



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

North Fork HPP Committee

Delta County Annex Building

July 31st, 2018

6:00 p.m.

North Fork HPP Members Present: Steve Kossler, Livestock Grower; Dennis Garrison, USFS; Ross Allen, Livestock Grower; Jess Campbell, Livestock Grower; Adam Gall, Sports person; Andrew Taylor for Cody Purcell, CPW

Guests: Ben Harris, Joey Burns

Introduction: Committee members were introduced and the FY2018 end-of-year budget was reviewed. The FY2019 budget is \$105,000.

New Business:

1. Ben Harris and Joey Burns presented a fencing project on the North Fork Valley Ranch, located on Stevens Gulch Rd north of Paonia. The property is bordered by BLM on the south, USFS on the north, and other private lands/permittees on the east and west. There is very little water on the east side, resulting in frequent cattle trespass onto the property from the BLM permittee. The landowners have been completing habitat improvement projects throughout the rest of the property, including mastication and thinning to open the canopy and improve understory forage for big game. Many more acres of habitat work are planned for future years, including further mastication, water developments, and possibly seeding. Due to the cattle trespass, new fencing is needed to prevent overgrazing of the sensitive treatment areas. The current property boundary along the east side includes 8 miles of fencing; however a land use swap with the BLM is being pursued which would drop the length of requested fencing to 4 miles. The fence would be wildlife-friendly to HPP specs.

The committee was interested in the work being done on this property. The ranch is located in important winter range for deer and elk, and represents a large refuge area that could help reduce game damage conflicts on nearby landowners. However, there were concerns about the total price and scope of the project, especially since the status of the BLM land

use swap was uncertain. The North Fork committee has historically avoided new fence projects, especially in areas that border public lands. However, the committee recognizes that this is critical habitat work in an area where big game herds are below objective and significant big game conflicts exist. The committee decided not to participate in funding the fence project, however they invited the applicants to return to the next meeting with proposals for hydroax work, seeding, and water developments instead of fence work.

2. The committee approved up to \$2,500 for 12 rolls of high visibility wire and connectors from Kencove. The wire will be provided to fence repair/project applicants as needed.
3. The committee reviewed and updated the tentative fertilizer recipient list and amounts. The list will be reviewed again in the spring before final approval.
4. Annual projects: The Delta County Weed Control project was approved for \$20,000. The committee approved \$2,000.00 for fence vouchers in increments of \$200. The committee also approved \$5,000 for herbicide vouchers in increments of \$200. DWMs may issue the vouchers to landowners as needed.
5. The committee discussed the need for water projects and developments, especially in such a dry year. The Grand Mesa committee has annual projects where contractors work with the local cattlemen's associations to clean out ponds on public allotments. While this would be an ideal project for the North Fork area next year, there is not much time left to put this type of project together with potential cooperators before the snow flies. Instead, the committee approved \$15,000.00 for a 'pond cleanout program'. Individuals may request payment of \$100/hr of labor with heavy equipment, up to \$500 total, to clean out 2 ponds that receive significant wildlife use. Pond work, including identifying the specific ponds to be cleaned out, must be approved by a DWM or committee member prior to the individual beginning work. Once pond work is completed, a DWM, committee member, or USFS/BLM staff person will inspect the ponds for completion. The program will expire on December 1st, 2018, and the committee will evaluate the program for the spring. In the future the committee would like to implement a program similar to Grand Mesa's annual projects, which might be organized through the local cattlemen's association or the BLM Grazing Advisory Board.

Other Business:

1. The committee discussed the influx of HPP questions regarding projects on "small properties," meaning community or personal gardens and "hobby farms". Many of these "small properties" are less than an acre, which do not qualify for Game Damage, and do not represent a commercial agricultural operation. Many of these potential projects involve requests for exclusionary fencing. The committee felt that unless there were extraordinary circumstances, these types of projects did not fit the scope of HPP and would not be considered.
2. The committee reviewed highlights from the recent State Council meeting. It is unlikely that the committee will receive any requests for fencing or seed due to the Buttermilk fire, which is burning primarily in wilderness areas; however in the event that the committee does receive requests they may provide high visibility wire or consider funding reseeding efforts. Finally, hemp operations are growing in popularity in the North Fork Valley; however the committee affirmed that if the crop is not considered by Game Damage to have damage potential from deer and elk, the committee would not participate in projects where the conflict involves hemp crops.

Next Meeting: TBD