

Cebolla Steering Committee Meeting
November 18, 2009
Albuquerque, BLM

Present:

Matt Schultz, *NMED*
Matt Atencio, *BLM*
Steve Fischer, *BLM*
Dave Mattern, *BLM*
Bill Zeedyk, *Zeedyk Ecological Consulting*
Gene Tatum, *AWF*
Glenda Muirfield, *AWF*
Dale Hall, *NM Game and Fish*
Ken Jones, *El Malpais NCA*
Barbara Johnson, *Rio Puerco Alliance*

The Restoration Reconnaissance was completed in October (Task 2) and an initial design was created.

There were 90 potential structures considered and mapped by Matt on maps of the project area. Bill and Matt went through all the reaches except Reach 6 and planned possible work. Most of the structures have been GPSed and mapped, and a portion have been staked. In addition, baseline monitoring, geomorphological data, and cross sections were established, recorded, and mapped. We still need an estimate of materials and equipment needed and a tentative schedule for work. We also need an inventory of the rock supply for quantity by size along the existing road to determine if it is adequate for the work contemplated. There probably is a sufficient amount of boulders, but smaller boulders and cobble may be limited. In addition, areas to stage materials need to be identified. A treatment doesn't have to be funded in order to be included in the NEPA; these treatments could be implemented later as funding is made available.

Trigger Points

Bill suggested that we put small fence exclosures (approximately eight acres total) around some riparian trigger points to increase riparian vegetation, promote sediment deposition, and speed up raising the bed elevation. The fences would be built to BLM fencing standards.

Bill was also making some suggestions to the BLM about designs for low water crossings at two road crossings to establish grade control using cross vanes.

Tributaries

There are three major tributaries coming into valley right. The middle one has a discontinued (but still hydrologically active) irrigation ditch and a livestock tank. Currently, the ditch diverts water away from the livestock tank. In addition, the irrigation ditch will eventually gully. It would be best to reconnect the ditch to the original channel bottom and block the old irrigation ditch. This will enhance the stock pond without

altering the structure by increasing the water stored and vegetation productivity. This is an example of how some of this restoration work will have direct benefits to the permittee.

Design

We discussed the proposed design reach by reach, highlighting changes from the workplan:

Reach 0: At the top of the reach, we want to capture water going down the ditch, and redirect it using a flow splitter to valley right where the original channel may be been. This will create a wetland over the long term by reconnecting the terrace as floodplain. One drawback is the possibility of sediment also being diverted which could cut off the sediment supply downstream, and create dunes in the valley. This part of the design will have a lower priority than some of the other design components.

Other structures are contemplated to put the old road “to sleep.” The BLM will move the road in its work.

In order to treat Little Cebolla Spring we will need agreement from the permittee. There are four options to consider: 1) No action (provides high quality water for wildlife and wetland plant nursery); 2) Backfill and put in drinker for permittee operations which will create a marsh leading to Lake Cebolla; 3) Remove berm at toe to allow excess flow to create wetlands downstream without impacting the water source; 4) Remove berm partially and partially fill (drinker may be required).

There was some discussion of the future of Lake Cebolla. It will eventually disappear as the sediment plug from the irrigation ditch is eroded or blown out during a flood. But in the meantime it is providing value in the form of wildlife habitat. The restoration design only calls for fencing and vegetation planting to temporarily stabilize the feature.

The EA for the Malpais grazing allotment currently used by the York Ranch expires in 2010. The BLM is responsible for developing a grazing management plan for the riparian pastures that we will be working on. Matt Atencio wants to meet with the permittees this winter to develop this plan. We hope that this will a simplified grazing plan that will be enforceable, and that includes grazing on a strict schedule to allow for rest in the riparian pastures. Matt would like the riparian areas to be rested for at least two years, and then only grazed during the dormant season or for short duration.

Bill would like another riparian pasture in Reach 0.

Right now fences are being cut by people or sustaining elk damage. The BLM doesn't have money for fence repair, but this is causing a problem for our restoration efforts. Dale said the Game and Fish might be able to help with this. It might be useful to set up a coordination plan to do fence checks when BLM, NMED, RPA, or volunteer personnel are at the restoration site. Dale also recommended a comprehensive approach to reconfigure and minimize the number of fences.

We need to take out some fence (5-strand barbed wire) on property recently acquired by the BLM and replace it with wildlife friendly fencing that meets BLM standards.

We need to get the permittees involved in the restoration effort. We will try to get them to join the Steering Committee. They may have some ideas for restoration. We need to let permittees know how these restoration efforts will benefit their operation.

Livestock use needs to be considered in the EA for restoration areas.

Reach 2: This will involve speeding up the natural processes. We want to include trigger point where we will get more immediate response—i.e. jumpstart riparian vegetation and raise the water table. We will probably need to use a flow-splitter and burrito dams to keep water wetting the wetland area on the terrace.

Reach 3: Most of the restoration work in this reach will be done by hand. AWF will be out around April 18-19, 2010, and will hopefully start the hand work and possibly the enclosure fencing if the NEPA is done. There may be a wilderness issue regarding the use of an auger for putting in the fencing.

We also want to put in new riparian pasture fencing and take out the old enclosure fence. The old fence has outlived its usefulness so we can replace it with the riparian pasture fence—it will be about an equal amount of fencing.

Machine work would not be done until the fall of 2010 at the earliest—we need the road fixed first the monsoon season over.

Reach 5: We might need to do extra work not yet in the design to deal with the headcut and 30' gully near the Savage property before it reaches the private inholding. This reach is considered a reference reach and we may need to take preventative action to keep it functioning as it currently is.

Reach 6: This has been divided into two areas, 6A and 6B. In 6A, it appears that we need to reconnect the channel to the floodplain. No treatment is needed in the tributary south of 6A. The 6B area has the deep headcut. Dave Mattern will work on the design for stabilizing that headcut, using rocks and grass swales. But the work needs to be done at the same time the other equipment work is done to minimize mobilization costs. It is estimated that 500 yards of shaping will need to be done. In order to stabilize the area, we will probably use a rock rundown, step pools, and turf reinforcement mats. We might use an excavator with a thumb. We might need a dump truck on treads. We will probably have to come in from the south to get the equipment in.

Reach 7: This will all be handwork, except for the rock hauling and hole augering, which will require machinery. We will need cross country access.

Reach 8: The roadwork for this section is not included in the NEPA for the BLM roadwork under the stimulus money. But we can't do equipment work until the road is fixed. Some maintenance may be being deferred by the BLM until their deferred maintenance money comes in, but we don't know when that will be.

Monitoring

Ellen Soles has created a draft scope of work regarding groundwater monitoring. She wants to put in the groundwater monitoring equipment in the Spring. Steve Vrooman has a monitoring plan and is beginning baseline geomorphological monitoring.

Travis Perry's group from Furman University did some small mammal trapping in Reaches 0, 1, 2 and by the Stone House. They found seven different species, two of which are wetland obligate species. There were no meadow mice, which should be present, but there were a couple of water dependent bats. Furman would like to be kept involved in this project.

Dale said he would try to get DFG people together to see what issues might constrain re-introduction and whether we could use Share with Wildlife money.

It is clear that many keystone species are currently missing from the system. The questions are, are there geographical barriers or were they extirpated because of agriculture? We were also wondering if their keystone plants missing. Vrooman has started a plant list to help us determine this.

Misc.

Matt Schultz and Bill will need to complete an estimate of the time and duration of equipment intrusion into the wilderness for the NEPA and wilderness exception. We might want to put up some explanatory signage (or perhaps an exhibit or interpretive guide at the Ranger Station) for the restoration project (we will need to work with Ken). Possibly use photos of Cebolla Springs pre-1994 as before photos when it was a blue grama flat. Make the case that these activities will enhance the wilderness character over the long term.

We need to include the grazing permittees on the Committee if they will agree. We still need a representative from NMWA.

Steve F: BLM Road Construction Environmental Assessment is available.

We will hold our next meeting in early February.