

Otero Working Group
April 25, 2018
Sacramento District Ranger Station
Cloudcroft, NM

Otero WUI Working Group

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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Update Southern Sacramento Mountain Watershed and Forest Restoration Strategy:
 - Tularosa Creek Focus Area
 - Two Goats-High Rolls-Maruchi Focus Area
 - Southern Sacramento Restoration Project Focus Area
3. Update on Custom Crates and Pallets CFRP Utilization Grant
4. State Wide Rx Burn CFRP
5. Review Otero County CWPP
6. 2018 NM Wood Industry Summit update
7. Westside Sacramento Mountain Watershed and Forest Restoration Implementation CFRP grant proposal
8. Discussion on “ Collaborative Spatial Fire Management ”
9. Update from agencies

Next meeting June, 2018

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Meeting Minutes

Attending

Mark Cadwallader, Partnership Coordinator, USFS Lincoln NF
Ron Riise, FMO, USFS Lincoln NF
Robert Kasuboski, NM State Land Office
Leland Pellman, Mescalero Apache Tribe, DRMP
Jared Aguilar, NM State Land Office
Daniel Dyer, BIA Mescalero Agency
Sandra Hunt, Spirit Ranch
Frank Silva, NMSF Capitan
Sue Dreikosen, Village of Cloudcroft EMS
Dave Venable, Mayor, Village of Cloudcroft
Rick Merrick, Facilitator, South Central Mountains RC&D
Alan Barton, NM Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute

Rick Merrick reviewed the map and what was happening in different focus areas.

Two Goats/Marruchi Focus Area

NMSF (Frank S.) – put in for a non-federal lands (NFL) grant in this area. Half in Maruchi, half in Carr Canyon. In Maruchi, the landowner is Jason Blankenship.

BIA/Mescalero – nothing to report.

USFS (Mark C.) – On the CFRP Planning Grant for Marruchi and La Luz Canyon, they have NEPA cleared about 6,600 acres for prescribed fire and mastication work. They signed the decision on part of area last summer, and 2 months ago signed decision on another area.

They also put in for a CFRP grant for treatment this year, and will be in Albuquerque next week to present the proposal. This is for 250–300 acres of P-J mastication in the La Luz Canyon and Marruchi area.

They haven't discussed prescribed fire in this area yet but that may be coming up.

This area is mostly P-J country, which is a priority but not a top priority.

Priority Area 3 is Alamo Canyon, which includes a grant with the City of Alamogordo and some mastication work – looking for funding now.

Mark is also looking for opportunities to do some commercial fuelwood sales, which is an opportunity to get some clearing done without much funding.

Jim Lewis Focus Area

Jim Lewis Project (Mark C.) – the project is continuing, they have some timber work going on. They completed a 1,900 prescribed fire after several attempts. The USFS will phase out of Jim Lewis and into SSRP.

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SSRP Area

There should be a draft EIS coming soon on the South Sacramento Restoration Project. The target is still to get the decision signed by the end of this year. They are planning some implementation to get on the ground soon after the ROD is signed.

Money for this comes from NM Game & Fish, but about 25% comes from state money, and 75% from federal Pitman Robertson funds that are administered by the state.

Bluewater – this is a state funded project, with the USFS, NM Game & Fish, and NM State Forestry Division. Money is available but they need to get it on the ground soon. Frank said they're out marking to be able to do the thinning. This is a pre-commercial thinning and mastication in Ponderosa Pine.

SLO (Robert) – the State Land Office is looking at starting work on the boundary of the national forest north of Timberon. Mark was talking to Mark Meyers about this last week. SWCD got some funds for thinning work near Duncan, and the SLO will likely have some end-of-year money to spend quickly, so it could go to these projects.

Mark suggested that when they get more fuels folks on the Sacramento District, the USFS needs to arrange a meeting with the SLO to discuss work.

Rick said there are lots of opportunities for cross-boundary work in the area around Timberon. Several agencies – NMSF, BLM, SLO and USFS – are involved. It is some rough country, but it needs work.

The partners are looking at applying for NMAC funds to start a planning project in this area.

Frank – The NMSF has put in for an NFL grant in that same area – if they can work on several lands they'll get a good chunk of treated forests there.

Mark – The SSRP is the future timber program for the national forest. The USFS recently hired a silviculturalist to work on this.

Custom Crates & Pallettes

Mark said the Custom Crates and Pallettes CFRP this is a 3-year utilization grant. Equipment purchased with this grant – a feller-buncher and a chipper – arrived last month. The currently are working in the SE area. The company is innovative and continues to grow. They have some projects in NM and some in Texas. Adolfo has ideas for working with the national forest to increase his capacity.

Rick said the collaborative needs to take a field trip to watch the machinery at work. Right now, there are 3-5 truckloads/week going to Mexico. The company wants to ramp up to 35 trucks/week. The Mexican company is very happy with the work. There is another company in Mexico that is also interested.

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They are looking at transporting via railroad. They can get 3 semi-loads on one rail car, so it would reduce the number of trips to Mexico.

Adolfo is also buying logs from 4-FRI in AZ. They need logs.

The CFRP grant said they would hire 10 more people in Otero County.

Mescalero will not be burning this Spring. Fire restrictions are very high right now. Cloudcroft went to fire restrictions on Tuesday, and USFS has fire restrictions in place. The rest of Otero County is waiting for the county commissioners to take action.

Statewide CFRP (Mark C.) – this has been challenging for this area. The biggest problem is finding qualified personnel.

NM Prescribed Burn Council is writing a similar grant for the Gila.

Otero County CWPP

Otero County is one-year out from updating their CWPP. They will be applying for a grant for next year. Rick wants the OWG to review the CWPP, starting with chapter 5.0, which includes some action items.

The CWPP was signed in 2014, so how are we doing? Mark said we've made some progress, but not nearly enough. Rick said we've done a lot, particularly working with private landowners to change perceptions. Leland said there's been a lot done on the reservation in the corner around the Nogel area. Rick said the CWPP is a supporting document to use for funding.

Fuels reduction work in southern Sacramentos focuses first on southwest side of populated areas. Winds come from that direction. Dave said getting people involved in these projects is extremely difficult. There are lots of protests against home treatment projects. It's a very tough sell for private property owners.

The County took over operation of the pit for slash. No one seemed to know the current status. Last anyone heard, it was pretty full. The pit has been closed, so nothing has been added to it. It's supposed to be open on weekends. Contractors can't dump in the pit – the argument is the anti-donation clause wouldn't allow this. Mayor Dave found this ridiculous.

Rick said he's pushing mastication for cost-share programs.

For the next go-around of CWPP, pay attention to the southwest corner.

North Sacramento Watershed Strategy

North Sacramento Mountain Watershed Strategy is completed. Signing ceremony May 18, 1:00 pm at Smokey Bear Ranger Office.

Mark said the Regional Forester told this group a year ago that each group needs a plan. This document shows people are working together. This is good for fundraising.

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Biomass and Energy

Looking for opportunities. Mayor Dave said they need a constant supply of material. They can't just rely on the slash pit. 15 years ago, Cloudcroft's plans for a biomass plant were killed because they couldn't get a reliable, consistent supply.

Staffing

Mark said the USFS has struggled with staffing. There has been a lot of turnover and not many qualified candidates to fill open positions.

The BIA, on the other hand, has not had a lot of turnover. Staffing at the Mescalero Apache tribe is fine as well.

The State Land Office has an open position in Hobbs. Other than that, they have enough staff.

The NM State Forestry Division is finally fully staffed. They have a new FMO at Capitan. Nick also started there recently as District Forester.

In Cloudcroft, Sue is back. She spent 5 months in Florida on Hurricane clean-up. She's now going to the Virgin Islands for FEMA. She's written two grant proposals for the Village of Cloudcroft in the past month. One is for a big generator for their wastewater plant.

Omnibus Bill

Mark said that streamlining NEPA is a big part of the Omnibus Bill. NEPA is time consuming. Finding ways to speed up NEPA is something the USFS is hoping for. Rick noted that Jodie is using a lot of CEs in Smokey Bear.

Wood Industry Summit

Rick reviewed the meeting this morning of the New Mexico Wood Industry Summit planning team. They have the logistics pretty well lined up, and they're now working on the show – how it will move forward. They probably will have concurrent sessions. Carmen Austin brought a lot of ideas of potential speakers. They want Butch Blazer to speak at the opening and also to introduce Cal Joyner, who is keynote speaker.

Mark noted that one goal of Wood Summit is to bring more resources to this area.

Rick said people who use the wood can set up in the exhibition there. Some are crafts, but most are industry.

Collaborative Spatial Fire Management

Mescalero is working on a Spatial Fire Management plan right now, which is nearly done. The plan informs the whole Fire Management Plan for the BIA. The BIA contracted the plan to the tribe.

Frank said there's a blog on this as well, that identifies areas where you'll allow fire use, areas where there are controls. Mark noted the USFS has a similar tool.

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Rick suggested people bring their maps to this collaborative group, and everyone can view it and discuss plans. For example, people may suggest where letting a fire burn might not be a good idea for some reasons. This allows a buy-in from communities that would be impacted, as well as building collaboration.

Frank said this planning tool pre-identifies how a fire will be handled in different parts of a forest.

The USFS is coming out with a map that shows management priorities for fires that might ignite from a lightning strike. They want to share this with fire departments around the area – if a fire ignites, a fire department might put it out before USFS gets there, and there might be some management benefits from letting it burn.

This is a huge process and requires a GIS specialist to do it.

In the past, the plans have only covered general areas, not specific. Can do a lot of work on specific sites. This is a good tool that can be used.

Rick suggested we table this for now and get more information on it, and see if we want to use this collaborative group to work through this.

The discussion continued about work on the Mescalero Reservation and some potential fires on USFS land to the south. There is a large fuel break on the Reservation just north of USFS land – so if a fire is burning north in the LNF, with Mescalero permission, they could let it burn onto the Reservation. BIA said that would be good.

Round Robin

Dave – On May 1, Cloudcroft's new \$8 million wastewater treatment plant will go into service.

Frank – There has been a quick start to the fire season – they have had the 246 fire in Capitan, and the El Paso Canyon fire in Timberon. The Scout fire also was 16 acres near the 246 fire – they found live ordinance and had to call the state bomb squad. It was right in the middle of the fire. Fire season is just beginning, and will continue. In the area north of Timberon – tall grass and lop & scatter – if that catches, it is going to go big.

Rick – Otero needs to do a better job of coordinating and communicating across fire departments. They need better after-action plans. This is part of national cohesive strategy.

Sandra said she retired into a mountain community, and it's interesting to be part of it. She feels intimately involved in everything that goes on in the mountains. All the young people are leaving; EMS group used to be about 20 people, now it's down to about 5, with average age over 60. There is a lot of noise from military jets training. She loves these meetings because they give her hope, everyone here is working hard.

The BIA has a couple of NEPA's they are working on. One is a 19,000 acre broadcast burn in the fall. Have some piles they need to take care of.

Alan talked about the NMAC WUF summit, and the new Forest Restoration Triangle (FORT) project that links the NM Highlands University Forestry Department, the NM Forest & Watershed

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Restoration Institute, and the NM State University forestry lab in Mora. He also said forestry faculty from Highlands University will participate in the NM Wood Summit.

The State Land Office had a state DRM meeting. They are working on building relationships with other agencies.

Leland noted there is lots of thinning at the SW corner of the Mescalero Reservation. They have been working on a 200 acre project with NMSF, which was finished last Friday.

The Sacramento district is working on training for prescribed burns. Rx burns are good for training, but also for building relationships. When they get called to a fire, they know each other, and are more willing to listen to each other. Frank said those relationships pay off. People listen to each other and don't fight over turf.

Two or more states this year are going to break records for fires and for homes lost.

Forest health; there is low moisture this year and this is going to affect forest health. Dry trees can't resist bark beetles. There will be more mortality.

Mark – Thanked everyone for participating.