



## HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

### Gunnison Basin HPP Committee

CPW Office - 300 W. New York St, Gunnison CO

March 22, 2022

11:00am

**Gunnison Basin HPP Members Present:** Nick Gallowich, CPW; Dayle Funka, USFS; Paul Mowery, Livestock Grower; Navid Navidi, Sportsman; Shane Cox, Livestock Grower; Steve Guerrieri, Livestock Grower; Kathy Brodhead, BLM

**Guests:** Michael Blanck, CPW; Aiden Downey, USFS; Aleshia Rummel, NRCS; Burt Guerrieri, Terry Southworth, USFS; Nichole Schultheis

**Introductions & Budget:** Committee members and guests were introduced. The remaining budget at the beginning of the meeting was \$110,499.50.

#### **Old Business:**

1. Aleshia Rummel presented an update to the virtual fence project. The collars operate in a similar fashion to a dog shock collar, with an audio tone warning prior to the shock. Animal welfare regulations are observed with a cessation of shock after a set time interval if the animal continues past the boundary. Calves are typically not collared, and may be able to learn from the cows that the audio tone signals a boundary. The virtual fences are currently programmed through cellular data, but the long-term desire is to switch to satellite. The manufacturer has been incorporating design updates based on feedback from this trial, and the NRCS is working on incorporating the technology into standard grazing management protocols.

#### **New Business:**

1. Burt Guerrieri presented a pond cleanout proposal on USFS allotments. The allotments are located in big game summer and transitional range. Water may be a limiting factor in the area for deer and elk. Stock ponds in the area have not been cleaned in several decades, and they have become silted in such that they do not efficiently hold water. This results in poor livestock and big game distribution around the remaining water sources, and competition for water. Very few fences exist on the allotment, so water is the primary means of controlling livestock distribution and grazing pressure. Livestock use is from July 1 - September 30. The project consists of cleaning and repairing a minimum of 20 ponds to improve water storage capacity. Holding more water on the landscape for longer periods of time will improve big game distribution and reduce competition with livestock. The project was approved for 50% of

contractor costs up to \$25,000, with Steve Guerrieri abstaining from the consensus decision.

2. Nick Gallowich presented a weed control project on BLM and USFS lands. The project area is located in important transitional and winter range for elk, and experiences year-round use by deer. Cheatgrass is present within Gunnison Basin and is rapidly outcompeting native forage species, which reduces habitat quality for big game on public lands. Constant monitoring and control efforts are needed to reduce current infestations and prevent spread into new areas. The proposal includes purchasing herbicide for treatment on approximately 450 acres within NPS, BLM, and USFS lands to help reduce current infestations and prevent spread throughout adjacent areas. Eliminating cheatgrass will allow native forage species to reestablish, which will increase access to adequate nutrition for big game on public lands. This work is also considered pre-treatment for planned prescribed burning in the area. The project was approved for \$15,000 for herbicide costs.
  
3. Kathy Brodhead presented an informational item for a BLM fencing project. Many existing fences on BLM lands are not wildlife-friendly, and there is growing interest in landscape-scale retrofitting to wildlife-friendly. Currently seasonal employees are identifying and measuring fences to be removed or retrofitted. Fences within one mile of a sage grouse lek will be given higher priority. HPP may be asked to provide materials to support this project.

**Roundtable:**

1. The committee discussed exclusionary fences. There is a property near a SWA that experiences heavy wildlife use during migration and winter, and the landowners are tolerant of deer and elk on the majority of the property. Collaring data shows that the property lies in a major migration route, and if the area is targeted for highway over or underpasses, this property would be a likely site for installation. A small vegetable farm is present on the property, and there is a need for exclusionary fence to protect that operation. The committee noted that while HPP does not typically fund exclusionary fences, this maybe an instance where it is an appropriate treatment. No application has been submitted at this time.

**Next meeting: TBD**