

BLM San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Collaborative Adaptive Management - Annual Partner Meeting

September 22, 2021 | 1:00 - 3:00pm | Zoom

Meeting Summary

Meeting Purpose

- Review progress on the SPRNCA Collaborative Adaptive Management process since July 2021 kick-off meeting.
- Gather input and feedback from partners about priorities being pursued by working groups
- Hear updates from BLM on current management priorities

Participants

Partners:

Catie Armstrong, Community Watershed Alliance Diane Laush, Lower San Pedro Watershed Alliance Emily Burns, Sky Island Alliance
Holly Richter, The Nature Conservancy Jeff Burgess
Joy Banks Lizann Michaud
Mark Apel, Cochise County
Matt Jewel, AZ Dept of Forestry and Fire Management Renell Stewart, Friends of the San Pedro River
Robin Silver, Center for Biological Diversity Sharon Rock
Teresa Murphy, Cochise County
Tricia Gerrodette

BLM:

Scott Feldhausen, Gila District Manager
Jayme Lopez, Acting Associate District Manager Sharisse Flatt, Acting Field Manager
Colleen Bergmanis, Assistant Field Manager June Lowery, Public Affairs Officer
Amy McGowan, Planning and Environmental Specialist
Christina Perez, Fisheries Biologist Dave Murray, Hydrologist
Eric Baker, Rangeland Specialist Theresa Condo, Vegetation Tech
Francisco Mendoza, Outdoor Recreation Planner Mark McCabe, Natural Resource Specialist Rachel Feagley, Intern
Lea Schram von Haupt, NEPA intern

Facilitation and Documentation:

Tahnee Robertson and Colleen Whitaker (Southwest Decision Resources)

Acronyms used:

SPRNCA - San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area RMP - Resource Management Plan

LHE - Land Health Evaluation EA - Environmental Assessment

DNA – Determination of NEPA Adequacy

SPRNCA Adaptive Management Overview - *Tahnee Robertson, Amy McGowan*

Amy and Tahnee shared a presentation outlining collaborative adaptive management and the overall process design for the SPRNCA effort. Presentation available upon request.

Questions/discussion:

- During the RMP process, there were questions about implementing actions and we were assured that on-the-ground actions would need to go through NEPA analysis. I know of a project that relied on 8-10 year old NEPA documents. Is that going to be a pattern?
 - If BLM relies on previously completed NEPA analysis, we still have to complete a determination of NEPA adequacy (DNA) and information about any upcoming NEPA projects (including DNAs and categorical exclusions) for the SPRNCA will be included in the quarterly SPRNCA newsletter.
- How can a local knowledgeable person be included in one of these working groups?
 - Please contact the facilitation team if you are interested (Tahnee and Colleen)

Communication

Website (sprncaadaptivemanagement.net)

- This website is administered by Southwest Decision Resources and is intended for partners. It has background information and resources, upcoming meeting dates, and past meeting notes.
- Please share any ideas for improvement with Colleen (colleen@swdresources.com)

Quarterly Email

- The BLM has been endeavoring to send quarterly update emails to all partners interested in the SPRNCA. (Note: The recent one was sent over email slightly late, after this meeting – 9.27.21)
- Partners shared feedback via a zoom poll about what type of information they find most useful in the quarterly emails. In order of preference these are:
 - Ongoing implementation related NEPA projects
 - Upcoming projects
 - Upcoming meetings
 - Completed projects update
 - Working groups and adaptive management update

BLM Update - Scott Feldhausen

- It has been a busy year for Gila District
- Fire season started in early April
 - The district has had the most acres burned in BLM AZ this year. We are seeing increasingly abnormal fire behaviors
 - There were four incident teams on the district at once
 - Almost half the staff was gone for at least a month; continuous juggling of resources and priorities. This has slowed some processes and projects.
- Staff vacancies are at about 25-30%
- Covid impacts - federal employees have to be vaccinated
- The oil and gas lease project in the Safford Field Office has taken a lot of time and district resources
- Change in administration has meant a shift in the border infrastructure emphasis. There is a DOI proposal for mitigation that was submitted; waiting to hear (SPRNCA and other areas are a piece of it).
- Working to bring in funding on SPRNCA to help with monitoring and other priority issues.

- Recently signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the BLM, Ft. Huachuca, City of Sierra Vista and Cochise County to work together on evaluating conditions and modeling trends in the San Pedro river. This is not a decision document, but a way to formalize working together.

Questions/discussion:

- Re: MOU - these are not natural resource organizations. What expertise do they have?
 - All these agencies have natural resources staff.
 - Cochise County and Ft. Huachuca are also members of the Cochise Conservation and Recharge Network. There will be integration between BLM SPRNCA monitoring to help gauge where to put recharge projects.
- What are the vegetation management NEPA documents that are being worked on, and when will comment periods open?
 - There are currently two active vegetation management NEPA documents in progress in the Gila District. One in Safford (Safford Field Office Vegetation Management EA) - public comment occurred in ~Spring 2021. The other one is Las Cienegas Landscape Restoration EA, and had public comment in Jan/Feb 2020. BLM is working to finish Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on this one.
- Can members of the public be automatically notified of all comment periods? Where does the general public need to look for comment periods?
 - For any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public comment periods for projects on the SPRNCA - everyone on the SPRNCA stakeholder email list will be notified. For other projects that have comment periods in the Gila District, stakeholder notification lists are developed on a project-by-project basis. Notify Amy McGowan to be notified of comment periods on projects in the Gila District.

Unauthorized grazing update - *Sharisse Flatt*

Sharisse shared a presentation. Presentation upon request. Main points:

- Unauthorized grazing is the use of livestock on lands where they are not authorized. This is what we're talking about when there are cattle in the riparian area in SPRNCA and other parts of the SPRNCA that are not "available" for livestock grazing and are not under a BLM livestock grazing lease. These could be BLM lease holders, non-BLM leaseholders, and/or unknowns.
- Current management actions
 - BLM logs a reports - who reported, brand identification, and BLM actions taken
 - In the past, this hasn't been done well. BLM is working to improve this.
- Data (2018-2021) shows that the majority of unauthorized grazing is from non-BLM allotments (neighboring state and private land). The second largest source is unidentified. SPRNCA allotments are not accounting for these unauthorized cattle.
- Identification is done through branding. Sometimes the brand cannot be recognized (no BLM nexus), or they may be feral cattle. Sometimes by the time BLM gets to the location of the sighting, the cattle are gone.
- Future management actions for authorized grazing (4 SPRNCA allotments)
 - Finish the Land Health Evaluation; utilize newly acquired fencing materials

- Future management actions for unauthorized grazing

- Even if there were no SPRNCA allotments we would still have this issue
- Repair SPRNCA boundary fence
- Build partnerships. Partners report what they see. BLM can't do it alone
- Email: BLM_AZ_TFOWEB@blm.gov

Questions/discussion:

- Regarding trespass cattle in the river - do their owners, when you are able to identify them, suffer any penalties?
 - Not at this time. When there is no nexus with the owners, the BLM doesn't have a lot of recourse. Want to focus on partnership building to help address these issues with

non-BLM permittees.

- If it is a BLM lessee (someone who holds a BLM livestock grazing lease), the BLM works through proper regulations to address the issue.
- But these are primarily estray cattle, not cattle of BLM lessees.
- I believe there's a legal process for removing unauthorized cattle. What triggers that action?
 - That can be triggered by the inability to identify a responsible party or by the responsible party not being willing to respond to the issue.
- In the past the BLM used to sell the cattle at auction. Why isn't this done now?
 - Impoundment is a difficult process, and the BLM explores all potential alternative solutions before pursuing this option. It can lead to very challenging situations; one familiar example involved the Bundys in Nevada.
 - Scott shared his own experience with a difficult impoundment as a Field Manager in another state, which included threats to other involved parties.
 - The Tucson Field Office has found that building relationships on the ground is the most successful way to resolve these issues, and is focusing on communication, partnerships and accountability.
- If BLM can't reach the owner what is done?
 - BLM can reach out to state brand inspectors.
 - Note that the Tucson Field Office has 170 range allotments, with only two people to manage these. There is no range specialist assigned specifically to SPRNCA. Monsoon season washed out a bunch of fences. This is challenging. There are two people trying to fix roads on the whole district.
- If managing trespass/unauthorized cattle is so difficult, why did BLM put in the Record of Decision to use cattle as a vegetative management tool?
 - If the BLM were to use cattle as a vegetation management tool, BLM would issue a

non-renewable grazing authorization to authorize the cattle, goats, or sheep that would be used to achieve a specific vegetation objective. So the issue of unauthorized cattle is separate from using cattle as a controlled vegetation management tool.

- It was included as a vegetation management tool, along with multiple other options, to be considered in areas where it might be feasible with temporary fencing, along with other tools like prescribed fire, mechanical treatments or herbicide, depending on the issue.
- If BLM determines that they are not meeting an ecological objective or have a risk of wildfire impacting those objectives, it is one of a suite of tools to be evaluated.

Land Health Evaluations and Grazing Lease Renewals - Amy McGowan/Eric Baker.

Presentation upon request. Main points:

- This is for the 4 BLM allotments
- The Land Health Evaluation (LHE) determines if AZ Standards for Rangeland Health are being achieved on the allotment
- LHE includes an Adaptive Management process (chapter 8 outlines the process).
- BLM is now drafting the EA for the leases. The last public comment period (May-June 2021) solicited comments on the draft LHEs and scoping on the SPRNCA Allotments grazing lease renewal EA.
 - Comments - 71 letters with 164 substantive comments received. All will be outlined and responded to in the Draft EA
- There will be another opportunity to comment on the draft SPRNCA Allotments grazing lease renewal EA in ~December 2021.
- Expect to issue a proposed decision on the SPRNCA Allotments grazing lease renewal EA around February 2022.
- BLM has developed an interactive web tool (also known as a StoryMap) that accompanied the LHE documents to provide more information to partners. This is being piloted as a new way to share information. A new StoryMap will accompany the Draft EA. After this meeting a survey will be shared to collect feedback on the StoryMap.

Working group updates

Three working groups have been convened as part of the collaborative adaptive management process. The purpose of the working groups is to work with partners to provide technical expertise and knowledge in key resource areas in support of achieving the RMP objectives.

Uplands and Grazing - Eric Baker

- Status: Have held two meetings (March and July 2021)
- Work to date: Partner orientation to SPRNCA uplands and grazing programs/priorities; partner feedback and input on Land Health Evaluations and grazing lease renewals; StoryMap development
- Upcoming: Fencing workshop (Hereford NRCD and Friends of San Pedro), shared learning with partners on vegetation management tools/techniques to inform vegetation management EA, low impact erosion control site prioritization

Questions:

- Is it possible to form a group to help deal with unauthorized grazing?
 - Contact Tahnee and Colleen to discuss.

Recreation and Cultural/Heritage - Francisco Mendoza/Colleen Bergmanis

- Status: Have held two meetings (February and May 2021)
- Work to date:

- Partner orientation to SPRNCA recreation and cultural/heritage programs and sites; sharing and synthesizing BLM and partner needs/opportunities; development of sites matrix to help inventory and prioritize sites for future work; planning site visits
- BLM priorities:
 - Ongoing maintenance, trash collection, etc.
 - Increase sportsman access across SPRNCA
 - Considering establishing fee sites
 - Development of Sun corridor trail
 - Agents of Discovery app
 - Ebikes
 - Missed having Friends of San Pedro
- Upcoming: Working group field visits to help prioritize sites, leverage partnership opportunities for site work, and shared learning.
- Field trip planned Sept 29 to San Pedro House, Murray Springs and Lehner (as of 9/20/2021 6 signed up).

Riparian and Aquatic - Dave Murray/Christina Perez

- Status: First meeting will be in early October 2021
- Initial identified priorities for discussion with partners: Coordination with Upper San Pedro Partnership, Monitoring (expanded near stream well point, the preliminary AIM data, Riparian at the Stromberg Transects), Proper Function Condition (PFC) - coming up on 10 years, Recovery Actions – Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species augmentations, reintroductions, monitoring; BLM sensitive species monitoring on the main-stem SPR

Breakout group discussions

Partners divided into groups to discuss the working group progress and priorities.

Riparian and Aquatic

Participants: Christina Perez, Dave Murray, June Lowery, Lea Schram von Haupt, Mark McCabe, Catie Armstrong, Holly Richter, Emily Burns, Diane Laush, Joy Banks, Mark Apel, Maddy Marsh, Tricia Gerrodette, Lizann Michaud, Sharon Rock

Questions/feedback on initial priority topics:

- Do any of the Proper Functioning Condition or Assessment Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) monitoring cover water quality?
 - AIM does. PFC covers more riparian/vegetation factors.
- What type of coordination has the BLM been doing with the Upper San Pedro Partnership?
 - Main coordination with the USPP group is through the Technical Committee. Partnership focus is more hydrology; this is good for further discussion with the working group
- What does BLM species monitoring include?
 - An example of water umbel monitoring was discussed. BLM wants to come up with a better way to monitor water umbel in the SPRNCA. There is existing data that goes back

more than 30 years. They stopped gathering it about five years ago and the BLM picked it back up. Species existence in the water is a good indicator of water quality.

- Should include BLM wildlife biologist in this working group as well

Partner priorities:

- San Pedro as a wildlife corridor and the impacts and mitigation opportunities from the border wall and associated flood gates
- Monitoring of animal impacts from border through the use of wildlife monitoring cameras within the SPRNCA
- How MOU related condition riparian monitoring will fold into this monitoring
- Lower San Pedro area and connections to SPRNCA
- ADEQ project to fence off portion of Babocomari for water quality concerns
- Fire management/prescribed fire
- Exotic species control (tamarisk, etc.)
- Which T & E species are being prioritized for augmentations or reintroduction in the SPRNCA (mostly fish per BLM)
- Interested in ensuring that the riparian vegetation and quantity and quality of water in the SPRNCA is not negatively impacted by the RMP.
- Interest in evaluations of Wild and Scenic River status of the SPRNCA and Babocomari.

Uplands and Grazing

Participants: Amy McGowan, Eric Baker, Alice True, Theresa Condo, Jeff Burgess, Matt Jewell

Discussion:

- What happens to trespass cattle when you find them in the river?
 - work through neighbors to get them out of the river. 1-2 instances where it was never resolved. Cows must be gathered and then brand inspectors must come.
- Why is there money for veg treatments but not cattle removal?
 - Money is earmarked for specific purposes. There are more resources coming for fences.
- In the LHEs, why was there so much monitoring on uplands and not on the Babocomari River?
 - BLM acknowledges that and are working on addressing the lack of monitoring; the riparian working group will also focus on this. Also, terrestrial AIM was implemented nationally first and lotic was second, contributing to the delay.
- What is the expectation for building and fortifying the SPRNCA boundary fence? Are there volunteers available?
 - BLM is trying to get people interested in building and maintaining fences. There could be opportunities to contract work to build fences on a case by case basis.
- Could we use cameras on fence lines to monitor?
 - Alice reports that she has used cameras for some success. There are some legality issues, but it's okay for a lessee to implement this on their own.
- Fencing workshop: Hereford NRCD, BLM and NRCS are planning to host a workshop focused on how to build wildlife friendly fences with proper spacing and repair solutions. Opportunity for BLM to issue fencing materials to partners.

Recreation and Cultural/Heritage

Participants: Renell Stewart, Rachel Feagley, Francisco Mendoza, Colleen Bergmanis, Rachel Feagley

Discussion:

- Are there specific objectives for drone flying?
 - This effort could develop supplementary rules and regulations for SPRNCA
- It was too bad there weren't more people in the recent field trip.
 - Covid restrictions really meant that a smaller group was better. The discussion was good.
 - Hope to return to normalcy next year.
 - The working groups activities are still new, hopeful the field trip will start conversations to add to future scope
- Remediation efforts will be important to include as this does impact recreation

Word Cloud: What do you love most about the SPRNCA?

