

New Mexico Beaver Coalition Kickoff Meeting Notes
January 11, 2024, 10:00-11:30 am
Virtual on Zoom
Convened by Rio Grande Return (Karen Menetrey and Cecil Rich)
Next Meeting: February 8, 2024, 10:00-11:30 am

Organizations represented and participants attending: NM Department of Game and Fish (Nick Forman, Brock Lorenz, Daniel Lusk, Ginny Seamster (attending for Jack Marchetti)), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Stephanie Siemek), U.S. Forest Service (Brad Allen, Leslie Hay, Becky Kirby, Jack Williams, Kristin Warren, Eileen Henry, Ashley Hom), BLM (Isidro Barela), Santa Clara Pueblo (Daniel Denepah), State Lands Office and Universities (not represented), Santa Fe County (Nav Khalsa, Monica Harmon), Rio Grande Return (Karen Menetrey, Todd Lopez, Cecil Rich, Reid Whittlesey), Wild Earth Guardians (Chris Smith), Trout Unlimited (Claire Catlett, Toner Mitchell), The Beaver Institute (Adam Burnett), National Forest Foundation (Katie Sickmann), Forest Stewards Guild (Krista Bonfontaine, Cody Dems), Amigos Bravos (Steven Fry), NM Trout (Ron Loehman), Riversource (Rich Schrader), Animal Protection NM (Nina Eydelman), National Wildlife Federation (Alicia Marrs), Individuals (John Harned, Ramsey Lofton, Ellen Soles)

Karen Menetrey welcomed the group and went over the meeting agenda and operating principles.

Cecil Rich then discussed the purposes for bringing the group together. This included bringing together a diverse group of state, federal, tribal, non-profit, for-profit organizations, and individuals to share information, coordinate activities, and identify common interests and opportunities to work collaboratively to expand the distribution of beaver across New Mexico.

Karen then led a round-robin session where participants were asked to summarize their activities related to beaver and to share what they hoped to get out of the coalition.

Round robin summary:

Rio Grande Return

Reid Whittlesey, Restoration Director summarized their work to implement habitat improvement for beaver that began about 15 years ago. In the most recent 5 years have implemented projects in 9 streams in 3 mountain ranges in NM, including over 500,000 willow and cottonwood stems, 150 acres of cow and elk enclosures, and 4000 instream structures. Also, working with the Valles Caldera National Preserve to improve habitat for beaver including relocation efforts.

Todd Lopez, Executive Director, expressed his appreciation and support for this work.

NM Department of Game and Fish

Nick Forman, Furbearer Biologist Supervisor. Conducts management, research, and distribution surveys for beaver. Coordination of reintroduction efforts and best tools for management.

Ginny Seamster, Asst. Chief for Technical Guidance. Interested in incorporating information from group into guidance they provide on projects. Ginny indicated that *Jack Marchetti*, Aquatic and Riparian

Biologist will be the main contact for this group. He will be developing language into guidance for bridge and culvert projects. Expand language aimed at keeping beaver on the landscape. Will be working with Nick Forman on a broader set of beaver-focused guidelines to incorporate into project reviews and will be provided to the public.

Daniel Lusk, Habitat Program Manager. Involved in riparian restoration and Process-based Restoration projects across the state.

Brock Lorenz, Northern Region Habitat Biologist. Working to develop habitat restoration projects across his region.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Stephanie Siemek, SW Regional Office. Interested in using BDAs to help improve habitats on refuges to help keep beaver there. Have many canals and culverts and need a strategy to help beaver thrive.

U.S. Forest Service, SW Regional Office

Leslie Hay, Reg. Wildlife Program Manager. Goal is to enhance coordination with groups in New Mexico on activities on FS lands.

Becky Kirby, Regional Wildlife Ecologist. Interested in supporting these efforts.

Jack Williams, Wildlife Biologist on the NM Meadow Jumping Mouse Recovery Team. Interested in utilizing beaver as a part of recovery efforts.

Brad Allen, Wildlife and Fisheries Technician, Lincoln NF, Smokey Bear RD. Leading riparian restoration efforts on the forest. Beaver were extirpated on the forest. Working with Rio Grande Return to improve habitats to enable beaver to expand from their current populations downstream on private lands. Interest in bringing both beaver and Rio Grande cutthroat trout back to the Lincoln NF.

Kristin Warren, Cibola NF, Kiowa Natl. Grasslands. Concerns over loss of streamflow at some times of the year.

Eileen Henry, Fisheries Biologist, Gila NF. Very interested in working with beaver to assist with Gila Trout recovery, recovery from fire impacts, addressing conflict over impacts on culverts and bridges. Interested in beaver as a tool for addressing habitat restoration in wilderness areas where other techniques are limited.

Ashley Hom, Tribal Liaison, National Partnership Office. Washington Office, works with indigenous youth and interested in connecting with beaver-based restoration efforts.

Bureau of Land Management

Isidro Barela, Wildlife Biologist, Rio Puerco Field Office. Master's project in Mississippi and Alabama with beaver. Research with Dr. Jennifer Frey at NMSU. Constructed BDAs in No. CA in salmon habitat. Interested in legal issues related to beaver and the status of beaver across the state.

Santa Clara Pueblo

Daniel Denepah, Director of Forestry. Working with beaver to create habitat, including for fish. Protect road crossings from beaver activity.

Santa Fe County

Nav Khalsa, Volunteer Coordinator. Discussed their experience at the Chimayo property where they eliminated cattle and 3 beavers came to the site and their dam building led to a total transformation of the site and the return of a firefly species that had been long been absent from the site. Worked with Peggy Darr at Defenders of Wildlife.

Monica Harmon, Open Space Manager. Interested in strengthening partnerships.

Wild Earth Guardians

Chris Smith, SW Wildlife Advocate. Works on administrative and legal advocacy. Interested in creating opportunities, widening bottleneck, prioritizing coexistence, improved legal frameworks and policies. Revisiting the 2014 Senate Memorial directing NM DGF to develop a beaver management plan.

Trout Unlimited

Toner Mitchell. Working with Rio Grande Return and Defenders of Wildlife on multiple projects including in Costilla and Vallecitos. Toner's role has been advancing the coexistence narrative in the agricultural space. Has found that lots of folks are sympathetic to beaver as a way to address ecological problems.

Claire Catlett, URG Engagement Manager. Working on Federal policy also with Dan Roper of TU. TU has Keystone agreements with the USFS to do Process-Based Restoration projects in NM. TU has 5 chapters in NM including Gila, Rio Grande, Bosque, Truchas, and Enchanted Circle.

Beaver Institute

Adam Burnett, Executive Director. Goal is to restore ecological balance with beaver! Have the Beavercorps training program that has certified 80 people across the country to employ beaver coexistence methods. Have a biennial conference, BeaverCON that will be in Boulder, CO in October 20-23, 2024 and he hopes many from NM can attend. The Beaver Institute has 6 national working groups focused on habitat restoration, conflict reduction, policy/legal, education, research, and funding.

Amigos Bravos

Steven Fry, Policy and Projects Specialist. They do both policy and restoration projects across NM. Interested to incorporate beaver and beaver-related strategies into their projects. Have installed a few BDAs in Taos County.

National Forest Foundation

Katie Sickmann, SW Watershed Coordinator. Works with Manny Lopez and Sasha Stortz in NM. NFF has funded LT-PBR projects in NM and AZ, and CO in Colo. R. basin. Interested to connect with the group and expand capacity.

Forest Stewards Guild

Cody Dems, Program Manager. Interested personally as a "beaver believer". Professionally and from the standpoint of the FSG is involved in the 2-3-2 Cohesive Strategy, a collaborative partnership started in 2016 around the headwaters of the Rio Chama, San Juan, and Rio Grande Rivers. Includes a watershed focus that recognizes the importance of beaver, PBR, to improve and maintain systems. Working to develop a LS scale monitoring program that includes the

question of effects of upland and riparian treatments on wildlife, one species of interest is beaver and looking at ways to meaningfully monitor beaver. Interested in working with this group to expand monitoring and further develop monitoring program to understand beaver response to climate and treatments.

Krista Bonfontaine, Watershed Restoration Program Manager. Long-time “beaver believer”. Described and experience 20 years ago where she was doing environmental ed with kids and came upon a beaver in a trap in the Santa Fe River watershed. Made a lasting impression. See beaver as agents of resilience of water and fire on the landscape. Seeking opportunities to reduce conflict and improve habitat. Her initial focus is on work with the 2-3-2 Collaborative and the Rio Chama CFLRP in No. NM and So. Colo., and also interested in working with the group on beaver across NM watersheds.

New Mexico Trout

Ron Loehman, Conservation Chair. Group has had a long-time interest in beaver since the group volunteered to build BDAs on Rio Cebolla, Santa Fe NF, when Cecil with the Fish Bio there. Also replaced and have been maintaining water temp. loggers in 5 Jemez Mtn. streams for the past few years. Interested in beaver and continuing their volunteer work and working with Rio Grande Return. Ron related that a beaver family lives and have created a wetland along the Rio Guadalupe where he has land.

Riversource

Rich Schrader. Worked on project supported by NM Game and Fish called Beavers Building Habitat that worked to address beaver-human conflicts and took school kids out to wrap high value trees and riparian revegetation. Also, project with TU and Defenders of WL ground-truthing of beaver translocation sites may be. Only 1 of 13 areas had suitable habitat and G&F was already working on relocation there (Frijoles Canyon/Bandelier). Currently, have a project with the Santa Fe NF on NM meadow jumping mouse recovery. Riparian fence work using youth conservation crews in Polvadera, Rio Puerco, and Rito Penas Negras sites in Jemez Mtns. Interested in bringing school kids on field trips to BDA projects to see and monitor what is happening. Also interested in connecting youth conservation crew work to restoration activities.

Animal Protection New Mexico

Nina Eydelman, Program and Policy Officer. Wildlife Program, Interested to collaborate on wildlife coexistence issues. Past projects include 2006 helped with coexistence workshops, 2010 created landowner’s guide to nonlethal solutions for beaver conflicts that is still posted on their website, 2016 persuaded the Santa Fe County Commission to reject a proposal to kill beavers on the Santa Fe River. Interested in protecting NM’s ecosystems in times of climate change.

National Wildlife Federation

Alicia Marrs, Director of Western Water. Works with Jeremy Romero based in NM and Brian Kurzow with their Rocky Mountain Region based in Colo. Ribbons of Life Initiative coalition of partners working in the Upper Rio Grande watershed of Southern CO and Northern NM. Focus

is on riparian connectivity and restoration. Have a focus on beaver coexistence work including in MT on the beaver working group there. Working with the Beaver institute to share and leverage efforts that are happening in states across the west. Interested in helping to contribute to NM efforts.

Individuals

Ellen Soles, semi-retired geographer, formerly with N. Ariz. University. Lives in Cliff-Gila Valley where there is extraordinary beaver habitat. Resilient riparian areas but beginning to see some effects of climate change. Has been doing monitoring and research on this river for 25 years. Have acequias and is interested in hearing from people who have experience on the ground dealing with beaver impacts.

John Harned, wilderness guide throughout the West for 35 years and firm beaver believer! Interested in opportunities to volunteer in the Black Range, Gila drainage has beavers everywhere! Interested in producing a publication or something for ranchers of rancher success stories with beaver, some of best beaver habitat is on private land.

Ramsey Lofton, beaver enthusiast, retired UNM educator, and tree steward with Tree NM. interested in this group to help communicate to the general public about beaver-related work being done by agencies and groups in NM. Have been doing presentations on beaver and climate resilience at community centers and schools in ABQ.

Discussion:

Cecil summarized common issues brought up by participants including:

- habitat improvement to facilitate expansion of beaver
- improved policies and procedures to facilitate relocation of beaver where suitable habitat exists but they are absent
- education on the benefits of beaver
- conflict reduction and beaver-human coexistence
- technical guidance to incorporate consideration of beaver into projects

Cecil also mentioned projects that are planned to develop decision support to help prioritize efforts to expand beaver in the state. This includes a statewide beaver dams census using high resolution aerial imagery and statewide modeling of habitat suitability using the Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool (BRAT). This would be carried out by Utah State University and potentially be funded by NM Dept. of Game and Fish. These efforts would provide baseline information on the current distribution of beaver across the state and provide mapping of where suitable habitat exists for beaver and the estimated density of dams that could be supported as well as identifying areas that could support beaver but habitat improvement would first be needed.

Ron Lohman also recommended that there be a way to connect volunteers to projects, such as a clearinghouse.

There was discussion of including representatives from acequia associations in this group. The group thought that it may be best to include any from acequia association who are sympathetic to beaver first to pave the way for further representation.

Karen discussed the desire that the group identify goals and objectives for what needs to be done. She mentioned that the proposed date for the next meeting is **February 8th from 10:00-11:30.**

Cecil mentioned that initially the idea is for this group to meet monthly as the group identifies what it wants to achieve and potentially develops subgroups to focus on topical areas. Then subgroups could develop their own schedules.

Leslie Hay indicated that she would reach out to the SW Beaver Coalition to let them know that we will be avoiding any duplication of efforts and that the NM group may be identifying subgroups to focus on getting work done.

Chris Smith indicated that he is interested in working with any people on policy issues related to opening up bottleneck as well as state-level funding opportunities.

Karen wrapped up the meeting and invited folks to reach out to her or Cecil with any feedback on the meeting. Cecil will distribute meeting notes and an invitation for the next meeting.