

Meeting Notes

Mountainair Collaborative Meeting

June 13, 2018, 1:30 – 3:30 pm

Edgewood SWCD, Moriarty, New Mexico

Attendees:

Mark Sando, Cibola NF, Resources Officer
Cheyenne Trujillo, Cibola NF, Critical Hire
Laura Doff, South Central Mountains RC&D
Alan Warne, Cibola NF, Mountainair District Rangeland Mgmt.
Mark Werkmeister, NM Offroad Vehicle Alliance
Susan Ostlie, Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Robert Barber, Lincoln County LANRAC
Sarah Brown, Cibola NF Acting Planner
Alan Barton, NM Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute
Jay Turner, Cibola NF, Mountainair District Ranger
Art Swenka, Estancia Basin Resource Association
Jason Quintana, Manzano Land Grant
Dee Tarr, Claunch Pinto SWCD
Joe Zebrowski, NM Highlands University, Facilitator

What is the Mountainair Collaborative?

To get started, Joe reviewed the purpose of the Mountainair Collaborative.

The Mountainair Collaborative is a group of people with an interest in the area around the Mountainair Ranger District. The purpose and desire is to form a community of people who can bring diverse perspectives on issues around the area, and to assist the USFS in its activities. The Mountainair Collaborative seeks two-way communication with USFS – so the Forest Service can understand the interests and perspectives of local communities, and the collaborative can get information from the USFS out to communities.

Joe reviewed the agenda for the meeting and participants introduced themselves.

Last Meeting

At the last meeting of the Mountainair Collaborative, we reviewed the operating principles of collaborative, then finalized some of the wording, and formally adopted the operating principles. They are available on the website. You can find the website by searching for “Mountainair Collaborative” on the Internet. The website includes meeting notes, agendas, other documents, and contact information for all partners.

Contact Joe if you have any ideas for topics to discuss at meetings.

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Mountainair Ranger District Update

Jay Turner –

Forest Closure

Wildfire activity has been low on the Mountainair District, but the fire danger is extreme. Fuel moistures are at the lowest possible level. So, the Cibola NF will be closed starting at 8:00 am this Friday, June 15.

There will still be access to inholdings, allotment permittees, communications site managers and a few other specific purposes, mostly one-day events. The USFS is trying to minimize the amount of activity in backcountry, however. The primary concern is visitor safety, as in the event of a wildfire, it is hard to evacuate people if you don't know where they are. There also is the risk of a fire start if many people are in the backcountry.

Contractors have all been notified of the closure.

It appears there might be early monsoons this year, although it is difficult to predict. The National Weather Service has said an early monsoon season is likely. Until the monsoons start, however, the area could get volatile weather, including dry lightning and wind shifts. An early monsoon may mean it collapses, however.

CFRPs on Mountainair District

The forest closure has been affecting other activities on the Mountainair District as well.

The Romero CFRP is currently in a holding pattern. Dee's group has been doing good work on this project. The project should be completed at end of August, although the forest closure could extend the project if it can't be completed by then.

The Isleta CFRP is on hold as well. The Isleta Pueblo has a project to look at springs in the Manzanos, and their cultural significance. This project will include hydrological restoration as well.

Other Ranger District Closures

The Mt. Taylor District is closing next week, and the Sandia District is closing this Friday. The Magdalena District is on hold for now.

Prescribed Burns

There are no prescribed burns at the moment. The USFS will not consider prescribed burns until there is a significant change in conditions.

Dog Head Fire Rehabilitation

Fence removal will start once the cultural resource clearances are finalized. The District wants to replace the fences with new ones.

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Next year, the District is looking at planting Ponderosa pine in severe burn areas from the Dog Head Fire. This summer, they are starting the NEPA work for this.

There is a contractor working on Forest Road 321, near Tajique. This road goes into Dog Head area. Work on the road will continue during the closure.

Youth Engagement

The annual summer Youth Conservation Corps crew that the Forest Stewards Guild assembles is in, and they currently are doing trail work. The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew is working on the crest trail as well. During the forest closure they'll be in the front country at recreation sites and trail heads doing work.

Water

Jason noted that water flow in the lake is not getting into the ditches now. Jay said he would see if there is some way to assist.

Cibola Forest Plan Revision

Sarah Browne –

Sarah is the acting planner for the Cibola National Forest. She has been on the Cibola planning team for three years. She is an Albuquerque native and previously worked with the City of Albuquerque Open Space Division.

The Cibola NF and the planning effort have been going through a transition with a new forest supervisor, Steve Hattenbach. Steve has been reviewing the planning documents and is getting feedback to USFS specialists.

The Cibola NF currently is looking to roll out a draft of the revised forest plan and Draft EIS to the public in Jan. 2019. Before that, they have to send the draft plan to the USFS Region 3 Office for review, and once approved they have to brief the USFS Washington Office before they get the green light to proceed with issuing the plan to the public. Generally, once the document is sent to the Regional Office for review, it takes 3 to 6 months to publication. Once the document is published, there is a 90-day public comment period, which the Cibola NF can extend if necessary. Consequently, the planning team doesn't want to release the documents during the holiday season as they don't want to have the public comment period during this time. So, they plan to open the comment period in Jan.

The planning team has gone through a number of personnel changes, which has slowed the process. They started with 5 people and now are down to 2. They recently hired Cheyenne Trujillo and plan to hire someone to help with project records in July.

Sarah explained what a project record is. The USFS must compile a record of everything they do, so they must keep files on public comments, meeting notes, or anything with a meaningful, direct relationship to the forest planning process. The Cibola planning team follows regional and national guidance on how to maintain records, and can share these records with anyone who is interested.

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The record includes all wilderness documentation, but they won't be available for the public to review until the comment period. On the Cibola website, the public currently can access all of the 2016 documents that were made available at public meetings on wilderness, including the 2016 plan. These documents will be updated and released again with the draft EIS.

The documents that came out in 2016 were drafts and there was no formal comment period at that time. Mark noted that the documents that are currently on the website are there to view but the Cibola NF is not receiving any comments associated with these documents. Jay said that the comment period will begin in January once a legal notice appears in the newspaper of record. Also, once the formal comment period begins and the new documents are posted, all previous versions of the documents will be pulled off of the website to avoid confusion.

Joe Z. will add a link to the Mountainair website to these documents.

Sarah said the USFS will set up a series of official meetings once the DEIS and draft plan are issued to take comments. The Cibola NF is also open to the idea of the local collaboratives hosting meetings in conjunction with the official meetings. How these meetings will be structured and interact with each other is still under discussion. Sarah worked with landscape teams in 2016, and they found that it is easier logistically if the USFS simply handles the official meetings themselves. But, the Cibola NF would like to have as much public engagement as possible during the comment period, as the last opportunity for public input was in 2016.

A question came up about the role of the landscape team in rolling out the draft plan. Sarah said Steve and others discussed this topic this morning. The landscape teams still officially exist and the MOUs are in place. Many people understand that the landscape teams no longer exist, however. But, Susan and Mark said this has not been the position of the Mt. Taylor Collaborative. This is a point of confusion and some disagreement. Sarah said these details still need to be worked out.

Mark said there is a misunderstanding in terms of what people heard at the last meeting of the Cibola Shared Stewardship Council meeting. There is a difference between the landscape teams being inactive and being disbanded. Everyone agrees that the landscape teams are inactive, and Steve considers the landscape teams to be done. However, there is some disagreement, and since the teams are not officially disbanded, technically they could be restarted if there is something for them to address, such as the DEIS.

Susan noted that there seems to be a general impression that the landscape teams were disbanded, but the council did not vote on this.

A question came up to clarify what the landscape teams were. Jay said they were formed early in the plan revision process, and their role has been strictly to provide input to the Cibola NF on plan revision. Joe noted that membership on the landscape teams was limited to entities with a cooperating agreement with the USFS, including public agencies. The collaboratives, which came about later, are much broader in their mission. Participants may have a cooperating agreement with the Forest Service but it is not required to participate in the collaborative.

Perhaps we should note on the roster for the Mountainair Collaborative which groups have a cooperating agreement with the Forest Service, without mentioning anything about the landscape teams.

Sarah clarified that groups on the landscape teams included cooperating units of government, which consisted of groups with MOUs, recognized land grants, tribal governments, and other governmental entities (e.g. soil & water conservation districts, counties, federal & state agencies, Kirtland AFB).

Elaine Kohrman initiated the landscape teams following some contentious public meetings. The teams were an effort to break the mold that the USFS often used, which was to work internally and then dictate their mandates to the public. So, the Cibola NF took a different path and wanted to work closely with other entities in developing the forest plan. But, as the process advanced, many groups felt excluded, such as NGOs. So, Elaine decided to start the collaboratives, to open up the process to other groups beyond just the cooperating units.

Today, however, the MOUs still exist and have not been terminated. So, now, the Forest has to share everything with everyone – cooperating units of government, the collaborative, and the general public.

Robert noted that the landscape teams were supposed to dissolve once the draft plan is completed and published. The collaboratives are supposed to be more long-term. Jay said that was the plan initially. But, there has been overlap between the landscape teams and the formation of the collaboratives. Sarah said that when the Record of Decision is signed for the plan, the MOUs for the cooperating agencies would no longer be active. The way the MOUs were written, they would be terminated not at a specific date, but rather when the ROD was signed.

Once the public comment period starts in January, the Cibola NF would begin revising the draft plan and DEIS, which they anticipate would take about one year. They have to issue formal responses to all of the comments, which are included in the Final EIS. Once this is complete, they would issue the Final Revised Forest Plan and the EIS and ROD.

Near the end of the whole planning process, there also is an objections process. Any individual with standing to object can file an objection at this point. Standing means a person signed in with their name and address at at least one public meeting. Their comments must be written down as well – if they said something at a public meeting it must be part of the transcript or they don't qualify for standing. The USFS tries to mediate these objections.

Jay noted that the objections process is now pre-decisional rather than post-decisional. Previously, someone could only appeal once the plan was issued. Now an objection must be filed before the final publication so there is a chance to mediate and resolve issues before the final document is published. Sarah said that the pre-decisional process means that once the plan is signed, all the objections are over.

Once everything is complete and the plan is signed, the Forest staff starts implementing the plan. They are aiming for Spring 2020 for this. The Cibola NF is facing dwindling resources and a lot of pressure to wrap up the planning process and start implementation.

Joe noted that collaborative members can participate as part of public, but asked if there may be more consultation between the USFS and the collaborative.

Jay said the USFS is still working on this. Sarah said collaborative members have the opportunity to participate as an individual or as members of their organizations. It could be very helpful to the USFS if there is some way for the collaborative to participate as well. One thing the collaborative could do is to

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encourage more people to comment on the draft plan. Jay said that one collective comment from a group is more helpful than a comment campaign where 500 people all submit the same comment. Sarah pointed out that a collaborative can help with this as the collaborative is for resolving disputes in a proactive way, so the collaborative can help in clarifying issues and submitting one response.

Susan asked about the relationship between the forest plan NEPA process and other NEPA processes. Sarah and Jay said that NEPA processes for specific projects are ongoing. The NEPA process for the forest plan is separate from NEPA processes for any other proposed project, and they project NEPAs can go on before or after the ROD for the forest plan is signed.

Joe said we can include updates on the forest plan revision process on the agenda for Mountainair Collaborative meetings throughout the whole process.

Sarah agreed and said she will attend as many meetings as possible and is happy to help out in any way. Having input is helpful to her and the planning team. Joe suggested the collaborative should consider what our role will be in the whole process. Jay noted that Steve has said loud and clear that completing the forest plan is the Cibola NF's number one priority. Steve has been very supportive of the process.

Other Collaborative Efforts in NM

Alan Barton –

Alan works with a number of collaborative organizations and gave an overview of what other collaboratives are doing.

In the Cibola NF and Central NM, the Mt. Taylor and Sandia Collaboratives are up and running. Participation in the Sandia Collaborative has been down lately, but the leaders are working on a strategy to revitalize the organization. The Sandia Collaborative has a complex structure with several standing committees, a formal charter, and frequent meetings. The group may need to streamline its structure and process to maintain active participation.

Alan has not followed the Mt. Taylor Collaborative.

The Magdalena Collaborative had a kick-off meeting in April, which attracted a large number of people and got the organization off to a very good start. The meeting was led by an outside facilitator who put together a good program that engaged everyone and developed ideas for projects for the collaborative to work on. The Coordinating Team for the Magdalena Collaborative will meet later in June to carry forward the activities initiated at the kick off meeting and to develop a structure and plan for the organization.

The Lincoln NF has two long-standing collaborative groups and one new group. The Otero Working Group has worked on and off in Otero County and the Sacramento Ranger District for many years, and starting about three years ago began working with the Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute to develop a formal strategy. This came after a visit by the Regional Forester, who told them having documentation of their plans would help with fundraising. Working with Vicki Estrada and the FWRI, the Otero Working Group developed a strategy that groups projects into defined focus areas and coordinates the goals and activities of the collaborators.

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The Greater Ruidoso Area WUI Working Group has also been working for many years, primarily in the Ruidoso area, which is one of the most at risk communities in the country for wildfire. They have coordinated a lot of treatments in and around Ruidoso to mitigate the wildfire potential. About 18 months ago, they contact the FWRI and wanted to develop a strategy similar to the Otero Working Group. There is some overlap in the membership in both groups, from the Lincoln NF Supervisors Office, the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the BIA and New Mexico State Forestry Division. The Ruidoso group created a sub-group to work on developing the strategy. Alan worked with this group, which met and contributed ideas for the strategy. The document was completed and signed in May. The strategy is similar to the Otero Working Group strategy in how it is structured, and expands the project area for the Ruidoso group to include about half of the Mescalero Reservation, and the northern part of the Sacramento Mountains, the Vera Cruz Mountains, the Capitan Mountains, and the Jicarilla Mountains. The boundary extends to the north near Corona.

The District Ranger in the Smokey Bear District also heard about the Mountainair Group and wanted to see about starting a similar collaborative organization for the Smokey Bear district. She contacted the South Central Mountains RC&D and organized a meeting, attended by ranger district staff, the Forest Supervisor for the Lincoln NF, the director and facilitator of the SCMRC&D, and the director and collaboration program manager for the FWRI. In discussions, the group decided to focus the new collaborative on recreation and transportation issues. The Ruidoso group is primarily focused on fuel reduction and forest restoration, so the groups would complement each other nicely.

The Santa Fe National Forest has several collaboratives in operation or forming. The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition has been around for a little over two years. They focus on the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and are very organized, with four standing committees to work on watershed resiliency, communications and public relations, implementation and monitoring. They meet quarterly and hold periodic community meetings to keep people informed on their projects. There is some resistance in Santa Fe to this group, and there has been a debate in the local media about the forest restoration projects the Forest Service has been implementing in the area. The GSFFC is responding to these with public relations campaigns and community meetings.

The CFLRP project in the Southwest Jemez Mountains has a collaborative group associated with it. This group also meets every three months and focuses primarily on sharing information about the forest restoration projects. The CFLRP also holds an annual two-day meeting in Santa Fe that focuses primarily on the research that is being done in collaboration with the project.

There is a fairly new group called the East Jemez Mountains Landscape Futures that operates around Los Alamos. They have been working with folks from Northern Arizona University. There also is a group that is forming now to focus on recreation. This group has met once. The FWRI has also worked with some other organizations to create a collaborative in the area of La Jara, near Cuba. This group has been awarded a CFRP planning grant this year and hopefully will develop a long-term forest restoration group through the monitoring efforts.

In the area of the Gila National Forest, there have been two previous collaborative groups in the Silver City area, both of which eventually petered out. In January, there was a meeting in Silver City to organize a new collaborative group, focusing on the area around the entire national forest. Two local state representatives got together with the New Mexico Forest Industry Association, and encouraged people in the local area to create this collaborative. At the initial meeting in January, about 60 people

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showed up and showed support for the collaborative. A committee has organized additional meetings in the communities around the forest that will be held in June.

One collaborative group on the Carson NF is the 2-3-2 Forest Partnership, which works in 2 states (Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado), 3 rivers (San Juan, Chama and Rio Grande) and 2 watersheds (San Juan-Chama and Rio Grande). This collaborative works with the San Juan and Carson National Forests, along with a number of partners. The Mountain Studies Institute in Durango, CO takes the lead in organizing this group.

The Cimarron Watershed Association organizes landowners along the eastern flanks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in northern New Mexico. The CWA meets regularly at the Philmont Scout Ranch and in the Moreno Valley, and focuses primarily on stream and wetland restoration, working with the New Mexico Environment Department and the Office of the State Engineer. Last year, they were awarded a CFRP and work in the Valle Vidal in collaboration with the Carson NF. The regular members of the CWA are drawn primarily from ranches in the area and local officials, including representatives from the local State Forestry office and the OSE. They bring in agencies or NGOs as partners when they are working on grants from these groups, and they also regularly invite speakers from agencies to present information at their meetings. The CWA also maintains loose relationships with other watershed groups in the Sangre de Crisos, including the Hermits Peak Watershed Alliance and the Upper Pecos Watershed Association.

Partner Spotlight

Due to time constraints, we tabled the partner spotlight for this meeting.

Participants

We had a discussion about how to organize our partners/members/participants. Since this collaborative started, we have had a variety of groups that have participated in our meetings. There are a number of other groups in the community, however, who might want to keep informed on what we are doing, but that don't necessarily want to participate actively in our regular meetings.

We might think about a directory or contact list for the area with groups that have an interest in what we're doing, but who don't participate actively in the meetings. Joe volunteered to start a list of non-partner contacts. If anyone has suggestions for organizations that should be on the list, please let Joe know.

We have a lot of people and organizations on our contact list who don't participate regularly. Some of these contacts, or new contacts we establish, may also be interested in joining as more active participants.

Who else should we think about as participants?

- Fire Departments
- Schools
- Chambers of Commerce
- Audubon and the NM Native Plant Society – both are on our list but are not active participants
- Cooperator groups with USFS

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- Allotment permittees
- NM Cattle Growers Association.

We need to take steps to get the word out more. We could send flyers out to our email list, or we could post the flyer on our website and send out an email directing people there.

Announcements

The Forest Stewards Guild are looking for youth workers for the Youth Conservation Corps. Jay noted that this year, the FSG are forming a group with some fire background, consisting of youth 18 to 24 years old. They will be red card trained and saw trained as part of their service. Laura said they had a group like this on the Lincoln NF, and it was a great group to work with.

Next meeting – mid-September. Date TBD.