

Agenda

March 21, 2019
Lincoln County Emergency Services Office
111 Copper Ridge Road

3:00 PM to 5:00 PM

- Welcome – Laura Doth
- Review of Previous Meeting/Notes – Laura Doth
- Discussion of Hale Lake Area and Recreation Project Maps – ALL
- Next Meeting Date – ALL

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 3 PM.

Attendance

15 people in attendance

Laura Doth, SCMRC&D, Facilitator
Clark Taylor, Grazing permittees
Leroy Cockrell, OHVs
Patricia Fox, OHVs
Mike Buechter, Mountain Bikes
Jodie Canfield, USFS, LNF
Andrew Ellis, USFS, LNF
Alan Barton, NM Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute
Jill Andrews - Equestrians
Joseph Graham, Outfitters
Joe Jarvis – City of Ruidoso Downs
Israel Chavez – City of Ruidoso Downs
Joseph Morales, NM Game & Fish
Benjamin Byrd, NM Game & Fish
Joe Kenmore, Lincoln County Office of Emergency Services

Introduction

Handout – The handout includes the agenda from this meeting, the minutes from the last meeting (Feb. 27), and the ideas generated at the Oct. 24 meeting.

Laura – The purpose of this meeting is to review the maps that collaborators have prepared for the Hale Lake area. Andrew has put all of the information onto map layers. We need to distill all of the contributions down to a cohesive plan for the Hale Lake area.

Andrew projected a base map at the front of room, and guided the group in a process of reviewing the contributions. He was able to change this map in real time. People also could approach the front of the room and add elements to the map.

As a review, the Smokey Bear Collaborative has been working on a travel/transportation plan for the Hale Lake area. The SBC started last Fall with each participating organization/interest saying what they would like to see in the focus area around Hale Lake if there were no restrictions. This brainstorming exercise generated a list of topics to address. Then, at the last meeting, each participant specified their main interests. The idea was for each group to “shoot the moon,” how would the area look if all of your interests were represented? Participants submitted maps showing their interests. Andrew has taken these and mapped layers for each participating organization or interest. Today, we’ll look at how these interact and where there are common interests and conflicts.

The goal is a recommendation for planning transportation and recreation in the Hale Lake area. Once this process is complete, preparing the plan should be much easier and faster.

Andrew started by explaining the base map. Black roads are access areas. Red roads are user created, unauthorized routes. Yellow roads are former USFS roads that have been removed from the system. They should not have traffic on them, but they are being used some. Orange routes are USFS roads for administrative use only, not for general public to use. Dotted green lines are fences – not necessarily allotment boundaries, but the fences that exist. Pink dots are range improvement sites (e.g., drinking troughs).

The thickness of roads indicates accessibility – thicker are more accessible, skinnier are for high clearance vehicles only.

The green part of the map is Forest Service land. White is private land. South of this area is Mescalero Reservation.

Shooting Range – Andrew added a buffer around the shooting range showing the maximum range where bullets may end up.

Map Layers

Andrew then reviewed the layers he received from each individual. The layers represent each organization's ideal use.

► Leroy Cockrell, OHVs – looking for as much motorized vehicle use as possible. Single track, ATV and side-by-side vehicles can all run on same tracks. The jury is still out on Jeeps and full-sized vehicles; they're bigger and heavier and will have a larger impact. They may run on the same roads as others, but Leroy isn't sure what to designate for them.

Leroy noted that a lot of the user-created roads are not created by OHVs. They are created by permittees, but OHV users can use these roads. There are 5 cattle permittees in this area.

Mountain Bike Trails – shown by dotted purple lines. Some of these may be taken out or adjusted due to private land and topography. These trails do not currently exist. They come off of the public road in the area, near Hale Lake.

► Jill Andrews, Equestrians – The goal is three trailheads and parking, and a hiking and horseback-riding area. Also one camping area and one day-use area. These are on the western part of the project area.

Curtis – Game & Fish – suggested refugia area for wildlife

► Mike Buechter, Mountain bikes – Represented by orange dotted lines along contours. Mike explained how people can use these trails, which include camping on the trails. People can plan 3-4 day trips. These trails start at Hale Lake and go to the east, north of 443. Also, a small spot at the west end that local people can use for nice evening rides. These trails are not there, for the most part (there may be some overlap with existing trails).

Laura expressed a concern with parking and accessibility, so that it doesn't cross private property or disrupt homeowners in the area.

Andrew noted that at this point, we're talking hypotheticals. There are a lot of details to work out. We're brainstorming now.

► Clark Taylor & Joe Kenmore, Mountain bike and horse trails – For the area south and west of Hale Lake, they suggested two access roads, for emergency access. Also a helicopter access site. They recommended the central part stay vacant, due to an archeological site, Water Hole Canyon area. Also, there are cliffs with paintings. On the road south of San Isidro Lane, there is an administrative access road that is gated at the bottom end but not the top. Need to gate the top part because if people go down it, it is hard to turn around. The road is alongside a canyon and is very narrow. The road was probably used in the past by a lessee for access.

Laura asked if the archeological site would make a good public site? Andrew and Jodie suggested listening to the recommendations from SHPO. If the recommendation is to protect the area, they don't like to call attention to the site.

There is a small private land inholding that one of the trails crosses – there is an opportunity to move the trail around the private land. This land is currently undeveloped.

► Anne – presented a conceptual idea. Wanted multiple sites for access to horse trailers to park, and then horse trails. Andrew didn't map this as it was more of a conceptual idea.

Hale Lake Developed Campground

Jodie then noted that at one point, participants were talking about a developed area, with a campsite, picnic grounds, bathrooms, and the like. Right now, however, the Forest Service Regional Office isn't looking at adding new things, they want to take things away, so if developed camping is desirable we need to capture this now.

Laura said that the Hale Lake area is the only realistic place to put in a developed site. But she asked if we still want a campsite? And if so, does it have to be by Hale Lake?

Several participants chimed in to say that if a campground is put in near Hale Lake, Highway 443 needs to be developed so visitors can get trailers up and down the road. The road needs to be improved and regularly maintained. There are multiple switchbacks, and 5th wheels get stuck easily. Leroy suggested that the road could be posted for single axis trailers only. Joe told about a group that visited the church camp up that road. They had 6 large 70 passenger motor coaches up there last year, that got stuck. He got calls from parents and had to go up and help the busses down the road. In response to questions, Andrew said that Lincoln County maintains that road.

Jodie said that fixing the road would take a lot of money and probably relocating the road up at the top. Anyone with a trailer would have to come in from the northern end of the road. Laura suggested that it seems the Hale Lake area is not a good spot for developing campgrounds with restrooms, campground hosts and other facilities. Israel said there already is more developed camping closer to town, such as Cedar Creek. Jodie said that if we're going to put a campsite on this district, Grindstone Mesa is the best place, because it has a very good road going in there. Around Hale Lake, you can put in a somewhat improved campsite with a fire ring and parking spot, but no fee, for more primitive camping only. Israel said that a big problem is that the roads are loose soil with no base. If you redo the roads and put a solid base in, people should be able to get in from west entrance to Hale Lake.

Common Themes

Andrew identified common themes that emerged from the mapping project.

- Most participants identified the Hale Lake area as a good site for camping.
- Participants see the area to south of Hale Lake for mountain biking.
- Participants want more access at the western end of the project area.
- Participants suggested that the best day use areas would be on the east end of 443.

Andrew suggested that what might work best is a large gravel trailhead, with kiosk, map, parking, and turnaround. Joe compared this to the trailhead at the Argentina Trail, where there are restrooms, non-potable water, and easy access.

Israel – Grew up here, hikes, ATV, horse back. Hale Lake needs more ATV areas, which also are suitable for mountain bikes. This would mostly be for locals – the area is not the most scenic part of the SBRD, so people from desert aren't likely to come here. Hiking trails – the whole mountain is open, so it's easy hiking, horseback riding, and trails aren't necessary. A good ATV loop would be great.

Joe – Ruidoso would like to see a trail through town, down to the Downs, and to Hale Lake. The USFS has been closing roads.

Jodie – the travel plan now in place was created in 1986. The USFS has not closed a road since then.

Andrew – from USFS perspective, we're talking about closing official roads. There are user-created roads that have been closed.

Jodie – it's up to the local users to pay for any work that is done. USFS doesn't have that money.

Laura – we're looking to get a plan together, and then we start to see how we can make this happen. Everyone has limited budgets, but with the plan, different groups can chip in and over time we can get things done.

Andrew – and with the plan in place, when money does become available, we can act on the objectives.

Laura – the State Legislature just passed a bill that will open up some funds. We need to frame our proposals according to the funding. But, every grant proposal needs a plan to accompany it.

Jodie – she wants the collaborative to give her a proposed action.

Israel – the Forest should be used by everyone. We don't need designated areas, people can share the land.

Ben – Horses and ATVs aren't going to mix very well.

Laura – also, wildlife can be impacted.

Israel – we already have areas – BLM, Grindstone – that don't allow ATVs. These are good for horses. And in Hale Lake area, horseback riders don't need to be on the roads.

Ben – When everything is put on map, it looks like oil fields. There are way too many roads, and many user-created roads and trails.

If we put a system of trails in that are designated for specific uses, and the trails are well-constructed to avoid erosion, and the trails create loops and don't disrupt wildlife, then it will work for everyone.

Leroy – also, need to limit some use during hunting season.

Ben – these days, hunting and ATVs go hand-in-hand, so can mix hunting and ATVs during hunting season.

Joseph – How did Turkey Canyon get shut off? Illegal dumping. Not likely to open up again.

Andrew – what are areas of conflict?

- Legal access to areas

- Intended use – crossing private lands

- NMG&F looking for no motorized rec south of 443 for habitat and enforcement

 - This cuts off a lot of recreational area. 443C is a decent loop for off-road vehicles. High clearance road.

 - Ben – looking to give wildlife someplace to go. One or two access roads may be possible but this shouldn't be a heavy use area, for wildlife.

- Shooting range is an area of conflict

Jodie – new connectors are on the table.

Israel – Stetson Highway is a potential connector – loop to 443. Probably an OHV trail.

Laura – NMG&F says no motorized vehicles south of 443, but the southwestern part of the project site has been identified by everyone as an area of interest for multiple use. How much land is necessary for wildlife?

Ben – The southeastern area is good for wildlife, if roads are limited. Just usable roads, not all the spur roads, this would be good for G&F.

Joseph – right now it's a free-for-all – there are lots of people in there and they're parking everywhere.

Laura – How hard is it to get rid of user-created roads? Getting them back to natural conditions, how hard is it to do this?

Jodie – it is tough, but it can be done. First you need to block off the road, and then reseed it.

Israel – but people tend to just create a new road. Signage is very important.

Laura – if we let people know that the area is being reclaimed, hopefully most people will respect that.

Jodie – local people need to police this.

Israel – need a strong metal pole to avoid vandalism.

Leroy – it will take a lot of signage.

Laura – but it's doable. Majority of people will respect this, especially if they have other options.

Joe – we still need to be able to get in to get people who might get stuck there. An ambulance down 443 and a heliport would be important.

Laura – 443 is a FS road. Do you have an agreement to maintain it?

Jodie – we have an agreement with the County to maintain it, but it's been 2 years since money was put into this. Right now it's more of a hand shake agreement.

Israel – retrieval routes. A lot of times hunters go off road to retrieve their game.

Andrew – this is part of Forest Plan Revision – another Forest has added this to their plan.

Jodie – is that part of Forest Plan or can it be in a Travel Plan? Because in some places there is a provision for a road to be open part of the time for hunters.

Forest Plan Revision doesn't make decisions about travel. It could shut off retrieval routes and then they can't be in a Travel Plan.

You could have a road that is open part of the year and closed part of the year for wildlife. Have it open during hunting season for retrieval route.

A Travel Plan can have seasonal restrictions. It's hard to enforce, but if it's important to the user groups, then the USFS could do it.

Israel – would that be hard for NMG&F?

Ben – No, not really. But, people can get injured getting ATVs into retrieval sites. Need to consider this more.

Andrew – This needs more investigation to see what the agencies can do.

Jill – there are fewer and fewer pack animals available in this area. So more and more people are using ATVs.

Jodie – we'll look into this and see what the USFS can do on this.

Question – how can we measure the distance of different trails and roads? A proposed action requires total amount of mountain bike trails, amount of ATV trails, etc.

Jodie – we can estimate it. Not a problem.

Andrew – or you could put it in in terms of acreage – there are different ways to include this in a plan.

Joseph – is there a route for commercial ATV rides?

Jodie – No; the commercial operators can use any of the areas that are open.

Laura – and they also have deals with private landowners and use their land in addition to the NF.

Jodie – for OHVs, can Leroy create a system of difficulty for roads? Can include connectors if necessary. For Jill, same for horses. For Mike, for bike trails.

Jill – users do need trails. Visitors get lost out there. Jill believes in trail etiquette, with multi-use trails. If people follow speed guidelines, then it works. Horses can step off trail and let OHVs to go by, no problem, as long as everyone is following the etiquette guidelines. In parking lots, no need to segregate for trailers and other – let people work it out. As long as people are polite, it works fine. Trails are for everyone, there is no private use. Trails should be marked like a ski area – beginner, intermediate, advanced. But you do need trails, people can't always navigate through woods.

Jodie – so, it sounds like in addition to Hale Lake, maybe a couple of loops at the southeast corner of the map.

Israel – perhaps a loop just off 443 at the east end, and a loop trail in the Stetson area, and by Grapevine Canyon to Turkey Canyon, then to 443. This would make a great trail.

Leroy – In the southwestern areas, mountain bikes and horses would be good. In the middle area east of Hale Lake, there are good areas for trails. The vacant area in there is fine to leave like that, everyone can stay out of there. There's room for everyone. The southeast area is good for hunters, and they can use ATVs. Leroy is happy with the way people have talked about zoning the area.

Laura – we also need to develop some way to educate users who are using the area. Locals who grew up here know the rules, but visitors from elsewhere don't know the rules. There needs to be public education on these issues. For example, explain to people the rule to leave a gate as you found it (open/closed), and if an area is closed, don't go in there. But people need to know why an area is closed – this should be explained to them. What is the best way to educate people about this – a brochure? Signage? Lots of outsiders who come to visit this area don't know how to behave.

Leroy – educational boards at trailheads are a good educational tool. Also, a permit system is a good idea, and also a possible way to raise some money. When someone gets a permit, then the authorities can give them a map and explain the uses and what areas are closed, and why.

Jodie – the USFS can't necessarily issue permits, as they don't have the staff to enforce the permits. But, there can be a sign-in system that would allow for some education.

Israel – doesn't want to see a permit to use the national forest. With more outsiders and increased traffic, people don't know the etiquette. They leave trash, and area shows a bigger impact.

Laura – the need is clear, but how do we manage the area to account for these issues? How do we get the plan in place to bring everything together? There's plenty of room over 35,000 acres. We want this area to be used sustainably for many years. We want this area to be amazing in 50 years.

Jodie – this discussion is encouraging; the group seems like it can get to a proposed action. We have some general agreements. It's up to people from different interests to get together and map it out. In each part – west, central and SE, groups with interests in each area need to get together and work out the trail system and uses. We have helispots identified.

Laura – is everyone in agreement with the helispot areas? No response, everyone is in agreement that this is OK to do.

How do we want to proceed with mapping each of the areas?

Ben – happy to meet with people to determine road areas and beginning, intermediate, advanced.

Joseph – need to have parking and turnaround areas at each trailhead site.

Group Discussion on Shooting – there is no designated place for shooting. Gun range is only for members and have to pay. So people are shooting in a lot of places. They leave a lot of trash around. Can we designate a place with some sort of facility or shooting spot?

Jodie – the issue is lead, which is expensive to clean up. A designated area for the general public would require a remediation plan.

Ben – NMG&F does have money for shooting ranges. Also, there are companies that will come and reclaim lead and will pay for this, you get 30% of what they make.

Joseph – there used to be a shooting area next to the gun range that people used to use, but it's been blocked off.

Ben – NMG&F did build a range near Taos. At the north end of state there aren't any private ranges, so the problems are worse there. Ben will investigate the possibilities for this.

Jodie – we can propose this and see.

Israel – is it possible to have a day rate for the existing range? It's already there, on USFS land.

Laura – it's worth asking. They may not be interested, but we can ask. Also, it's good to find out from NMG&F about what they're doing in Taos.

Jodie – the range may be interested in having more younger people involved.

Joseph – probably need a different site. They do "cowboy action" shoots there, when it's closed down.

The range in Capitan is also private.

Jodie – the USFS needs a proposed action by April 15 (with some wiggle room).

Andrew – we won't have letter to public until we get the story map product.

Jodie – we need that by the end of the month. People at the USFS Regional Office have shot holes in the story board, Andrew has been shepherding this.

Laura

Next meeting – Wednesday, April 24. A little past the deadline, but if everyone gets their work done by then, we'll be OK. The meeting will be at the Hubbard Museum, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.