cottonwood habitat are counted. Later, Mr. Ivers clarified that it is a proportion of non-federal contributions to the easement that are used for mitigation acres. Paul Tigan asked for clarification on the voluntary nature of the mitigation parcels. Mr. Mangle explained that the HCP agreement was a separate, voluntary overlay to an easement that allows the District monitoring access.

Jenny Nehring asked if the HCP agreement was always voluntary. Mr. Mangle explained that it could be written into an easement, but that it has not been done to date.

Mrs. Dunne asked if there is an ownership change is there some sort of conveyance of HCP participation. Mr. Ivers explained that the agreement asks for a 60 day notice to try and get the new owners to sign-up for mitigation credit.

Mr. Clark asked how many acres of mitigation were needed. Mr. Ivers stated that the total was about 310 acres.

Mrs. Dunne asked about the City of Alamosa and the Corp of Engineers wanting to clear the cottonwoods along the river. Mr. Mangle stated the City of Alamosa is covered under the HCP, but federal projects are not.

Mr. Ireland asked if willow and cottonwood areas were being recorded separately, so different habitats could be accounted for. Mr. Ivers stated that they were reported together, but that they are distinguished in the data. Mrs. Aloia stated that her data shows that flycatchers use cottonwoods as well.

Mrs. Aloia asked if there was any index of quality for the mitigation acres. Mr. Mangle explained that there is a quality level that must be met before an area can count for mitigation.

Mr. Mangle reminded everyone that one of the functions of the steering committee was to act as the eyes and ears in the community, in seeking new and better opportunities to work with landowners on conservation and mitigation for the HCP.

MONITORING

BLM

Mr. Tigan introduced Joel Humphries, the BLM's new wildlife biologist, to the group. He then reported that monitoring on lower Cat Creek, La Jara Creek, lower La Garita Creek, and the Rio Grande North of State Highway 142 yielded no flycatcher detections. South of Highway 142 they had four "migrant" detections, in the first survey period.

Mr. Tigan then reported that the McIntyre/Simpson property's burned areas were surveyed this year and three probable territories were found. That area usually has 7 territories, but none were seen last year.

Mr. Tigan also reported that vegetation monitoring was being done in the burn area and that they will be building 17 exclosures along the Rio Grande. Discussion was held on the exclosures.

Steve Vandiver asked about the health of the riparian area in the burn area. Mr. Tigan stated that there is willow and some cottonwood regeneration occurring and that overall the area is recovering.

Mr. Ireland asked if the flycatcher detections were on unburned “islands” or in new growth. Mr. Tigan stated that they were in areas directly affected by the fire.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Mrs. Nehring and Mrs. Aloia handed out a printout summarizing the results of their surveys (Attached). They also brought up issues with flycatcher detections outside the survey, visual/behavioral observations without auditory confirmation, and the fact that survey results are conservative estimates. Discussion was held on these issues.

Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge

Suzanne Beauchaine reported that they had five territories on the Alamosa refuge this year and that they experienced many of the same issues brought up by Mrs. Aloia and Mrs. Nehring. Mrs. Beauchaine asked how often each group conducts monitoring and if it should be synchronized to get a better picture across the valley. Discussion was held on the monitoring schedules.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO DISCUSSION

Mr. Ivers asked Mr. Ireland about a survey protocol and training to conduct surveys. Discussion was held on protocols and training opportunities.

Mrs. Aloia reported that they detected one cuckoo on the Higel State Wildlife Area.

Mr. Ivers informed everyone that the District submitted a comment to the USFWS opposing any critical habitat designation in the valley and requested letters of support from counties, water user associations, and other entities. Discussion was held on why the District opposed critical habitat designation. Mr. Ireland reminded everyone that a second comment period was opened. Discussion was held on the piece of BLM land on the Rio Grande.

Mrs. Nehring asked if critical habitat is excluded will there still be an expectation for cuckoo monitoring. Mr. Ivers explained that HCP monitoring will still occur because the HCP mitigates potential take of cuckoo.

Mrs. Aloia asked if there was a difference in monitoring between threatened and endangered species. Mr. Ireland explained that there was no difference.

Mr. Vandiver asked Mr. Ireland why go through the critical habitat process if the HCP already provides protections. Mr. Ireland stated that in his opinion, the best thing about critical habitat is that it can aide in recovery in areas that aren't currently occupied.

Mrs. Aloia asked about a recovery plan and how can they make one given the lack of data on the cuckoo in the valley. Mr. Ireland stated that he doesn't know yet. Mr. Vandiver asked about when and where the recovery team will meet and made a formal request to have a chance to comment on the make-up of the team and have a chance to have some local input.

OTHER

Ruth Lewis gave a report on her WRP projects.

SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday April 13th, 2015 at 1:30 pm.