

Gravelly Landscape Collaborative Meeting Notes
MONDAY, April 23, 2018

Purpose: BLM Project Update, Proposed Focus Tobacco Roots Landscape

Attending: Glenn Hockett, Paul Griffin, Richard Stem, Linda Owens, Kevin Suzuki, Darrel Goodman, Dan Durham, Dave Delisi, John Anderson, Dean Waltee, John Helle, Evan Helle, Jake Stewart, Jeff Barnes, Pat Fosse, Kipper Blotkamp, Sean Claffey, J Sampson, Kelly Sewage, Caitlin Avey, Jennifer Boyer facilitator,

Trapline:

Riparian and aquatic restoration activities out of the BLM Dillon District work with the Ruby watershed through a cooperative agreement.

MT FW&P - Survey work is a focus now including mule deer population, phone survey for harvest, sage grouse, whitetail deer. Summaries will be shared. We are interested in moose and appreciate sighting reports (adult, calf, location and date).

Grizzly roaming around Ruby Valley - be bear aware.

Wildlife speaker series in the summer and on August 14th 5:30 potluck dinner with BBQ at Woodson Ranch – trout focus with a discussion with local ranchers.

MVRG follow up brucellosis workshop being planned for November 2018.

Greenhorn Project: USFS has a draft that should be ready for internal review in a few weeks, the project continues to move on timeline.

Field trip with BLM and FWP focusing on implementation next spring in Greenhorns and near Snowcrest Ranch. The project that includes mechanical work is expanded in scope with cooperative agreements on private lands adjacent to targeted areas. Projects are implemented in 5-7 years depending on the grazing schedule. Implementation includes burns, timber harvest, weeds, mechanical work and grazing management on 3,000 acres with an additional 1,000 private acres that target Juniper and Doug Fir.

A large landscape conifer encroachment project is being done with The Nature Conservancy, Beaverhead Watershed and BLM.

Gallatin Wildlife Association Bighorn Sheep habitat and lawsuit:

Bighorn are in trouble not only here but across the West. GWA focuses on 2 things 1) separation from domestic sheep and 2) population size. Bighorn sheep populations are low, and the FWP Bighorn Sheep Plan (2010) supports 120 sheep as a viable population. GWA is concerned about the proposal to hunt the Greenhorn herd, we believe the criteria is faulty based on the observable population, the criteria meets the ratio but not the target numbers.

An original goal of establishing 200 Bighorns in the Greenhorns was changed to 120 sheep. GWA has concern about inbreeding with low population numbers. GWA also is concerned about the larger region population and connectivity between populations for genetic variability and health. GWA has concerns across the entire Beaverhead-Deerlodge and are in litigation with B-D FS on Bighorn management. GWA believes there is risk of extinction.

Q: What are the latest population records for Bighorn? 50 years old population records are the oldest. There are just smattering of data from long ago so it involves stitching together these sources.

Q: What is the distance recommended between wild and domestic? GWA believes it is arbitrary, 14 miles is the guideline which is used in most circumstances.

Comment: Genetics are a concern but we can move animals in to diversify the gene pool. Working ranches are also at risk and we contribute a lot to solving the issues. There is complexity between a pathogen vs. actual disease.

BLM Tobacco Roots Scope of Work:

Fifteen years ago we broke our region into 16 watersheds and implemented adaptive management, we are now in our second rotation of this approach. The South Tobacco Roots encompasses about 33,000 acres of public lands in the watershed, and in response to our assessment in 2006, we implemented grazing management, riparian restoration, prescribed burns, weeds etc. We returned 10 years later and assign an ID team to conduct a two week inventory to compile a report (2016), an EA spring 2017 and decision fall 2017. The process is: assess-plan-implement-monitor-repeat.

The following projects are on deck for implementation:

Forestry – Salvage logging (insect infestation) has been identified for about 2,500 acres based on access. The goal is to promote health and resilience of existing trees and thinning to favor the healthiest trees. These projects are commercial and RY timber bought most of the sales. Try to have a variety of sales that serve a variety of companies. There is also focus on conifer removal for aspen release. Some treatments include working with prescribed fire.

Riparian treatments have been completed for 15 miles and target juniper and conifer removal. Aspen regeneration has been good after treatment. Stream restoration activities on California Creek with the Ruby Watershed include grade

control and beaver mimicry to reconnect and floodplain connectivity. Inevitably we miss some juniper and have contracted maintenance with local folks through Ruby Watershed Council. Historically there could have been some large Doug Fir along the riparian but then the willow communities were dominant, we are really losing the deciduous diversity due to conifer encroachment and this is the target.

Takes a long time for the juniper to decompose when it is lopped and scattered (i.e. the South Fork Greenhorn is a blanket of juniper limbs, stuff will grow through the branches once the needles are off). Prescription is ALL juniper and Doug Fir under 12 inches, different treatments (slash or pile or burn) are monitored for effectiveness. If we bring the water table up make it less hospitable to juniper, some areas may benefit from fire.

Fire and Large Disturbance – The area has identified 9,001 acres (19 units) that targets WUI and sagebrush steppe restoration. The focus is CWPP from Madison County, this prioritizes the risk and WUI and this helps us get the projects through.

Phase 1 = few conifers

Phase 2 = 50-50

Phase 3 = mostly conifer

We focus on phase 1 and 2 encroachment. The expansion of juniper has lost sage brush obligate species that used to be here in the past. Goal to get 5-7,000 acres complete annually.

Q: What is the response for lightning strikes? A: Fire is allowed but with some restrictions.

Grazing - We made some changes to 8 allotments that focused on riparian management. BLM meets with permittees and we develop strategies for improvement including rest (rest-rotation) and changing the grazing period. Our goal is a win-win every time. Our management has found that prescriptive treatment with fire at the sage edge of the riparian helps move the livestock out of the riparian. When implementing fire the rest is 3 seasons total, 1 before to build fuels and two growing seasons after burn for grazing rest. Usually the ranchers are excited about the burn so any inconvenience with rest is outweighed. There has been elk damage in burn units before the rest (the sites are often elk winter range). This is why we need landscape scale treatments to disperse the use.

Q: What is the cost to burn an acre? A: The bigger, the more cost effective. \$80-100 acre but can go down to \$40 / acre when larger units. Treating juniper in riparian areas is about \$500-600 / acre, tree tipping is \$236 / acre.

GLC Discussion

The USFS project in Tobacco Roots looked at Madison District and included timber, post and pole, Doug Fir and conifer encroachment and aspen release. The project died. Given the past EA work and the GLC work for the Greenhorns we have a good base to build on. The conditions don't stop at the boundary between FS and BLM.

There may be an opportunity to use the Categorical Exclusions and also tie into the BLM projects (economic incentives). The CEs are faster and can address high risk areas like WUI and wildlife, but CEs depend on the FS capacity which is not growing. We could work with the regional office to help get CE on line and in process if the collaborative has good broad support.

QUESTION: Does anyone have concern with the GLC Planning Committee exploring options in the Tobacco Roots? A: No, all present are in favor of this next step.

Upcoming GLC Schedule 2018

May – June GLC Planning Group to develop ideas for Tobacco Root project

- FS Specialists (wildlife, forest, fire)
- David Stout
- Darcie Warden
- Kevin Suzuki
- Dan Durham
- Ag / Permittee in TRoots

Begin with past analysis and desired future conditions for the Greenhorns to identify possible projects and areas to focus work. Use the work of the BLM and Ruby Watershed to find opportunities to expand impacts and build on work that is in progress.

June – September: Community Outreach, Education and Involvement

- Host a Forum on Greenhorn Project when draft is released TBD June?
- Promote wildlife speaker series * August 14 at Woodson Ranch
- Organize tour of potential project in Tobacco Roots TBD Sept?
- Promote Bear Aware information and trainings
- Madisonian Articles

October Meeting

- Update on Greenhorn project
- Focus on Tobacco Root project development
 - Presentation
 - Impacts addressed
 - Possible management strategies
 - Desired future conditions / outcomes
 - DISCUSSION – DIRECTION

November-December Meeting

- Joint Meeting with Ruby Watershed? Year in review
- Moving forward with Tobacco Root project development