

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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DRAFT MEETING NOTES August 25, 2016

Members present: Stacy Corless, Mono Supervisors; Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo; Adrienne Thatcher USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Steve Nelson, BLM; Cleland Hoff, Mammoth Town Council; Erin Nordin, USFWS/Reno; Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile National Monument; Kathleen Morse & Josh Welsh, Yosemite National Park

Members absent: Gayle Rosander, Caltrans; Alisa Ellsworth, CDFW; Doug Power, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Justin Nalder, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Rana Saulque, Benton Paiutes

Staff present: Scott Burns, Wendy Sugimura, CD Ritter

Guests present: Geoff McQuilkin, Mono Lake Committee; Joel Rathje & Dan Holler, Town of Mammoth Lakes; Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy; Wendi Grasseschi, Mammoth Times; Pat Hayes, MCWD; April Sall, Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ATTENDEE INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Stacy Corless called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. in the Town/County Conference Room at Minaret Village Mall in Mammoth Lakes. Attendees recited pledge of allegiance to the flag.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT: Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, announced: 1)

3. MEETING NOTES: Review/approve draft meeting notes from April 28, 2016. (*Regelbrugge/Nelson. Ayes: All.*)

4. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE: Agencies discussed planning issues & pending projects

5. GEOTHERMAL MONITORING PROGRAM STATUS. Steve Nelson, BLM, stated no timeline for signed/approved monitoring plan. Facilitated meetings between MCWD and Ormat are ongoing. BLM has no geologist, so pulling together internal team.

Difference between entities? Nelson stated it tends to be moving target. The clearest piece of disagreement is need for second monitoring well. Ormat thinks not needed, but will fund one at its expense. Agreed last year to prepare grant request to California Energy Commission (CEC) to help fund dual-cap wells on lease. Some talk about MCWD carrying forward if Ormat prepared it. Or Mono County. 80/20 match. Money comes from geothermal royalties, so it makes sense to carry on geothermal monitoring. Can't say what it's going to look like, as it's expected to change -- must be adaptable because not a perfect monitoring plan. Learn/incorporate new things. Some disagreement on length of baseline monitoring period, but full agreement on at least one full hydrologic cycle (18 months minimum). Too many one-liners, still simmering, not add background noise. Ormat knows BLM requirement, sole authority on use of reservoir, right thing to do. Knows importance on both sides. Lot of thought put into it, but unlikely everybody's happy with it. Potential exists to get where everybody wants to be. Lots of moving parts in background with BLM, and too early to share.

Pat Hayes, Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD), said he appreciated Nelson's comments on monitoring plans. Ormat has not had this kind of scrutiny before, he said. Federal lands, federal resource. MCWD looks at it as its resource. CEC grant is in play, open up grant application in mid-October. If MCWD leads or sponsors, 80/20 split. MCWD board is willing to do its part in grant app, will pay 10%, with other 10% on proponent. Conditions: 18 months to 2 years in lock step with USGS recommendation. BLM asked for USGS

input, Monitoring program for water quality is in effect. Potential exists for intermingling of brine and drinking water. Well 14-25A data out, more to come. CEC grant is critical to pay for monitoring well.

Corless suggested if future need arises, Mono County has strategic plan in process.

Nelson described big challenge as location of second well. It's off lease, so no jurisdiction, rely on agency partners. Easier for Ormat to get deep well plus additional information. Very connected ideas. Nick Criss did great job of explaining the Long Valley Hydrologic Advisory Committee, which is not a regulatory body, Mono County created the HAC for information sharing, and no agency is bound by its recommendations. HAC has long looked at monitoring data, tied to early issues. Smart people in room have lots of knowledge, but not regulatory. Nonpublic resource in mid-80s to pay for locatable minerals, predecessor paid for right to reservoir, so no longer public resource. BLM still required to manage for public benefit with consideration of other factors. Whole issue is complicated.

Corless noticed big equipment at site, on public land. Nelson described it as flow test, typical geothermal business. For all wells, hydrogeologists think where to drill. Once drill, go through characterization process. Production or injection well. Pre-CD IV permission, back now. Not tied to CD IV, not part of current monitoring plan, not a substitute for what may be required for CD IV. BLM and HAC can explain in layperson terms the effect on drinking water and recreation. Corless suggested maybe talking in more collaborative way.

Hayes stated two wells are part of CD IV, and MCWD is concerned about CD IV.

Regelbrugge clarified wells were authorized prior to CD IV, early 2000 environmental assessment, CD IV was signed in 2013. Not part of CD IV decision per se. Prior authorization, not authorized to put into production. No pipeline connecting to CD IV. Pipe connects well pads. All before CD IV.

Nelson noted confusion, made it clear not part of monitoring plan. Expect more info.

Hayes found it murky. Collin Reinhardt of BLM said no new wells could be connected to existing or future power plants until monitoring plan is in place. Well 14-25 will not connect via pipeline to existing power plant without monitoring plan. Nelson confirmed.

Regelbrugge has been working on monitoring plan. Have 40-some other pre-project plans tied to environmental review. Monitoring is additional.

Nelson noted Ormat wants to be good neighbor, not want to affect Town's water supply, but is reluctant to invest more money. Length of time and uncertainty affects both sides.

--- Break 10:25 - 10:35 ---

6. INYO FOREST PLAN REVISION UPDATE. Jon Regelbrugge, Mammoth District Ranger, indicated USFS has been operating under 1992 Plan and planning rule revised in 2012 with different regulatory framework. More collaborative, less site-specific, more objective. What should forest look like? Published draft in early June, 90-day comment period ends today. Draft revised plan is available on Internet. DEIS in two chapters, maps, and summary. One of early adopters of new planning rules: Inyo, Sierra, Sequoia. Three separate decisions to adopt new plan. Several alternatives: A = no action; B = proposed action, best balance of all competing interests/uses on how to manage forest. Lots comments indicate more value on protection. More resource use also, so Alt C = more use emphasis. Alternative D was presented also.

Thousands of comments so far, hope to finish within calendar year 2017. Respond to all comments, incorporate some into documents after analysis. Pre-decisional objection period. Not warranted or resolve in some way to sign record decision. No longer is resolving an appeal the final step. Deciding on alternative, finalizing EIS, and resolving objections. Don't know who, how many objections.

How will it interface with Wilderness Plan? Regelbrugge indicated current thinking is nine design wildernesses should be stand-alone plans. Some already have plans in place, people think should revise. Broad overall advice, but not specific.

Regelbrugge noted John Muir Wilderness Plan has only Inyo and Sierra. In 2001, litigated to 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and back in gyrations. Ansel Adams Wilderness also was litigated. Wildernesses connect with others like Hoover.

How do standards and guidelines tie together? Regelbrugge stated desired conditions are description of what USFS believes on specific location or category of landscape should look like as properly functioning ecosystem. Either at or moving toward them. Rate not specified. Standards more mechanical, guidelines softer.

OSV (Over Snow Vehicle) route not begin till Plan is completed? Regelbrugge indicated management principles in place may not be consistent with new Plan. Better to defer more site-specific decision to completed overall.

Similarities to 1988? Regelbrugge stated drought changes on landscape were new. OSV needed finer-scale resolution, all elements that would apply not thought out in higher-level plan. Main drivers of change: fire, fuels,

vegetation condition, sustainable recreation, and ecological integrity. Didn't identify any need for change to grazing management. Old plan did not address tree mortality, etc.

Corless mentioned huge interest to public. Mono Supervisors heard 10 hours of comments. Great public outreach. How did Humboldt-Toiyabe reach California residents? Meetings in Mammoth were civil, friendly.

Regelbrugge was pleased with depth and substance at meetings.

7. DROUGHT IMPACTS TO MONO LAKE: Geoff McQuilkin, executive director, stated the Mono Lake Committee was founded in 1978, seeing ecological catastrophe with Los Angeles aqueduct system. Courtroom drama unfolded.

Mono Lake's salty and alkaline waters host algae, brine shrimp, alkali flies, nesting and migratory birds. It is second-largest bird migratory area. Phalaropes fly nonstop 3,000 miles to South America. The lake has lots of wildlife, visitors, birdwatching, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and a dozen seasonal employees in summertime. Passion for Mono Lake, protecting area remains. Membership includes 16,000 all across country. Restoration includes planting trees. Education programs, tours, school groups from Los Angeles to see where their water comes from.

Mono Lake is forever connected to LA through the aqueduct. Four tributary streams divert to aqueduct. In 1994, State Water Board revised water rights to maintain lake level. Lake responds directly to drought conditions. Extreme, exceptional drought persists even after 85% normal winter. Exposed lakebed was visible in photo. Lake has gone down 7 vertical feet in last four years. LA Times published story on it. If no diversion had occurred, lake would be 38 ft higher. If no protection had occurred, lake would be 28 ft lower. Lake level determines how much water goes to aqueduct. Lake level gauge is discussed with LADWP. Optimal lake level is 14 ft higher than today. LA cut back 70% or so this year. Conservation programs have been in effect in LA.

Land bridge to nesting islands formed, with easy access for coyotes. Temporary fence route to deter predator access. Drought-induced change hopefully short term. Long-term protection is water. Maybe temporary electric fence would keep exploratory coyotes away.

Timing for deterrent? McQuilkin recalled fence did not work particularly well; not year-round, just nesting season. No easy access to install fence. Lake level forecast in average winter shows fence is needed. Long-term changes of drought: more rain/less snow, warmer temperatures. Future warming temps shift timing of snowmelt. Aqueduct constructed to fully take all water in streams. That technology does not exist today, but will soon, with lots of players involved. Flow schedules are designed for maximum ecological benefit. Water Board revision of export licenses to maximize stream restoration expected in late 2016.

8. YOSEMITE WILDERNESS PLAN: Division Chief Kathleen Morse and Project Manager Josh Welsh noted the Wilderness Plan as one more plan in addition to Merced and Tuolumne river plans. First plan in 1979 was mainly descriptive, historical overview, boundary descriptions. One good thing: trailhead quota system has stood test of time, but needs tweaking.

Wilderness covers 95% of Yosemite, totaling 704,000 acres. Yosemite Valley and Tuolumne Meadows are not in wilderness. Adaptive decision-making plan adjusts management actions in response to changes in visitor use and environmental conditions. What does protecting wilderness really mean? New data and methods create policy guidance to address visitor use and reassess validity of current capacity calculations.

Stock use: important for pack trips, trail maintenance, and law enforcement. Look at how and where it occurs. Commercial, private use.

Trail management: Direct to where it's really needed.

Commercial services: Evaluate need, determine appropriate amount to be authorized.

Refinements: Natural resource management and ecosystem restoration. Scoping got 750 comments, shown on website. Final document in winter 2017. Focus groups at workshops, webinar.

Josh Welsh focused on visitor use and capacity as core of plan. Gradual uptick of overnight users, no method to track day use. Access is through USFS lands. John Muir Trail popularity is increasing, and Pacific Crest Trail saw huge increase as well. Through hikers are not necessarily educated on wilderness ethics. Identify major hot spots.

Wilderness has 53 travel zones. Capacity responds to ecological carrying capacity. Sunrise Creek capacity = 50 backpackers. Can see that many at one particular site within zone. Challenges: obtaining wilderness permit, growing density of campers, balancing use with capacity, and solitude is harder to find. Tools for managing visitor use include quotas on trailheads, destination, pass and exit, zone, and designated campsites. Maybe decrease number of permits to hot spots.

Tradeoffs with ideas. Zone approach with destination quotas received most support. Designate campsites only in very high use areas.

Banning campfires? Proliferation of fire rings, social trails, and firewood depletion.

Make sure to simplify process for visitors. Current public transportation options limit those without cars to plan trips. Maintain freedom of discovery and of travel.

Small percentage of commercial stock use. Damage to sensitive meadows, disturbance of artifacts. Consider changing access routes to avoid sensitive cultural and ecological sites. Regulations for commercial: location, trail use, grazing. Closing high-use hiking trails to stock. Manure along trails seen as greatest conflict between hikers and stock users. Maybe alternating use days for stock.

9. DOE RIDGE TRAIL CONCEPT: Joel Rathje, Town of Mammoth Lakes, started work on trails at Lassen Volcanic National Park. With 76 miles of trails connected to Susanville, residents don't need to travel far.

Town of Mammoth Lakes has developed trails goals and priorities. Site 100 miles of new single-track trail. Parking areas, trailheads, and existing structures are in place.

On a tour to Whitmore Track & Sports Field, he looked up at Doe Ridge, a high and dry opportunity away from meadows and wetlands. Intensive land uses include airport, US 395, and dirt roads. A complementary facility could enhance multi-use capacity. Existing track and field complex has restroom facilities. Surge in trail running.

Doe Ridge has sandy soil on leeward side. Less steep (< 5%) road segments hold up well. Just an idea, not a concept yet. Spent time there in winter, where five miles away had five feet of snow. Multiple jurisdictions would be involved. Great opportunity for agency partnership; Mono, Town, BLM, USFS. Improve Hot Creek trails, fencing as added value.

Mountain biking? Avoid unsustainable steepness that turns into a ditch. Use "half rule" for steepness, especially with loose soils. Lots of meandering, rolling ridges.

Introduced idea to BLM. Looking to identify appropriate locations for rolling-contour trails. Steep trails are too difficult/challenging for some. Could take family out there.

Field trip to Doe Ridge after next meeting?

10. Upcoming agenda items: Wildlife presentation by CDFW & Caltrans

11. Adjourn at 12:35 p.m. to Thursday, Oct. 27, 2016, at 9 a.m.

Prepared by CD Ritter, CPT secretary