



## HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

### San Juan Basin HPP Committee

Zoom Videoconference

February 28, 2022

6:00 p.m.

**San Juan Basin HPP Members Present:** Anthony Garcia, USFS; Phil Craig, Livestock Grower; Dan Huntington, Livestock Grower; Ty Smith, CPW; John Gardner, Sportsman; George Malarsie, Sportsman; Jesse Montoya, Livestock Grower

**Guests:** Sarah Bangert, Chris Warmack, Wayne Warmack

**Introduction:** Committee members and guests were introduced. Ty Smith was introduced as the new CPW representative. The remaining budget at the beginning of the meeting was \$56,660.00.

#### **Old Business:**

1. Sarah Bangert gave an update on Phase 1 of the Valley View Prescribed Grazing project. Goats were used to graze oakbrush regrowth after the East Canyon Fire to prevent heavy reemergence and allow grasses and forbes to reestablish. Continued grazing may be spread throughout the year to target different species and widen the impacted plant communities; and drill seed via light hoof impacts. The goats also removed musk thistle, which reduces the quality of forage for big game. No game damage claims were made this year, which was attributed to careful supervision by herders, use of livestock guard dogs, and nighttime electric fencing. The committee noted that oak regrowth utilizes most of the available water in the ground, and that holding the oak back allowed the forage and beneficial shrubs to reestablish well despite the continued drought.

#### **New Business:**

1. Sarah Bangert presented Phase 2 of the project, which would be implemented in fall 2022. The goats would be used to treat 300 acres, with retreatment in spring of 2023. The cost per acre is difficult to determine because the pricing is based on the number of goats per day, but the estimated range is \$43 - \$96 per acre. The Western Sustainable Agricultural Research & Education Center is a new partner for this year and is providing \$25,000 to support research on using goats to suppress gambel oak and musk thistle. The committee noted that this type of work is not a short-term project and will require retreatment in successive years, but felt that this project was

a unique opportunity to evaluate the use of goats to control oakbrush. The committee also felt that this type of project gains a cumulative effect, with long-term efforts continuing to produce improved results over time. The project was approved for \$11,250.00 in FY23.

2. Wayne and Chris Warmack presented a solar well project. The property is located in a very dry area of the Dry Creek migration corridor and experiences year-round use by deer and some resident elk, however water with sufficient cover is increasingly difficult for big game to find. Existing ponds and springs in the area have begun to go dry for the first time in decades, leaving large swaths of the landscape without consistent water sources for several miles. Ongoing work within the project area includes replanting forage and brush management, but these habitat improvements will not be fully utilized by big game without sufficient water. The project consists of drilling water well that will be fitted with a solar pump and stock tank to increase water availability and storage capacity for big game. Increasing water throughout the area will improve big game distribution, and allow deer and elk to better utilize the other habitat improvements on the property. No domestic livestock will use the property, although hunting is allowed.  
The project cost was quoted as \$23,915.00, which included up to 240' of drilling. However, the final cost may be higher depending on the depth of the water. The committee discussed several funding models, and noted that well projects are typically approved for 50% of project costs and are only reimbursable if the well produces water. The project was approved for \$11,957.50 for FY23. The committee noted that if prices increased substantially due to drilling or infrastructure costs, the landowners were welcome to apply for additional funding; however the budget modification would need to be made before the extra labor or materials purchases were initiated.
3. The committee discussed FY22 fertilizer vouchers. There were 18 applicants this year for a total of 2295 acres, with a \$4,000 cap on individual recipients. The committee approved \$20/acre, for a project total of \$38,700.00. The committee also decided to set \$20/acre as a permanent annual rate.

**Meeting adjourned. Next meeting May 9<sup>th</sup>**