



## HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEETING MINUTES

### Uncompahgre HPP Committee

2300 S. Townsend, Montrose

July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

6:30 p.m.

**Uncompahgre HPP Members Present:** Dave Alexander, Livestock Grower; Bobby Gray, Sportsman; Kelly Crane, CPW; Thane Stranathan, BLM; Bob Black, Livestock Grower; Loren Paulson, USFS; Todd Stewart, Livestock Grower

**Guests:** Michael Blanck, CPW; Kim Berscheid, CPW; Marian Cole, CPW; Bill Head, Aaron Brock, Ed Wofford, John Harold

**Introduction:** Committee members and the new HPP admins were introduced. The remaining budget at the start of the meeting was \$98,523.59.

#### **Old Business:**

1. The committee discussed reapproving projects from FY21 that were unable to be implemented. The Enstrom Water Development project was reapproved for \$4,000.00 in FY22.
2. The committee resumed discussion on the Scryfall Fence project. The committee supported the project in FY21, but there were unresolved questions regarding contractor quotes addressing different designs or lengths of fence. The quotes were resubmitted with matching information, and the project was approved for \$13,464.00 with 4 rolls of white wire from the committee stockpile.
3. The committee discussed fencing project guidelines. These were tabled for further discussion at the next meeting.
  - a. The committee has begun to receive large fence project applications that exceed \$25,000, which use significant portions of the annual budget and may require going through the state bid process. The committee considered capping individual fence projects at \$25,000.
  - b. HPP has encountered projects where funding is granted based on a 50%-50% match with a single landowner, but after approval additional partnerships between neighbors are negotiated. HPP should pay an equal portion of the project as all other cooperators.
  - c. Other HPP committees have instituted a \$1.50/ft cost cap to help manage fence project spending. Additionally, sourcing materials from Game Damage represents

significant cost savings. For projects over \$10,000.00, HPP should cap funding at \$1.50/ft or pay for materials at Game Damage pricing.

## **New Business:**

### **Project Application Proposals and Reviews:**

1. Tony Abel presented Phase 2 of the Cimarron Brush Management project. The project area experiences seasonal use by elk, moose, and deer. Currently the property is overgrown with brush, which has crowded out grass and forage species in the understory. While the brush offers cover for big game, there is little forage available, which results in deer and elk utilizing nearby private irrigated fields and causing damage to pasture and crops. The project consists of masticating approximately 260 acres that are heavily overgrown with oakbrush. Thinning will occur in a mosaic pattern with up to 85% of brush on the 'range' portion, and up to 40% of brush on the 'forest' portion, being removed. This will allow the existing seedbank to establish new, quality forage to develop in the understory. Some larger oak brush stands will be left to provide cover to encourage big game to use the area. Improving forage availability in the area will help hold deer and elk off of nearby private lands and reduce damage to irrigated fields, as well as improve the quality of transition and winter range to help achieve big game management objectives. The project was approved for \$24,839.00 for contractor labor.
2. Ed Wofford and Aaron Brock presented a fencing proposal for Simmons Mountain Ranch. The existing fence is old and in disrepair, and is composed primarily of woven wire sheep fencing. The property experiences heavy big game use in the spring, summer, and fall, especially during migration. Deer and elk sometimes become entangled or cause damage when attempting to cross the fence line, which can result in abnormal big game distribution in the area. Fences do not properly contain livestock, which results in cattle trespass and poor grazing rotation and impacts to forage. The project consists of removing 3 miles of existing woven wire fence and clearing the right-of way. A new wildlife-friendly fence that meets HPP specifications for wire spacing will be constructed, including a high-visibility top wire and 2 wildlife crossings per mile. This will increase the ability of big game to move throughout the property without getting caught up, and will help prevent future damage to the fence. Implementing proper grazing rotation and preventing cattle trespass will improve the amount of forage that is left for big game after livestock grazing. The project was approved for \$18,000.00 for materials, and the committee will provide 12 rolls of white wire.
3. The committee reviewed a pond project proposal from Oscar Massey. This project is similar to previous year's work on allotment ponds on BLM and USFS. The project area is located on the north end of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which holds large numbers of big game animals year-round. Many existing ponds receive sufficient water from precipitation or runoff to fill, but the ponds no longer hold water or are silted in and unusable. This reduces the amount of water available on the landscape, and concentrates wildlife and livestock around the few ponds with water. Agricultural conflicts occur when producers must haul water for livestock, which is then also utilized by big game. Habitat in the immediate vicinity of the functional ponds is degraded from overuse and becomes less productive for wildlife. The project consists of cleaning 10-15 ponds on USFS and BLM allotments with heavy equipment. Additional ponds on allotments or Massey Ranch private land will also be cleaned if rental time permits after the minimum 20 ponds have been completed. Ponds may also be treated with salt, bentonite, or liners as needed. Increasing the number of ponds that can reliably store and provide water will improve big game and livestock distribution throughout the area, and will help reduce conflicts with livestock that are centered around water sources. Improving water availability and wildlife distribution will also reduce pressure on the habitat around the currently used ponds, and will likely increase utilization of recent habitat improvement projects that have been completed on

public lands in the area. The project was approved for \$5,000.00 for either contractor or equipment rental costs.

4. The committee discussed the Thorpe and Harold fencing projects. Both projects were approved last year, but were not implemented by the landowners prior to the Gunnison sage grouse timing restrictions on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The committee warned both landowners that these issues had occurred in prior fiscal years and the committee would not entertain future fencing proposals if these projects were not completed this fiscal year. Additionally, future fence proposals should include all matches between neighbors so that HPP does not contribute for a large share than any other partners. The Thorpe fence was approved for \$6,270.00 and 2 rolls of white wire, and the Harold fence project was approved for \$25,000.00 and 8 rolls of white wire.
5. The committee discussed white wire inventory and approved \$4,837.50 for a white wire purchase from Kencove. The State Council may provide up to \$5,000.00 of white wire per committee this fall, and so this purchase will only be made if the State Council declines to purchase wire for local committees.

#### **Other Business:**

1. The committee resumed discussion about a pond cleanout program for the spring and/or next fiscal year. The BLM Grazing Advisory Board currently has a program that pays permittees \$500 for ponds completed on BLM permits. HPP may be able to partner with the GAB to provide additional funding for this program. For USFS permits, NEPA issues present a barrier to pond cleanouts, as many of the ponds predate NEPA and so are not allowed to be treated without working with USFS staff to obtain clearances for each pond. HPP may need to explore alternate options, such as paying for arc clearances to obtain NEPA on large batches of ponds in the area, and/or partnering with NRCS. For USFS permit ponds that do already have clearances, HPP may be able to fund pond cleanouts if those permit holders can be contacted.
2. The Distribution Management Plan is due for revision. The committee reviewed the current plan and identified areas and ideas for major updates. The first draft of the revised plan will be reviewed at the fall meeting.

**Next Meeting: Project Tour - TBD**