Escalante River Watershed Partnership
Full Partnership Meeting

Thursday, April 4th | 10:30am-12:30pm (MDT) | Zoom

Participants: see last page

Action Items:

- Contact Kevin if interested in joining the planning committee for the next symposium (All)
- Send lessons learned from Russian olive removal effort to Kevin for inclusion in the upcoming paper being developed (All)
- Send historical photos of the Escalante River to Kevin (All)
- Send ideas or volunteers for Tribal Engagement Committee to Kevin (All)

Updates:

Coordinating Committee (Terry DeLay)

- Slides
- Terry (co-chair of the Coordinating Committee) gave an overview of the background, purpose, and accomplishments of ERWP
- Linda is retiring from TNC, and Terry took the opportunity to open the floor for ERWP partners to share well-wishes with her
    - She will be joining us for future meetings on her own

Symposium (Kevin Berend)

- Held on March 21-23; 3rd annual
- Huge thank you to planning committee
- Variety of science topics, field trips, and other programs (Innastate, film screening, basketmaking workshop with Richard Graymountain)
- Total of about 220 people over the two days attended both in person and on Zoom
- Tentative next year March 20-22, 2025; will be reaching out in the fall for planning committee members, email Kevin if interested

Springs (Mike Scott)

- John and Mike worked with a Univ of Utah student on a prediction model and app for springs; still have not field validated but hope to get volunteers out to help with this eventually
    - Marc Coles-Ritchie may field test; John hopes to do bird surveys at Hobbit Spring this year and will coordinate with Marc
- Has been hard to get people together
- Grand Canyon Trust ran a volunteer trip surveying spring 2 years ago using Spring Stewardship Institute's map, also sent out a water intern to do some validation

Stewardship (Kevin Berend, on behalf of Kaitlin Martin)

- Kaitlin's team have been doing a lot of work on the Monument including graffiti remediation, working with BLM staff, campsite cleanups, Trail Ambassador trainings (one-on-one education of recreationists)
- Volunteer portal is on GSEP's website if anyone is interested

Slides for Climate Change, Uplands, Native Fish & Wildlife, and Riparian

Climate Change (Dennis Bramble & Kevin Berend)

- Upper Sand Creek Research Natural Area (RNA)
    - 5-year plan includes expanding monitoring with weather stations, inventory and analysis (FIA) sites (to the standard of the Forest Service so that it's useful in the future for Dixie NF),

vegetation transects, and lichens, as well as expanding biodiversity surveys, repeat photography, and extending tree-ring studies
    - "Joel's Spur" - area on the RNA with unique vegetation (green manzanita, stunted Douglas fir, white fir, limber pine, possibly bristlecone pine) with mineralized biocrusts; much higher diversity than expected
- Upcoming work at Hobbit Spring
    - Completing fencing this year, resampling transects, sample aquatic invertebrates, camera traps, repeat photos
    - Expanding to water temp & chem (with Utah Water Watch), data loggers; hope to compare to what's happening at Alvey Spring

Uplands (Terry DeLay)

- Landscape Conservation Forecasting (LCF) Model - joint effort with State of Utah, DNF, and Fishlake NF; completed Boulder Mountain and completed environmental analyses of where past and current projects are
    - Looking for where to do future environmental analyses to address areas that are "highly departed" from historical conditions - will govern vegetation management strategy for the foreseeable future, highlights where the need is
- Hungry Creek
    - 100k acres need restoration work; hoped to have a decision this winter, but delayed by 2 initiatives (climate change modeling, how to look at old growth in analyses)
    - Will be impacted by LCF model
    - Includes soil and water project for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout that will reduce sediment
- Using timber sales to emulate fire and thin ponderosa/mixed conifer; planning on 2 more sales this summer
- Upper Valley Good Neighbor Agreement - trying to slow pinyon-juniper encroachment into ponderosa areas
    - First contractor defaulted; will be starting up again with another contractor once the snow melts
    - Slash piles near private land; lop & scatter in more remote areas

Native Fish & Wildlife (Erik Woodhouse)

- UDWR - rotenone treatment efficacy sampling in Slickrock Saddle Bench, 3 species distribution sampling Boulder Creek to Harris Wash (last portion of the main stem to sample; have been working on it since 2017)
- BLM - planning low-tech restoration in the Gulch (pending RMP being signed)
- Trout Unlimited (TU) - just hired new staff that will help add capacity in the area

Riparian (Kevin Berend)

- Grant from State of Utah (landscape-scale conservation) for private land; retreated 45 acres since November, Utah Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) crew (20 people) will be working on this starting in June
- Utah Conservation Corps hitches start next week for public land retreatment
- Kevin, Marc, and Mike Scott working on a paper to talk about all of the Russian olive (RO) work that's been done in the watershed and successes from it, lessons learned
    - Want feedback on lessons learned or data/topics to make sure to include; please send to Kevin
- Western Colorado University - Graduate student looking at repeat photography to do a time series (pre-invasion, post-invasion, post-treatment), next step would be analyses based on the photos
    - If you have historical photos from the Escalante River, send to Kevin
- Mike S continuing aerial geomorphology work
- GSEP focused just on vegetation monitoring to-date, but want to expand to other aspects of the ecosystem
    - Bird transects 1999-2000 (when RO was at its worst) - need to be re-done now, 6-7 1 km transects primarily on GCNRA

Monitoring of the Escalante River channel - *Mike Scott*

- Slides
- Monitoring of Escalante River channel pre- and post- RO treatment
- Started as a project with students from the DIGITlab; Erin Williams did most of the digitizing
    - Hope to eventually hand this monitoring work off to the DIGITlab or a similar venue
- Monitoring channel movement can enhance vegetation monitoring
- River divided into 4 reaches from the mouth of Sand Creek down to the end of 25-Mile Wash
    - Look for differences between historical channel (pre-invasion) and current channel (post-treatment) using a Sym-dif tool (symmetrical differencing)
    - Invasion of RO contributed to considerably narrowing the channel
    - Expect to see the channel widen where RO has been removed, leading to a more active/dynamic mosaic of riparian vegetation, including native riparian woody species like sandbar willow
- Black arrows show the year treatment began (slide 3); channels narrowed during invasion (60% narrower)
    - When peak flows were higher than average following treatment, rate of channel narrowing slowed or reversed
    - When peak flows were not regularly higher than average, rate of channel narrowing increased
- Improvement in flood plain destruction post-treatment, indicating potential for channel movement even if narrowing
- Possible that other vegetation (both native and non-native) is slowing down the widening of the channel
    - Remaining question: Are the natives equally as effective at keeping the channel narrow during flood events?
    - Any river will narrow when there's a decrease in flow; it's how it responds to flow variability
- Changes in grazing management - no notable differences on invasion (invasion overwhelmed any impacts from grazing)
- Will be discussing monitoring more at future meetings, including high-level monitoring of the Partnership activities as a whole

Tribal Involvement in ERWP - *Kevin Berend*

- GSEP got a Catalyst Fund grant to build capacity and deepen engagement with Tribal partners
    - $25k over two years (2023-2025), primarily to cover travel
    - Used to bring Richard Graymountain and Innastate to the Symposium
    - Grant deliverables relevant to the Full Partnership: create Tribal Engagement Committee, tribal representation on existing committees
    - Georgie (GSEP's new contracted Tribal Liaison) working with Kevin on this
- Tribal Engagement Committee - could be a temporary committee to start the process/effort of getting more involvement
    - Looking for members, contact Kevin with ideas/volunteers
        - Figure out level of interest from Tribes in getting involved, as well as at what level we're trying to get Tribal members involved
    - Task is to draw up the objectives for Tribal engagement
    - Either Tribal government representatives or Tribal members
    - Ethnographic surveys on the Monument - incomplete; could be an objective
- Involvement in committees
    - No need to wait; encourage committee chairs to start thinking about this now
    - Good starting point: Symposium speakers if relevant
    - Plenty of opportunities for volunteers to join field work (Erik)
- John has background in ethnobotany and has worked with tribes on plant collection; not necessarily able to join the committee, but interested in helping
- This topic will be a continuing conversation at the Coordinating Committee and Full Partnership levels

Wrap up and next steps

- Fall meeting will be in-person, and may also include additional field-based components
- Funding for facilitation is still slim; please consider contributing if your agency/organization is able so that we can continue to have in-person meetings in the future
- Monitoring discussion will be continued at the fall meeting
- The Tribal Engagement Committee will be developed (with support from Coordinating Committee) over the next few months, and an update will be provided at the fall meeting

Participants

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Facilitation

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**Coordinating Committee members*