Aldo’s Steering Committee Meeting March 8, 2021

Joanie, Marty, and Marcia met via Zoom. Marcia took notes.

1. Grazing Committee Update – Marty reported that the grazing monitoring team (currently Denise, Marty, Nancy, Marcia) conducted several more monitoring surveys during February. We included some non-high priority forest service grazing exclusion areas, to avoid cold stream crossings this winter. Denise and Marcia will meet with a GNF Range person (on detail) tomorrow to discuss how we might interface with the monitoring interns this spring and summer.
2. Submit comments on National Forest Service public lands grazing program (Comments must be received by April 17, 2021.) - Marcia and Joanie outlined this issue, based on the March 3rd email forwarded to Aldo’s listserv. Marcia downloaded a file (Proposed Rangelands Management Directives Updates) from the Federal Register or associated links that summarizes this NFS action. (Will send a copy to Denise and Marty.) There would be multiple chapters to review, and we came up with several expedited strategies to contemplate. First we will see if GOB (Durango office) has or will be commenting on this rangeland management update, developed during the Trump administration. Sally will double check for us and let us know this week. A second possibility is to partner with the San Juan Broadband, if they are reviewing it and if they are interested in working with us.

3. 2021 NM Legislature updates – Status of these (next paragraph) was briefly summarized. Note that HB 200 Water Trust Board is slated to be heard this Tuesday by the Senate Conservation Committee. Joanie noted that getting some training regarding how to more fully understand the NM legislation tracker or contacting someone knowledgeable regarding this would be very helpful. Joanie sent an email to the Rio Grande Broadband leaders to see if they had suggestions regarding this. Sally may also have some suggestions from GOB to help address this. Marty mentioned there are some individuals locally that may also help based on their experience.

 Proposed HB 51 Environmental Database Act (email March 1); “Green Amendment” Environmental Rights Act SJR 3 (might be stalled); SB 32 Wildlife Conservation and Public Safety Act (Trapping Ban) NM (**Senate might be voting on that as early as this Tuesday night!)**; SB 312 Game & Fish & Wildlife Changes; SB 149 (Fracking)

4. Wildlife Corridors / Connectivity

Border wall wildlife update Zoom Feb. 26 – Marcia briefly summarized this Feb. 26 Tucson Broadband sponsored Zoom session which was informative and included photos from recent wall construction. For example, the eastern most wall contract work (destruction) in AZ took place in Guadalupe Canyon, where drone images showed blasting work. This specific area connects to the Gila River area. Animals such as bear and jaguar etc. use this habitat. (Guadalupe Mountains extend into SW NM, just south of the Peloncillo Mtns.) Let Marcia know if you are interested in receiving a copy of this Zoom event, images, and talking points for advocacy drafted by the Kate Scott with the Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center.

For more NM oriented borderlands info, we can check the Southwest Environmental Center website and perhaps communicate with Kevin Bixby. (Let Marcia know if you would like to do this, otherwise I’ll try.)

NM Wildlife Corridors Act (article in NM Land Conservancy fall / winter 2020): Brief summary of article) – Marcia summarized this article regarding status of projects following passage of the NM Wildlife Corridors Act signed by the Governor in 2019. According to this article, during 2020 the NM Game & Fish and NMDOT worked during the pandemic to develop the Wildlife Corridors Action Plan. The plan aims to identify the “top” five hotspots where traffic collides with migrating game animals and to focus funding for infrastructure to help channel wildlife safely - and for public safety as well. The research contract was awarded to Daniel B. Stephens & Associates (Albuquerque), to include several subcontractors. Using collision data, the list was eventually narrowed down to the top 25 hotspots. NM Game & Fish team gathered ground truthing data at the 25 sites via a survey app. Deer, elk, and pronghorn have been collared so their movements can be tracked to determine migratory corridors. The goal (as of late 2020) was to have a good plan in place by the end of 2021, noting however, that funding would still be needed. The article also states “… hopes that the agencies build on their partnership and gain support from the conservation community, etc. to help leverage NMDOT for federal funds to start implementing the plan on the ground.”

Let Marcia know if you would like a copy of the entire article.

Follow-up – Joanie and Marcia will read the article and decide who to contact (Game & Fish Terrestrial Habitat Specialist who has been actively involved with the project from the start – or the research firm) in order to follow this issue and receive updated info as available.

Optional if anyone has brief comment / observation - US 180 construction planning (March 4 virtual meeting / Due date March 18?) - None.

5. GRIP issues – (see Feb. 25 email for more info)

Malone District Exploration Project (See also March 2nd SC Daily Press): Any updates or comments to share? Some of us sent brief email comments individually. Marcia mentioned she hiked to the Malone mining area depicted on the topographic maps.

Do we want to participate in the Gila Earth Day- Community Action Day Saturday, April 24th by joining one of their work groups, or propose our own? Joanie asked Sally Sharp if there might be a relatively short GOB video that we could “borrow” for use during Earth Day. We talked about possibly focusing on the border wall relative to wildlife connectivity or similar issues. Sally will look into this and let us know. We could still include contact info etc. for Aldo’s BB. If so, that would be our focus rather trying to organize a work group for the community action day.

Brief Comments or news? Marcia indicated she is now attending the Trails and Open Space group meetings (currently Zoom) when possible, to take Diane’s place.