

2009

High Elevation Conservation Working Group

Meeting Agendas and Minutes

Wednesday Oct. 14, 2009 - Monongahela National Forest Office - 10 a.m.

AGENDA

- Reports on fall planting activities, spruce conference, and other updates
- Introduction to new VISTA position
- Joint work plan for FY09-FY10 actions
 - What are our needs?
 - Planting projects
 - Joint climate assessments, soil work, monitoring, etc.
 - Reporting mechanisms
- Steps to assess funding opportunities & proposals
- Recap & Actions
 - Assignments, committees, and follow-up
 - Set date for next meeting in December

MEETING MINUTES 10/14/09

Next Meeting: Wednesday December 9th – 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Forest Service, Elkins

Action Items: *Amy, Ken & Elizabeth will brainstorm on “what is restored?”*

Everyone will send Evan historical literature

Shane & Jason will continue to work on soil analysis

Evan will start merging GIS layers group members send to him & start “branding” group activities

Thomas & Cathy will continue to tackle climate change issues

In attendance: John Rossell, Jack Tribble, Tom Schuler, Jason Teets, Evan Burks, Shane Jones, Thomas Minney, Elizabeth Byers, Ken Sturm, Glen Juergens, Amy Cimarolli, Mike Powell, Dave Saville, Cathy Johnson, Jim Vanderhorst

Updates & Reporting

Jason Teets: Worked with Shane Jones and Stephanie Connolly on soil pits with very thick O horizons suggesting that they were non-burned sites historically containing spruce. Stephanie applied for funding to continue research.

John Rossell: Completed 128 acre sale at Kumbrabow that included a 15 acre spruce release. Working on Camp Bowers deferment cut. Thick understory of winterberry on 125 acres. Working on seed gathering to send to Alderson and planting speckled alder.

Tom Schuler: Currently editing spruce conference papers that will be available in 2010.

Mike Powell: Continues to work on bringing Rob Gilligan (Blackwater SP) into the group. Completed appx. 2 acres of deer fence in Canaan Valley to protect spruce and balsam fir, and the 5,000 trees that were planted at Rusty Morgan's last spring.

Ken Sturm: Had 130 volunteers at fall planting on refuge and FS land; planted 1,275 trees/hr. Received \$2,500 and 50 volunteers from Dominion plus a \$5,500 F&WS grant for spring planting project.

Elizabeth Byers: Working on Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund that will give money to conserve land based on biodiversity, recreation, hunting, etc. Spruce will be specially featured as a criterion. Completed National Vegetation Classification – no spruce communities listed as secure.

Thomas Minney: Heading to S. Appalachian Biosphere Conference next month. He will present group's work. No definitive conclusions on climate change yet.

Shane Jones: Planted 2,200 different species on Mower Tract. Planted 250 caged Balsam Firs at Blister Swamp.

Jack Tribble: Planted 390 spruce on Mullinex allotment with ecosystems group

Amy Cimarolli: Working on restoration prioritization map for private landowners. Applying for NRCS Healthy Forests Grant and may need more letters of support.

Jim Vanderhorst: Pulling old research for wind power potential on high ridges for a DNR magazine article to be published next spring.

Dave Saville: Collected more balsam fir cones and processed seeds. Brought bag of seeds for those who could use them.

Project Work

Canaan Valley

Idleman Run – USFS, Timberline, CVNWR

- Received \$2,500 + 50 volunteers from Dominion (Ken Sturm)
- Received \$5,500 from F&WS grant (Ken Sturm)
- Need NEPA work done for Salamander (Cathy Johnson)
- Possibility of girdling on Canaan Mt. (Cathy Johnson)
- Contacting Timberline manager (John Schmidt)
- 25 acres & connectivity w/ two agencies + private

Mt. Porte Crayon

- TNC contacting private landowners for buffer land (Amy Cimarolli)

Land Near Blackwater SP

- Possibility of doing a spruce project (Cathy Johnson)

**UXO concerns in Canaan Valley were discussed

**Range-wide Aspen pen root collection for growing at Alderson will take place in Nov. Contact Shane Jones for more information.

Cheat Mountain

- Recently timbered lands with spruce component
- 5 scattered stands totally 70 acres set for spruce release within 6 months (Shane Jones, Terry Jones)

Mower Tract

- 70 acres of deep ripping and restoration on Barton Bench (West Side) within next year (Cindy Sandeno)
- NEPA scheduled for second year (Cindy Sandeno)

Upper Greenbrier

Upper GB North Spruce Restoration

- Planning phase; NEPA first, then funding proposals for 1,000s of acres
- Private tract – Wilson’s near Wildell timbered area good for release and connectivity. Good time to approach landowners? (Amy Cimarolli)

Morgan Tract

- Will continue with tree plantings this spring (Ashton Berdine)

Gandy Creek

- Landowner cultivation, potential planting areas, more fencing work, etc. (Ashton, John Schmidt)

2009-10 Planting Numbers

25,000 trees available (Red Spruce)

8,000 trees for Canaan

5,000 trees for Morgan

***12,000 trees still available for 2009-10*

R&D Topics

- Climate change & viability questions/ analysis for spruce-N. hardwood restoration (Thomas & Cathy will explore)
- Historical ecology with lit review & library of info (Evan & whole group)
- Soils for Spruce historical sites (Shane & Jason)
- How to define *what is restored?* (Amy Cimarolli, Ken Sturm)
 - o Can we make criteria?
 - o Developing restoration plan?
 - o Get layer w/ activities for reference (USFS layer)
- Focus on “branding” our restoration initiative to get funding (Evan)

12/09/09 High Elevation Conservation Working Group

9 am - Supervisor’s Office – Elkins, WV

AGENDA 12/09/09

- Brief updates/progress
 - Monitoring Plan
 - PR/Communications Plan
 - Upper Shavers Planting
 - Other news

- Increasing group marketability by changing our name

- Funding Priorities
 1. Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge
 2. Upper Greenbrier
 3. Mower Tract
 4. Alderson Plant Materials Center
 5. Others?

- NFF Matching Dominion Funds Grant (Highlands Conservancy)

- Funding Action Matrix
 - Who is applying for what?
 - Deadlines & matching timing to projects
 - What is the next step?

- Set date for February meeting

MEETING MINUTES 12/09/09

Next meeting will be 9 a.m. February 10 at the Forest Service Office in Elkins

ACTION ITEMS:

John Schmidt will contact Tom Blanz about Timberline Project

Shane Jones & Jason Teets will send a summary of new soil info directly relating to group objectives.

Evan Burks will continue to work on Communications Plan, Monitoring Plan, and Private Landowner Prioritization Plan for February.

Evan Burks will begin working to expand commercial nursery outreach.

Jason Teets & Evan Burks will submit NFF CAP grant.

Jack Tribble & Thomas Minney will work towards setting up larger Appalachian Restoration Initiative meeting for late spring 2010.

I. Updates

A. Soil Carbon (Jason Teets, Shane Jones)

- New literature on soils containing methodology for soil research leading to new info on carbon (Evan emailed these documents to the group)

- Article discounted FF carbon because DWD is a larger component, but below ground contains most fixed soil carbon so beware of literature discounting FF carbon
- Second article shows tulip poplar soil decomposes litter faster than rhodo
- Forest Service success story will be submitted on spruce-soil relationships work done this summer.
- Ken Sturm requests a summary of soil info directly relating to group objectives and goals
- Jason suggests a good possibility of funding due to new articles like these

B. Communications Plan (Kate Goodrich-Arling)

- Group communications plan is underway. Working on getting messages to the public by indentifying audiences, key messages, etc.
- There are plans to begin developing a photo library specifically for this group
- Draft will be released at the February meeting for comment

C. Private Landowner Outreach Strategy (Amy Cimarolli)

- Partners for FWS & TNC have started working on a private landowner prioritization strategy for outreach
- Developing prioritization criteria that includes: existing spruce, historical spruce habitat, potential WVNFS habitat based on MENZEL, and increasing existing or creating connectivity.
- Secondary criteria includes: karst, higher elevations, tracts near public land, acid dep. resistance? And natural heritage elements
- Group has started a list of landowners to help prioritize and is developing talking points for approaching landowners

D. Upper Shavers Planting (Evan Burks)

- DNR planted about 500 red spruce trees on rail authority property along Upper Shavers as part of a habitat restoration project that will lock in \$200,000 from WHIP.

E. Climate Change & More (Thomas Minney)

- Original surveys from 1820-1840s for Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike show references for tree species and fires. Records exist in Richmond and it may be beneficial to develop a historical map for Cheat Mtn.
- Southern Appalachian Man & the Biosphere Conference
 - Models for this area are done on large scale but don't account for elevation
 - New work includes elev. & precip. For temp change on the ground
 - We may have more buffering potential than lower elevations.
 - Our group is now well known in NC, Region 8 and with other large NGOs after this conference
 - Smokey's have science work, but lack on the ground collaborative effort we have
 - Great potential for creating cooperative effort with NC

- Funding has been released for climate change monitoring effort along entire AT – they are looking for monitoring hubs (like us) for their network

F. Natural Heritage (Elizabeth Byers)

- Allocating funds to evaluate 200 some species vulnerable to climate change
- Addressing drought stress in climate change vulnerability index
- Major push for rare species in database. 20% increase by spring, ¼ of new species are associated with spruce ecosystem
- Due to the increase, everyone should request new data this spring.
- Blister Swamp fences from the fall planting are doing well

G. Statewide Hemlock Plan (Amy Onken)

- Beetle releases are not working yet
- Individual chemical treatment seems to be only effective method right now
- Winter mortality of adelgid in high elevations is promising
- Possibility of using spruce in regen. if hemlock is not coming back
- Statewide interest in developing joint project in Canaan for hemlocks

II. Group Marketability

- Kate Goodrich-Arling summarizes name change memo that was sent to group noting the main goal is to increase group marketability
- Thomas Minney reemphasizes the goals of the group will not change.
- Possibility of our group acting as a subgroup in a larger restoration initiative involving AMJV, NC, Region 8 & 9.
- USDA is using the word restoration to get at ecosystem services
- Several names are suggested including CASCI, CASCRI, CASRI, CASI, and Central Aps Boreal Ecosystem Initiative
- John Schmidt suggests “High Elevation West Virginia!” as a tag-line
- **Group reaches consensus on changing name to Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI).**

III. Funding Priorities

- Funding priorities are identified in no particular order as Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge, Mower Tract, Upper Greenbrier North, Alderson Plant Materials Center, State Parks/Forests, and Private Landowner Projects
- Jason Teets suggests applying for a NFF Community Assistance Program grant for 5-15k.
- Evan Burks and Dave Saville have submitted a matching NFF grant for Timberline Project.
- \$2,500 donation from Dominion could provide access to larger Dominion Grant Funds
- John Schmidt addresses the need for private landowner funding, but the subgroup for private landowner work has no projects on the table for 2010 yet.
- John Rossell wants to plant at Kumbrabow, but there is a need to work out costs of trees through a timber sale. This is a priority for connectivity.
- Rob Gilligan will commit to a planting at Blackwater Falls State Park this spring

- Cathy Johnson thinks a Blackwater Falls project has good collaboration potential with the FS for a mine reclamation project.
- Randall Lester mentions Alderson needs money for materials and plant propagation.
- Jack Tribble has submitted a FS internal grant to get sufficient funding for Alderson. Final word on these dollars will come by mid-January.
- It is decided that Upper Greenbrier is not ready to be considered for funding until next year.
- **Please see funding action matrices for more details on priorities!**

IV. Alderson Plant Materials Center Discussion

- Ken Sturm suggests Quarter Pine Farms needs to be built into our support network
- It is suggested Alderson get a cone tumbler & drier to supply more spruce seeds
- Jack Tribble emphasizes that our goal is not to supplant commercial growers, but present our work to them for local economic benefit.
- Jason Teets suggests contacting the State Conservationist about helping Alderson increase outreach to commercial growers.
- Evan says he will begin working closely with Alderson, Dave Saville, and Quarter Pine to set up a field trip and increase commercial nursery outreach.