

Otero WUI Working Group

October 10, 2018

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. Review Otero County CWPP
5. 2018 NM Wood Industry Summit update
6. Westside Sacramento Mountain Watershed and Forest Restoration Implementation CFRP grant proposal “2019”
7. Lincoln National Forest and South Central Mountain RCD Partnership Agreement
8. Update Lincoln Nation Forest Plan Revision
9. Update from agencies

Next meeting December 2018

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Attending

Ryan Whitaker, USFS, Acting District Ranger, Sacramento District
Mark Cadwallader, USFS, LNF Partnership Coordinator
Dave Venable, Mayor, Village of Cloudcroft
Frank Silva, NMSF Capitan Office, Timber Management
Sid Gordon, NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
Rick Merrick, South Central Mountains RC&D
Alan Barton, NM Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute

Rick Merrick, the meeting facilitator, opened the meeting with introductions.

The collaborators then discussed implementation of the Southern Sacramento Mountains Watershed Restoration Strategy.

Tularosa Creek Focus Area

The Tularosa Creek Focus Area includes BLM land that has mostly been treated, as well as Mescalero land, and some private lands.

Rick asked if anyone had tried to contact the BIA recently. He has sent emails that have been returned, and wasn't sure what was going on.

Two Goats/High Rolls/Maruchi Focus Area

Mark discussed several projects in the Two Goats / High Rolls / Maruchi Focus Area.

The West Side CFRP planning grant was completed last year. The City of Alamogordo was the main entity. The partners applied this year for a new grant with SCMRC&D as the lead. Initially, the grant was not funded, but in Sept. they heard they've been funded for \$185,000. The plan is to apply the funds to fuel reduction in the Maruchi and La Luz Canyons. The area is 200 acres. The next step is for the SO and the district to start working on planning the treatments. District staff needs to get out into the area to identify sites for the treatments and flag the areas. This is a 2-year grant, and they want to try to do all the work together. It is largely P-J mastication work. The work will probably begin next fall.

The LNF also applied for Tier 3 funding. They put in a proposal for \$120,000, to do more P-J mastication in the same area, Maruchi & La Luz Canyons. There are lots of partners involved in this project, and the USFS feels good that they'll be awarded this grant.

The SO has also been investigating applying for a Joint Chiefs Initiative grant. This is a program administered cooperatively by the NRCS & the USFS. They are looking for funding for additional implementation.

There are three priority areas for implementation: (1) La Bracita (?), (2) Maruchi/La Luz, (3) Alamo Canyon.

The SCMRC&D is ready to start putting out an RFP for contractors to do the work on this project. They need to have contractors lined up if additional funds come in.

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Sid and NMSU Extension is also a part of this project, handling the monitoring. They need to bring together all the monitoring parties – including NM Tech, Ecoservants. Right now they're putting together the monitoring equipment, and soon will start training the Ecoservants, who will do the monitoring. Dr. Young needs to visit the site so he'll be more familiar with the conditions.

Under this contract, there will be no spraying of the juniper. The USFS does have an upcoming project to do some spraying, but currently they don't have a mechanism for addressing sprouts.

Sid said he recently talked to a landowner who believes the treatments that the USFS has done have caused flooding. Mark said the USFS hasn't done any treatments in that area. The City of Alamogordo has done some mowing there. Others are doing cost-share programs in the area. But the USFS hasn't done anything. Sid said the landowner must be confused about who has been doing the treatments.

Rick noted that in the CFRP grant proposal, they put in a cost of \$1,200 per acre, and they were docked for this. The cost will likely be more like \$600 per acre for mastication. The material in there is all small diameter – there really is no market for this. Mastication should be relatively easy on the small trees. They were planning on reapplying for this CFRP grant next year, but since they received money at the last minute, they probably will reapply in 2020.

Mark noted that the future of CFRP is up in the air. Walter Dunn, who wrote the legislation and has managed the program, retired a week ago. No one has said who will fill his position.

Another project is Priority Area 3, in Alamo Canyon, which is City of Alamogordo property, totaling 160 acres. The area goes up Alamo Canyon towards Two Goats. Some of the area cannot be treated with mechanical equipment, but Rx fire is possible. The total area is about 3,000 acres, but a lot of that is not treatable. NMSF has already done some treatments in this area. The objective of the project has been to treat the area above the watershed.

Frank said that NMSF is waiting to hear what the legislature does to see if they'll have watershed money available. The legislature has said they have a lot of oil & gas money, so NMSF is hopeful, but they have to wait to see what the final word from the legislature is.

For monitoring in these areas, NMSU wants to see what invasive species have been there. They want to do monitoring now to know what's there, so they'll know if the mastication changes invasive species or other outcomes. Also, this monitoring data will inform how they train workers.

SSRP Focus Area

The South Sacramento Restoration Project (SSRP) is huge for the Sacramento Mountains. The project is moving along and making progress. Mark reported he just talked to NM Game & Fish this morning. The contractor on the project, SWCA, has completed the wildlife evaluation. Now, they are almost ready to submit the draft EIS. They will send the DEIS to the USFS on Oct. 19 for review. This is a big milestone in the project. Once the Forest Service completes its review, the DEIS will be ready to put out to the public. They are just a little behind their anticipated timeline, but they are close to on track. The final Record of Decision document will probably be issued around May 1, and then they can begin implementation on the project.

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Once the DEIS comes out, the USFS will organize another public meeting to discuss the DEIS.

There was a very good public field trip about the SSRP in August. They had a good crowd, about 34 people went on the trip. They viewed some areas that were meeting desired conditions to show what it should look like. Also, they saw a lot of untreated areas. They also visited the Alamo Peak mastication project. Overall, it was a great field trip. There was a representative from the Center for Biological Diversity along on the trip, and the CBD has shown buy in on the project.

The USFS has gotten additional funds from NM Game & Fish to complete the archeological surveys. NM Game & Fish is ready to fund some implementation as well. The agency has a new director, Mike Sloane, who has shown a willingness to move forward on this. Mike has spent his career with NM Game & Fish. The previous director had a personal investment in the project, but the new director wants to carry it forward. However, after the governor's election, there may be another change in the directorship, depending on how the election turns out.

Rick asked about the prospects for long-term funding of forest restoration projects, and what the options were. Alan told about the 3-day workshop on alternative forms of financing forest restoration projects, held on the Santa Fe National Forest in August. This was part of a pilot project organized by the USFS Washington Office and the National Forest Foundation. The Santa Fe NF and the Monongahela NF were the two pilot sites. Based on the discussions in these two workshops, the organizers will move forward with additional educational materials on alternative funding sources for forest restoration. The USFS is clearly aware that current funding is likely not sustainable, and we need to look for more partnerships to fund treatments over the long term. Mark noted that partnering to extending funding opportunities is important.

Rick asked what role collaboration would play in restoration projects moving forward. Alan discussed some academic research that has been coming out of Oregon and elsewhere on the New Natural Resource Economy. The authors of these studies recognize that rural economies in formerly timber-dependent communities are struggling, and are looking at new economic opportunities for rural areas. Collaboratives and financing for forest restoration play a role in the new economies. Collaboratives need to look beyond just fundraising and extend their activities to include community outreach and community economic development.

Mark summed up by saying the SSRP project is going well, and the USFS expects to issue its ROD in May, 2019.

Wood Industry Summit

Rick handed out the current agenda for the Wood Industry Summit. The keynote speaker will be State & Private Forestry Deputy Director, Don Vandendriesche, from the Region 3 office. Butch Blazer (Mescalero Governor) will introduce the speaker.

Gubernatorial candidate Steve Pearce has a new advertisement out about revitalizing the logging industry in NM. We discussed whether he has been invited to the Summit, and if he would come. Several people noted the Summit is right after the election, and while the winners may want to attend, they may be busy organizing their transition. It would be good to get politicians to attend, however, since their understanding of the issues is incomplete. Pearce's new advertisement is misleading, for example. Cutting down trees will not create a saw mill. We need to think differently about this. We need to figure out what to do with small diameter

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material. Options might include pallets or chips, but any effort to generate options for utilizing small diameter material would require investment. It is not as simple as just bringing back timber jobs.

Sid asked if timber harvesting in NM focuses on local labor, or is work coming from out-of-state? Often, for larger harvests, locals don't have the equipment to do the work. Also, the USFS is required to put it up for national bid. The agency has to look at economic value.

Rick suggested we need to find or create local companies that could utilize the wood, and still compete with national companies that just grind up the material. This is why we need politicians to participate in the Summit. We need tax incentives and support from politicians in this realm to bring companies in or to support entrepreneurs. Pearce talking about bringing back the timber industry is fine, but he needs to understand and talk about the whole picture.

It is likely that some of the staffers for politicians will be at the Summit, as they are good about showing up to various events.

Mark noted that the USFS has some programs for local contracting, small business contracting, minority business contracting, and others, especially for smaller contracts. But for larger contracts, by law they have to go to the market, and offer contracts nationally. If they get a lower bid, they will take it.

At the Summit, on Saturday at 12:00 pm there will be a tour of Ski Apache to see the steep-slope equipment being used there for treatment work.

WiseWood Energy, an Oregon company, will be at summit. They make large boilers that use wood.

Custom Crates & Pallets CFRP Utilization Grant

Not much new to report. Ecoservants has done some monitoring on this project. Part of this grant is to introduce young people to the industry side of forest management.

Otero County CWPP

This project is still on track to begin next year. Rick suggested that one focus area for this project might be treatments at least 300 feet around subdivisions. If this extends into the national forest, however, they cannot cut on the forest right now. The USFS may be able to use CEs to do projects like this that extend onto NF. Lincoln NF now has regular meetings to discuss CEs on small projects like this.

Dave noted that homeowners can do the thinning, but in Cloudcroft they rely on the USFS to do much of the work on surrounding areas. Without that, the work the homeowners do probably will be of little value.

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Forest Plan Revision

The Lincoln NF is moving forward on its forest plan revision. They had several public meetings in communities around the national forest recently. There was a meeting at the co-op in Cloudcroft a week ago Monday. Three people attended the meeting. About 20 to 25 people attended in Weed during the same week. They also had meetings in Alamogordo and in Carlsbad. Only 1 person showed up to the Carlsbad meeting. The Lincoln NF still has a way to go on revising its forest plan.

Round Robin

Ryan – Joe Kimball is acting in the fuels position through March. They will hire a new fuels person in February. Dan Ray's position should be filled at same time. The AFMO position on the Smokey Bear District has been open for awhile, and the national forest is looking to fill that position as well.

The applications for the Sacramento Ranger job closed, so they should have someone new in that position in 3 or 4 months.

Alan – For the Wood Summit, we need to have a way to capture what happens at each session. Can we have a notetaker at each session, or perhaps a video or audio recording of the sessions? We should also capture the questions that people ask in each session. And, we should get the slides the presenters use, even though the slides alone often are not very helpful.

We also want to have evaluations for participants to fill out – a short evaluation of each session, and a longer evaluation of the entire Summit.

Frank – The NMSF Capitán Office is working on the Bluewater Canyon project. This is an area southwest of Weed, in Jim Lewis Focus Area. NM Game & Fish is funding vegetation work in the area, and it is a bit chunk of money, \$400,000. Nick is working on getting this grant arranged. The project is ready to go but the paperwork needs to be completed. Due to personnel changes in both the USFS and NMSF, this project was put on hold for awhile. Due to MSO PACs, can only work about 6 months out of the year.

Otero WUI Grant – They originally heard they didn't get it, but then heard they found \$67,000, with a possibility of going up to \$267,000. NMSF is waiting to hear the final figure to do the paperwork.

They have also applied for next year's WUI grant for Otero County. They've been working on the application, and they changed the scope of project somewhat to narrow it, in line with the instructions, which suggest narrowly tailored projects will be more successful. So, the new grant is for Timburon and US82 Corridor, instead of Otero County.

Mark – The USFS has carried out thinning around Cloudcroft, using RAC project money. The first part of this has been done, on land belonging to the Village of Cloudcroft, near the ski area.

PERC-Rx burn (?) – Mark is working on an article to get into local papers. NM Game & Fish will reintroduce desert bighorn sheep to the Sacramento Mountains at the end of October. They have been talking about this for years. Bighorn have been extirpated from the

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Sacramentos for over 100 years. They'll bring sheep in from San Andres NWR, across the basin, and release them behind the Space Center. Sheep will all be collared so there will be tracking.

The USFS is looking to do a Rx burn, in the Jim Lewis Focus Area. The burn plan area consists of 4,800 acres, although not all of that will be burned. Weather permitting, it will start sometime in November or December. It will be a broadcast burn, and it is adjacent to the PERC work from last year.

Sid – The Society of Range Management had a tour here on Aug. 24 in Agua Chiquitas. Lots of students attended – 20 to 25 from NMSU. It is very important to get young people interested in this industry. Young people aren't exposed to an agrarian lifestyle anymore. Bringing young people in to see the whole picture, on the ground, is very valuable. Also local people, agency people.

With Doug Cram, Sid is working on home protection from wildfire. Sid wants to put a lot of effort into private land.

Dave – Michael Adams did a great job on thinning the area near the ski area. This will be used in training firefighters. Will be burning piles from a previous project, and perhaps the new project.

Cloudcroft needs more volunteer firefighters – about 10 to 15 more, and EMS as well – most EMS live outside of town. City will pay for all the training and everything. Need young people to get involved.

Rick – still working on the Circle Cross, with Frank & Robert. Perhaps 250 to 500 acres.

Rick is still working on BLM money, RC&D has taken the lead on writing plan.

Mark Cadwallader is retiring at the end of December, so we likely won't see him at any more Otero Working Group meetings, at least not representing the USFS. He may show up as a local landowner in the future. He also will be at the Wood Industry Summit in November. Thank you, Mark, for all of your work and for being a great collaborator in the Otero Working Group.

The next meeting will be: January 2019.