

Escalante River Watershed Partnership Full Partnership Meeting

Wednesday, October 12, 2022 | 9:00AM-4:30PM (MDT)
Interagency Conference Room, 755 W. Main St., Escalante, UT

Participants: [see here](#)

Action Items:

- Contact Kaitlin re: partnering on 2023 volunteer stewardship projects
- Contact Marc re: 2023 Science Symposium
- Contact Kevin or Lisa with ideas for supporting riparian work

Committee and Partner Updates

BLM and “RMP 101” - Harry Barber, Paria River District Manager, and Tye Morgan, Planner and Environmental Specialist

- Presentation [here](#): “Virtual Scoping Meeting #1: 08/17/22” and “Virtual Scoping Meeting #2: 08/30/22”
- Timeline
 - Comment period closed at the end of September; there will be another comment period on the draft RMP EIS in March 2023
 - Jan/Feb 2024 - Proposed RMP and Final EIS will be shared; there will be a final period where the Governor will review for inconsistencies with state/local management
 - Spring 2024 - approved RMP and Record of Decision expected
- Standing
 - ERWP does not have standing, but individual partners can comment/acquire standing
- Differences in the 2000 RMP vs. new RMP
 - The new plan includes a Travel Management and Grazing Management component, and is intended to parallel the 2000 plan. Many components from the 2000 plan will be incorporated, particularly as it relates to science on the Monument, but it will still be fairly open throughout the process which components are retained and which ones are changed
- Announcements

- Adé Nelson is the new permanent Monument Manager
- MAC meeting on Oct 18, virtual from 9-4
- Reach out to [Turiya](#) or [Ade](#) to get more info on how to stay up to date on deadlines

ERWP Committee Presentations

Coordinating Committee - *Linda Whitham and Terry DeLay*

- Linda and Terry are co-chairs; work with the facilitator to coordinate partnership activities, track funding, set agendas for the meetings; oversee overall partnership health
- Represented by BLM, NPS, USFS, UDWR, and rep from each standing committee
- Developed a one-pager for ERWP, will be putting it on the website
 - Overview of the history of ERWP and our priorities
 - Celebrate our accomplishments
- Linda, Mike, Lisa met with BLM (Ade and Harry) and NPS (Billy Shott, Taryn Preston, and others) to reaffirm commitment and build relationships post-turnover
- Kristen Jespersen with REW previously helped track our financials and has now moved on from her position. Need someone else to take on this role permanently and possibly put a new system in place for tracking

Financial Update - *Sophia Cinnamon*

- Slides [here](#)

Upland Restoration - *Terry DeLay*

- FS awarded another Ponderosa contract in the watershed (6 ongoing contracts now); still thinning to reduce fire danger
- Prioritizing treatments around Escalante Municipal Watershed
- \$140k funds for thinning in Upper Valley; want to preserve the old growth character, good neighbor agreement with DNR who will secure the contractor; need to reduce lighter fuels (pinyon/juniper), slash piles then under-burn, will be right along the highway
- Boulder Mountain Landscape Conservation Forecasting Project
 - Collaborative project focused on remote sensing and ground truthing to identify vegetation communities on Boulder Mountain (project area: 700,000 acres); UDWR, TNC, USFS met 2 weeks ago
 - Preliminary findings: 46 distinct ecological systems (most ever found); all of the aspen systems are “out of whack” (most likely due to lack of fire; lack of regeneration, takeover by conifer), and many ponderosa and montane riparian; unique areas with a mix of ponderosa and aspen; trying to maintain this mix
 - Mountain shrub systems are not really showing up on the maps from remote sensing due to PJ overgrowth; working to improve this

- Future goals: tier future NEPA to this project; next meeting in February; hope to produce final report by May 2023
- These maps will be very helpful for securing funding for management/implementation projects
- Need more studies of PJ removal projects and the potential benefits/detriment to wildlife; [paper](#) recently released showed they were not necessarily helpful

Native Fish & Wildlife - *Erik Woodhouse*

- Slides [here](#)
- Bring Back the Natives - project started in 2020
 - Slickrock Saddle Bench spring
 - Tamarisk removal area
- Headwaters Ranch project will make irrigation more difficult, but the landowner prefers to have more wildlife on the property
- Trout Unlimited is working with a local alfalfa farmer to put in a covariance tower on his property

Stewardship - *Kaitlin Martin*

- Kaitlin is the only member
- Completed work
 - Escalante River trip to remove invasive fish with Erik
 - Glen Canyon trip to help pick up trash
 - Fencing around Hobbit Spring
- Upcoming: trailwork on Escalante Trailhead with BLM this weekend, 3 day backpacking trip from Escalante to Highway 12 bridge remediating visitor impacts (graffiti, half-buried tires)
- Have lots of resources in terms of volunteer power; reach out to Kaitlin with project ideas in Nov-Jan
- Stump Springs fencing project waiting on USFS capacity; they are currently waiting to fill several vacancies.

Springs - *John Spence*

- Need to locate springs, assess condition, and monitor them
 - John and Larry have done a lot of surveying in the middle and lower parts of the watershed
 - Still need to fill in gaps
 - Working with Ryan Thomas (DIGITLab) who created a spatial model that predicts potential presence of springs; plan on field testing the model in Spring

2023, and if accurate, it will save a significant amount of field time; will publish a paper afterward

- USFS currently working on springs assessments
- Basic app and cheat sheets available for spring inventories; still needs to be field tested
- John starting bryophyte inventory on Boulder Mountain

Riparian Restoration - *Kevin Berend*

- Slides [here](#); see for pre/post-treatment photos
- Looking for funding opportunities; did not receive WRI funding
- Below the threshold for action with woody and herbaceous non-native species, based on the monitoring data
- Needs: funding
 - IJA/IRA (federal sources, NPS has mentioned pursuing this)
 - Could be a good fit for WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Project (EWRP) funds
- Harris Wash - will be shifting attention here as it still needs primary treatment, private lands work
- Harry would like to have BLM folks help out with this work and join Alex in the field

Climate Change - *Kevin Berend and Dennis Bramble*

- Slides [here](#)
- Upper Sand Creek RNA
 - Bioblitz and tree ring analysis completed
 - Seeing vegetation regeneration and ecosystem changes post-fire
- A coalition of regional conservation groups is proposing multiple RNAs in the Monument
- Received funding from Maki Foundation for three weather stations; pursuing ways to integrate them into BLM's existing network of weather stations across GSENM
- Relict communities on the Monument - isolated stands of Ponderosa in unexpected elevations, likely left from the last Ice Age
 - Monitoring within these stands will be valuable to understand how ponderosa withstand stresses over time

Riparian Program Funding - *Lisa Clark*

- GSEP did not receive key funding for riparian work (WRI); they are putting in a significant amount staff-time; will know more in November about the funding picture
- Asking ERWP for support: funding, capacity for continued monitoring and maintenance work, grant writing and reporting
- Discussion

- Suggestion for more public funding from federal partners because this work is on public lands; mention of former cooperative agreement between NPS and GSEP.
- Desire to “maintain Walton Foundation investment” through monitoring and re-treatment and follow-up restoration
- Tourism tax suggestion; [example](#) mentioned in Chaffee County

Discussion

- Marc Coles-Ritchie suggested planning a 2023 science symposium; those interested should reach out to him directly
- GSEP did not receive key funding for riparian work and would like ERWP to discuss implications and solutions
- Linda was contacted by a graduate student from UNC interested in interviewing members; contact her directly if interested