

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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DRAFT MEETING NOTES

Thursday, April 30, 2015

Members present: Tim Fesko, Mono Supervisors; Ryan Dermody, Caltrans; Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo; John Wentworth, Mammoth Lakes Town Council; Dale Johnson, BLM alternate; Alisa Ellsworth, CDFW; Deanna Dulen, Devil's Postpile National Monument; Doug Power, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center; Erin Nordin, USFWS/Reno

Members absent: Jeff Ulrich, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Justin Nalder, Bridgeport Indian Colony; LADWP; Benton Paiute Tribe.

Staff present: Scott Burns, Wendy Sugimura, Cedar Barager, Nate Greenberg

Guests present: Wendi Grasseschi, Mammoth Times; Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy; Jim Branham, Sierra Nevada Conservancy; Sandra Moberly, Town of Mammoth Lakes; Fran Hunt, Sierra Club; Wilma Wheeler, self; Stacy Corless, Mono Supervisor; Hope Woodward, USFS/Inyo; Deb Schweitzer, USFS/Inyo; Jim Leddy, Mono County CAO

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1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Tim Fesko called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. Attendees recited the pledge of allegiance and introduced themselves.
 2. PUBLIC COMMENT: Jim Branham, executive officer of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, with area representative Danna Stroud, presented an update from the Conservancy. The SNC is a state agency which represents 22 counties. Locally, they have carried out the Prop 84 grant program, which is coming to end. Awards of \$54 million have been made, to promote environmental, economic and social well-being. There is a broad slate of projects, with a fair number on the eastside. Prop 1 provided \$21 million to focus on forest health issues in Sierra Nevada. Also has launched watershed health project with Region 5 of the USFS, to look realistically at need to restore watersheds, and a wide-range of issues around restoration. Have had conversations with the Rural County Representatives of California, to partner with key counties. The goal is to accomplish real work, watershed by watershed. Is establishing partnership with USFS to focus on public lands, and bring California Fish & Wildlife Service and Cal Fire and others with resources to coordinate holistically. Now working at state departmental level with the director of CFWS to address issues regionally, and to quickly get things going on the ground.
 3. MEETING NOTES:

MOTION: Approve draft meeting notes of January 29, 2015. (*Wentworth/Dermody. Ayes: All.*)
 4. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE: Agencies presented planning issues & pending projects.
 5. EASTERN SIERRA RECREATIONAL COLLABORATIVE UPDATE: John Wentworth reported that the Eastern Sierra Recreation Collaborative had received a grant of \$24,000 tied to

forest plan update. There is a great leadership team, and he is grateful to Inyo NF to be able to engage in this productive relationship, to move planning forward. The Inyo is in an “early adopter” program with Sierra and Sequoia National Forests to adopt plans collaboratively. In reviewing Supervisor Alpers comments from last meeting, he noted the importance of collaboration.

He mentioned that this week Supervisor Corless shared a link to Madera County, where there is concern with watershed issues, and a proposal has been made to consider that county taking over Sierra National Forest. The proposal suggests working with Fresno and Mariposa Counties to talk about taking over Sierra NF. The ESRC is interested in this, because we share forest planning with these forests and counties. We think the partnership with Inyo which we have is the way to go. We could share what works with our colleagues on the west side. We will figure a way to go to collaborate with those counties. For example, Chair 14 is in Madera County. Similar proposals had been made in Utah. The outdoor industry association in Utah went to the governor and talked with, ended up with the appointment to cabinet level position of an outdoor industry representative, changed the approach. So this could be a model for our area. It is a fundamental thing, that the value of recreation is competitive with extractive industries. Working with the agencies to enhance capacity is the model we are looking at here on the east side.

Jim Branham commented that a solution was suggested by Fresno that other than USFS to manage forest. The next SNC board meeting will be in Madera County. Managing our lands is in all of our interest, we do not advocate different ownership structure. Fesko commented that due to frustrations, people just react. We don't have the drought here as they do on west side. Land let fallow, lack of water, that's what's driving the trying to be heard. Wentworth added that a framework for sustainable recreation is to get funding to agencies to get done what needs to get done. Stroud added clarification: Concerned Citizens of California made the suggestion, not Madera County. ESRC is entertaining the idea of meeting with stakeholders of gateway communities on the west side who are concerned with recreational values, and looking at ecological restoration with a recreation lens, as part of watershed management.

6. TRAVEL ANALYSIS PROCESS & FOREST PLAN UPDATE: Deb Schweitzer of Inyo NF provided a brief review of the forest planning process. We thought we would have the draft EIS in April, fair to say that won't happen. The new timeline, not in great detail, is probably the fall is when we are expecting the DEIS to come out. We are hoping for the internal draft by June, available for public probably in the fall. Have promised to have meeting to share results of wilderness evaluation process, for meeting on May 13, has not happened due to need to coordinate with the three forests, will do it but will be put off until straight. Meeting on process announcement will be in June. Will be meeting with the three forests to determine how it will be formatted for the three forests for one DEIS. That's forest plan revision as it stands.

Schweitzer then presented the Travel Analysis Process (TAP) PowerPoint. Every forest is mandated to do this. The TAP is part of travel management, but does not redo it. The TAP analyses only roads that are part of the NF system. It works towards future management plans for transportation, but is not forest plan revision. It does tier off forest planning but is not the same. The TAP is not a decision making process, it highlights issues and makes recommendations. TAP is a 6-step process to analyze and identify issues, benefits and risks. In Mono County, a lot of our roads are not maintained by the USFS, rather by other agencies such as the county and state. There is a lot of density of roads around TOML, less so on east side of White Mountains. Mammoth will appear to be more intensive compared to Dyer. The TAP looks at each road individually, not necessarily at an area as a whole. It looks at risks, benefits and problems, i.e. in roadless area, RNA, rare plant habitat, tribal interests to open or close. Benefits could be access to resources and recreation, fire and fuels, fuelwood collection. Something can be both risk and benefit. Opportunities can be determined, potential changes to road system identified through TAP. Maintenance levels changes can be considered to address problems. Roads needed vs. likely not needed. About 17% of our system is likely not needed; 326 miles of

roads are in this category. These may have deteriorated on their own, may be repetitive, have issues, or be costly to maintain.

Some realities: USFS only receives 58% of the funding needed to maintain roads, mostly for paved roads. Closure of level 2 dirt OHV roads would have little effect on economic sustainability of the system. Using partnerships would allow greatest reduction of costs. Public input in the process will be most useful by May 18.

People love or hate TAP. Specific comments will be helpful, philosophic opinions less so. The USFS webpage has a link to find more information and for commenting. It takes some time, lots of content. Wentworth: question about who owns roads, if there are issues, is this the process through which these things get addressed? Regelbrugge responded: this would identify any issues on the ground to be addressed, but is not a decision making process. The mechanics of acquiring easements etc. is outside of this process, but TAP would identify a need for a change. Wentworth asked if there are any staff to staff conversations regarding jurisdiction? Schweitzer responded that the process is to go to the agency that you think has the jurisdiction, than weigh in as official agency comment. Regelbrugge: there are cases where there is no paper or easement that addresses ownership of certain roads. Many situations don't meet the modern standard. This process allows us to identify and put effort into resolving these types of questions. Wentworth asked: Is this process being driven by budget concerns? Schweitzer: it is a bit more complicated than that. TAP is mandated, and is part of it as they take money away from us if not done. For example, roads were made for timber harvest, but are not maintained. What can we do to correct that? The USFS is under a lot of direction to create a more manageable maintenance program.

Stroud commented: during travel management process, decisions were made regarding road removal. As decisions are implemented, perhaps some of roads recommended to be removed are the wrong ones. Were these errors analyzed and part of what is being recommended through TAP now? Schweitzer: it requires follow up to correct small level errors. They are not re-opening the discussion except to correct certain specific areas. If TAP is looking at forest system acknowledged in 2009, any changes will have to be incorporated into travel management planning. Comments will have more weight if they address roads identified in the 2009 planning. Travel management looked at which roads could be identified to be included in system. There were 1000 miles or more that were not inventoried, and recommendations were made on which to include. Regelbrugge added that the USFS is always happy to take comments, and will look and consider. A handful of comments contained new information. Again, philosophical issues will have less consideration than specific information that affects management issues. But this is outside the scope of travel analysis. Stroud: when do you move from analysis to implementation? Schweitzer: this report will help inform NEPA process, site specific info will be included. Not compelled to act on this report (TAP), but issues may or may not be addressed through NEPA. No schedule is imposed for implementation. Corless asked if there are places where the USFS may need to look at density, is that part of this process? Schweitzer responded no, this is not part of this process. Corless asked Burns how Mono County is engaging in this process. Burns: we'll consult with our Public Works staff to determine. Corless: is there a way to look at pots of money to see how County and USFS can collaborate to maintain roads? Schweitzer: recommended to engage in the comment process, but relationship with the town, county, etc. is an ongoing thing. Fran Hunt asked if there is a way to address density issues. Schweitzer responded that it will depend on the scope of the NEPA, and the scope of a project to make that determination. There is an opportunity to provide input to USFS. Specific information will be useful. Regelbrugge: it is difficult to articulate adverse environmental issues on many of our roads due to the nature of our soils, pumice. Watershed and soils impacts are probably the least. Wildlife impacts may be easier. Anybody who wants to bring us an issue will need to articulate specific concerns.

Sugimura added a related comment: we understand that TAP addresses road by road, but density is a larger question. Seems like there should be a way to address some of these questions, like visitor experiences, or cumulative or ripple effects to the larger system. There needs to be a way in place to address these larger impacts. Stroud: travel management process was the pre-decision discussion opportunity. Travel management did consider these. If TAP is

just road specific, cumulative impact needs to be looked at. Schweitzer: tap does not address density, and this is an area that needs to be looked at.

7. BI-STATE SAGE GROUSE LISTING DECISION. Erin Nordin with Reno office of USFWS introduced the discussion about the decision to not list. In 2013 service listed a proposed rule to list the Bi-State Sage Grouse as threatened. In the interim, they have received additional information and had delayed until April 28, 2015, the final decision. Last week, Sally Jewel announced that we would not be listing the BSG. On the 23rd, the USFWS issued a formal withdrawal of the listing proposal. We will continue to work with our partners to implement those conservation actions identified in the collaborative planning for the species. Dermody asked: from a regulatory standpoint, do we still have to address it through project planning? Nordin: regulator-wise, we do not have a status for the sage grouse. Since we decided not to list the species, look at those plans and commitments to determine what actions can be allowed or not. Regelbrugge added that on national forest land, any species still considered sensitive, so actions should not threaten species viability. Fesko noted that plans are in place, commitments have been made, and commitments need to be followed. Listing would have been a burden, but because we have been involved with the Bi-State Working Group, we will keep moving forward to make sure this species does not come back around as a candidate in the future. Nordin: even though we decided not to list, future litigation could bring the issue back. Committees have been working on and researching the sage grouse and projects will go forward. Fesko: this was a great model of agencies working together to achieve a balance.

Grasseschi asked: if you remove that hammer, who's watching to make sure you are doing what you said? Nordin: under our policy, we have policy on monitoring the certainty and effectiveness of conservation efforts. We want to make sure that the species is protected, but don't want to insert ourselves into the process. Grasseschi: how do you integrate information such as the drought into this process? Nordin: these species evolved with drought. If we continue to see drought, we will have to look at it, for example critical brood rearing habitat. This year will be tough. Will continue to monitor the populations. Johnson noted that the point is to conserve the species, not avoid the listing. USFWS was confident that the agencies were making the efforts, and will be following through. They have received the funding and will implement the actions.

Dermody: is there a legal regulatory authority regarding land management? Johnson and Regelbrugge noted that there is on federal lands. Burns: part of our role is to develop and implement General Plan level policies on the private lands. CEQA and also County policies indicate the importance for Mono County. So we do have some authority to regulate development on private lands. Sugimura added: we did an analysis of private lands in sage grouse habitat, and it is almost entirely in low density and low intensity land use designations, plus there are further regulatory actions to further limit impacts. Ellsworth: there is no listing on state side. Nordin: agencies did sign on dotted line and say they will commit. It is important to remember that we are going to work towards recovery, reducing threats to the species.

8. MONO COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORT: Mono County CAO Jim Leddy reviewed the progress on the Strategic Planning effort. In January of 2013, the Board of Supervisors realized it was time to have a Strategic Plan for Mono County. A framework was developed from the bottom up, including employees. It is a continuing process. Much of the money provided to County to provide services comes from the state; we have to figure out how to do what's best in the longest term. These documents reflect the work of our staff and employees, to codify our mission, vision, values, and to create strategic directions moving forward. Has/is going to all community groups such as Regional Planning Advisory Committees. Part of process is calling for projects, to prioritize and look at what projects will County will focus on. Mono County will work with our agency partners, community groups, and private sector to determine what we will be doing. We cannot count on funds that we do not have. Leddy Invited comments and participation to the May 11 strategic planning meeting in Lee Vining. The Strategic Plan is not a product, but a process. This is helping us to establish a common language

on what we will be focus on. One goal is to break down barriers between departments. Employees have been able to invest their time, and result is championed by the BOS. This will be a living document, and can be adapted. Supervisors Fesko and Corless have been involved, as has staff. Fesko: this is a good starting point of a continuous process. Corless: one of our directions is protect natural resources and public access for recreation. Look at direction and how can we as a county set policy, strategy and policy. How can we set better policy? If you have comments we would love to hear them. Leddy: this will enable us to decide what are the projects that are going to focus staff time? Can't do it all. This may be a two year project. We are creating a new way of doing business. Wentworth: question to Corless about working with the Town of Mammoth Lakes, since so many County constituents live in the TOML Corless: yes will be talking next week with Town Manager Dan Holler. Wentworth asked how to include TOML in County planning process? We need to figure out a way to make sure we are on the same program.

9. DIGITAL 395 UPDATE: Nate Greenberg presented a talk about Digital 395 from an infrastructure and forward thinking way of looking. Internet service is critical infrastructure. There are four stages of looking at: anticipation, where Verizon was the single carrier; facilitation, permitting, oversight and management; realization, which is building capacity; and capitalization.

Digital 395 is a bundle of fiber-optic cable, well beyond the capacity of most networks in the US. It is interesting to see how sophisticated the network is. This is critical infrastructure for us. It has increased circuits by 35 xs, cut costs by 50%. Every resident and business should have access at competitive rates.

During the Round Fire: we were taken aback by the impact this had. Reality was combination of fires that really crippled Mono County communication. Power lost, email system, phone system, county was severed from world. Phones and cell, 911 all lost for considerable time. Our entire backbone is tied to Verizon, which is non-redundant. It comes from south, when cut off, this impacted whole county. Digital 395 provided some level of ability to remain operational. We were able to use other methods of IT-based communication. The community centers, sheriff remained operational, and D395 was the main conduit of operations during incident. After 50 hours in, we were able to interconnect with Verizon to get cell network and internet back up via D395. This work-around enabled service to be back up after 50 hours. Would have been >3 weeks without D395. Fesko asked if Frontier has DSL service anywhere that Verizon has service. Could Frontier take over landline from Verizon? Greenberg: hopeful that acquisition of Verizon by Frontier will go through, they seem more willing to work with local needs.

All Mono County schools will be purchasing D395 gigabit service. Mammoth hospital also, paying same that they were before, cost savings for increased value. The more we buy in as region, the more we will be able to maximize and take advantage of the opportunities. As agencies, we have interface capabilities which are not being utilized. In order to see long-term growth and sustainability, will take buy in. As agencies we have an obligation to demonstrate best practices, and to be efficient in removing barriers to extension of broadband into communities. This could be permitting, zoning, tax breaks, and other areas that we play some role in. Entities have talked about finding opportunities to think ahead to aggregate resources; will set us up for success.

There are potential economic benefits of leveraging this as a resource. We need to educate businesses about the opportunities. Mono County has unique potentials and quality of life. With Digital 395, there are opportunities to relocate business, or start a small business. There are examples in similar communities such as Reno and Truckee. Thinking big and forward. Dermody asked: does Gardnerville or Carson have the opportunity to tie in? Greenberg: yes. Dermody: for last-mile provider, is there any way to use current infrastructure or is this a bottle neck? Greenberg: it comes down to ownership. There are opportunities to lease within the conduit, reality is as things go on, and some of our communities are not set up yet to look at wireless. As a long term strategy, need to look at strategies to get things implemented. Wentworth: implementation of the opportunity is happening, but we could end up with 35 of these, need to

avoid balkanization. Want to make sure that we can have single point of contact. We elected officials need to establish a vision for the region to take these conversations to the policy level. Stroud: ESIA staff can now communicate in real time up and down the east side. Saves time in not having to drive between sites. Not just a government thing, the NGOs are also taking advantage. Do the County/jurisdictions have policy regarding adoption of standards and consistency? Greenberg: we are talking with Bishop and the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

10. FIRE DROUGHT RESTRICTIONS & RECREATION: Ellsworth noted that Governor Brown has issued an executive order to all agencies to reduce water consumption by 25%. Dermody stated that turf will die in Caltrans rest areas. Stroud added that all agencies should take the opportunity to make visitors aware of efforts to conserve, and encourage all to make sure that our visitor centers and tourism boards are receiving the information so that it can be posted and distributed to the public.

11. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: 1) Manzanar; 2) Draft State of the Parks Report for Devils Postpile (DEPO) & DEPO Centennial; 3) Alisa Ellsworth (CDFW) would like to share a presentation on mesocarnivore (bear) survey; 4) Bi-State Sage Grouse report.

12. ADJOURN at 12:01p.m. to next meeting: Thursday, July 30, 2015, at 9 a.m.

Prepared by Cedar Barager, permit tech/office assistant