



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES
Lower Colorado River HPP Committee
Zoom Video Conference
April 15th, 2021
1:00 pm

Lower Colorado HPP Members Present: Scot Dodero, Livestock Producer; Hilary Boyd, BLM; Pat Luark, Livestock Producer; Darren Chacon, CPW; Jim Nieslanik, Livestock Producer (proxy); Phil Nyland, USFS; Rick Bumgardner, Sportsman

Guests: Joe Hood, Dan Cacho, Christine Prins, Pat Tucker, Lloyd Gerard

Introduction: Committee members were introduced. The current remaining budget at the start of the meeting was \$79,365.69.

Public Comments:

1. Phil Nyland gave an update on the Toner Creek Mastication project. The scope of work may be changing based on contractor costs. Additional funding models were discussed, including renting equipment and having USFS personnel provide labor for the project. HPP cannot enter rental agreements or pay agency staff time. Phil will continue to work on firming up contractor costs and may need to resubmit the project to the committee if the scope of work substantially changes.
2. Darren informed the committee that there are only 3 fence vouchers left to issue. Landowners in need should contact their local DWM.

Minutes: The March 2021 minutes were reviewed and approved.

New Business:

Project Application Proposals and Reviews:

1. Joe Hood presented an aspen mitigation/clean up project. The project area is located in big game summer and transitional range for deer and elk, and experiences year-round use by moose. The area is north-facing and is utilized for fawning and calving. With the die off of mature aspen trees in recent years, parts of the landscape have become impassable for migrating wildlife and grazing livestock. Litter from down trees also suppresses forage production. The proposal includes treating 20-40 acres with heavy equipment to mow dying aspen and stack downed trees, which will help rejuvenate understory grasses and forage as well as improve the ability of big game to move through the area. This is a continuation of a previously approved project, and will help support CPW population objectives for deer and elk.

The project will help provide important habitat, especially since it is isolated from recreational impacts. The project was approved for \$7,550.00 for equipment time and labor.

2. Joe Hood presented another project for the same area. A pond on the property which is an important source of water for wildlife and livestock has become silted in, and no longer provides reliable water. The project involves cleaning the pond with heavy equipment and seeding around the pond, as well as the acres that are treated during the aspen mitigation project. The seed mix has been reviewed and will perform well at mid-to-high elevation. The project was approved for \$3,781.25 for seed and equipment costs. The committee noted that the aspen mitigation work as well as this project would be ideal for a project tour this summer or next FY.
 - a. Note: administratively, this project will be combined with the aspen mitigation project for HPP's Tracker database and payment processes.
3. The committee reviewed a request for white vinyl wire from Lloyd Gerard. Mr. Gerard leases open space on Brush Creek, which experiences heavy elk use. A public road is being rerouted through the area, and high visibility wire is needed for new sections of fence along the road. Hunting is not permitted on that property, however hunters can cross the open space to access adjacent BLM lands for hunting. High visibility wire will ensure that big game does not pull down sections of fence or become entangled. The project was approved for 8 rolls of white wire from HPP's inventory.
4. The committee reviewed a virtual fence project from Pat Luark. Mr. Luark has a 640-acre section on BLM allotments which have multiple areas in need of rest from poor soil and overgrazing issues. Virtual fencing that utilizes shock collars for cattle will help improve grazing management and allow for proper rotation of livestock without needing to build physical fences. Big game will benefit from increased forage production and availability when livestock are not present on those sections of the allotment, and the range will recover from previous grazing issues.

The committee discussed the nature of the match, which was intended to be the value of the forage left on the landscape for big game grazing. There were concerns that this project would set a precedent of paying permittees not to graze on allotments, which is not within the scope of HPP. The committee has considered leasing private acres for exclusive wildlife use as well as other types of forage purchases, but has ultimately decided that this is not an appropriate use of HPP money if the purchase does not also help reduce big game conflicts on neighboring private agricultural operations. However, the committee is interested in exploring the utility of fenceless grazing management and recognizes the value of proper grazing rotation to restore range health and ability to produce forage for big game.

It was noted that BLM has invested at least \$45,000 on infrastructure, including towers for collar signals. The committee suggested that rather than the value of the forage, the additional BLM funds and permittee time spent on deploying collars, assembling towers, and additional purchase costs would be a more appropriate match. The landowner agreed to share more of the collar costs, and the project was approved as a pilot/test project for \$5,000 towards collar purchases. The committee requested that any media or news releases from the BLM regarding this effort include recognition of HPP's contribution, and that BLM should provide updates and final data from this project to HPP. They also discussed the importance of deploying this project as a test of a new type of management tool to improve range conditions and support big game population objectives, rather than simply a virtual fence to make ranching operations easier for the operator or as a forage purchase.

- a) Administrative note: HPP will not entertain future requests from virtual fencing from any committee until data is available from this project, and the test deployment of Agersens virtual fencing testing in Gunnison Basin.

Other Business:

1. Due to the HPP admin shortage, the committee will not have another FY21 meeting unless an 'emergency' project is brought forward. Next meeting dates will be determined after a replacement admin is hired for the committee.

Next Meeting: TBD