



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

San Juan Basin HPP Committee

Zoom Videoconference

February 8th, 2021

6:00 p.m.

San Juan Basin HPP Members Present: Adrian Archuleta, CPW; Aran Johnson, SUIT; Phil Craig, Livestock Grower; John Gardner, Sportsman; Mike Schmidt, BLM; Dan Huntington, Livestock Grower; Anthony Garcia, USFS; Jesse Montoya, Livestock Grower

Guests: Dave Dillon, Davin Montoya, Tom Brossia, Pat Tucker, Toby Cook, Noah Daniels

Introduction: Committee members and guests were introduced. The remaining budget at the beginning of the meeting was \$66,312.93.

New Business:

1. Tom Brossia and Dave Dillon introduced themselves to solicit State Council nominations from the committee for the sportsperson representative position. Committee members asked questions of both candidates, and approved both nominations.
2. Davin Montoya presented a brush management project. The project area is located in big game summer and transition range, and is adjacent to irrigated hayland which experiences heavy elk use. The hay fields are surrounded by dry land and draws, which are overgrown with oak brush and snowberry. Lack of forage in the draws and nearby areas causes big game to graze on the hay crop, causing damage to the field and loss of crops. The project involves masticating 35 acres within an 80-acre area with a dozer. Thinning will occur in a mosaic pattern, which will allow new, quality forage to develop in the understory. Some larger oak brush will be left to provide cover to encourage big game to use the area. The treated areas will be reseeded with a grass mix to improve forage quality and availability for big game. Providing forage in these alternate areas will help hold big game off of the hayfields, and reduce the amount of game damage to irrigated fields. The project was approved for \$9,900.

3. The committee reviewed fertilizer project proposals. There were 19 applicants this year for a total of 1498 acres. The committee approved \$24.00 per acre with a \$4,000 cap on individual recipients, for a total project cost of \$35,032.00.

Other Business:

1. Toby Cook and Noah Daniels gave an update on the Vallecito-Piedra burn project. In 2020 there was a moratorium on burning due to the pandemic and air quality concerns. The current task order with \$142,000 is set to expire at the end of June 2021. A spring burn window is not anticipated, however USFS feels confident that the remaining funds could be spent by October 2021. Alternatively, Toby asked the committee if the funds could be redirected towards mechanical thinning in the same area, which could be completed by June 30th and achieve a similar effect on a smaller scale. The committee discussed this at length. Several concerns were identified: the funds were originally intended to treat a large number of new, untreated areas north of Highway 160, and the mechanical treatment would not accomplish the same scale and might be in a different location, which is a lower priority for the committee. Additionally, there may be contracting difficulties from the USFS side, especially if a burn window occurs after mechanical treatment has already been contracted. HPP and the State Council wants to support burn projects, but having a mechanical treatment built in as a “fall-back” option may make such projects less appealing. Further information is needed to explore this idea for the existing task order and future burn requests. The committee approved a task order amendment to extend the funding for one additional year, and would be willing to consider mechanical treatment as a fall-back option if burning is not accomplished by the end of the fall burn season.
2. The committee briefly discussed whether acres leased on tribal lands would qualify for HPP projects. The general consensus was that due to restrictions on non-member hunting, tribal acres would not qualify for voucher programs, and would be unlikely to meet the scope of regular HPP projects. However, some situations may occur where the committee would be willing to consider exceptions for a landscape-scale habitat project that significantly benefitted big game on adjacent non-tribal lands.
3. Adrian briefly reviewed initial data from the 2020 hunting season. CWD has been detected in deer in the committee area.

Meeting adjourned. Next meeting April 19 @ 6:00pm