

## White River Partnership Goals and WRI site discussion

12/14/2020 2:00-3:00

- WRP restoration plan goals
- WRI phase 6/7 sites

In attendance: John Leary, Jerrad Goodell, Jake Deslaurier, Tildon Jones, Iain Emmons, Pat Rainbolt, Ethan Hallows, Casey Pennock, Matt Breen

The 2020 ISM grant is now open: <https://ag.utah.gov/2020/12/08/fy2022-invasive-species-mitigation-grant-application/>.

### **Partnership Goals**

Maintaining the partnership and keeping people engaged is key for long-term success. Right now we're lucky to have people very engaged and also a reliable funding source in WRI.

Jake mentioned that financial input to keep the coordinator role is a crucial component moving forward. BLM funding for this has run out and John and Jerrad are looking to WRI to supplement.

Workshop for private landowners on the Colorado side would be beneficial. UT is mostly public lands. Identify the right landowner would be helpful, someone worked with the sheriff or chief of police at some point on a restoration project.

Increasing community involvement in Utah through a volunteer event would be good. USU-Vernal or high school students for a planting event.

Continue site selection meetings once or twice a year. Late in the summer can be busy but is a good time because it is just before the WRI work begins for fall and spring. We can check to see if there's any hot spots on SITLA land or BLM land we need to target.

### **Site selection**

USU is putting a lot of time and effort into site identification. The goal is to identify priority areas for these sites, also working with Matt and Jordon for fish data. Wally is working on veg mapping and analysis. Prioritizing sites and strategies for the conservation and restoration of the White River. There will be a prioritization scheme; ranking ecological priorities and in-stream habitat restoration. Similar to the Price plan. Focus on maintaining areas where restoration has already been done and tamarisk and Russian olive has been removed, especially reaches of the river that look like good fish habitat. Important to expand sites where restoration already happened before starting a satellite area.

The plan covers 4 reaches from Bonanza Bridge to Enron takeout. A meeting with USU and BLM managers once the plan is closer to finished would be good.

There is interest in restoration from the Ute Tribe and some of the private landowners.

Other considerations for site selection? Wildlife? grazing?

Ethan is unaware of any specific hot spots. SITLA does a lot of range and upland work. All the range improvement applications go through him. Happy to look at areas that we recommend.

Lots of wildlife still uses Russian olive. Some projects in the past have eliminated it, the dense veg is valuable for upland game, we need to focus on what we're replacing it with. There is wildlife value even though it's a non-native weed. Because of heavy alkali soils in some areas of the White it's difficult to get native vegetation in there. We certainly want to see native species but don't want to see a primary weed succession after Russian olive removal.

One unique thing about the White is that it has channel migration b/c of pristine hydrograph. You get native species colonizing disturbed reaches where RO has been removed. That's something to consider about the White and revegetation. We may fare better than other rivers

This was our first year doing plantings for BLM; we could probably do more of that.

The RO and tamarisk provides the mid-level and lower canopy structure. Some sites that UCC crews have worked on have nice upper story cottonwood canopy, but we're removing the mid-canopy, which is good for fire perspective but is important for native wildlife species. From a wildlife perspective having an aggressive restoration plan in mind with native species and consistent reveg effort would be important.

ISM grant money is available for that. It's open now, they prefer multi-year projects that benefit multiple land uses: <https://ag.utah.gov/2020/12/08/fy2022-invasive-species-mitigation-grant-application/>

Is the recovery program looking for more involvement in the White?: Recovery Program is in the process of writing a programmatic biological opinion for the White River which would be accompanied by a management plan that identifies a series of actions that need to happen to mitigate impacts if there is water development. The state of CO is interested in potentially pursuing water development, so it's a suite of actions that would happen if they started doing that. There's interest in the partnership because there are a lot of entities and cooperation going on. However, the Recovery Program focuses on identifying needs for the fish. There's a lot of separation because the WRP is riparian. Open to ideas and input.

A potential tie-in to the Recovery Program's priorities would be maintaining channel complexity, not allowing the channel to simplify with TRO. That's the biggest area of overlap. A lot of BPO is focused on nonnative fish and instream flow protections; eg if there were a dam

what flow recs would maintain function in the river. Establishing environmental flows is needed if some sort of development happens. It's hard to have mitigation actions without knowing what the water development would look like. How do we protect flows or ensure flows to meet needs in the future? Potentially a lot of water rights that the Tribe could pursue, but it's unclear and has been unclear for a long time as far as their development or not.

## **WRI**

Jerrad: Spring is funded, looking to USU restoration plan for final site selection. Now looking at key habitats and boat-in sites, it will depend on the plan, whether breaking down banks or other goals. Undecided but likely to be boat-in. This fall work was done where crews can hike to.

When can we have a better understanding of the USU plan?

March is tentative. Waiting on vegetation mapping, once that's there it will be pretty quick. Do we need something before March for planning? We could try to get something together earlier if needed.

Phase 7 application: We usually just modify the previous year's application, we usually use hand crews, but we're open to mechanized restoration. Are we missing anything we could add to the WRI proposal?

Could we have a followup discussion later when we have more information?

Are we still covered under the original RIP, we may need to do another one with multiple phases.

Ethan will look at target areas and John will reach out about how the past RIP looked

Jake: Historically we do remote stretches depending on flows May-June, flows permitting. Preplanning could be helpful, as long as we know we can execute the funding and on that section of river, the nitty gritty of which polygons can stay in the air. There's one specific polygon he's interested in, for recreational aspects.

Will recreation be a part?

We talked with Jack Schmidt, recreation can be a huge impetus for restoration. Jake is on a whitewater advocacy board, we can brainstorm on that. Also interest in raft-in wild turkey hunting.

Jerrad and John will work on the WRI application, Jan 3 or 6 is the deadline so if you have any comments let them know ASAP.

A separate line item for seed request for remote sections would be easier to get the seed mix from the warehouse. We can up the amount, last year it only had \$5,000 for seed and plants. We may have a few thousand leftover from herbicide money. We should include a pollinator component

The management plan from the Recovery Program has at a minimum monitoring of channel complexity and vegetation, not sure if that ties in directly, but may be a way to monitor for future sites. May be helpful for seeing channel changes.

Is there baseline data that we could use to track changes from our sites?

Potentially, they are still throwing out ideas of what we're hoping to accomplish on the White.

They are figuring out if they can or will recommend actions that they are not responsible for, if they need to fund everything they recommend.