

**Magdalena Collaborative Meeting
Agenda**

Friday August 11th, 2023

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Water Canyon Campground -Day Use Pavilion

1:00 pm	Introductions	Crystal Medina (Facilitator)
1:15 pm	Current Projects and Updates	Tina Cason, District Ranger
1:45 pm	Water Canyon Campground Fees and Trails Update	Christopher Nichols, Forest Recreation Program Manager
2:15 pm	Survey results/Discussion of Key issues to focus on as a group	Crystal Medina
2:30 pm	Partner Updates	Everyone
2:50 pm	Wrap-up and identify next steps/meeting date	Crystal Medina
3:00 pm	Meeting Adjourned	

Magdalena Collaborative Meeting Notes

August 11th, 2023

In-Person Meeting Water Canyon Campground

Attendance:

Linda Starr, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Susan Ostlie, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Jim Nelson, Village of Magdalena

Tina Cason, US Forest Service, District Ranger, Magdalena District

Phil Rudy: US Forest Service, Partnership Coordinator, Cibola National Forest

Chris Nichols: US Forest Service, Forest Recreation Program Manager, Cibola National Forest and Grasslands

Eleanor Ludwig, NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute/AmeriCorps VISTA

Crystal Medina, NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute

Magdalena District Updates

Tina Cason

Magdalena District Ranger

Bear Trap Fire Update

The Bear Trap recovery project began in 2022 and is still underway. The Bear Trap fire was human caused, with the investigation pending. Approximately \$4.1 million was allocated for disaster recovery, including rebuilding of the Bear Trap Campground. Many rebuilding plans are currently in analysis phase, including road, waterway reconstructions, and range infrastructure improvement, all of which require NEPA approval. Some drafts also have flood zone conflicts in the FEMA 100-year flood zone, and therefore not eligible for certain funds. There has been some debate about these proposals, especially given that the Bear Trap campground is entirely in the flood zone. Roads in the area are also currently impassable and the campground bathroom had flooded, and still needs to be fixed. The area as well as Hughes Mill, the neighboring campground, were considered “dispersed recreation” previously.

The Bear Trap fire was enclosed by previously burned areas to the east side, with managed fires in 2015 and 2016, reducing the size and severity of the fire. There have been several starts in the district this year, especially in the Juniper to Pine vegetation transition zone, where there is an increased risk for fire/lightning start. Tina discussed district protocol for the process of moving from a fire with a natural start to being a managed fire. The Magdalena district has had 3 prescribed burns this year and Magdalena was the first district in the state to initiate prescribed burns after the Hermit Peak/Calf Canyon fires.

In addition, \$3,000 has been allocated for district biologists to study and protect quail water sources, through constructing fences around key sources/watering holes. This is run also by volunteers. The Cibola Timber team received \$900k to work in partnership with Zuni Pueblo. This money must be used in conjunction with a previous grant agreement, which will require some discussion.

Fire Planning/Management

The Cibola National Forest Magdalena District is also working on creating Good Neighbor Authority with the state. Allowing for more cross-boundary cooperation, the authority will focus on thinning and pushing back the tree line in key areas, with a goal of fuel load reductions overall for future fire preparedness. Plans are to pile burn 30 acres to start. This process will require NEPA approval. Specifically, in the East Magdalena District area, fuel reduction plans are being discussed. Thinning is proposed to take place around residences with ~600 acres of hand thinning initially planned. Tina will also push for NEPA for the entire district, increasing wildlife protections.

Planning has also begun on developing a new fire management structure of the Cibola National Forest using “PODs” (Potential Operational Delineations), a national forestry wildfire management concept to group landscapes/regions by vegetation, manmade breaks, natural formations to maintain/create fire lines. The high amount of White Pine fuel loading currently increases the need for management. There are limited road/trail systems to factor in. The district is planning to work with NM State Forestry to use existing connections.

Trail Maintenance

A Socorro group is volunteering and working on brushing and logging out local trail systems. There are also Forest-level discussions of connecting current trails to neighboring BLM trails. Magdalena District has a small trail crew, so this project is out of reach for now. The district is reaching out to hunting groups to build partnerships. To involve future generations, there's a push to involve students in maintenance, bring next NFS workers into the fold.

Regarding Socorro County and Magdalena road systems, the old contract to maintain main Magdalena district roads expired two years ago and the new 5-yr contract was only recently approved this year. Socorro county will maintain paved roads, especially ones connecting to nearby subdivisions.

Water Canyon Campground Fees and Trails Update

Chris Nichols
Forest Recreation Program Manager

Finishing up Trails Updates

The Rocky Mountain Youth Corp has worked on and completed 4 miles of the Apache Kid trail. They are working in South Canyon (Magdalena District) as well. NM Wild is also putting work in on the Apache Kid. They have installed at least a dozen junction signs across the Apache over this past spring, generally on the east side. Chris has received \$62-65k for trails conservation and Ancestral land preservation. This will either take place in Magdalena District or Apache area, depending on how well/how much NM Wild gets done in the Apache area. The Recreation group is also working on beautifying the Water Canyon Campground, also being by far the most used campground in the district. They had a national traveling work crew in on the day of meeting and

other district employees went around replacing/repainting signs. Trails job positions are hardest to recruit.

CDT (Continental Divide Trail) Rerouting Project Explorations/Proposals

To move the CDT away from roads and increase access to water for hikers, the CDT trail has been migrating nationally over the past few years. There has been a regional recreational push lately for CDT rerouting. In the Magdalena District, there is limited water access. The rerouting could possibly go through the Sandias. Work on rerouting the trail on Mt. Taylor will be done this year, NEPA approved. The Rocky Mountain Youth Corp is lined up to do the work, and will use six hitches. In the area, the section of the Alameda River (flows to the Rio Salado) at top of forest was just acquired by BLM, granting river access to the CDT trail

Fees Update

The increase in fees is Cibola Forest-wide, soon to be implemented. They started the process in 2019 and scoped the plan for two years. The increase applies to: Water Canyon Campground, Group pavilion/camping, day-use area, all of which were constructed in 2004-05. The fee increase was passed in meeting goals of sustainable recreation, in the light of FS declining budgets to maintain infrastructure and bolster current funding. Recent improvements include new signage, gravel, with picnic tables to be replaced over the next five years. This is also part of a year-long process to improve recreation grounds in Magdalena. Specific fee increases are: \$10 per night single campground sites, group pavilion/site use \$50 a night, day-use pavilion = \$35 (capacity= 40 ppl). Day trips: \$5 per vehicle per day. Herbert is the Magdalena Recreation Technician and the main recreation program manager for the district. Tina recently put out a hiring request for a full-time assistant technician with the new fee increase. In the district, YCC (Youth Conservation Corps) students are also brought in to help work.

Seasonal passes will still apply with the fee increase. There has also been a recent greenlight for NM-wide "Enchantment Pass" for all NM National Forests. The inter-agency volunteer pass normally requires 240 hours (Chris: # might be outdated), but the NM Enchantment pass will only require 24 hours.

Survey Results, Discussion of Key Issues to Focus on as a Group

In an effort to re-energize the Magdalena Collaborative, the NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute sent out a survey to members of the group. The primary goal of the Magdalena Collaborative survey was to gauge members input on meeting frequency and key issues to focus on as a group. The majority of survey respondents suggested quarterly meetings (8 of 15 respondents). Among the top issues to focus on as a group, Recreation General/Access and Forest Health/Wildfire were selected by the majority of respondents (11 of 15 respondents selected these categories). Watershed/water quality and wildlife/wildlife habitat were second (9 of 15 respondents selected these categories). Vegetation/native plants, off road vehicles, trails/trail conditions, and invasive species/biodiversity were also selected as top issues to consider (7-8 of 15 respondents selected these categories).

- Discussion:
 - Off-roading restrictions for wildlife purposes
 - Tina: as District Ranger, needs specificity in goals from this Collaborative.

- Wildfire management for wildlife
- People/Orgs to Contact to join/re-join Magdalena Collaborative
 - ABQ Wildlife Federation – previous member of Collaborative.
 - Working on Limestone Canyon currently
 - Local ranchers/landowners
 - Broadband group in Silver City
 - Riparian focus, monitoring
- Need for chainsaw operator training for trail maintenance
 - Loppers and chainsaws together are ideal
- Magdalena District: invasive species generally low, higher around rivers
 - Tamarisk, Yellow Blue Stem
 - Helping factors: dry environment, less vectors: dogs, vehicles, etc.
- Master trail plan for Magdalena District
 - Most public interest around the Water Canyon trails
 - Also interest in connecting district trails to BLM trails
 - Tina: focus on existing trails first, then work on connecting the trails
- Water storage project in South Canyon, Magdalena District
 - Benefit cattle and wildlife in dry years
 - Protect spring from animal foot traffic deterioration/erosion
 - Unfinished since 2005, requires helicopter transportation

Partner Updates

- Great Old Broads for Wildlife, based on of Albuquerque
 - New national president
 - Escalante River is a current Great Old Broads for Wilderness work area

Wrap-up and identify next steps/meeting date

- Another survey is unnecessary
 - Email or talk/directly in between now and next meeting
- Meet next in Nov./Dec., date TBD
- Plan service project for Spring '24
- Meeting plan proposal:
 - Meet in person Fall, Spring;
 - Meet ONLINE Summer, Winter

Meeting Adjourned