

Escalante River Watershed Partnership Full Partnership Meeting

Thursday, October 17th | 9:15am-2:30pm (MDT) | In person and Zoom

Participants: see last page

Action Items:

- Connect with Kaitlin on any volunteer project needs (ALL)
- Share information on watershed grant with Kaitlin (Darren)
- Let Matt know when spring restoration projects come up (Kaitlin)
- Talk about Upland Committee involvement (Terry & Stan)
- Send rotenone studies to Claire (Erik)
- Share the KUER piece on monitoring training when published (Kevin)
- Email committee co-chairs about the monitoring plan update (Kevin)

Updates:

General

- Hank Stevens (Navajo Nation and member of the Tribal Advisory Board for GSENM) welcomed everyone and stressed the importance of Grand Staircase to tribes

Coordinating Committee (Terry DeLay)

- Time of transition - Linda retired in April, Terry retiring in December; new chairs are Erik and Kevin
- Terry has really enjoyed working with ERWP, have made incredible and meaningful accomplishments
- Expect that this group will continue, though our biggest challenge is to keep people engaged; great to see new faces here
- Thanks to Terry!
- Facilitation funding continues to be a challenge; Terry working on securing \$10k before he leaves
 - Shifting Kevin to a support facilitator role, Lisa focusing on back end strategic support and keeping the partnership moving forward
 - Waiting to hear on potential funding that would allow Kevin to take a more active role in facilitating/coordinating, and would also fund SDR for 2 more years

Springs - no update

Stewardship (Kaitlin Martin)

- [Slides](#) - including stats for 2024
- GSEP working with GCT, but there's not much of a committee right now
- Working with affinity groups (SUWA Latinx Program, Hiking My Feelings)
- Main focus of volunteer work is remediating recreation impacts like graffiti, campfire, vehicle trespass
- Wilderness Study Area Monitoring - 400 miles!

- Springs Fencing project - Hobbit and Stump Springs, repaired damaged enclosure around Garden Spring; hope to continue this work next summer, but waiting on funding
- Tribal trips are not volunteer based; cover travel expenses and honoraria
- **Let Kaitlin know about any volunteer needs (monitoring, clean ups, build fences)**
- Pending funding: America the Beautiful (through 30x30, \$100k), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), smaller foundation grants, National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) funding through BLM - hope this will open in November
 - Funding source related to watersheds that was just approved, also another one for grassland restoration (**Darren will follow up with Kaitlin**)
 - B2E grant (BOR), deadline just passed but it may have been extended; huge grant (\$300k is the minimum), but has to be applied to by a public agency
 - \$5 mil America the Beautiful grant for work on the Little Colorado River - Navajo Nation just applied for that; could be a great opportunity to share resources and volunteers
- Most current projects are with adult volunteers, but there are opportunities for younger volunteers
 - May be possible to tie in with summer programs on the Navajo Nation
 - Strategize ways for younger kids to volunteer as well
- Monitoring (Wilderness Study Area) - official partnership with the Monument, so is all official data
- Matt interested in springs protection work; Kaitlin will let him know when those opportunities come up
- Important objective is to engage the younger generation
 - Disconnect between what tribes used to do and what they can do now, because of the water

Climate Change (Dennis)

- [Slides](#)
- Biggest step forward: protection of Hobbit Spring; would not have happened without Terry's support along the way
 - Adopted by Utah Water Watch as an official monitoring site - surprised that the spring has really high dissolved oxygen, so will see if that shifts at all
 - Utah Tech University did invertebrate sampling and found some small clams, no aquatic snails
 - Rare to have a spring like Hobbit with an open pond - investigating importance to wildlife
- Able to do comparisons between Hobbit Spring and Alvey Spring; virtually identical in weather conditions between the two, despite one being shaded by the slope and the other being more exposed
 - Likely has to do with the groundwater and the age of the spring
 - Aging these springs by assessing the composition of rock that has fallen from upslope as the hillside slowly retreats; landslides are really common in the Monument - negative indicator of climate change, but through the years the landscape has gone through change

- Alvey Spring is much younger (hundreds of years) than Hobbit Spring (thousands of years)
- Many of the springs in this area have been altered by development, livestock, etc. which arrests evolution and development of the springs
- What is the significance of Hobbit Spring to indigenous peoples? What was it called? - hope to learn more about this
 - Expected to see evidence of use, but don't see anything
 - FS has done State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) clearance, there was a small amount of evidence in that process, but not enough to stop any work
 - Could have been a shrine or place to give offerings, rather than a place to live
- Upper Sand Creek RNA
 - Working toward a long-term study/monitoring
 - [Paper](#)

Upland (Terry)

- Vegetation treatments have been on the Dixie; more opportunity to do this kind of work here than other lands
 - Want to make sure work in the Dixie doesn't negatively impact the rest of the watershed
- Boulder Mountain vegetation modeling with The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
 - Incredible diversity of vegetation types, some unique types
 - Able to determine current condition of each veg type which helps to prioritize vegetation treatment work
 - Sand Creek to Mesquite Creek ponderosa is a target area
 - Aspen and ponderosas are most out of whack, primarily because of the lack of fire; FS working to restore a more natural fire regime in a way that also still protects people and structures
- Hungry Creek - moving toward Final Decision, hope it will be out by the holidays for implementation in 2025
 - 10-20 year project, covers all cover types on the Boulder Mountain map
 - Includes soil and water project for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout
- Ponderosa and mixed conifer timber sales - most efficient way to do vegetation treatments on the Forest, FS gets paid while thinning also happens
 - Photos in the slides of landscapes post-sale/thinning - more open, natural fire breaks
 - Last sawmill in the area burned down, but optimistic that they will rebuild
- Importance of mixed conifer areas: Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) collared mule deer and found that they really rely on mixed conifer areas to build up fat stores before the winter
 - Small sales to eventually chip the smaller trees and use as livestock bedding
 - Have to be careful about how these treatments are done, so that timber companies don't fully remove all trees
- Upper Valley Good Neighbor Agreement with State of Utah (FS pays for the work, Utah helps conduct it)

- Photos of pre- and post-treatment in the slides
- Both hand thinning and mastication (equipment used may have been too big, lots of ground disturbance)
- Too dense to try and burn before this treatment, now that there are slash piles, will be easier to control a prescribed burn
- No chemical treatments done
- Hope that Terry's replacement will take over this committee, would be great to [get Stan involved](#) so that the State is involved
 - Stan has worked with Kevin and Alex on RO removal, but happy to jump in on more work on the forest where needed

Native Fish & Wildlife

- [Slides](#)
- Three Species conservation work
 - Flannelmouth sucker, bluemouth sucker, roundtail chub - conservation agreement created to keep these species from being listed as Threatened or Endangered
 - 16 stations along the river, where there are 20 sites at each location; sample to count fish of different species
 - Speckled dace were most common, but also saw a good amount of the 3 species
 - Want to see reproduction, recruitment (surviving to adulthood), and diverse age structure
 - Harris Creek to Boulder Wash was the last portion to complete one full pass of the Escalante (since 2017); first time this has been accomplished, will use this data to guide management actions
 - Alex helped to guide this trip
- Slickrock Saddle Bench Spring - off-channel spring/stream area, in the past found high populations of non-native fish here
 - Have been mechanically removing the non-natives
 - 2023 - rotenone treatment, and have been doing monitoring; didn't find any non-natives in May 2024, but October sampling found fathead minnow again
 - Ephemeral stream, so the non-native fish are able to re-enter when flows are present; there were high flows in the monsoon that likely facilitated movement
 - Will sample again early 2025, try to disrupt spawning, look for source population
- BLM will gladly accept partner support with their low-tech process-based restoration projects; contact Erik if interested
- Trout Unlimited has a new representative, Tommy DeHart, who will be joining the committee
- Importance of non-native fish management
 - Red shiner have been a huge issue in southern Utah, not entirely sure why but they do also tend to stay in the lower reaches of the Escalante River - remove them when encountered
 - In a lot of cases, the non-native fish wipe out the native fish populations through predation, depletion of resources, etc.

- Quagga mussels also a big issue
- Aquatic hitchhikers - there are public education programs in place and inspections, particularly at Glen Canyon NRA, to help prevent this
 - “Don’t ditch your fish” to inform people of the dangers of introducing non-native species and moving fish from stream to stream, promote the message
- Rotenone safety
 - Treat at 3 ppm, so affects anything with gills and not harmful to wildlife even if they were to drink the water during treatment; denatures in the water fairly quickly, not persistent in the environment
 - Populations of invertebrates come back fairly quickly
 - Erik can send some studies that investigate the safety of rotenone, connect with Claire
 - Can also add a chemical that neutralizes the rotenone

Riparian

- [Slides](#)
- New permits with BLM and GCNRA
- Got funding this year from Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI), and Forever Our Rivers Foundation, as well as continuing Utah Landscape-Scale Restoration grant
- Wilderness Volunteers helped at Harris Wash
- Utah Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) helping do additional work on private land
- 1,450 acres treated this year, and 20 sites monitored
- Journalist from KUER came down to join the monitoring training in April; Kevin will share the piece that came from this when it is published
- Mark Briggs creating a monitoring manual for the Escalante, Dolores, and Verde Rivers - broader than what’s been done to date
- Implemented some low-tech process-based restoration (LTPBR) structures including Zuni bowls and beaver dam analogs
 - Will be doing more in the Dixie and hopefully also on the Monument
 - Still learning, and monitoring effectiveness of structures that have been implemented so far
 - Joe Wheaton from USU has created a lot of guidance about LTPBR implementation and effectiveness
- Repeat photography research by Katie Woodward - haven’t heard anything since July from the student who was doing the field work; Alex went out with her a couple of times
 - Encouraged her to present at the symposium in March

Tribal Engagement updates

- [Slides](#)
- Tribal Engagement Committee is contingent on funding from National Forest Foundation; still waiting on this
- Projects over the summer - rock work and fencing

- Hopi/Paiute work crew, GSEP, and Dixie NF
- Tribes have lost access over the years to public lands through forced removal; starting the work of reconnecting them to the Grand Staircase area and these ancestral lands
 - Really helpful to have the funds to bring people here, because it is far from where people currently live
- Benefits for everyone; workforce development for tribes, reconnection, protect springs
- Focus on building long-term, lasting relationships
 - Lots of mistrust in the past with governments and tribes; working to repair that
 - Shifting perspectives
 - Traditional Ecological Knowledge on equal footing with scientific knowledge
- Everyone was excited about learning how to do buck and rail fencing - helpful skills to bring back home
- Lots of opportunities for partnership with future projects like this

Values activity

- Have accomplished a lot over the years; now in another period of transition, bringing in new partners and shift in leadership, which brings along with it a transition in structure/scope
- The group did an activity (split between in-person and virtual participants) to share where have seen value in participating in ERWP (in blue), and what would be most valuable moving forward (in green)
- Full notes transcribed from sticky notes [available here](#)

Partner relationships, networking, and knowledge sharing

- Sharing different projects, approaches, and lessons learned/knowledge throughout the watershed
 - Who is doing what
 - Highlighting accomplishments
 - Include Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)
 - Continue this
- Bridging the gap between communities
 - Bring in new perspectives and diverse partners, particularly indigenous communities
- Networking and make connections to work toward collaboration
 - Continue this
- Strong partnerships
 - New tribal partnerships
 - Continue this
 - Consider formal agreement with tribes to help with securing funding
 - Active role in the partnership
 - Collaboratively design projects
 - A closer working relationship on the ground with the land management agencies

Funding

- Share funding opportunities
 - Collaboratively seek out funding

Cross-jurisdictional

- Cross-boundary management
 - Continue this
- Landscape-wide, holistic restoration

Science/Monitoring

- Integration of science
- Continued monitoring of treatment impacts and maintaining progress

Shared values

- Working together for the benefit of all
- Working with others that share similar values for protecting natural landscapes
- We all care about nature
- Revisit prioritization of the most pressing issues

Engagement (volunteers and youth)

- Opportunities for youth to participate, reconnect to the area, and engage in conservation work
- Develop next generation of conservation leaders
 - Continue this
 - Increased outreach and collaboration in hopes for future generations to carry the teachings and will for the land and others
 - Broaden to monitoring
- Source of volunteer opportunities and project ideas

Education/Learning

- Opportunity to learn about the watershed
 - Share this learned information back out again and apply it
- Be creative

Perceptions and protocols

- Reconsider perceptions on land and resource management, non-native removal (purpose, methods, impacts)
- Focus on connection to the landscape

Meeting/Partnership structure

- In person meetings are most valuable, but having a hybrid option is helpful
 - Consider prioritizing in-person once a year; include field trips
- Continued neutral facilitation of ERWP

- Clearer opportunities and information for involvement with Committees

General feedback

- Newsletters not very helpful; not enough detail

Monitoring overview

- Have discussed monitoring at the past 2 meetings; trying to think about monitoring from a more holistic perspective beyond just vegetation
- ERWP has a Monitoring and Maintenance plan that needs to be updated (almost 20 years old)
- Kevin will send out an email to committee co-chairs with the information that's needed for the monitoring plan update

Wrap Up

Additional thoughts

- Our relationship to the land has shifted over time; work to reconnect people
- Question some of the practices like targeting non-native species
 - Russian olive have their own values (provide habitat, food, windbreaks for cottonwoods)
 - Reconsider use of herbicides and other chemicals
 - Native trees seem to be negatively impacted
- Want to better understand the purpose behind the removal
 - Hopi Tribe have done removal, really helps to bring the water level back up, Russian olive grows so fast and aggressively that nothing else is able to grow and biodiversity goes down
 - Dangerous to springs, can completely dry them up
 - It's about bringing back the balance

Next steps

- Symposium March 20-22
- Next meeting: either before or after the symposium
 - Watershed issues discussion
 - GSENM Resource Management Plan presentation

Lower Calf Creek Falls Field Trip



Participants

Terry DeLay*	Dixie National Forest	tjodelay@yahoo.com
Lauren Nickell*	Dixie National Forest	lauren.nickell@usda.gov
Mike Popejoy	Grand Canyon Trust	mpopejoy@grandcanyontrust.org
Kevin Berend*	Grand Staircase Escalante Partners (GSEP)	kevin@gsenm.org
Alex Engel	GSEP	field_supervisor@gsenm.org
Kaitlin Martin	GSEP	kaitlin@gsenm.org
Georgie Pongyesva	GSEP	gpongyesva@gmail.com
Manny Fredericks	Hopi Tribe	mannyfredericks@gmail.com
Melinda Poleahla	Hopi Tribe	epoleahla@gmail.com
Max Taylor	Hopi Tribe	mt.bluecanyon@gmail.com
Darren Talayumptewa	Hopi Tribe	
Erik Stanfield	Navajo Nation	erikstanfield@hotmail.com
Frances Stevens	Navajo Nation	fistevens.63@gmail.com
Hank Stevens	Navajo Nation	nmwua@hotmail.com
Paul Fuhrmann	Resident	
Dennis Bramble	University of Utah and Private landowner	bramble@bioscience.utah.edu
Nick Whittier	US Geological Survey	whittier@usgs.gov
Alex Moore	Utah Conservation Corps	alex.moore@usu.edu
Kenny Henager	Utah Conservation Corps	kenny.henager@usu.edu
Amy Dickey	Utah Division of Water Quality	adickey@utah.gov
Erik Woodhouse*	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	erikwoodhouse@utah.gov
Stan Gurley	Utah Forestry, Fire, and State Lands	stangurley@utah.gov
Matt Graham	Wilderness guide	feetinthedirt@gmail.com
Claire Nelson	Wilderness guide	claire11nelson@gmail.com

Facilitation

Lisa Clark	Southwest Decision Resources	lisa@swdresources.com
------------	------------------------------	-----------------------

**Coordinating Committee members*