



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

North Fork HPP Committee

Zoom Videoconference

September 1st, 2020

7:00 p.m.

North Fork HPP Members Present: Ken Holsinger, BLM; Cody Purcell, CPW; Steve Kossler, Livestock Grower; Ross Allen, Livestock Grower

Guests: Stuart Sinclair, Pat Tucker, CPW; Robbie LeValley, Delta County; Ilana Moir, CO West Land Trust

Introduction: The remaining budget at the start of the meeting was \$115,000.00. The committee received a 10% budget increase from last year, and this increase will remain in place for next year. In the following year, the State Council will evaluate each committee's budget and project spending to determine whether committee budgets will change again.

Old Business:

1. Scenic Mesa Ranch was approved for a seed project last year, however the funds were not utilized by the end of the fiscal year and the project was not implemented. The committee declined to re-fund the project in FY21 without reviewing an updated project proposal.

New Business:

1. Ilana Moir presented a conservation easement proposal for the Meek Ranch. The property is located south of Crawford and adjacent to USFS lands. Currently the property is in agricultural use and supports year-round use by big game, as well as representing important transitional and winter range. The greater area is likely to experience increasing residential development in the next several decades, as human population in Colorado continues to expand and hobby ranches or larger private properties with access to public lands become more popular. If the Meek Ranch was subdivided and development took place in the future, critical habitat for deer and elk would be lost, and the associated changes in big game distribution and movement patterns would likely result in increased game damage on nearby private lands with agricultural operations.

The proposal includes placing 1200 acres under a conservation easement, which would restrict future development on the property to three building envelopes in areas that would not add roads or other disruptive infrastructure, or otherwise disturb important wildlife areas. Ensuring that the property remains in agricultural production and cannot be developed in the future will help maintain habitat connectivity and prevent future game damage issues on other private lands. The project was approved for \$5,000 towards transaction costs.

2. Ilana presented a second conservation easement proposal for the Campbell Ranch. The property is adjacent to a major river corridor that experiences heavy year-round use by deer and elk, and is located in an area where future development of vacation homes and hobby ranches is likely. Currently the property is in agricultural use and supports year-round use by big game, as well as representing important transitional and winter range. If the ranch was subdivided and development took place in the future, critical habitat for deer and elk would be lost, and the associated changes in big game distribution and movement patterns would likely result in increased game damage on nearby private lands with agricultural operations.

The proposal includes placing 410 acres of the ranch under a conservation easement. The easement would restrict future development on the property to three building envelopes in areas that would not add roads or other disruptive infrastructure, or otherwise disturb important wildlife areas. The easement would also allow for hunting leases to help disperse deer and elk from the property during periods of heavier use or game damage. Ensuring that the property remains in agricultural production and cannot be developed in the future will help maintain habitat connectivity and prevent future game damage issues on other private lands. The project was approved for \$5,000 for transaction costs.

3. The committee reviewed a seeding proposal from Lazy H Ranch, which is part of a multi-year, landscape-scale habitat improvement effort. The project area is located in winter range for elk and experiences year-round use by deer; and includes irrigated hay fields with adjacent areas of thick oak brush and pinyon juniper. There is very little forage available outside of the fields, and so deer and elk utilize the fields for forage which severely reduces the amount of hay produced for livestock. 95+ acres of the project area has been masticated to reduce the oak brush and PJ communities and open the canopy. The proposal includes seeding the area to improve reestablishment of native forage species, and prevent noxious weed reemergence. Increasing the amount of forage available throughout the property should improve big game distribution and reduce big game pressure on the hayfields. The project was approved for \$5,000; and the committee noted that with the ongoing HPP assistance over the last several years, a summer tour of the property would be appreciated.
4. Robbie LeValley presented the annual proposal for the Delta County Weed Control project that has been implemented in conjunction with HPP for the past several years. Other partners include CDOT, CDA, and Montrose County. Each year the program treats hundreds of acres of public and private lands within Delta and Montrose counties utilizing multiple contractors. While some infestations are being maintained at or below current levels, weather conditions can vary annually and may result in different weed flushes in new locations (leafy purge appears to be a high priority for treatment this year). The project was approved for \$20,000.

5. The committee approved annual voucher allocations as follows: Fence vouchers - \$2,000 (10 vouchers @ \$200 each); pond cleanout vouchers - \$11,250 (15 vouchers @ \$750 each); herbicide vouchers - \$2,000 (10 vouchers @ \$200 each). The committee noted that distributing rolls of white high visibility wire (1 per \$200 fence voucher) was approved. Adding high vis wire to continually-damaged sections of fence will help to prevent future damages and extend the life of the fence/HPP investment.

6. The committee briefly discussed the fertilizer budget. Last year nearly \$50,000 was allocated to fertilizer vouchers, which is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run. Voucher amounts are decided based on the amount of use by elk, and the resulting damage to forage production. Some landowners are satisfied with their vouchers while others feel they are not receiving enough. Other HPP committees use a universal 'price per acre' system to more evenly distribute fertilizer funds, and have implemented a cap on fertilizer spending as a percent of their annual budget. The committee tabled the issue for further consideration in the spring.

Meeting adjourned. Next Meeting: TBD