

# Escalante River Watershed Partnership Full Partnership Meeting

Monday, November 13th | 1-3pm (MT) | Zoom

Participants: see [here](#)

## Action Items:

- Send ideas and Indigenous contacts to Kevin to support further Indigenous involvement (All)
- Send speaker ideas to Marc for presentations throughout the year similar to those given during the Symposium (All)
- Review the outcomes from the small group discussions and determine next steps for Committees (Marc, Mike, Kevin)

## Updates:

### Partners

- Jackie Grant is currently at USU but will be the new Executive Director for GSEP starting Jan 2
- Marc is now with BLM, formerly with Grand Canyon Trust
- Kendall Nelson is covering for Terry while he's on detail
- Escalante and Fremont are priority watersheds for Trout Unlimited
- Lots of interest from partners to meet in Escalante again

### Coordinating Committee (Linda Whitham and Lisa Clark)

- Focused outreach to federal partners (summer 2023) who have vested interest in the watershed; received feedback. Now have Bud Fazio (NPS) and Marc (Science Coordinator and Ecologist for GSENM) on the Coordinating Committee; strong representation from all three federal agencies.
- Third Annual Symposium coming up in 2024 - led by Marc and Kevin will be March 21-22 in Escalante and on Zoom.
- [Monitoring white paper](#) was completed, will discuss later in the meeting
- Funding
  - Contributions from TNC, DNF, and UDWR; will be getting another from GSENM and GSEP (\$2500); NPS contribution is pending federal budgetary decisions
  - Budget is leaner and will discuss with the coordinating committee how to prioritize facilitation time
  - [NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Association](#) opportunity (Due March 1, 2024):
    - Provide professional services and collaborative assistance rather than financial/monetary grants, with a community and conservation focus
    - Any partner can apply, but would be strengthened significantly by letters of support
    - SDR can support and give guidance but cannot apply
    - Main NPS point of contact is Ericka Pilcher ([RTCA\\_Apps\\_IMR@nps.gov](mailto:RTCA_Apps_IMR@nps.gov))

### Native Fish & Wildlife (Erik Woodhouse)

- [Slides](#)
- UDWR working on two projects in the basin
  - Non-native fish eradication in an off-channel (3 species), working on this project since 2019. Wrapping up chemical eradication which has proved successful, will continue to monitor.
  - 3 species distribution survey over the summer, the 3 species are doing well; self-sustaining populations throughout the river
- USFS completed phase 2 of chemical eradication in North Creek; working to introduce Northern cutthroat
- BLM completed 16 lotic AIM sites in the Escalante and within the Monument. They are also monitoring harmful algal blooms
- TU and USFWS restored 7 acres of wetland habitat on private land near Boulder

- Taryn completed year one of yellow-billed cuckoo monitoring, will start year 2 in 2024
- Erik will be doing downstream monitoring in Glen Canyon and will be reaching out to NPS

#### *Upland (Linda Whitham, on behalf of Terry DeLay)*

- [Slides](#)
- Landscape Conservation Forecasting Report identified forest types most outside of their range
- Hungry Creek NEPA - currently being finalized, included mechanical and prescribed fire treatments within Pine and North Creek watersheds
  - Proposal covers many vegetation sites and includes beaver analogs
- Uplands implementation: CCC timber sale adjacent to Posey Lake Campground; following timber sale portions of area will be replanted with Ponderosa to maintain ponderosa/aspen mix
  - 6 Ponderosa stand sales under contract
- Upper Valley Timber Stand improvement thinning - reduce fuels and improve stand resiliency
  - Lop and scatter/lop and pile are being conducted across all projects; at Posey Lake; have also done work adjacent to the Escalante municipal area.
  - No treatments planned in Box Hollow Wilderness
  - Burn mosaic happening in some area off of Hell's Backbone - this treatment will not be extending into the wilderness area.

#### *Stewardship (Sarah Bauman, on behalf of Kaitlin Martin)*

- Between April and October 2023, we led 13 single day and multi day volunteer projects in the Grand Staircase Region. During these projects, 69 volunteers donated 1,492 hours to remove over 4,500 pounds of trash, remediate 75 dispersed campsites, address 1500 sq ft of graffiti, remove goathead plants and Russian thistle, and more!

#### *Riparian (Kevin Berend)*

- [Slides](#)
- Received funding to support re-treatment efforts (UT Dept of AG, Forever Our Rivers Foundation)
- Accomplished treatment goals for the year including several hitches with UCC
- Received funds from Landscape Scale Restoration grant; will lean heavily into this to complete private land work
- Monitoring: worked with SWCC to monitor 20 pre-established vegetation sites; purpose is to ensure that woody invasive species are not becoming reestablished after treatment
- Natural rock structure work continues, in partnership with the BLM
- Attending training with Mimi Trudeau to go through the entire monitoring protocol
- Looking ahead, need reliable income to continue maintenance

#### *Springs (Mike Scott)*

- Hoping to do field based validation of a model that predicts location of springs; field app has been in development to document presence of predicted springs; awaiting opportunity to get into the field with volunteers - look ahead at this coming summer.
- Marc and John Spence are scheduling field trip to test system for spring prediction

#### *Climate change (Dennis Bramble)*

- [Slides](#)
- Upper Sand Creek
  - Developing a research and monitoring proposal (5 years)
  - 60% of the RNA is wilderness, so the process for approval looks a little different
  - Expected types of monitoring:
    - Forest Inventory and Analysis protocols, trying to keep consistent with FS monitoring
    - Lichen monitoring with Steve Leavitt
    - Repeat photography

- Springs (different than the springs committee work)
  - Monitoring and protecting Hobbit and Alvey Springs
  - Hobbit spring has been fenced; Alvey Springs not fenced but cattle are kept out
  - Starting to look at temp and humidity, water level changes, wildlife cameras, aquatic invertebrates
  - Both springs used heavily by elk, but only bulls

#### *Funding to support future Tribal involvement (Kevin Berend)*

- GSEP awarded \$25,000 over 2 years from [Catalyst Fund](#) to increase Tribal involvement in ERWP. The coordinating committee will be discussing what this will look like at upcoming meetings, potentially through a subcommittee.
  - Please send recommendations of Indigenous folks who could join committees to Kevin. This is about getting and integrating Tribal perspectives at the front end and throughout the planning process. Funding available to committees to host Tribal representatives on the landscapes.
  - Send Kevin ideas/contacts

#### *BLM update (Marc Coles-Ritchie)*

- Comment period just ended and the Resource Management Plan will be released in 2024.
- Marc has been reaching out to researchers and universities to invite them to do research on the Monument; BLM doesn't have funding, but Marc is look for sources
- Handles the permit process for research on the Monument, so can help expedite the process for researchers
- Marc would like to have speakers throughout the year (in person/Zoom) similar to Symposium. Send any speaker contacts or ideas to Marc
- BLM will continue to fund ERWP

#### *NPS update (Lauren Nickell & Kendall Nelson)*

- Cuckoo survey mentioned above
- Reach out to Bud for any info around methods and visitor impacts
- With climate change and changes in the rivers, visitors are seeking more upland area and NPS is concerned about visitor impacts to cultural resources
- No news on funding; dependent on what Congress decides

#### **Scientific Monitoring in Action**

- [White paper](#) - purpose is to reintroduce and update the importance of monitoring in resource management
  - Past thinking: monitoring is expensive for not providing much information
  - Lots of restoration work in the past has not had any follow-up afterward, so there is no way to determine how effective it is
  - Citizen science can be really helpful for monitoring of targeted metrics post-restoration
  - RO removal was a monumental effort, but need to make sure the follow-up is there and the condition of the watershed is tracked; it is critical to be clear on the measurables and metrics here
  - Post-restoration monitoring of the response of the river has not been as extensive as it ideally would be; recommendations for improvements in the white paper
  - More effectively involve monitoring in all collective interests in the Escalante River Watershed; important for all committees to do this
- Why monitor?
  - Track recovery rates
  - Hydrology
  - Geomorphology
  - Adaptive management

- Prove that the work has the intended effect
- Justify the \$\$ spent, quantitatively
- Support future funding requests
- Furthers scientific knowledge
- Allows for further collaboration
- Would love to have a publication to document the great work done by ERWP in Russian olive removal
- Will be important for committee chairs to think about what monitoring looks like in the context of their committees

### *Small Group Discussions*

- The group split up into 4 groups of 5 people to further discuss what monitoring is happening, where the gaps are, and where the opportunities for collaboration and funding are.

### Existing Monitoring Efforts

- Wildlife
  - Yellow-billed cuckoo (NPS)
  - Goshawk, bat, and bee surveys
  - Hummingbird banding
  - Hobbit Springs/Alvey Spring camera traps
  - Riparian bird surveys
  - Reptiles and amphibians
- Rangeland
  - Grazing utilization (USFS)
  - Grazing plots (NPS)
  - Rangeland health (BLM)
  - Changes that occur in riparian and spring ecosystems when livestock impacts are removed.
- Geomorphology and Hydrology
  - Cross-section surveys (Rosgen Method) (USFS)
  - Geomorphology
  - Water quality monitoring (BLM)
- Springs
  - Hobbit Springs/Alvey Spring vegetation, water loggers
  - Springs (NPS)
  - Springs Stewardship Institute (SSI) springs surveys
- Comprehensive surveys
  - Upper Sand Creek RNA surveys (ERWP)
  - Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (BLM): lotic (stream), riparian wetland, terrestrial
  - Forest Inventory and Analysis (USFS)
  - USGS
- Vegetation
  - Russian olive post-treatment/re-invasion monitoring
  - MIMs/veg studies
  - Native plant populations & seeds
- Citizen science
  - iBeaver Community Science data collection
  - Utah Water Watch Citizen Science Monitoring Locations
- Harmful algal bloom monitoring at Calf Creek
- Fossils

## Gaps in Monitoring

- Wildlife
  - Wildlife friendly-fence surveys; could use State app
  - Feral animal impacts
  - Tamarisk beetle
  - Bats
  - Nocturnal pollinators
  - Aquatic invertebrates and mollusks
  - Pinyon Jay
  - Future lowland riparian bird monitoring
- Rangeland
  - Relative effects of grazing vs invasive species
- Geomorphology and Hydrology
  - Sedimentation
  - Geomorphic recovery of Escalante River following RO treatment
  - Year-round flow in main tributaries
  - Follow up on monitoring 303(d) impaired waters
- Springs
  - Spring monitoring
- Comprehensive surveys
  - Pre-treatment data (birds, veg)
- Vegetation
  - Other invasive plants
  - Biocrust and soils
  - Bryophytes and lichens
  - Piñon pine removal
- Recreation
  - Impacts of recreation: vehicles, noise, dust, lights
  - Impacts to cultural sites
  - Visitor use and impacts
- Indigenous participation in monitoring/knowledge
- Social science

## Collaboration Opportunities

- University researchers
  - Digit Lab–University of Utah, GIS-based monitoring
- Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration (USFS) approaches on flow, sedimentation restoration, and monitoring
- Existing data
  - USGS data
  - NOAA data
  - Johnson Lakes Canyon - pre/post grazing
- Citizen science
  - K-12
  - Nonprofits
  - EarthWatch International
- Potential partnerships
  - Tribal partnerships

- Bird conservancies
- Other watershed groups
- State and federal opportunities

#### Funding Sources

- WaterSmart (BOR)
- Foundations
- New BLM Wildlife Program, RFP: *January 19, 2024*
- Watershed Restoration Initiative
- State legislature
- Inflation Reduction Act
- Sportsmen dollars
- Dixie NF is actively looking for tribal engagement projects
- Bat Conservation International
- National Parks Conservation Association

#### **Wrap up and next steps**

- Monitoring Team will review the outcomes from the small group discussions and determine next steps for Committees