

Magdalena Collaborative Meeting

December 13, 2024
10:00 am – 11:00 am

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://nmhu.zoom.us/j/92468473529?pwd=TEExCV1dOUlF6ckRmMGVlOW9TRWNlZz09>

Meeting ID: 924 6847 3529
Passcode:760634

Meeting Purpose:

Update from Magdalena Ranger District
Gauge interest and select date for Spring meeting and field tour

Magdalena Collaborative Goals:

The Magdalena Collaborative was established in 2018 with two main goals;

- 1) Convene diverse partners working in the greater Magdalena landscape to identify shared interests, priority needs for collaboration, and clear actions steps, and
- 2) Foster networking and relationship building.

Agenda

10:00 am	Introductions	Crystal Medina (Facilitator)
10:10 am	Current Projects and Updates	Tina Cason, District Ranger
10:30 am	Discussion: Spring meeting: Proposed field tour Identify meeting/tour date	Crystal Medina
10:45 am	Partner Updates	Everyone
11:00 am	Meeting Adjourned	

Magdalena Collaborative

Virtual Meeting

December 13, 2024

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Attendance

- Tina Cason (District Ranger, Magdalena Ranger District, Cibola NF, USDA FS)
- Jim Nelson (Local Resident)
- Andrea Petrullo (Habitat Biologist, NM Department of Game and Fish)
- Crystal Medina (NMFWRI)
- Alejandro Collins (NMFWRI)
- Phil Rudy (Partnership Coordinator, Cibola NF, USDA FS)
- Eugenio Padilla (Project and Urban Forester, Socorro District, NM EMNRD Forestry Division)
- Daniel Lusk (Habitat Manager, NM Department of Game and Fish)
- Mary Kathryn Ray (Local Resident)
- Hamish Thompson (Volunteer, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation)

Contacts sent in meeting chat

- Daniel Lusk, Habitat Manager NMDGF, Daniel.Lusk@dgf.nm.gov, 575-649-1658
- Hamish Thomson, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation, hbgthomson@gmail.com
- Andrea Petrullo, Northwest/central NM habitat biologist, andrea.petrullo@dgf.nm.gov, 505-490-1059
- Eugenio Padilla, Socorro Project and Urban Forester, NM Forestry Division. eugenio.padilla@emnrd.nm.gov 505-479-1565
- Crystal Medina, Collaboration Program Manager, NMFWRI, camedina@nmhu.edu
- Alejandro Collins, Collaboration Specialist, NMFWRI, amcollins@nmhu.edu

NM Department of Game and Fish

Daniel Lusk, Habitat Manager

The NM Department of Game and Fish has funding opportunities available for prescribed burning throughout the state on both state and federal lands. The Department has also recently increased its internal capacity to facilitate the awarding of funds and assist with other prescribed burning needs. Meeting attendees are encouraged to reach out to Daniel if they have related funding needs or interests.

Magdalena District, Cibola National Forest

Tina Cason, District Ranger

Several of the projects presented during the previous meeting in March are still ongoing.

Hop Canyon Patterson Project Area

The Hop Canyon Patterson Project, considered to be in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), has been cleared by NEPA regulations since 2009. Until a couple of years ago, much of the work in the area had been based on availability and capacity of the district to implement projects. More recently, the district collaborated with the New Mexico EMNRD Forestry Division to obtain more secure funding to implement projects, which began in September of this year (2024). Treatments in Unit 1 of the project area have been completed; treatments in Unit 2 are underway and the crews will seek to treat Units 3 and 4 early in the new year. The district is working with the property owners adjacent to Units 3 and 4 to survey the land and ensure the treatments are contained within the project area units.

The district intends to open Units 1 and 2 for the public to gather firewood from downed material after the projects and related documentation are finalized. As is customary, individuals will be required to obtain the respective permits to gather firewood. The district plans to burn any material left on the ground by the fall of 2025 with prescribed pile burns if conditions allow. Notably, Units 3 and 4 will not be opened to the public for gathering firewood due to their proximity to private lands.

Magdalena Mountains Restoration Project

The district will be seeking a NEPA categorical exclusion for wildlife habitat enhancement for this 91,000-acre project. Possible treatments will include prescribed burning, thinning, and others. Tina Cason explains that “thinning will be used where possible, while prescribed burns will be used where they make sense.” Treatments will be used to maximize access to areas considered to be the most optimal potential wildfire suppression fire lines. These will be based on factors like vegetation and topography to best keep a wildfire contained in the event of an unplanned natural ignition. Lightning strikes, which appear to be more common than the norm in the Magdalena Mountains, are likely causes for unplanned natural ignitions. If an unplanned ignition were to occur in an area where wildfire lines have already been prepared, and if the environmental conditions are appropriate, the district intends to manage the wildfire for positive benefits, similarly to a planned prescribed burn.

The district managed a wildfire in the Fisher Unit in this exact way. A prescribed burn was implemented in this unit in 2010 / 2011 and then experienced an unplanned ignition in 2022. Because of the district’s foresight in preparing fire lines, the wildfire in the 8,433-acre unit was managed and yielded significant benefits. For greater access to the fire, the district expanded the road back into Bear Trap Canyon that had previously been in poor condition. The district views this as a double-benefit event, the road into Bear Trap Canyon was repaired and the unit experienced a successful burn with positive benefits.

The district was awarded emergency restoration funding for Bear Trap Canyon which experienced post-fire flooding that significantly impacted the campground. A previous NEPA clearance allows the district to seek options for restoration. Currently, the district is exploring options to re-route the road into the campground, as it is susceptible to flooding. Further, a contracted trails crew out of Socorro is assessing fire and post-fire flooding and erosion damage to trails in Bear Trap Canyon. The trail crew is on-the-ground and will soon be delivering an assessment of the area’s trails for the district to better evaluate its next steps. The campground and toilets at Bear Trap Canyon, which is also situated in a 100-year flood zone, experienced flooding that created health hazards and will need to be relocated. Attendees are invited to

provide feedback during the meeting on possible sites for its relocation. One option being explored by the district is the possibility of relocating the campground to the Monica cabin area, which is already a popular camping area. Regardless, the district will have to go through the NEPA process, which entails opportunities for public comments.

San Juan Mountains

The district intends to conduct two prescribed burns to connect 21,000 acres of continuous treated sites. Initial approvals for these have been obtained and the district is now exploring burn units in hopes of burning in the spring if there are ideal conditions. It is also possible the district may have to wait until the fall of 2025 to conduct these, depending on how quickly the process continues and on environmental conditions. The district is appreciative of the collaborative partnerships for restoration projects in the Limestone area which have resulted in significant improvements to the landscape. A prescribed burn in the Ranch Supply inholding is being planned carefully, due to the presence of Mexican Spotted Owls, for the fall of 2025.

Partners

The Forest Service is experiencing internal challenges nationwide that are causing difficulties in implementing restoration projects. The district is seeking and is appreciative of any partners willing to provide financial or other assistance in implementing these projects.

Durfee Bolander

Restoration projects are being conducted in the Durfee Bolander Project Area, which was cleared by NEPA in 2013. Both prescribed burns and thinning have been utilized in several units over the past couple of years. Prescribed burns have been successfully implemented or planned in Units 5, 6, 9, 12, and 13 thus far, amounting to 4,000 acres treated combined. These prescribed burns will continue as ideal conditions occur. The NM Forestry Division thinned primarily Piñon-Juniper Units 1 and 2b. More recently, the Forestry Division and the Alamo Navajo cutting crew completed thinning in Unit 11 and are currently working in Unit 9 until the roads become impassable due to winter conditions, which will likely shift the crew's work to Units 12 and 13. Funding for the thinning crews was provided by NM Forestry Division. Thinning work is expected to continue into the spring or summer.

Hunters have been providing feedback on the quantity and quality of game animals in treated units. Mule deer, turkey, and elk appear to be benefitting positively from the treatment-improved habitats. The district notes that there has not been much feedback from others on the outcomes of the treatments but are still happy with the results. An attendee speaks up and expresses their concern for the potential of prescribed fires negatively impacting the newly expanded and reconnected floodplain in the Ranch Supply area. The district responds by ensuring that the prescribed burns planned in that area will be of low severity that would return essential nutrients to the soil and that they do not expect a negative impact significant enough to reduce the size of the floodplain. Further, the district explains that the landowners of private land adjacent to Unit 9 requested their land to be included in the prescribed fires originally planned for Forest Service land. Although it required extensive paperwork and coordination, the district was able to accommodate these requests. Ranch Supply is in a similar situation.

Water Canyon Campground

A fee deposit tube was installed at the campground two days ago to prepare for the implementation of visitor-use fees beginning in the new year. Potential visitors will be able to reserve camping sites and the group shelter beginning in January.

The same trail crew contractor from the Bear Trap Canyon will also likely be assessing the trails in the Water Canyon Campground with the intention of connecting out-and-back trails to each other to create loops, which are preferred by hikers. Construction of the connections will require NEPA clearance. This is still in the initial stages of coordinating; the district's current priorities are to keep the existing trails maintained for visitor use.

The New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NM Tech) will likely be constructing cement slabs at the top of the Magdalena Mountains to construct research observatories. This location is one of three ideal locations for the intended research in the world, and the only one in the United States. NM Tech intends to work closely with tribal partners to seek their input throughout the research process. These projects are a collaborative effort that involves the Magdalena Ridge Observatory and the Langmuir Laboratory for Atmospheric Research at NM Tech. In March, a crane was attempting to reach existing NM Tech equipment that is already on top of the mountains when it slipped on a patch of ice. Since then, the crane has been recovered, removed, and any environmental degradation has been remediated.

Attendee Questions / Discussion

An attendee requested an update on the status of Forest Road 549 over Monicas Saddle. The district commented that it is not closed to the public but might require high clearance vehicles equipped with 4-wheel drive. Crews recently conducted maintenance on the road and it has been improved. Another attendee requested an update on "Withington Road"; the district confirmed that it was not closed by the district, but rather it may be impassible due to snow or ice.

One attendee commented that they have seen more NM Locust than expected growing back after a fire in the Western Canyon Watershed, near Indian Creek. The district explains that growth of NM Locus in post-fire areas is likely a part of the regeneration response, but offered to monitor specific areas if the attendee could send over the locations in question.

Next meeting

NMFWRI offers to host a field tour in lieu of the next meeting, with most attendees responding favorably. It is recommended that the tour include visits to previous and planned prescribed burn sites. Attendees and organizers agree that late March, April, or early May of 2025 would be ideal timing for the field tour. It is also noted by an attendee that they would like to include visits to flood plains.