



HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

HPP State Council Committee
September 27, 2022 1pm - 5pm; September 28, 2022 8am - 12pm
In Person/Zoom Virtual Meeting; Surf Hotel, 1012 Front Loop, Buena Vista

State Council HPP Members, Manager, Assistant Present: Ty Bevan, John Hardwick, Hunter Seim, Gary Visintainer, Robbie LeValley, Michael Blanck, Teri Polley

State Council HPP Members Virtual: Todd Peterson, Brian Dreher

Additional Attendees & Guests: Travis Black, Garrett Watson, Kim Berscheid, Marian Cole, Dustin Wise, Chris West

September 27 1:00 - 4:00

Introductions/Discussion with Travis Black, Northwest Regional Manager

Travis introduced himself and expressed his appreciation to the council for their time and effort. HPP is an important statewide program and helps to solve many issues for the agency.

HPP Council Question and Comments

Instead of a roundtable near the end of the meeting, Michael asked the council for questions, comments and updates to begin the meeting.

Brian Dreher updated the council on several items: 1) Regarding the wolf planning process, both the Stakeholder Advisory Group and Technical Working Group held their final meetings wrapping up a 15-month-long process that will inform Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff as they prepare to present the draft Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan to the CPW Commission on December 9th. Once this draft plan is submitted, there will be multiple meetings scheduled dedicated to hearing public comments on the final plan. 2) As an agency, CPW decided to have a habitat unit and recently hired Casey Cooley to manage this program as the new Habitat Unit Supervisor in the Terrestrial Section. Casey will report directly to me/Brian and supervise the four statewide habitat coordinators, Ray Aberle, CPW Private Lands Program Manager and Brian Sullivan, CPW Wetlands Program Coordinator. In the future, four habitat biologists at the field level will be hired. Over the past 20 years, Casey has served in several roles within the agency as an Area Habitat Biologist, an Area Conservation Biologist and Forest Habitat Coordinator. 3) Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) is federal legislation that will provide roughly 26M annually to the state of Colorado for work to be done on species of concern. There is a chance this legislature may go through shortly and provide many opportunities for the agency to work on species of concern. 4) Colorado Parks and Wildlife are currently working with the BLM on a couple of resource management plans. Two of the plans are associated with the Greater Sage Grouse and Gunnison Sage Grouse; also big game migration corridors and movements.



Todd Peterson shared with the council that local committee members expressed to no longer having virtual meetings.

Michael Blanck announced Katie Richman, Administrative Assistant for the six southwest committees, has accepted a new position with the agency as a Grant Specialist. Michael will be filling this vacancy soon. Also, NRCS will be accepting their EQIP application in October with a December 3rd deadline for submission.

Gary Visintainer agreed that moving this business of the meeting to the beginning is a good idea. The Colorado Wool Growers discussed virtual fencing at their last meeting, and the Visintainer Ranch hosted the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission in September. The brief site visit was for the Ranching for Wildlife Program and Gary was able to point out previous HPP projects on the ranch.

As a crop producer representative on the state council for twenty-two years, John Hardwick shared he was glad term limits were going to be discussed at this meeting. The effective members of the local committees keep the projects going.

Ty Bevan had a field trip to Divide Creek/Garfield Creek State Wildlife Area to view the brush-chopping projects in the past ten years and the regrowth. It was interesting to see how the mosaic patterns benefitted the wildlife and their movement.

Hunter Seim shared that the BLM named Doug Vilsack as the BLM Colorado State Director. Doug's optimism and this appointment to BLM senior leadership are exciting. The BLM has a pilot virtual fence project with the base station on BLM ground and this fence is gaining traction with the BLM agency. Additionally, at the recent NW Resource Council Meeting, one of the focuses was on virtual fencing.

Kim Berscheid shared she is enjoying her second year as an administrative assistant to the HPP committees on the east slope.

Marian Cole thanked the council and was glad to be part of the meeting.

Robbie LeValley shared there is reporting that a 16-20% failure rate of virtual collars. The majority of the cows follow the lead cow, but we need to temper our expectations of the virtual fence and not start tearing out an existing fence. Robbie was optimistic the technology will improve. The collars are not falling off in the brush and they still send a signal. The unit in the collar is just not working.

Travis Black shared that the reauthorization of the HPP program is a major step forward. The agency is looking at the bison in western Colorado and is in the very early stages of putting some working groups together.



Preliminary FY2022 Annual Report

State Council discussed and approved the FY22 annual report, which is similar in content and format to past years. There was a discussion about easements and wildlife migration corridors both on the landscape and the highways. Conservation easements are included in all committee Distribution Plans as an allowable method and tool to preserve wildlife habitat and reduce conflicts. HPP cannot hold an easement nor does HPP participate in the funding of the easement itself. State Statutes only provide for CPW and the Commission to enter into real estate projects and HPP can only contribute to transaction costs. Land trusts are the normal entity for easements that HPP works with. They become the easement holder while the HPP committee assists with necessary transaction costs to implement the easement, ie survey, baseline records, management plans, mineral searches, appraisals, etc. on a reimbursable basis only after the easement has been signed and recorded. Brian added he would like to see project spotlights added to the report.

Term Limits for State Council and Committees

With the passage of the current bill, the council discussed term limits for the committees and the state council. The statute reads four-year term limits with an unlimited amount of terms for the existing council. Although the statute is in place there is no policy. Instead of endorsements from grassroots organizations, the discussion circled around the organization putting forth recommendations. Marian Cole will be working on a special assignment to raise awareness among these organizations about the Habitat Partnership Program. The discussion also included onboarding new members and the value of the current members to both the local committees and the council. The council approved the term limit policy Michael proposed to them.

Council/Committee Representative Performance Standards & the Council's Role

The council continued discussing the HPP program and efforts to actively work on EDI investments with the council and committee representatives. People need to be committed to attendance when important topics are being discussed and decided on to progress the program forward.

Committee Approval Prior to State Council Funding

The Council decided the local committee's large projects that need additional State Council funding shall first obtain support from the local committee. If the local committee is not able to hold a meeting prior to the request for funding at the next State Council meeting, they can individually and without discussion, convey through HPP administrative staff their conceptual support of the Council considering funding the project. Alternatively, the state council can appropriate additional funding to the local committee to cover the project so that the local committee has adequate funds available at their next meeting.



September 28 8:00 - Noon

Projects

The Bijou Creek Ranch Fence, Area 14 Aaron Berscheid & Rough Cut Ranch Tire Tank/Fence Projects, Fowler CO, Area 14 Jordon were canceled and not discussed.

NFWF RESTORE Update

Chris West, Director, of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Rocky Mountain Regional Office gave an update presentation and the council had a long discussion about the projects and mapping. The state council committed \$500,000 last year to RESTORE. Michael sits on the review panel for the projects presented. The RESTORE Colorado program expects to award approximately \$3.5 million in 2023 to 12-16 projects, with a minimum grant amount of \$100,000.

Deployment of HPP in Areas Not Historically Covered by an HPP Committee Boundary

Dustin Wise Sportsman Rep/Chair Republican Rivers HPP Committee spoke to the state council about operating in areas outside local committee boundaries and the types of projects he anticipates coming to the State Council from these areas on the eastern plains.

State Wildlife Area Funding

The State Wildlife Area weed and fence funding was discussed and the decision was made to extend funding to include mastication, water projects, and seeding. The SWA technicians are tasked with long-term planning and extending funding to add these three is helpful; additionally, the agency gave the SWA's a 20% budgetary increase for operating and maintenance.

Additional Funding Projects

The council approved Michael's request to provide additional funding to cover a water project to be heard by the Northwest Colorado Committee that is in excess of his \$20,000 approval authority.

Kencove White Wire

The state council approved to purchase up to 25 rolls per committee for inventory.