

Dolores River Restoration Partnership:

Core Team Retreat - Draft Meeting Minutes

January 15, 2013

Desired Outcomes

- Resolution on and action items for salient issues
- A fun, engaging, retreat in Grand Junction
- Our next meeting scheduled and 'other items' advanced

Key Action Items:

- **Rusty and Funding SC:** initiate long-term funding to support monitoring and maintenance
- **Julie and SMS:** revisit DRRAP goals based on feasibility and report back to Core Team
- **Jim:** develop a state-and-transition model
- **Peter:** work with Terry to develop an integrity table
- **All:** consider Tim's question, "What role do we want the WFF to play (e.g. in the Core Team, partnership, biannual meetings) moving forward?"
- **Mike:** report back to Core Team about his SCC transition, once the structure has been solidified; also, be the secretary during future Core Team phone calls.
- **Daniel:** attend the SURP community event in May; work with the subcommittee chairs to develop ways to documents challenges, successes, and lessons learned for the SER journal article; work with Julie to develop the managers' report; revisit governance document, re: edits and outreach

Attendees:

Jim Cagney - BLM; Tim Carlson - Walton Family Foundation; Sue Bellagamba & Peter Mueller - TNC; Mike Wight – Southwest Conservation Corps; Rusty Lloyd, Julie Knudson, & Daniel Oppenheimer – Tamarisk Coalition

I. DRRAP Implementation and the Post DRRAP-Handoff:

The team agreed to dispose of the Phase I-II language and paradigm, settling on the implementation of DRRAP (the completion of which will vary by site) and Post-DRRAP (which will focus on monitoring and maintenance, i.e. protecting the investment). While protecting the investment is key to post-DRRAP, there was also acknowledgement that we should remain open to other potentially suitable opportunities that may emerge (e.g. surrounding recreation, education, and other environmental concerns).

II. What Success Looks Like – round robin:

Success is not just ecological, but ties back to all DRRAP goals (social, economic, management). With the social goals, for example, there may be more to be done for engaging students and empowering Conservation Corps crews, as discussed at the last partnership meeting. There are also some portions of DRRAP goals that we do not tend to discuss/assess (e.g. the section on protecting property from wildfire threats). This should be considered when updating DRRAP.

Given the complexity & breadth of the success-question and interests at the table, the Core Team decided that the conversation should start with a focus on success in an ecological context. The following list focuses on *ecological* success:

- There are different levels or benchmarks for success and tools for assessing it (e.g. integrity tables, state-and-transition models)
- One level might be based on manager interpretation and resource objectives; another might be species- and DRRAP goals-based (e.g. 90% tamarisk reduced at a site); while another might be geared more towards the riparian system and plant community.
- When native plant succession is underway and has a reasonable chance to continue (i.e. is put in a positive path, trajectory, trending towards)
- Success can't be measured on a 5 year time frame, it will take many more years
- Success should be feasible/achievable with clear, measurable objectives based on system limitations; the Society for Ecological Restoration provides some useful framing of success in terms of what can be controlled, what can't (i.e. achievability), relieving a system of stressors so that the system can move in a positive direction and withstand periodic, future stressors (e.g. flooding, grazing)
- Do we need to re-define our goals in DRRAP – based on what we've learned in the past years, are these goal still sufficient/feasible given the realities of a given reach?
- According to DRRAP:

DR-RAP Ecological Goal #4 = “Each of the active removal projects (sites) will be monitored and maintained to a point of success (meeting Ecological Goals 1,2, and 3) requiring a reduced and sustainable level of management and/or funds and labor will be identified to do so, within the 5-year span of DR-RAP.”

So, at least for sites where tamarisk has been actively treated, a site has reached a point of success when it has met the below Ecological Goals:

- *Ecological Goal #1 = Tamarisk has been reduced to less than 5 % of the vegetation cover within riparian areas*
- *Ecological Goal #2 = Other invasive, non-native plants have been reduced to less than 15% of vegetation cover in riparian areas and less than 25% within the drier upper terrace areas of the floodplain*
- *Ecological Goal #3 = The remaining percent vegetation cover will be composed of desirable or native species*

III. When the handoff happens and what does it look like:

- Ecologically, this happens once the threats are eliminated (i.e. passes the truth test) and the systems is trending towards a resilient state/when plant succession is shifting towards native species.
- In terms of capacity, it can be understood as when it is no longer appropriate or efficient for the partnership to be involved in managing a given site. More simply put, when the heavy lifting is done and there's a shift to landowner maintenance; monitoring will inform the maintenance.

- Each land manager (BLM and otherwise) will be seeing their treated sites transition from a state of significant active treatment to a state of maintenance on different timetables. We cannot expect it to be otherwise.
- It will be staged and not always hard & fast; there are sites that are active, some that are passive, and still others that are a hybrid; these may look differently in terms of the handoff.
- For the future: addressing the challenge of funding (i.e. how much will it cost to monitor and maintain a given site, all sites?). A mechanism like the Assistance Agreement would be great to support these long-term activities (e.g. \$25k/year/field office for three years).
- What about private lands? What does monitoring and maintenance look like on private lands? Gets down to issues of accountability. The USFWS Partners program contract with private landowners includes the expectation that the landowners will protect the investment (i.e. do long term stewardship).
- It needs to be rigorously tracked, site-by site, whereby we formally identify places that we are done
- It will be staged, depend on a particular site's needs, and require conversations between land managers, private landowners, and the DRRP
- It is not just two phases (on-off)
- Maybe there's a highly trained rapid response team that handles the monitoring and maintenance (perhaps Corps, e.g., use the intern model, engaging the county weed managers, BLM staff).

Based on this discussion, several action items or outstanding questions to be later addressed were identified. These include:

- Revisiting DR-RAP goals (ecological, social, economic, management) based on feasibility and other considerations. Julie will initially take this on with the upcoming Science and Monitoring Committee and report back to the Core Team.
- What are the future needs that the Corps can meet? How to be flexible and adapt to evolving needs of the partnership and managers? This will be addressed in the upcoming Implementation Subcommittee meeting.
- Creating tools/template for assessing work towards success: Jim will develop a state-and-transition model, while Peter will work with his TNC colleague, Terry, to develop an integrity table. These tools should be based off of conversations with managers and others. This 'Assessment Table' could then be brought to the November Partnership meeting for discussion by the entire Partnership
- In terms of considering funding to support long-term monitoring and maintenance, the Funding Subcommittee will start looking into long-term funding.
- Core Team will re-visit how to ensure accountability and protection of the investment.
- Who's receiving the handoff?
- Active revegetation – what more can be done?
- Revisit the social goals (improving steps towards) at our next partnership meeting.

IV. Adaptive Management:

For this section, we wanted to do three things. First, exploring how adaptive management is being done; secondly, document and communicate this; and thirdly, determine how we can improve adaptive management.

- Julie’s concept diagram for adaptive management as it pertains to the Science and Monitoring Subcommittee (SMS) and ecological success (presented back in Ridgeway) provided a great starting point. We know that adaptive management goes beyond the SMS and that we are already doing it.
- Some feel like adaptive management is a loaded term with a negative connotation. Instead, we should focus on “lessons learned” and “best practices.”
- The Core Team agreed that it is important both within the DRRP and beyond to document and increase awareness of our lessons learned and how we’re building on them.
- Each Subcommittee should put together (for the topic(s) most relevant to them) a summary report thus far that discusses Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned for the SER journal article that Daniel and Julie will be composing. Daniel will work with the subcommittee chairs about how to solicit feedback from subcommittee members. The result should be something, simple, concise, and useful (like the Ken Lair summary notes).
- In order to get basic concepts out there (e.g. testing soil salinity, testing water table depth so know where to plant), we really need to conduct on-the-ground field trainings to get this message across to people.
- The Implementation Committee (Daniel, with help from Julie) will be writing up and distributing a ‘2012 Managers (& Contractors?) Report’ that will be a summary of Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned from their on-the-ground work in 2012. Website can be a location to distribute.
- Other Questions: What mistakes are we making that can be avoided? We should be paying attention and identifying the response to each approach. What baselines are we not tracking?
- Suggestion of Managers Report- this could be 10 key question to ask managers- successes, challenges, and lessons, that needs to be shared in a timely fashion. The Implementation Subcommittee meeting could be this through asking managers these questions to inform their presentation, get outline ahead of time and consolidate for sharing with others.
- Do we need a Master Tracking Document to cover methods at each site to compare with monitoring? This could dovetail with the implementation overview.

V. Transitions and roles:

Tim & WFF – Tim is looking to decrease his role in some of the WFF partnerships, particularly the ones that are in a good and sustainable situation.

- WFF are contracting expertise in endangered species and river ecology, hiring an Endangered Species Expert and a River Ecologist to advise on various projects.
 - Tim is looking to move towards retirement and cutting back
 - Other WFF watershed are requiring more of his time

- Tim will be available for issues and meeting as needed and identified by the Core Team/DRRP. He could help with issues such as future funding, successes, metrics and aligned goals of the WFF and watersheds.
- WFF-funded watersheds should especially be talking to each other about monitoring and funding
- DRRP is integral to learning, sharing lessons learned restoration successes with other watersheds like Escalante, and Gila watersheds
- Tim also challenges us to ask ourselves, What role do we want the WFF to play (e.g. in the Core Team, partnership, biannual meetings) moving forward?

Chris Nessel and Corps - Chris Nessel is leaving SCC. Mike will potentially have a more remote supervisor and take on a larger role to fill the void (funding subcommittee, budget management and strategy) with assistance from other SCC staff in Durango and the Partnership as needed. Chris will be missed. Mike will share the new structure once it is solidified.

Facilitator Discussion - What would we like from Marsha as we move forward?

- Currently she is the face of the partnership meetings, plays an important part in organizational management/task master, works with others on annual report, web page, newsletter, minutes. She has a great awareness of issues, potential conflicts and asks the “So What” questions. Marsha pushes us to answer questions and stay on task.
- Marsha wants to continue facilitating bi-annual meetings. Core team agrees and would like her/Kathy’s continued assistance with website, newsletter and in-person core team meetings.
- Daniel is happy to continue in his somewhat recent level of increased role in agenda building, communications, assistance with newsletters and coordinating core team calls.
- Mike offered to be secretary for core team calls.
- The group acknowledged it is hard to take notes, facilitate and be involved and that continued Marsha’s participation is valuable.

VI. Other Partnerships and Initiatives:

- SURP: has a May 19th community outreach event in Moab; the Core Team agreed that we should get a booth at the event. Daniel will join the SURP Projects Community to better tie our groups/efforts
- ‘Partners on the margins’ is a discussion we need to keep going. This discussion has many positive elements we should explore further (for funding, building relationships with landowners, etc.). In the future, the Team will come up with a list of top individuals/organizations for us to reach out to.

VII. Governance Document:

- What do we do with this? (still needs editing and review)
- Internal use- for new members, committees etc.
- External Use- for transparency- i.e. post on website
- FAQ- Daniel has developed this as a summary of some of the points in the Gov Doc. He will revisit the governance document (in terms of FAQ and website material and edits still required).