

RPW Steering Committee Meeting Summary **July 1st, 2014**

In Attendance

Jeff Widen, Ann Oliver, Bruce Whitehead, John Taylor, Preston Groetzke, Kara Chadwick, Chuck Wanner, Steve Fearn, Suzanne Sellers, Tami Graham: facilitator/notetaker

Introductions

All in attendance introduced themselves. A brief overview of the RPW was given for Kara Chadwick, new SJNF Supervisor.

Approval of last meeting summary

A correction was made regarding water rights purchased on Mineral Creek. Otherwise the summary from the May 16th, 2014 meeting was approved.

Observer Input

No observer input at this point in the meeting.

Hermosa Legislation Update

Jeff was in Washington last week. Was able to meet with Senate staff. Things are looking hopeful for Hermosa. Tipton delegation is committed to getting it passed by the full house in July. Word has it that the house will hold one or two more mark-up sessions in July and that this legislation is at the top of the list. If it doesn't make it out of committee in the House by the end of July, it probably won't happen until after the elections. On the Senate side, there is a new Chair. No mark ups scheduled in the near future. If approved by the House, may be an attempt to get the bill passed on the floor with a unanimous consent vote. Rob Bishop's staff have insisted on adding one little provision as it's marked up, as related to a "wildlands" policy related to a secretarial order from former Interior Secretary Salazar. Conservation community is fine with it and Jeff reports that Tipton's office is fine with it as well. However, the language is likely to meet resistance in the Senate. The Bennet and Tipton offices will need to find a way to resolve that.

At the end of the discussion, Jeff added that a recent addition to the legislation would be designate portions of the Wilderness Study Areas as Wilderness. This had not been discussed with the Steering Committee or the Hermosa Drafting Committee. Bruce and Steve mentioned that it has the potential to raise concerns by entities that had previously submitted letters of support for the legislation.

Phase II/Regional Discussion

Steve took a shot at summarizing where he feels we're at with the regional discussion. Additional comments noted.

- Piedra: General agreement to move forward with the workgroup's outcomes and recommendations.

- Vallecito/Pine: General agreement to leave alone – status quo.
- Hermosa: General agreement for WSR designation.
- San Juan West Fork: General agreement to leave alone - status quo.
- San Juan East Fork: SWCD has appealed the FS's decision to add suitability on a portion of the East Fork of the San Juan. May need to circle back to discuss, although some felt that the regional discussion should not address this, advocating for status quo, as per the new SJNF plan. Needs further discussion.
- Animas: A key area needing further discussion.

Animas – overview of current regional discussion

(Note: a detailed summary of both TU and SJCA/WS proposals will be distributed to the SC shortly)

- General agreement on removal of WSR on main stem
- General agreement for mineral withdrawal in the area between existing WSA's, up to Sultan Creek, on the Animas River below Silverton.
- General agreement to designate two WSA's (Whitehead Gulch, Weminuche Contiguous) to be included in Weminuche Wilderness. May want to leave West Needles (Molas pass) alone at this time, due to Hermosa legislation process, to exclude private lands.
- General agreement for removal of suitability on Mineral Creek
- South Mineral Creek – special management area on 19,000 acres and WSR recreation designation on 7 miles, as proposed by Jeff and Jimbo – no consensus yet.
- Suitability on South Mineral Creek – need to discuss further
- Issues left to discuss primarily related to proposed boundary adjustments that may added as Wilderness in canyon area and how to address South Mineral Creek
- May need to circle back with the Animas workgroup

South Mineral Creek

- Jeff/Jimbo proposal wouldn't designate anything on Mineral Creek. Would stop at or above the confluence with South Mineral Creek.
- Steve: floated idea of leaving suitability on South Mineral and that's it. Has concerns with SMA on South Mineral. Wait and see what happens with the San Juan Wilderness bill. Jeff said the provision for this has been removed from that bill.
- Steve: does it make sense to have a WSR designation on such a small area? Leave suitability in place – status quo.

- Bruce: If this group pushed for designation or removal, would we need to go back to Animas workgroup. If we left suitability in place, we would not need to circle back. Has a concern about going back to that workgroup, as the group was very split.
- Jeff: Advocates for not shying away from going back to the Animas workgroup. At least consider it. Mineral withdrawal is a protection that isn't in place that an SMA would bring. Jeff would like to see a compilation of information regarding mineral potential on South Mineral Creek.
- Several voiced concerns with the potential time delay in compiling mineral information and whether or not the information would sway anyone's views.
- Jeff expressed concern that the group wasn't open to gathering information to better inform it's decisions, as it always has been previously.
- Mely: consider utilizing Outstanding Waters Protection tool from state. A no degradation measure.
- Steve: Hermosa was designated as Outstanding Waters, as the only stream in state outside of formal wilderness with the designation.
- Chuck: Outstanding Waters designation - has to meet 12 parameters of value. No idea if the water quality is there or not on South Mineral Creek.
- Jeff: Can we agree to other tools, outside of federal legislation, that the group can take a look at, i.e. Outstanding Waters? Could be included as an expression of support or cooperative agreement where the groups around the table apply together.
- Steve: Could be problematic with SW but in spirit, yes, could look at something like that.
- Bruce: Could pursue the evaluation of Outstanding Waters to see if it meets the criteria. Lets not mix state and federal law. Outstanding Waters is a state designation.
- Steve: The fens are the other values that the group wanted to protect. Could pursue collectively as well.
- Bruce registered concerns around mineral withdrawal on South Mineral Creek.
- Ann: Removal of suitability on the mainstem is an easier one to finesse with the Animas workgroup than designation. When reading the report, the same conclusion was reached (no consensus) regarding removal or designation or status quo. One way or another, we will need to go back to the workgroups.

- Steve: Lets focus on whether we're going to have a second WSR designation in Colorado, which was the original driver for the entire conversation. This is not a local issue but rather a statewide issue. This is a hurdle that SW will have to sell.
- Chuck: Agreed. Hermosa is an isolated basin without a lot of water rights involved, which is in our favor.

WSA's:

- Steve: Could live with Whitehead Gulch, Weminuche Contiguous getting turned into Wilderness, however, do we want to go there? Might get taken care of with Hermosa bill. Many concurred to keep West Needles as a floater for now, as, again, it may be dealt with as part of Hermosa legislation.
- Steve: Would have some concerns with Elk Park, Tank Creek and Grasshopper Creek but could be looked at.
- Animas workgroup didn't talk about Grasshopper, Tank Creek or Elk Park. Those are new ideas. May want to steer away from including them, since the workgroup didn't discuss.
- Jeff reminded the group that the way the circle back process was designed allows for new ideas to be brought to the table.
- Ann feels Wilderness protection for Grasshopper is appealing due to the native cutthroat population. It was stated that there are other protections in place to protect cutthroat including it being a roadless area.
- Bruce registered a concern about the addition of a small segment of Wilderness in the Hermosa bill that wasn't widely known. Jeff felt it didn't change the spirit of the bill, as the management of that area (approximately 600 acres) is the same whether managed as a WSA or Wilderness.
- Steve also registered a concern in the same regard, as it relates to our current deliberations.

Next Steps

The goal of the next meeting will be to determine if we're in a place to move forward with a basin-wide package. Tami will create a spreadsheet or table that will summarize both proposals on the table, including areas of steering committee broad agreement, and areas where there is not broad agreement.

Next Meeting Date

All present could meet July 29th, 30th or August 15th, from 1-4pm. The

preference is July 29th or 30th. Tami will email all steering committee members not present and assess which date works best. It was noted that this will be a very important meeting and would be ideal to have as many members present as possible.

Observer Input

Sandy Young: Question on Hermosa section of Jeff and Jimbo's proposal and amount of miles proposed for WSR designation. Is it 62.28 or 35 miles? Chuck stated that he believed it was all the segments that were found to be suitable. Concern is around the "Wild" designation as it's the most stringent related to grazing. Concerned about cattle segments on west side. Sandy stated that cattlemen are getting a lot of pressure from land managers regarding Lynx habitat. To have two wild segments on the Hermosa gives rise to a concern that it might have enough teeth for the FS to remove cattle in 2018.

Preston: Noted a concern around the FS cutting back on grazing permits in the Weminuche.

Mely: In response to Sandy's comment, Mely's sense is that we are walking the edge here with not a lot of room for movement, particularly with some groups. Need to get creative about how they are resolved. FS will have an agenda irregardless of what we move forward with. When we talk about downgrading from Wild to Scenic, there's a feeling that we're backtracking.

Bruce: Need to talk with legislative delegation regarding specific designations i.e. wild vs. scenic vs. recreation. Will address concern when/if we get to a basin-wide package that we're working through, as it relates to a possible Hermosa designation.

