



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

Lower Colorado River HPP Committee
Eagle County Government Building- 500 Broadway, Eagle, CO
April 6, 2022
1:00 pm

Lower Colorado HPP Members Present: Darren Chacon- CPW, Scot Dodero- Livestock Grower, Pat Luark- Livestock Grower, Jim Nieslanik- Livestock Grower, Rick Bumgardner- Sportsperson, Hilary Boyd- BLM, Phil Nyland- USFS

Guests: Michael Blanck- CPW, Evan Jones- CPW, Mike Swaro- CPW, Evan Koster, Brian Hightower, Tim Nieslanik, Mark Logan, Chase Nieslanik

Introductions: Committee members and guests were introduced.

General Public Comments:

Budget Report: The remaining budget at the start of the meeting was \$69,663.10.

Old Business: The minutes from the February 1st meeting were approved as written.

New Business:

1. St. Benedict's Monastery Gates- The committee reviewed a project from St. Benedict's Monastery to replace gates on the property. The property maintains approximately 50 gates which are opened every year after haying season to allow for better elk movement through the property. A few of the gates are unable to be used any longer which has caused elk to have to jump fences in some sections. This has led to elk damage along the fence lines where the elk have been crossing which has posed an entanglement risk and the need for repairs. The new gates will aid in providing more sections for elk to pass through and reduce damage to fences. The project was approved for up to \$2,054.24.
2. Anderson Fence- Evan Koster presented a fence project to implement approximately 1 mile of fence on a property leased for livestock pasture. The existing fence is in a state of disrepair and poses entanglement risks to deer and elk that graze in the pasture. The project aims to implement new wildlife friendly fence to adequately contain livestock and serve as a visual aid for wildlife. The committee discussed the large numbers of elk and deer that graze in the area and the idea of laydown fence. It was determined that laydown fence would not be used however, the committee recommended lowering the white vinyl top wire in commonly crossed areas to aid in the ease of wildlife passage. The project was approved for up to \$6,453.55.

3. Coffman Ranch Fence- Brian Hightower of Aspen Valley Land Trust presented a fence project to replace approximately 1.5 miles of fence on their Coffman Ranch property. The existing fence line is made up of woven wire and a couple strands of barbed wire. The committee was familiar with the fence and concurred that it was not wildlife friendly and would be great to replace with wildlife friendly fence. The committee asked if hunting was allowed on the property and were informed that hunting was not currently allowed. Brian stated he would approach the board to consider hunting opportunities. The committee was willing to fund the project with the anticipation that hunting may be allowed in the future. The project was approved for up to \$9,900.00.
4. East Mesa Water Improvement- Tim Nieslanik presented a ditch improvement project due to elk damage. The East Mesa ditch provides water to livestock, wildlife, and agricultural fields. This section of the ditch is located in good deer and elk habitat and is frequently used and crossed by wildlife in the area. In some sections, wildlife have created heavily used trails that have subsequently caused significant cuts on the ditch banks. This has led to the weakening of the bank and caused severe erosion of the bank in several sections. The committee was presented with several photos of crossed areas of the ditch and noted the significant cost and related issues if a ditch failure was to occur in the damaged sections. The project aims to implement 4 permanent crossing structures through the use of culverts, rocks, and concrete in the most heavily used wildlife crossings along the ditch. These crossings would ideally funnel elk and allow for better movement across the property and reduce the need for elk to wade through and cross other sections of the ditch line. The project was approved for up to \$12,000.00.
5. Lone Creek Land Company Fence- Mark Logan presented a fence replacement project of approximately 4 miles on the Porcupine Ridge Ranch. The existing fence line is currently in disrepair and does not effectively contain livestock. The dilapidated fence is not wildlife friendly and poses issues for livestock and wildlife entanglement. The ranch is located in great big game habitat where big game species are abundant and present year-round. This fence will assist in maintaining big game habitat through the use of grazing rotations and ideally reduce fence damage from wildlife. The committee noted the significant amount of wildlife in the area where the ranch is located and that this location is ideal to implement wildlife friendly fence. The proposal was a bit over the committee guidelines for fencing projects however the committee agreed to make an exception for this project due to the significant wildlife populations and benefits of implementing a wildlife friendly fence in the area. The project was approved for up to \$27,334.10.
6. Luark Railroad Lease Seeding- Pat Luark presented a seeding project on a leased property. The property serves as good winter range and has large herds of deer and antelope. Due to drought and overgrazing, the 150 acre parcel does not provide adequate, quality forage for wildlife and livestock in the area. Additionally, the dryland pasture has erosion issues and noxious weeds have taken root. The project aims to establish a cover crop on the degraded pasture to increase habitat values and available forage. The parcel would be seeded with spring triticale and spring peas to aid in soil health and forage for livestock and wildlife. Additionally, the seeding would aid in the reduction of erosion in the area and aid in noxious weed control. Pat Luark abstained from the approval decision. The project was approved for up to \$5,187.50.
7. Nieslanik Aerial Weed Spraying- Jim Nieslanik presented an aerial weed spraying project. Aerial spraying as proved to be a successful tool for the ranch and they would like to continue this work to target the noxious weeds on the property. Thistle has taken root and has limited the grass available for livestock and wildlife. The spraying will allow for an even application of chemical and target areas of the ranch as needed.

The reduction of noxious weeds in the area will provide more quality forage for both wildlife and livestock. Jim Nieslanik abstained from the approval decision. The project was approved for up to \$2,400.00.

8. CPW Basalt SWA Weed Control- Darren Chacon presented a weed control project for the Toner Creek Unit of the Basalt State Wildlife Area (SWA). The Basalt SWA serves as deer and elk winter range and provides big game hunting access. The Toner Creek Unit of the SWA previously maintained agricultural fields but have since been infested with noxious weeds. CPW staff have attempted to manage weed infestations through mechanical treatments, weed spraying, and community-wide projects to assist with weed removal. With limited staff and time available, there is a need to conduct additional weed spraying treatments to mitigate the further spread and continued establishment of noxious weeds. Weed control across the total 300 acres will improve big game habitat values and provide more quality forage for wildlife. Darren Chacon abstained from the approval decision. The project was approved for up to \$12,000.00 from State Council funds and an additional \$1,000.00 from the Lower Colorado River Committee.

*Administrative note- The \$1,000.00 from the LCRHPP Committee is no longer required and has been unencumbered from this project.

Remaining Committee Business/Other Discussion:

1. Luark Vence Update- Pat Luark provided an update on the Vence system implemented on his cattle operation. The Lower Colorado River HPP Committee funded a portion of the project which served as part of a pilot program for HPP to assess the effectiveness and applicability to the program. Overall, the Luarks are very happy with the virtual fence system and will continue to use it on their operation. The following is a short synopsis of the evaluation shared with the committee:
 - Would highly recommend the use of virtual fence technology
 - Training period is approximately 2 weeks
 - Start within an already fenced pasture
 - Set virtual boundary within the established fence line
 - Gradually continue to move boundary further out
 - Test by feeding on other side of virtual boundary
 - System is user friendly with previous computer experience
 - Use natural barriers such as ridgelines or roads to aid in setting boundaries
 - A well designed grazing rotation is essential to success
 - All interior property fences have been removed
 - Great vegetative response with rest rotational grazing implemented through the use of the collars
 - HPP's participation in the implementation of virtual fencing could reduce fences on the landscape for the benefit of wildlife, incentivize leaving forage for wildlife, and the use of rest rotation
2. Upcoming Meetings- The committee tentatively approved the following meeting date and associated location:
May 10, 2022 - Glenwood Springs

Roundtable: The committee discussed the remaining budget and potential projects that could be presented at the next meeting.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:10 pm.