

Gravelly Landscape Collaborative Meeting Notes  
**MONDAY, February 12, 2018**

**Purpose: Focus on Current Conditions and Opportunities in the Tobacco Roots**

Attending: Patricia Rydberg, Al Cerrum, Craig Staley, John Anderson, David Delisi, Carol Delisi, Sharon Berry, Glen and Barb Dunlap, Mike Berry, Claudia MacFarlane, George Trischman, Steve Primm, Darcie Warden, David Stout, Jake Stewart, Patrick Toalson, Jim King, Dale Olson, Glenn Hockett, Kevin Suzuki, Linda Owens, Tom Urell, Kris Inman, Jennifer Boyer facilitator,

Trapline:

- Mule Deer Foundation Ghosts of Madison chapter is looking for new members
- August 14<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Speakers Series at Woodson Ranch visitor center – topic is fish
- Madison Valley Ranchlands Group is hosting a meeting on Brucellosis - Thursday, February 22, 2018 in Three Forks
- May 15-17 Bear Creek Days education days 4-8<sup>th</sup> grades
- Greenhorn NEPA meeting next week to keep the process moving on time
- WCS and partners have a Wildlife Speaker Series during the summer and it is top notch, watch for dates and topics
- Watershed meeting 6pm on Feb. 21<sup>st</sup> in Sheridan
- DNRC water Summit March 5-7<sup>th</sup> David Stout has scholarship funding available through the CD/watershed
- Madison and Ruby CD banquet April 21<sup>st</sup> at Round Barn in Twin Bridges – it sells out so be sure to get your tickets

DAVID STOUT – Ruby Valley Watershed

The work that we are focusing on in the southern Tobacco Roots is based on our Watershed Restoration Plan that identifies stream conditions and outlines opportunities for meeting water quality standards and functions. Our Watershed Restoration Plan prioritizes work for sediment and improve water quality. The majority of sediment coming into the Ruby was identified in the lower Ruby / Southern Tobacco Roots. The drainages we are focusing on include; Wisconsin, Indian, Mill, Ramshorn, Bivens, California, Granite/Alder gulch. Conditions vary widely throughout these sub basins from high gradient habitats to low gradient spring creeks.

Ramshorn and California Creek are priorities as they have historic mining impacts, channel manipulation, riparian alterations, roads, and dewatering. These varied impacts occur across ownership boundaries. We have conducted riparian assessments that focus on condition and function and are scored by reach. Floodplain alterations are largely from past

practices, mostly mining. Fisheries inventory identified a pure WCT strain in Ramshorn Creek.

#### Watershed Projects:

Placer mining has created unstable conditions (unconsolidated cobble, sand etc.) and the restoration approach is to re-contour the stream and re-connect with floodplain and riparian habitat.

Road improvements are needed to address sediment input. There are many opportunities to improve road conditions that are inventoried by the FS.

Stream-floodplain reconnection is an important approach as it supports resiliency for drought and runoff. Beaver mimicry and induced meandering to increase sinuosity are approaches that are often used.

Conifer encroachment in riparian habitats has changed the water budget and habitat utility. Physical removal of conifer supports aspen regeneration and improve water quality.

#### Watershed Opportunities:

Continue to improve roads to reduce sediment, working closely with FS, Madison County, Private owners, BLM, and Conservation District to fix these issues – it needs many partners across ownerships.

Westslope Cutthroat Trout populations require protection and possible habitat expansion when possible.

Riparian conifer removal opportunities are throughout the landscape. The BLM has identified areas and we could build on their work to connect areas on FS and private lands, creating more ecological connectivity. Our efforts have focused on private lands but it would be great to put together larger projects across boundaries.

Mesic areas on 1<sup>st</sup> order streams i.e. California Creek, are good areas to target for drought resilience.

The Ruby Watershed meet with BLM and FS in January 2018 to coordinate projects and identify areas to work together.

#### FOREST SERVICE - Jim King (fire) & Jake Stewart (range)

In the Tobacco Roots fisheries and aquatic resources work focuses on native species conservation (WCT), road improvements to address sediment inputs and riparian restoration.

Upper Ramshorn is a focal area for WCT protection due to the genetic isolation. The population is secured through a culvert that separates the populations from the upper and lower reach. There is an opportunity to extend the population to the lower reach with a new barrier.

California Creek (monkey gulch) has poor road conditions and sediment input issues. The headwaters suffers from Placer mining, however the restoration is very expensive and may not be worth the investment? Channel avulsion at Kings Gulch.

Noble Fork in the Wisconsin Creek drainage is slated for an improved bridge for motorized users. Willow Creek (east side of Tobacco Roots) also has a road failure to be addressed. Can we close roads with resource damage? Yes – through travel planning.

Potential Johnson Lake dam decommission? The impounded water is not being used and dam at risk of failure. How do users feel about losing water storage for instream flows later in the summer? What would the impacts of a decommission be? The approach has been to reduce to the pool level with an outlet. You can reduce the hazards like at Branam lakes, to reduce risk to community.

In the Tobacco Roots there has been lots of analysis since the 1990s but not much action or change in management activities. The landscape assessment completed in the mid 1990s, identified areas for treatment including some timber harvest and burning. These projects were litigated and post litigation a full EIS was called for. The FS District then proposed 16,000 acres with similar activities over 10 years, the decision was to treat 6-7,000 acres over 3 years for WUI but no treatment was ever done. Proposed actions in these past plans are very similar to the Greenhorn project.

A WUI fuels project was proposed (900 acres) in South Meadow in an EA, the project only accomplished the burn in 2005/6.

Recommendations for Projects:

Focus on aspen release opportunities through the Categorical Exclusion.

Try and target stands of aspen that could lend themselves to timber harvest – this type of work can be contracted out easier and if it can generate some timber harvest then it can cover the costs more.

Timber shop wants to look at larger scale.

Match from Mule Deer Foundation and RMEF can be used for projects with federal agencies (FS).

There are thousands of acres of vegetation and habitat projects but the limitation is really our (FS) capacity to get to this.

**DISCUSSION** - The group asked questions about getting work done and why it takes such a long time. They also shared ideas on road work to address sediment, aspen release opportunities and timber harvest. The steering committee will take the recent presentations and discussions and identify potential next steps to bring back to the GLC.

## PEOPLE AND CARNIVORES – Steve Primm

Grizzly bears are moving back, or maybe never left the Gravellys. In 1984 there was a recorded sheep conflict. There used to be an old dump site at Wade Lake and people would come to watch bears, but the population collapsed in the Park and then in 1990s conflict management work started to take off and since then the population has been growing, expanding and dispersing. We have seen doubled distribution in the last 15 years.

Strategies for conflict management:

In backcountry sites we construct poles for hanging game and food (we have constructed 300) at remote camp sites and outfitter camps. Bears are really smart but the poles have been working really well and they have not figured out how to untie the ropes hoisting the food. Some structures are steel quadpods and tripods. The standard is to have a carcass at least 100 yards from camps. USFWS grant supports the building of backcountry poles and also other conflict reduction activities. Bear education to agencies and the public reached 22,000 people last year.

Food storage techniques and containers have proven very successful. There is a container loaner program locally (Madison and Dillon and P-burg) where folks can borrow containers for trips.

The use of electric fence around crops (corn) with 8,000 volts has been a proven deterrent.

Another project in the works is carcass composting for the Ruby and Madison. There is a secure composting facility located in Wisdom (60 carcasses last year) and we are working to get it in Madison Valley as well. We are still working on confirming the final location. A truck for picking up the carcasses was just purchased. Carcass pick up driver – 2 days a week during calving season. The compost facilities require management for temperature to ensure proper functioning.

Addressing kills on rangeland and in more wild places has proven to be a bigger challenge and we are still working on approaches. The Upper Green has been experimenting with intensive grazing practices, keeping cattle bunched up and out of willow bottoms. Range riders checking on herds and being present as well as moving them frequently reduces incidents. The issue is that once a bear begins killing cattle it can be hard to stop. Livestock guard dogs are also being used. We are experimenting with old world breeds. Dogs can work with wolves and bears. We have even seen long horn steers used to calm the cattle down.

For humans it is important to participate in conflict training. Using bear spray works, spray has a great track record and is an important tool but you have to be prepared and knowledgeable. Summer trainings are offered through Southwest Bear Education Center you can find out on Face Book. GLC can share the upcoming events.

Discussion:

If a bear is focused on livestock it doesn't always work to relocate the animal. Removing the animal is definitive. One conflict area is willow bottoms when cattle are getting water, it may be good to provide off stream to avoid predation? In low visibility areas like willow bottoms it can make cows nervous, riders nervous, moose nervous...