

**SAN LUIS VALLEY REGIONAL HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday November 4, 2013
1:30 P.M.
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION CONFERENCE ROOM
Alamosa, CO 81101**

Present: Doug Clark, RiGHT; Mike Blenden, USFWS; Marianne Dunne, Alamosa County; Suzane Beauchane, USFWS; Charlotte Bobiki, Senator Bennett Rep.; Greg Spangler, City of Monte Vista; Paul Tigan, BLM; Matt Hardesty, DWR; Matthew Valdez, Costilla County; Ken Anderson, Saguache County; Marty Asplin, Town of Del Norte; Terry Ireland, USFWS; Jenny Nehring, Wetland Dynamics; Cary Aloia, Wetland Dynamics; Stephanie Ferrero, CPW; Rick Basagoita, CPW; Nathan Coombs, CWCD; Ruth Lewis, NRCS; Jerry Freeman, SLVEC; David Montgomery, SLVEC; Karla Shriver, Rio Grande County; Jill Lucero, BLM; Sue Swift-Miller, BLM; Alyssa Radcliff, BLM; Erin Minks, Senator Udall Rep.;

RGWCD: Steve Vandiver, General Manager; Sandra Montoya, RGWCD; Jesse Geis, RGWCD; Bill Mangle, ERO; Peter Ampe, Hill and Robbins.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Sandra Montoya welcomed all those present and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Sandra Montoya asked for discussion on the agenda. Ms. Shriver moved to approve the agenda and Mr. Montgomery seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Ampe suggested that item number five, nomination of officers be the next item on the agenda, before the approval of the minutes.

NOMINATION OF OFFICERS

Sandra Montoya asked for nominations for Vice Chair. This position has a larger commitment because this individual would be expected to attend each meeting which would be a minimum of two meetings a year. Doug Clark volunteered to be the Vice Chair. Mr. Coombs moved to close the nominations. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved. A motion was made to approve Mr. Clark's nomination for Vice Chair. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Sandra Montoya asked for a motion to approve the June 12th, 2013 meeting minutes. Mr. Coombs moved to approve the minutes and Ms. Dunne seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sandra Montoya asked for public comment. Mr. Clark asked about the status of the yellow-billed Cuckoo habitat. Sandra Montoya said that Terry Ireland will address that next under his report.

USFWS REPORT

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

The proposed rule for listing the yellow-billed cuckoo was released on October 3rd, 2013. The public comment period will go through December 2, 2013. The proposed critical habitat ruling is not out yet but is expected in December or January and will also have a 60 day comment period. The whole valley was included for the species listing of the yellow-billed cuckoo. Mr. Mangle reminded the committee that the HCP provides the same endangered species act coverage and conservation measures for the yellow-billed cuckoo as for the southwestern willow flycatcher.

Mr. Freeman asked who was responsible for population monitoring for the two covered species and when will it occur. Mr. Ireland stated that there is no monitoring plan in place yet. The USFWS has done what funding has allowed from contracting with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory to conduct the population monitoring.

Ms. Nehring asked if the monitoring plan for the yellow-billed cuckoo will only occur if the status of the bird is listed as threatened. Mr. Ireland responded, yes when the final decision

comes out and will only be a USFWS effort to track or coordinate monitoring if the bird is listed. If the bird is not listed it is not warranted to be on the candidate list and no monitoring effort coordination will be done. The HCP has language that pertains to the bird and at this time Mr. Ireland is not sure how that will be dealt with, if the bird is not listed.

ANNUAL REPORT

Sandra Montoya and Bill Mangle updated the Committee on the status of the annual report. This will be the first Annual Report and will cover the 2013 fiscal year. The annual report will be due on March 1, 2014. Bill Mangle will draft an outline of the annual report and Sandra Montoya will populate the report and they will coordinate with Mr. Ireland. The annual report will be sent out to the committee members for comments once it is in draft form.

UPDATE ON MITIGATION

Sandra Montoya gave a brief update on mitigation. Bill Mangle reminded the committee that each monitoring property offsets the HCP impacts. The monitoring on the easements takes place to observe and assess the habitat and from that assessment there are calculations that are done to calculate the amount of habitat and the amount of mitigation credit. There is also a suitability form that is completed for each easement that demonstrates to Mr. Ireland that there is a reasonable connection between the conservation easement and the HCP conservation efforts. The third part of the mitigation package is a landowner agreement, which is between the District and the landowner, which specifies that everyone is ok to use the piece of property for HCP mitigation.

There are two easements that are being assessed for mitigation credit: The Willett Dairy Farm and Cattle Company easement and the River Valley Ranch easement. Monitoring was completed on both easements this summer while the easement suitability form was approved for the River Valley Ranch Easement and the field data is currently undergoing GIS analysis, approval on the easement suitability form for the Willett Dairy Farm and Cattle Company is pending and the GIS analysis on the field data has been completed. Once each of the pieces is completed the next step is to have the landowners sign a voluntary landowner agreement.

Ms. Shriver asked if there was a designated time frame of which the mitigation credit needed to be obtained. Bill Mangle responded that there is a three year window to line up the necessary mitigation credit. Currently, we are a year into the three year window and if the two properties pan out, most of the mitigation requirements will be met, although the HCP coordinator will continue to obtain mitigation credit to keep a good balance.

Mr. Freeman asked if another fieldtrip could be set up. Sandra Montoya said certainly another fieldtrip could be set up; however it will have to take place during the southwestern willow flycatcher breeding season, which is from the end of May to mid-July.

Ms. Shriver asked if there will be a setback with Sandra Montoya leaving. Mr. Vandiver responded that he is going to try to get someone hired and possibly use Sandra Montoya as a resource or possibly contract with remotely. Currently the job announcement is being worked on and hopefully the position will be filled before Sandra Montoya leaves. Also, Bill Mangle and Ron Beane will be resources to keep things moving with the HCP.

Mr. Freeman asked what the goals are for the mitigation credit. Bill Mangle responded that there are about 250 acres of mitigation credit that need to be obtained. The two easements that were previously mentioned contain well over 200 acres of mitigation credit. Sandra Montoya interjected that there are three more folks that have displayed interest in volunteering their easements to count as mitigation credit for the HCP. First the Willett Dairy Farm and Cattle Co. Easement and the River Valley Ranch Easement need to be finalized before any more are pursued.

Sandra Montoya announced that as part of the annual report all of the education and outreach requirements have been reached for the year 2013. Each year there is a requirement that six education and outreach efforts be made to groups of ten or more people. This year education and outreach was provided to the SLV Commissioners, the Law of the Rio Grande CLE conference, the 2013 Water Leaders Course, the GFWC Women's Citizenship Club, the Costilla County Farm Bureau and the Alamosa Farm Bureau. The six education and outreach efforts must be done annually for the first five years then the commitment will go down. Bill Mangle stated that the purpose of the education and outreach requirements are to continually raise awareness that HCP exists as both a conservation tool and a tool for landowners to understand what is and is not

covered under the scope of the HCP. The education and outreach also continues the conversation of riparian habitat conservation. Ms. Shriver recommended that the HCP Coordinator speak at the potato grain conference in February about the HCP.

MONITORING

BLM

Ms. Lucero and Ms. Swift-Miller were present to give an overview of the monitoring on the BLM's McIntire Simpson Property. The southwestern willow flycatcher monitoring has been done since 2002. In 2003 the monitoring shifted to project level monitoring and has been done every other year since. There are a few issues with the standard protocol that don't fit the San Luis Valley: 1. the survey period starts in May and leaf out does not occur until the last week of May. Typically two surveys are done during the second survey period; 2. The protocol recommends that surveys cease after the middle of July as the BLM has been doing but it has been noticed that some of the birds are still making attempts to nest later in July; 3. The protocol directs the surveyor to get into the middle of the habitat patches. On the McIntire Simpson property it is impossible to penetrate the willow patches because they are so dense. It is easier to survey along the edges of the willow patches especially because the birds project so far; and, 4. The protocol requires the surveyor to stop every 20 to 30 meters to call for the birds. On the McIntire Simpson property there is sometimes no habitat at all within the 20 to 30 meters, so Ms. Lucero recommends that the surveyor move on to the next patch of willows. It is also important in an area where birds are heard not to call because they will fly in from different directions and it will be hard to get an accurate account on the birds.

Ms. Swift-Miller stated that there is a large interest in volunteers to do the monitoring. It is important to have a more experienced person with volunteers in order to properly record bird behavior among other observations. There are a lot of experienced persons in the valley to help train volunteers.

As a result of an 80% decline in water available under the BLM's water rights a few SWSPs were filed in order to move water to areas that the birds tend to nest. Given the circumstances with a low water year and the wildfire on the McIntire Simpson property, the results from the survey were successful. There were eleven probable territories and five possible territories on the BLM McIntire Simpson Property. Probable territories are territories where birds were detected for at least three surveys and at least one of those detections were late in the survey period.

In addition to bird monitoring, lots of monitoring was done on fuel loading. There is a student working on a science fair project to determine the type and amount of insect and bio mass and amount of water needed underneath. Burned and unburned sites are being studied as are patch size and distance to water. So far, it has been observed that almost all territories are within 100 meters of standing water through the breeding season, while tall grass is also significant to the birds. Discussion was held on wells and water availability on the property.

Discussion was held on future monitoring and budget. Yellow-billed cuckoo surveys are done every other year when the budget allows. This year the budget did not allow for the surveys to be conducted, but the birds were listened for while conducting the southwestern willow flycatcher surveys and none were heard.

Discussion was held on the fire and recovery resulting from the recent rains. The willows started to rejuvenate and the grasses got really tall from the recent rains. The fires also provided one benefit; they helped to get rid of old decadent strands of willow.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Stephanie Ferrero updated the Committee on the status of the monitoring for the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The CPW is in the final steps of the planning process to conduct monitoring on the Higel and Rio Grande State Wildlife areas (SWA). They will coordinate with the BLM and USFWS to ensure that the proper protocol is followed.

Wetland Dynamics contracts with the CPW and conducted the 2007 and 2010 southwestern willow flycatcher surveys on the Higel and Rio Grande SWAs. This year despite the fact that the official survey protocol was not done on the Rio Grande and Higel SWAs; all southwestern willow flycatchers were back on their territories with a higher concentration in some areas, based off of hearing them call. This year was the first year that playback surveys were done for the

yellow-billed cuckoo on the Rio Grande SWA and at least four birds were detected. Because of the success of the play back survey a much more systematic process will be done on the Rio Grande and Higel SWA's next year. Wetland Dynamics also did some separate monitoring for southwestern willow flycatchers on private lands and discovered the birds where they had never heard them before while it was late in the season and on low quality habitat.

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 at this time. This might be an opportunity for all three organizations, the BLM, the CPW and the USFWS to synchronize their monitoring efforts. Mr. Ireland said it has been eight or nine years since there was a comprehensive synchronization of surveys and it needs to be done again soon.

Mr. Blenden stated that there was a vigorous growth of willows on the stretch on the Rio Grande going through the Alamosa this year despite the unusual low water flows going through that reach of the river.

Discussion was held on monitoring on private lands vs. public lands. The monitoring that takes place on private lands for the HCP is done every three years where the focus is on the quality of habitat. Presence absence surveys are done for both bird species while monitoring habitat. A value is derived from the habitat monitoring on private lands and is based on what is known about where they are nesting on public lands. The monitoring that takes place on mitigation parcels utilizes a Habitat Quality Index (HQI) to summarize a general quality and value of the habitat. It primarily focuses on breeding habitat with a forage component and it also includes a water component.

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. One county is working with the GIS authority to identify the parcels that are within the 100 year flood plain so that they can mail out the notifications, while another county has committed to sending out their landowner notifications in January.

OTHER

Committee Member Reports

Sandra Montoya asked counties that had any permanent impacts to report them and/or turn in County Impact Logs. There were no committee member reports.

SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Sandra Montoya asked the Committee if they wanted to establish regular meetings. Discussion was held and it was decided that the regular Steering Committee Meetings would take place on the second Monday of April and November. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday April 14th, 2014 at 1:30 p.m.