



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

November 16, 2020

Zoom Video Conference

6:00 PM-7:45 PM

Committee members Present:

- Ron Garcia, *USFWS Representative*
- Alvin Kunugi, *Livestock Growers Representative*
- Roy Oliver, *Livestock Growers Representative*
- Shane Lancaster, *Livestock Growers Representative*
- Mike Maldonado, *Sportsperson Representative*
- Scott Nilson, *BLM Representative*
- Brian Bechaver, *CPW Representative*

Administrators: Hanna Cook

Guests: Pam Rice (NPS), Brent Frankland (CPW Biologist)

Budget Report

The 2021 budget report was reviewed.

New Business

D-37 DAU Plan-Brent Frankland

Brent is renewing the DAU plan for D-37. This DAU encompasses GMU 82. CPW is proposing to increase the population objectives from 1,500-2,000 to 2,300-3,000. The current post hunt population estimate is 2,570, which is above the current objective, and the population seems to be on an upward trend. Increasing the objective will allow CPW to manage the population as is and allow for more growth. CPW is also proposing to increase the sex ratio objective from 20-25 bucks:100 does to 25-29 bucks:100 does. The current post hunt sex ratio is 36 bucks:100 does, so buck harvest will need to increase in order to reach the objective.

The winter range habitat in this DAU is limited, so habitat improvement on public lands will likely need to be implemented in order to successfully manage for the larger population of deer. CPW aims to work with public land agencies to implement habitat treatment and improve the quality and quantity of winter range. Scotty Nilson let the committee know that he is looking at implementing prescribed burns on BLM land in this area to improve the habitat. CWD risk is also a concern, so CPW has implemented mandatory CWD testing in order to get a better idea of CWD prevalence in the area. If the prevalence rate is too high, then they may look at

revising the objectives. Lowering the observed sex ratio to meet the objectives will also help to control CWD.

The committee agrees with the proposed objectives of 2,300-3,000 deer and 25-29 bucks:100 does and feels confident that CPW will be able to achieve them, especially with the mandatory CWD testing implemented. They also feel confident that CPW can work with other public land agencies to implement habitat improvement, with the potential for the committee to be a funding partner.

The committee will write a comment letter in support of the plan.

E-11 DAU Plan-Brent Frankland

Brent is renewing the DAU plan for E-11. This DAU encompasses GMU 82. CPW is proposing to maintain the population objectives of 3,000-4,000 elk. The current post hunt population estimate is 5,900. CPW is also proposing to maintain the sex ratio objective of 17-23 bulls:100 cows. The current post hunt sex ratio is 39 bulls:100 cows. Both the population and the sex ratio will need to decrease in order to reach objectives.

The current population numbers and the distribution of the elk have been causing problems on the Great Sand Dunes National Park, the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, and on private property. Controlling the population through harvest has been challenging because of hunting restrictions on the refuge, the park, and private land. CPW is currently working with the USFWS, NPS, and private landowners to try to facilitate more harvest in the area, but it has been a complicated process. The Mount Blanca HPP committee has also approved funding for a dispersal coordinator to help with dispersal efforts on the park and refuge. If harvest increases the population will decrease and dispersal will improve, which will reduce the damage elk are causing to habitat and fences on public and private lands.

The committee agrees that the population and sex ratio need to decrease to the proposed objectives. They acknowledge that it may be a complicated process, but they have already shown willingness to help with dispersal efforts and plan to continue to do so in the future.

The committee will write a comment letter in support of the plan.

Project Application Proposals and Reviews

Medano Zapata Preserve Fencing Project

Note Caitlyn Kelly was unable to join the call, so Brian Bechaver presented this project

The Nature Conservancy is asking HPP for \$1,094.40 to build five sections of wildlife friendly fence that will allow elk to cross without causing damage. Three crossings will be 200 yards long, and two crossings will be 100 yards long. These sections will be built in strategic areas where elk cross more frequently as identified by TNC, the Medano Ranch, CPW, NPS, and USFWS. The rest of the fence will be a taller fence designed to keep the bison from escaping onto the Great Sand Dunes National Park or the Baca National Wildlife Refuge.

The previous project that the committee reviewed to rebuild a large area of fence was denied by the State Council due to several concerns, including that wildlife friendly fence would not keep bison from escaping. Brian worked with TNC and the ranch to come up with an alternative design that would hopefully still help with elk damage to fences so that bison could not escape. Pat Tucker and the State Council have approved this revised project. HPP is being asked to provide t-posts and drill stem, the Baca Refuge will provide white wire and t-post clips, and the NPS will provide and monitor trail cameras to see how the fence is working. TNC and

Ranchlands will pay for labor and equipment. The remaining wire needed will be repurposed from the existing bison fence. The hope is that elk will be able to cross safely in these sections without damaging the fence. Less damage to the fence will reduce the risk of bison escaping onto the park or the refuge. They will monitor the bison to ensure that they are not able to cross the wildlife friendly sections of fence. If this works well, then they will likely be able to add more sections of wildlife friendly crossings in the future.

Ron Garcia requested that the project be changed from using 6'6" t-posts to 8' t-posts due to the sandy soil. The taller t-posts can be buried deeper in the ground, which will make them harder for bison to pull up. The committee agreed with this and will adjust the cost to allow for taller t-posts.

The committee discussed the importance of increasing hunting access on this property. They would like to see additional hunting allowed in order to help manage the elk population in this DAU. This could come in the form of working with the new dispersal coordinator (when one is selected), guided youth hunts, etc. They will consider this for future projects, and future funding will be dependent on developing better hunting access on this property.

The project was approved for \$1,531.20.

****Brian abstained from the committee decision****

Next meeting: February 8th, 2021 at 6:00 PM via Zoom.

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