

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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DRAFT MEETING NOTES

July 31, 2014

Members Present: Byng Hunt, Mono Supervisors; Jon Regelbrugge & Lesley Yen, USFS/Inyo; Dennee Alcala, Caltrans; Jeff Ulrich, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; John Wentworth, Mammoth Lakes Town Council; Alisa Ellsworth, CDFW; Steve Nelson, BLM; Isaac Vaughan, Devils Postpile National Monument; Doug Power, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center; Steve Abele, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (by phone); Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park (by phone)

Members Absent: Justin Nalder, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Chris Plakos, LADWP; Adora Saulque, Benton Paiutes

Staff Present: Scott Burns, Wendy Sugimura, Courtney Weiche, C.D. Ritter

Guests Present: Sandy Hogan; George Shirk, Mammoth Times; Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy; Laura Beardsley & Jora Fogg, Friends of the Inyo; Stacy Corless, Mono Supervisor-elect; Jeff Hunter, Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership; Stefan Pellegrini & Melia West, Opticos Design Inc.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ATTENDEE INTRODUCTIONS: Acting Chair Byng Hunt called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. Attendees recited the pledge of allegiance and introduced themselves.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

3. MEETING NOTES:

MOTION: Approve draft meeting notes from April 24, 2014, as submitted.
(Nelson/Power. Ayes: All.)

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

5. TUOLUMNE & MERCED RIVER PLANS: Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park, discussed by phone a printout of her PowerPoint.

Tuolumne River Plan: Comprehensive restoration plan is highest priority, including eliminating informal social trails, removing structures from riverbanks and wetlands, restoring riparian vegetation along riverbanks, and mitigating effects of stock use. The idea is better control by design, not default.

Changes to visitor services include rehabilitating Tuolumne Meadows campground, constructing a new visitor contact station, and discontinuing commercial stock day rides (would be available only at Wawona). A major change would eliminate roadside parking to improve view, safety, and protect ecosystem. John Wentworth asked if NPS would manage parking change at Tuolumne with federal parking tickets. *Yes. A few years are needed to reinforce idea of cultural change. Accommodate peak use now, add more public transit. Exponential growth of visitation would create a problem.* Sandy Hogan asked about improvements to public transit, such as turnarounds for shuttles and express lanes at Tioga entrance gate. *Express lanes exist at Arch Rock entrance. Increase transit runs from Lee Vining.*

Other actions to protect resources include removing gas station, moving concessioner housing away from river and wetlands, and limiting stock grazing in Lyell Canyon. Setting a limit is a huge step, Morse said.

The social carrying capacity (number of people and/or activities) for Tuolumne Meadows is ~ 4,700.

Merced River Plan: More than 30,000 public comments were received in the 112-day period, with 20,000 in support of the preferred alternative. Also involved were 10 public meetings, four webinars, and national and social media coverage.

Facilities: In response to public comment, the Sugar Pine Bridge and swimming pools will be retained, and some facilities will be moved outside the river corridor (bike and raft rentals, ice rink).

Campsites: More than half of the Valley's campsites were lost in the 1997 flood. In response to public comment, 42 sites will be eliminated at Eagle Creek campground and replaced with 32 sites at former Upper River campground and 10 drive-in/20 walk-in sites at former Lower River campground. Camp 4 campground will be expanded.

Parking: Pulling back development from river's edge will reduce day-use parking from 850 cars to 750, and a roundabout will be added. Sandy Hogan noted buses heading to Valley stack up. Buses should be the solution, not the problem. Maybe a transit center?

Restoration: Restore 189 acres of meadow, and restore riverbanks by planting native vegetation to stabilize, removing campsites within 100' of river, and prohibiting new development within 150' of river.

Visitation: The user capacity of the Valley is 18,710 people. Capacity will be managed by diverting vehicles at the El Capitan crossover at a pre-determined vehicle count. In 2011 peak daily visitation was 20,900. Alternative 5 would reduce that to 20,100. Clarification: User capacity is the "container," whereas visitation is how the container is likely to be filled and refilled throughout the course of a day.

6. BI-STATE SAGE GROUSE UPDATE

A. Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest Plan Amendment: Jeff Ulrich announced a Draft Environmental Impact Assessment to amend Forest Plan. East Walker has 20,000 acres set for pinyon removal and sagebrush habitat restoration.

B. USFWS Listing Status: Steve Abele, by phone, stated that internally, FWS is evaluating public comments, incorporating as need be into broader decision-making framework. Slated to reopen 30-day public comment on Aug. 5. Federal agencies have indicated various commitments and support to achieve Bi-State needs.

C. Local Area Working Group: Steve Nelson noted conservation effort started in early 2000s, driven by Nevada Department of Wildlife, evolved into multi-tiered structure all the way to top agency directors: local/science advisory team /executive oversight committee. Long-term trends across Bi-State area are stable. Unprecedented conservation effort for 30 years. New paradigm. Commitment is strong regardless of listing outcome. Initial \$38 million over 10 years, pushing almost \$50 million due to other entities. Responding to petitions, litigation, 40- to 50-yr-old laws. Byng Hunt cited going from threat to partnership. USFS, NRCS came in huge.

Bi-state population effort is different. Abele noted it was pulled off on heels of Bundy Ranch kerfuffle, and BLM commitment to conservation came through. Implementation timeline for project areas? Yes, vetted through. Bi-State area is data-rich environment even though it's 2 million acres. Lots of population data, best in country. Huge effort into

conservation model, planning tool tied to population demographics and habitat. Wendy Sugimura stated Bi-State is recognized as a model.

7. SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR DESIGN STUDY: Consultant Stefan Pellegrini of Opticos, which worked with Bridgeport two years ago, introduced key components that could contribute to scenic byway designation: 1) character of roadway itself, improve gateway signage; 2) public realm along corridor (45 mph throughout Walker, hard to access businesses); and 3) ideas and concepts for frontage improvements. Opportunities emerged to engage directly with property owners, ease regulatory process.

Walker/Coleville: Speed, access to properties along highway, context zones with definable entry into town to slow traffic. Clusters of businesses would avoid returning to highway to reach next business; properties are 70'-80' off highway in undefined area.

June Lake: Scenic components are not easily accessible, make entry experience clearer.

Crowley will be visited later today to check out signage and town.

Gateway communities are part of the process. Not many national scenic byways exist. They will provide criteria of characteristics (scenic, historic, etc.). National designation process change? *MAP-21 dropped some of funding. Strong desire to become more economically viable, improve main streets, signage along corridor, communities as staging areas. Hopefully, funding resurfaces. Other programs are possible.* Danna Stroud suggested access to CURES (former Coalition for Unified Recreation in Eastern Sierra) kiosks, etc. Pellegrini lauded CURES as an enormous resource.

8. INYO FOREST PLAN: Lesley Yen, representing Deb Schweizer, reported a second feedback period in June, more public meetings. Ideas were collated into need-to-change document, including sustainable recreation, Mammoth recreation area, and newer forms of recreation. Also noted were partnerships for management on ground, direction for sage grouse and bighorn sheep, wild horses in Adobe Valley, and facilities/road maintenance backlog (lack of funding). Wilderness inventory is confusing; consider recommending areas. Get early feedback from state and federal cooperating entities. Team at regional office is under time crunch. Full revised plan will be issued later. Series of public meetings during scoping period will be held in September.

9. BODIE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP: Jeff Hunter from Tennessee was hired a year ago to lead a coalition of 15 organizations. Conservation Lands Foundation (CLF) in Colorado wanted to establish groups, lead a campaign for a national monument, and establish a "friends" group. An aim is permanent protection of the many values while honoring tradition. The CLF invested \$225,000 over three years, and Sierra Nevada Alliance is a fiscal sponsor. Hunter commended BLM staff.

The goal is expanding coalition beyond traditional groups and looking past boom/bust cycle. Bridgeport and Lee Vining are primary gateway communities to Bodie Hills. Work with local residents, business owners. Three-prong focus involves advocacy, stewardship, and recreation. Free public outings on BLM lands have been held and are planned. Removal of fence should reduce wildlife mortality. California Native Plant Society with Martin Oliver is working on a restoration project. Hunter has been moving slowly, deliberately, listening and meeting with key stakeholders. Will take support from communities.

Steve Nelson indicated BLM wants Mono engaged at some level and encourages Mono leadership to think about a conservation vision. Byng Hunt acknowledged the need to recognize uniqueness of Bodie Hills, an area that needs special attention to conserve and protect characteristics. Nelson indicated a need for broad discussion of values with private landowners and business communities. Hunt cited contentious meetings on mining; broaden

discussion of what land means to people. Hunter indicated BLM model, unlike NPS model, deals with hunting, grazing, and OHVs.

10. WEST-WIDE ENERGY CORRIDOR: Steve Nelson, BLM, noted nothing on immediate horizon, but will talk with Supervisor Fred Stump. Designated in 1993, the planning corridor centered on existing power lines. Proposals needed feasibility studies and environmental document. Main difference was underground utilities. In an ongoing process, Mono has been engaged and received comments. Byng Hunt reported Stump heard plenty from concerned constituents. People didn't want hordes of windmills, lots of wires. Private solar was preferred to big commercial.

11. MISCELLANEOUS REPORT:

A. LAND ADJUSTMENT SUBCOMMITTEE: Chair Steve Nelson, BLM, reported brief meeting. Land exchanges for pockets of private land? Get better picture of other agencies. Consider land use plan amendment to facilitate exchanges for private and community interests.

12. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: 1) Inyo Forest-wide Alternative Transportation Study; 2) Tri-Valley Off-Highway Vehicle planning; 3) Mammoth Main Street & Zoning Studies; 4) synergistic opportunities around Forest Plan Amendment; 5) invite NRCS as member, also Cal Fire, reevaluate MOU; 6) history and potential of CPT

13. ADJOURN at 12:35 p.m. to Thursday, October 30, 2014, at 9 a.m.

Prepared by C.D. Ritter, CPT secretary