



## HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

### Grand Mesa HPP Committee

1850 Railroad Ave, Rifle CO 81650

February 20th, 2020

1:00 p.m.

**Grand Mesa HPP Members Present:** Harley Metz, Sportsperson; Heidi Plank, BLM; Kirk Oldham, CPW; Paul Bernklau, Livestock Producer; John Walter, Livestock Producer; Bob Mosher, USFS

**Guests:** Pat Tucker, Bob Morris, Michael Blanck, Scott Hoyer, Travis Bybee, Bob Price, Gary Galloway, Kiley Wheeler, Marjorie Alessandri, Peter Dodd, Wayne McCray, Ivan Archer, Jim Toomer, Dorothy Nauroth, Erin Quinn, Eric Bruton, Jacob Click, Brandon Bruton, Chuck Nichols, Jerry Rew

**Introduction:** Committee members and guests were introduced. The remaining budget at the start of the meeting was \$42,597.00.

#### **Old Business:**

1. Kirk Oldham briefly discussed new rules for the committee concerning applications. Having applications submitted 10 days prior to the meeting has helped streamline the process for DWM and committee review, and having properly completed application forms will help the committee and admin track projects and results.
2. Kirk also briefly reviewed the 2019 HPP Statewide Meeting and thanked Pat and the State Council for putting the event together.
3. Robert (Bob) Mosher was presented and welcomed as the new USFS representative.

#### **New Business:**

1. The committee reviewed fertilizer project proposals. The budget for fertilizer projects was \$25,375.00. There were 20 applicants this year for a total of 3164 acres. The price per acre came to \$8.00, and this amount was approved by the committee.

2. Marjorie Alessandri presented a weed control project to target thistle and other broadleaf noxious weeds. The area is located in important big game habitat, but ongoing weed infestations diminish forage quality for deer and elk. Neighboring landowners are also involved in treating weeds in the area, and this property represents an important piece in targeting weeds on a landscape scale. The committee noted that this type of project could be accomplished via herbicide vouchers, and approved Ms. Alessandri to receive two vouchers to cover herbicide costs.
3. Brandon Bruton presented a weed control project to remove jointed goatgrass. Most of the property is under a conservation easement, and experiences heavy use by elk and deer in the fall and winter. 50 acres of hayfields are heavily infested, which reduces the amount and quality of forage produced for wildlife and livestock. The project involves applying herbicide and reseeding with dryland alfalfa. If the treatment is successful, more acres may be treated in additional phases. The project was approved for \$4,750.00 for herbicide costs.
4. Kiley Wheeler presented several small weed control and seeding projects on different fields including contracted brush removal and weed spraying, and application of seed. The total project budget was \$21,347.50 and the requested HPP contribution was for 50% (\$10,673.75). The project application was not completed in its entirety, and so the project was briefly tabled until the end of the agenda.
5. Chuck Nichols presented a project for several pond cleanouts on BLM allotments. The existing ponds have been an important source of water in previous years for big game, and the ponds have been repaired a number of times. Currently the ponds are in disrepair and do not hold water. The project involves using heavy equipment to clean out and repair ponds. The GAB may have additional cooperator funds available in the fall to clean more ponds in the area, but Mr. Nichols would like to get started cleaning ponds this spring. The project was approved for \$1,251 for a minimum of 3 ponds, and GAB funding will be sought in the fall for additional ponds.
6. John Walter presented a water development project to replace an open ditch with underground pipeline. The current open ditches experience significant water loss to evaporation as the ditch line meanders through the area, and livestock cause significant erosion and degradation to the ditch banks. Installing pipeline will not only deliver water more efficiently to existing pastures, but will also allow Mr. Walter to irrigate 20 new acres that were previously too dry to produce forage. The property is heavily utilized by deer and elk, and a significant amount of forage loss is tolerated by the landowner; however increasing forage production would help offset future losses. The project budget includes cooperator funds from the landowner and a large contribution from NRCS. The HPP request is for \$10,000 from the Grand Mesa committee and an additional \$45,000 from the State Council for a total of \$55,000 in HPP funding. Since there are sufficient funds left in the budget, the committee felt it would be more appropriate to provide a larger contribution at this time and ask the State Council to make up the balance. The project was approved for \$20,000, and the committee will forward the project to the State Council for the remaining \$35,000 request with John Walter abstaining from the vote.
7. Erin Quinn presented an Aspen Valley Land Trust presented a conservation easement proposal for Don Fulton's property. 261 acres of the property are already enrolled in a conservation easement, and this project would add 518 acres to the existing CE. The property is located in an important migration corridor for deer and elk, and also supports

some resident big game year-round. The current easement includes CPW wildlife stipulations for fences, hunting access, etc, and these . The proposed easement would include 7 building envelopes for home sites to allow future development by heirs, although only a total of 5 homes may be constructed. The specific sites for the building envelopes have not yet been selected. The committee discussed the building envelopes at length, including whether the development of home sites was contrary to or inconsistent with the easement and wildlife values of the property. HPP's investment in a CE would need to be protected in the long-term against degradation of habitat by home construction and associated infrastructure, including new roads, fences, utilities, etc. The committee was supportive of the project in general, but the proposal was tabled until more information could be obtained about the locations of the potential building envelope sites. The committee suggested that DWM Travis Bybee work with AVLT and Don to determine the best sites that would minimally impact the quality of the big game habitat on the property.

8. The committee reviewed a stackyard proposal from Jim Toomer. An existing stackyard was established through Game Damage, however the posts and gates have become damaged and need to be repaired to maintain the integrity of the stackyard. The Game Damage program can only provide complete stackyards, not repair materials. The committee approved \$700.00 to purchase repair materials, and the landowner will provide labor to install the posts and gates.
9. The committee reviewed a proposal from Duane Junge for an irrigation project. The property experiences year-round use by big game. Two existing ponds were previously filled via a pipe/ditch for wildlife use and irrigation. The 2014 Salt Creek slide destroyed the ditch and the ponds have not filled with water since. This has caused increased wildlife pressure on water sources in Buzzard Creek, resulting in damages to fences and forage and conflicts with livestock for water. The project includes piping 140-feet of the ditch through the slide area to carry water to the existing ponds, which are still in good condition and hold water. The project was approved for \$3,000 for materials.
10. The committee resumed discussion of the Wheeler projects. The first project includes brush and cheatgrass removal on a 50-acre parcel and reseeding with alfalfa. The second project involves bringing a 15-acre irrigated field into forage production. The field is in a rotation where it is farmed and then rested, and this year it is due to be farmed again. The final project includes continuing work on a 100-acre parcel that needs to be sprayed for weeds, disced, and seeded. Each project site is located in important transition and winter range for big game, and experiences significant wildlife use and associated forage loss. For ease of funding considerations, the committee combined the costs of all three projects into one budget. The committee felt that some of the match labor was valued too highly or included too many labor hours, inflating the total cost of the project. The match values were revised to be more in line with committee expectations. The committee agreed to fund the cost of seed and 50% of the contracted spraying costs, which totaled \$8,427.50. The expected match from the Wheelers is \$9,050.00, which represents 50% of the contractor costs for spraying and additional labor to prep fields and apply seed. HPP's funds may be administratively split between projects as needed.

**Roundtable:**

1. Kirk briefly reviewed the CPW Mountain Lion plan.

**Next Meeting: Phone Conference on March 4<sup>th</sup> for Fulton Conservation Easement; regularly scheduled committee meeting on April 29<sup>th</sup>.**