

Slate River Working Group: Meeting 1
Meeting Minutes
May 16th, 2018
Crested Butte Depot

Stakeholders Present: Illene Roggensack, Mel Yemma, Michael Yerman, Hedda Peterson, Noel Durant, Tim Szurgot, Courtney Burton, Braden Burton, Julie Nania, Taylor Paulson, Frank Kugel, Billy Rankin, Tom Barry, Wynn Martens, Ryan Martens, Wayne Meredith, Jim Lovelace

Welcome and Introductions

Illene Roggensack introduced herself as the facilitator of this meeting and the general process. Stakeholders took turns to introduce themselves and their interest in the Slate River.

Overview of Planning Process, Intended Outcomes, Intended Outcomes

Noel gave an overview of the history of land conservation in the slate river valley and emphasized that the Town of Crested Butte (Town) has been an integral conservation partner of the Land Trust. He emphasized the importance of the Slate River Valley in the Land Trust's work and how the valley involves a patchwork of conservation management with many stakeholders including the BLM, Town, U.S.F.S., and private land owners. Noel emphasized the complexity of this project when it comes to competing conservation values including recreation, environmental health, wildlife habitat, and agriculture. The rapid increase in recreation use on the river was not anticipated when these conservation easements and management plans were originally put in place, requiring adaptive management.

Noel provided concrete examples of emerging issues, including recreation impacts to the Great Blue Heron rookery and cattle fence cutting by floaters. He emphasized that it is critical for this group to identify key points of conflict and come to a consensus on realistic solutions. This working group is a pilot project for coming up with the tools and approaches that can be applied at a larger scale. The desired outcome of this group is to produce a mutually agreed-upon, community driven management approach that results in sustainable river use (and will go before the public for review).

Michael explained that the Town's role is to listen and serve as a resource for questions that arise. Michael thanked the Town Council, the Land Trust, and the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District for funding this process. He emphasized that stewardship is a major priority of the town and he's looking forward to this process.

Questions from the group

Tim: Will the components of the plan be enforceable? *Noel:* Enforcement should definitely be part of the conservation and the plan. Generally, there are options down the road for enforcement. He also mentioned how public messaging/shaming is a tool of enforcement in this particular community.

Julie: Confused about the scope of this process as there are many competing processes, and unclear about the geographical scope. *Hedda:* the geographical scope is from Oh-Be-Joyful, south to the takeout in Skyland. This management plan is meant to be additive to current processes and is focused on river-specific recreation.

Billy: Perhaps on a future agenda we should discuss how the broader scope will be impacted from any decisions made. He cited the example of how closing the Gothic corridor to camping led to increased use in other valleys.

Ilene: Where else will this plan go to for approval? *Michael:* Gunnison County has the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) committee, but they didn't have the capacity to take this on, which is partly why the Town is involved. He also mentioned how he believes particular regulations through the Town and the Land Trust tend to carry a lot of weight when it comes to trail rules.

Tom: Curious about BLM's involvement. *Hedda:* They manage two properties above and near Gunsight Bridge. The BLM is unable to manage users at the time being (in regards to enforcement) and it would take a long-term planning process for that to happen. Hedda emphasized the importance of education and messaging as immediate action.

Wynn: Brought up the use of research institutes' involvement in the North Star management plan, and if will we do anything similar? For example, involving the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL). *Noel:* We are currently partnering with Western State and the Coal Creek Watershed Coalition on a study of the Great Blue Heron rookery on the Upper Slate River. We are also partnering with the Town to do a study on river use with use of river counters.

Expectations of Working Group

Ilene went over the expectations of each working group member. Most meetings will be two hours long at a similar time of day. She encouraged everyone to RSVP and come prepared to each meeting. A general set up rules/agreements for the process would be set later in the meeting.

Intended Outcomes and Agenda for this Meeting

Ilene reviewed intended outcomes for the meeting, which included:

- Stakeholders to articulate core values relevant to Slate River and the key management issues they wish to be addressed by working group,
- Begin to build and maintain positive relationships in the room,

Setting of agreements (during and outside of meetings)

Ilene led the group to establish set of ground rules for working group members during and outside of meetings. Agreements include:

- Cell phones off/silenced
- Come and go as needed
- Respectful dialogue
- Work towards consensus
- Avoid interrupting, avoid side conversations
- Media relations will have consistent messaging (Noel will coordinate media relations). Individuals will not interact with the media
- No public allowed at the meetings. If someone has an opinion, please listen and value it.
- Check at end of each meeting in regards to sharing info with others. An agreed upon press release will be sent out after each meeting to the papers and Gunnison Valley Paddlers Facebook group
- Contact Illene (the facilitator) with concerns about the process
- Be creative/flexible with thinking
- Avoid inflammatory words, use positive words
- Stay on topic and be concise, don't be repetitive
- Stick to timelines
- Minutes will be sent out to all working group members after each meeting
- Trust good intentions and be open-minded

Press/PR/Social Media Concerns: The Gunnison Times called CB Sup, Tim, and the Land Trust. Michael asked the Gunnison Times to give the group space to work through the process. The Land Trust will take the lead on sending out/communicating progress updates (with group consensus on messaging). Press release about the entire process and opportunities for public participation will be prepared to go out to the public.

Public Participation: It was suggested to include the public early in the process. Public participation is very important in this community as the community at large tends to want to be involved. The group discussed hosting a public comment period/open house/public to help inform the management plan, time TBD.

Timing: Is there action that can be taken this season during this process in regards to signage and establishing parameters/group rules. This was discussed in more depth later in the meeting.

Signage: Courtney mentioned that there's already new private property/information signs up this season that weren't there in past years.

Core/Shared Values

Illene led the group on brainstorming each individuals' core values in regards to the Slate River, and then each member voted for their top 5 values to see what floated to the top. Many stakeholders expressed concerned about how many values could be grouped together, and choosing 5 might not be representative. Ryan questioned the reasoning behind this activity. Noel and Illene expressed that the goal of this exercise is to understand where everyone is coming from as well as what shared values the group holds. *The values that we're discussed included:*

- Water quality
- Balanced management
- Educated users
- Wildlife Habitat
- Public Access
- Historic ranching use
- Commercial use
- Private property rights
- Right to float
- Resource protection
- Wild places
- Long-term solutions
- Sustainability
- Liability protection
- Being adaptable
- Community benefit
- General education
- Channel of communication
- Sense of place
- Respect
- Ecosystem health

After combining many of the values into broader categories, *the top values that emerged included:*

- Access (river access + access infrastructure (roads, parking, facilities), right to float, commercial use)
- Ecosystem Health (water quality, wild places, resource protection)
- Wildlife Habitat (wild places)
- Education/Sense of Place (educated users, general education, channel of communication, respect)
- Private property and agricultural rights (historic ranching use)
- Liability protection
- Sustainability/Long-Term Solutions (being adaptable, community benefit)

Inventory/Discussion of Key Issues

The group identified key management issues observed in regards to the Slate River, including:

- Unclear existing parameters of river use (physical conditions and river etiquette)
 - When are flows too low to float?
 - Existing land management plan and conservation easement obligations
 - Launch windows, user numbers, group numbers
- Enforcement/informing the community of parameters
- Avenues for education/outreach/messaging
- Trespassing
- Lack of understand of Colorado River law (what's legal vs. illegal)
- Cutting fences
- Human waste
- Impacts to wildlife
 - Great Blue Heron Rookery
 - Elk calving and migration
 - Beavers
 - Moose
 - Canadian geese

- Mountain lions
- Safety
- Riparian degradation, erosion issues
- Infrastructure
- Public access points
- Is fishing in the scope of this process? Fishing brings some issues with trespassing
- Proper equipment for the river
- Litter/trash
- Noise, amplified noise
- “disneyification” of the experience
- Disrespect
- Overall increased use, rapidly increasing use
- Dogs
- Large group sizes
- Irresponsible promotion of the resource
- Drones
- Illegal and/or dangerous parking
- Short-term vs. long-term solutions

The group then discussed how the conveners will split this list into common groups that will result in future agenda items. It was discussed that the next agenda will focus on short-term solutions that can happen soon. Frank asked if we could have an expert give a lesson on the Great Blue Heron Rookery at the next meeting. The group brainstormed ways to establish river parameters, which will come up at future meetings. The next meeting was set for June 6th at 5pm-7pm. The conveners will send out the minutes, and an agenda for the next meeting as well as the press release for the group to review. The conveners will also draft signage that will go before the group.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.