

## **Magdalena Collaborative General Meeting**

Monday, May 18, 2020  
Conference Call

### **Agenda**

2:00 pm	Introductions	Alan Barton, Facilitator
2:05 pm	Wolf Count Update	John Oakleaf U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
2:20 pm	Cibola NF Plan Revision Update Multi-Forest Riparian EA	Sarah Browne USFS, Cibola National Forest
2:35 pm	Trails Project Update -NM Volunteers for the Outdoors Summer Trails Projects	Jim Nelson Village of Magdalena
2:45 pm	Magdalena District Updates -COVID-19 Protocols & Practices -New District Ranger, Michael Salazar -Preparations for Fire Season	Tina Cason USFS, Magdalena District Interim District Ranger
2:55 pm	Partner Updates	Magdalena Collaborative
3:00 pm	End	

### **Conference Call Etiquette**

- (1) Identify yourself each time you speak
- (2) Please speak loudly and clearly
- (3) Keep your phone muted except when talking
- (4) Address other individuals by name
- (5) Be aware of background noise (e.g., paper shuffling)
- (6) If your phone plays music when on hold, please do not use hold
- (7) Please hold questions until a speaker is finished
- (8) Please let us know when you leave the call

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Attendance

Ruth Ann Harriet, Salado/Quemado Soil & Water Conservation District  
George Chavez, NM Association of Conservation Districts  
Oscar Simpson, NM Horse Council  
Mary Katherine Ray, Sierra Club  
Cary Romero, NM Council of Outfitters & Guides  
Jim Nelson, Village of Magdalena  
Jim McGrath, NM Native Plant Society  
Linda Starr, Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
Susan Ostlie, Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
John Oakley, US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Sarah Browne, Cibola National Forest  
Tina Cason, Acting District Ranger, Magdalena District  
Alan Barton, NM Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute

Wolf Count Update

John Oakley  
US Fish & Wildlife Service

The first point is to acknowledge that wolves are controversial.

Every year, between November and January, there is a minimum population count of wolves in New Mexico. This is done first through a ground count, and at the end of January, they do a helicopter survey. They're looking primarily for uncollared animals. The goal is to monitor trends in the wolf population numbers.

In the 2019/2020 count, 163 wolves were counted. This is an increase from the prior year, when 131 wolves were counted. The population has been increasing steadily and likely will continue to do so in the future.

In the Magdalena area:

- Magdalena Mountains: There are no resident wolves in the Magdalena Mountains.
- San Mateo Mountains: There is one pack of 4 uncollared wolves in the northwestern San Mateos. There also are 2 to 3 singles that come into this area. There was a pair, called the Wahoo Pack, that formed earlier this year, but the pair split up two months ago. Both are still in the area and are being monitored to see if they get back together.
- Bear Mountains: There are a few dispersers that come through this area, but no pack activity in the Bear Mountains.
- Gallinas Mountains: It appeared that a pack was forming in the Gallinas, but a male animal died, and it now looks like there are just a couple of singles, one north of the highway and one south of the highway

- There also is a new report of a couple of wolves in the Gila area, to the west of the Datil, in the Thompson Canyon/Davenport Canyon area. They are tracking these wolves right now, and they're not sure if they'll head up into the Datil Mountains.

There likely will be more wolves in the Magdalena area in the future.

This is an issue of lack of genetic diversity among Mexican grey wolves. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mexican grey wolves were going to be extinguished from the wild. Diversity among wild wolves was mixed, from unrelated to related. The US Fish & Wildlife Service captured a few of the last remnant wolves, and kept a captive population of 7 wolves. These have gone extinct, so genetic diversity is an issue in this population.

The Fish & Wildlife Service uses a process called cross-fostering to increase genetic diversity in the wild wolf population. Young pups born in captivity are put in wild dens when they are less than 2 weeks old. They are rubbed together with wild pups so they smell the same, and parents then raise them as wild wolves. This procedure has fewer problems than releasing them as adults from captivity, and is less controversial as well. Cross fostering accomplishes goals of increasing genetic diversity.

This year, the Fish & Wildlife Service has released 20 pups from captivity to wild dens. Last year they released 12. Two of the twelve released last year were collared and continue to be monitored. Overall, about 33 percent of the pups released into the wild survive to breeding age, about what was expected. About half of wolf pups die from 10 days to 1 year of age.

The recovery goal for New Mexico & Arizona, south of I-40, is a population of 320 wolves. There are some genetic diversity goals as well, and goals for the number of cross-fostered pups to reach adulthood.

Through cross-fosters, they are pushing greater diversity. By crossing wolves in captivity, they can do a better job of controlling diversity. There was one pack in Arizona that has been super-successful at raising fosters, and their genetics have spread throughout the population. Cases like this increase the overall success of wolf recovery.

One Magdalena Collaborative member stated they found this presentation very informative, and recommended that the Collaborative should have an update on the wolf population on an annual basis.

### Forest Plan Revision

Sarah Browne  
Cibola National Forest Planner

Despite the measures put in place to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including everyone teleworking from home, the Cibola National Forest planning team continues to move ahead with the Revised Forest Plan. The Draft Plan and EIS came out in August, 2019, and the planning team received lots of public comments during the Fall, into early November. All of the comments are much appreciated. Currently, the planning team has almost finished drafting their responses to the public comments that were received.

The Cibola planning team is also responding to comments from the three-forest joint public meeting held in Santa Fe along with planners from the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests.

The planners from the three forests are coordinating to ensure their responses to comments will be consistent.

The comments and responses will be published in an appendix to the Final EIS. The Final Revised Forest Plan will be published at same time. The Cibola NF Planning Team is still aiming to complete and issue all documents during the Fall of 2020.

Once the plan and EIS are issued, they will open a 45-day objection period.

Since this is an election year, the timeline may be postponed so that the comment period does not coincide with the election. So far, the Cibola NF has not received any word from the Forest Service's Washington Office regarding a delay during the election. They are still planning on a Fall release unless they are told otherwise.

Hopefully, the final documents will go to the Region 3 Office by mid-summer. After their review, they hope to get final documents out by October, which would allow the final plan to be released in early 2021, following the objection period.

A Magdalena Collaborative member asked if anywhere in the plan, there a list of invasive plants in the Cibola National Forest?

Sarah responded that the Forest Service brought in a botanist to help with the plant section of the EIS. The botanist produced a Biological Assessment, which includes information on invasive species. Sarah will review the Biological Assessment to see if a list of invasives is included.

There is an updated list of invasive species on the internet. Catherine Kennedy, the regional botanist for the Forest Service, would have more information on this as well.

### Riparian Restoration

Sarah Browne  
Cibola National Forest Planner

The Cibola National Forest, along with the Santa Fe NF, the Carson NF, and the Kiowa National Grasslands are coordinating a programmatic Environmental Assessment on riparian restoration. They started scoping last Fall. The Riparian Restoration Project is led by Josh Hall, the Natural Resources Officer on the Santa Fe National Forest.

The EA is being conducted by a contractor, Environmental Management and Planning Solutions, Inc. (EMPSi), out of Boulder, Colorado. Following last Fall's scoping meetings, EMPSi issued a draft EA which is now available. Due to COVID-19, they will not hold meetings on the draft EA, but they are accepting comments by mail, online via the Cibola NF's CARA website (the same one used for comments on the Draft Forest Plan), and also through a virtual public meeting site, where you can leave a comment. Sarah will forward an email that will explain ways to make comments on this EA. See an email forwarded from Alan following this meeting.

This is a programmatic EA, which provides a tool-based approach to restoration. Across the four Forest Service units, lots of restoration in all types of riparian areas is necessary. The EA identifies project activity and anticipated effects of the projects. Once the EA is approved, the Forest Service would use the EA and an associated checklist to comply with NEPA to clear

each project. The checklist would identify necessary conditions to clear a project, and if all conditions are met, the Forest Service could use the programmatic EA to clear the project and begin restoration. If not all conditions on the checklist are met, the Forest Service would do additional NEPA reviews before beginning the project.

Sarah has compared the Riparian Restoration EA to both the original 1985 Cibola National Forest Plan and the current Draft Plan to make sure it is in compliance.

This is a great project and there is a lot of public interest in it, and so far they have received good feedback from the public.

Josh Hall from the Santa Fe NF can answer additional questions about this EA.

One of the Magdalena Collaborative members noted that Larry Wynn from the Mt. Taylor Collaborative talked very extensively about this document and said it is very professionally done and a good assessment.

A member asked about how biodiversity will be protected in specific fens? In particular, the member was concerned about one specific fen in the Zuni Mountains.

Sarah said she will pass this concern on to Josh. Since this is a programmatic EA, it will be more about what to do to restore fens in general, rather than a site-specific plan for restoring any specific fen. Site specific details would not be handled by this EA, but by the checklist and additional analysis, and if necessary, a potential additional EA. For information on specific fens, contact Andrea, and for questions about this EA, contact Josh.

### Trails Project Update

Jim Nelson  
Village of Magdalena

Nick Tenorio is on the board of the New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors (NMVFO). Nick said that they have put their projects on hold as they anticipate their volunteer turnout will be low due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The demographics of typical NMVFO volunteers put them at particular risk from the novel coronavirus.

Volunteers must have a Volunteer Service Agreement in place if we want to proceed with projects. Tina noted that these typically are done on a case-by-case agreement. The Magdalena District is working with the Cibola NF Supervisor's Office on doing a 5-year agreement, which will make process a little smoother.

Jim said the volunteers are working on the Magdalena Mountains now, and have the San Mateos scheduled for a couple years down the road.

There is a full list of volunteer opportunities and projects on the NMVFO website.

A question was raised how the Mexican Spotted Owl injunction affects trail work. Can trail work involve removal of deadfall and brush? Tina said the MSO injunction is still in place, until it is settled in court. The current rules are any trees that are rooted at any point cannot be cut without an exemption. If a tree has broken and fallen across the trail, a trail crew can remove it,

but if it is still rooted, they can't cut it. This includes dead trees; if they are still rooted, they cannot be cut.

### Magdalena District Updates

Tina Cason  
Acting District Ranger

#### *COVID-19 Update*

COVID-19 hit about the same time as she became acting district ranger. The national forest is still open to the public, although doors at the office are locked. However, the staff is still serving the public. The front desk staff are teleworking and answering the phones from home, and responding to emails. District staff can also meet members of the public, but only by appointment. The range staff are meeting with permittees. This is a different way of operating, but the national forest is not closed to the public.

Most of the District staff are teleworking at least part of the time. Tina is in the office 2 days per week. Many staff are spending a lot of time out in the field. They are camping so that they aren't driving or around other people as much.

All of the Magdalena District firefighters are on board, and they have been very creative in maintaining social distancing and still completing training. The training initially has been done in isolation for two weeks, but once that time has passed, the trainees join the regular firefighting workforce. The fire crews are working on prepping prescribed fire lines. Work is going more smoothly than anticipated. Prepping fire lines is a great way to train new firefighters.

Recreation sites have been open, but some amenities, restrooms and trash pick up, have been shut down. Last Friday they opened up the restrooms, and resumed trash pick up. They can only clean restrooms once per week, and they have put up signs warning the public to use the restrooms at their own risk. They are spraying the restrooms with Clorox once per week.

No one knows when they'll be back to normal. They're not sure when office will open with full staffing.

#### *Fire Restrictions and Preparation*

On May 20, the Cibola National Forest will go into Stage 2 fire restrictions. They have been in camp fire restrictions to reduce the number of human starts on the national forest. Stage 2 is more in line with what is normal this time of year, when fire concerns start increasing.

The District is focused on preparations for fire season, following the same general protocols as they do every year, with a few adjustments. Generally, the agencies in the County meet early in the year to coordinate fire preparations, and to make sure all the local departments are on the same page. But, this year the meeting was planned for the week COVID hit, so they didn't have the meeting this year. All the partners have been touching base through phone calls, trying to stay in alignment. Firefighter safety is the top priority, and this year that includes protecting their health while fighting fires.

*New District Ranger*

Michael Salazar has been named as the new District Ranger for the Magdalena District. He is originally from Santa Rosa, and has been working as a Timber Management Officer in the Forest Service. He is moving back to New Mexico from Idaho, and will start as District Ranger on June 8. So, he'll be the ranger by the next meeting of the Magdalena Collaborative. Tina invited him to participate in this call, but he couldn't make it as he is doing a training this week. Once he arrives, we can get him in the loop.

Partner Updates

George Chavez: The NM Association of Conservation Districts got an extension on the RCPP restoration project. The RCPP is a funding source through the Natural Resource Conservation Service. They have 30-40 new contracts on public lands, which they probably will finalize in October or November, so there still is time to get the NEPA clearances done. The money is statewide, so all permittees in all national forests can apply.

Susan Ostlie: She is working on a citizen science project on invasive species. They are planning a webinar in July, and she'll send out an announcement.

End of Meeting.

The next regular meeting will be scheduled in August, 2020.

Magdalena Collaborative Website:

<https://www.nmfwri.org/collaboration/magdalena-collaborative>