

# Shrubsteppe Fire Preparedness, Response, and Restoration

Near-term Action Advisory Group Meeting

Sep 30, 2021 - Zoom Meeting Notes

**Advisory Group Members in attendance:** Mike Atamian, Elsa Bowen, Jon Gallie, Bonda Habets, Gerry Hayes, Tip Hudson, Jesse Ingels, Jay Kehne, Gregg Kurz, Jason Lowe, Colin Leingang, Kurt Merg, Marie Neumiller, TC Peterson, Carl Scheeler, Randi Shaw, Janet Gorrell

**Steering Committee attending** – Shana Joy, Allen Lebovitz, Hannah Anderson

**Facilitator:** Hannah Anderson, Shana Joy

## Welcome and check-in

Hannah welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda for the day.

930 – 945	Welcome & meeting logistics; brief steering committee introductions
945 – 1000	Briefest of brief briefing - proviso overview
1000 – 1030	Advisor introductions
1030 – 1100	Ground rule generation, expectations, feedback/input process
1100 – 1110	<b>BREAK</b>
	Advisory meeting objectives/recommendations sought
1110 – 1130	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Today – understanding tech teams, shovel-ready projects</li><li>• Oct 19 – Tech Team draft recommendations</li><li>• Nov 18 – Tech Team final recommendations</li><li>• Dec 16 – Project selection process and criteria; Communications plan</li></ul>
	Shovel-ready projects
1130 – 1210	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project selection considerations</li><li>• Submitted projects</li><li>• Advisor feedback</li></ul>
1210 – 1230	Public comment

## Steering Committee Introductions

Introduced the steering committee of the proviso. The steering committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC).

- Hannah Anderson – DFW Wildlife Diversity Division Manager
- Allen Lebovitz – DNR Wildland Fire and Forest Resiliency Liaison
- Shana Joy – SCC Regional Manager Coordinator

## Meeting Logistics

Went over Zoom logistics, such as muting yourself when not speaking and using the raise hand function.

## Proviso Overview

The genesis = the devastating wildfires that occurred in the shrubsteppe in 2020.

- In 2020 about 600,00 acres of shrubsteppe burned. Impacts to communities in shrubsteppe, both human and wildlife.
- WDFW received a call from Senator Rolfes who asked, “How bad is it and what can we do?”
  - How bad: for one of our endangered critters, the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, one of three recovery areas was completely lost. Homes and livelihoods were burned. Half the area occupied by sage and sharptailed grouse burned in the 2020 fires.
    - We know what to do to respond and restore after fire. But we don’t have enough resources (e.g., trained on the ground staff, archeologists, native plant materials) so we need to know where the important places to put limited resources are.
    - We need to increase habitat’s resiliency so that when fire occurs, we can recover quickly. There is a lot of work that needs to be prioritized and we have interacting threats (green energy development, solar and wind development, habitat conversation, invasive species, climate change, etc.)
  - What we can do: we can implement near-term, immediate actions and we can get together with communities to define a long-term strategy in the face of wildfire threat.
    - Those suggestions made their way into a proviso, a directive to the Department, in the 2021-2023 budget.
    - Its primary purpose is to benefit wildlife
    - Ongoing operating \$2.35 million per biennium
    - One-time capital \$1.5 million for the 2021-2023 biennium
    - Partnerships with DNR and SCC, advised by diverse interests.
    - Two components - implement immediate restoration actions and develop long-term strategy. We have another advisory group that will start putting together that strategy. We are bringing on a third-party neutral facilitator. That will start in November and go into 2023.
- What are the near-term actions? It is *not* a traditional grant program. It is the base upon which to grow a landscape-level restoration program. In your mind, think about it as a service delivery program rather than a grant program. We hope this works but we will learn as we go.
  - Near-term action identified in the proviso= increase trained on-the-ground capacity.
    - One way to expand capacity is by bringing on Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) groups.
    - We’ll also be looking to find solutions to enhance capacity to do cultural resource review
  - Another key piece of the proviso= enhance the availability of native plant materials.
    - One way is to engage in partnership in the [Sustainability in Prisons Project](#),

- with the Evergreen State College and the Department of Corrections.
      - We are also looking to engage with other local growers.
  - Rebuilding fences with wildlife-friendly versions.
  - Another piece of the proviso= facilitate deferred grazing.
    - Providing hay to ranchers so they don't have to turn cattle out when ground needs more time to recover. Another service delivery.
  - Species specific recovery actions.
    - Like grouse augmentation or perhaps supporting our pygmy rabbit reintroduction.
- Where would these services be delivered? It is pretty broad; it just says shrubsteppe habitat. We are initially targeting focus areas impacted by Pearl Hill and Whitney fires because that is the genesis, but we can talk about what makes sense. We have done some prioritization around mapping which wildlife is high value, high burn severity, and cheatgrass invasion potential. Our collective knowledge will advise what makes sense.
  - Importantly, these dollars are not just for state lands or WDFW lands. It is any land ownership. It could be private, state, federal, other.
- Where is the best place to get at those objectives? Some decisions we have already made.
  - We have convened advisory groups and associated technical teams
  - We have decided on strategy of delivering restoration services
  - We have contracted with WCC (they start in Oct 14)
  - We have already decided to partner with the Sustainability in Prisons program
  - We have hired a shrubsteppe restoration coordinator (Kurt Merg starts Oct 1) to relieve land managers of so much coordination
  - We also already decided to implement shovel-ready projects while developing this process
- A lot of decisions are yet to be made. We are looking to advisors and associated technical teams to recommend these solutions.
- We have six technical teams built around near-term actions defined by the proviso and expediting the delivery of restoration services on the ground.
  - These teams are meant to be small and nimble. They are not all super small but have great expertise.
  - They are composed of individuals with relevant expertise. It is also tapping into other communities' expertise,
    - Ex. the deferred grazing team has individuals that are not part of the proviso process but have very relevant and important expertise.
  - Each team has a team lead that is part of this group as well who is facilitating the conversations.

**As requested, Hannah will put together a 2-3-page communication piece about the proviso to send out.**

Question in chat:

What thought is being given to in-state and out-of-state shrubsteppe landowners' economic incentive to install large tract solar farms? How might such farms affect your efforts to save shrubsteppe habitat statewide?

Answer: I will just say my first inclination is that is a great aspect to bring up as part of long-term

strategy.

Answer: That is what I think too. There is a lot moving around green energy and shrubsteppe, the use of shrubsteppe to support solar & wind energy, and that conversation will occur in the long-term strategy development group.

## Advisor Introductions

- Jason Lowe: Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Wildlife biologist in Spokane, did a lot of restoration after the Whitney fire
- Jesse Ingels: Cattleman's Association. District 2 representative
- Carl Scheeler: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla. Wildlife program manager, manages large shrubsteppe areas
- Jay Kehne: Conservation Northwest. Sagelands Heritage Program lead and serving on tech team about fencing
- Marie Neumiller: Inland Northwest Wildlife Council. Based in Spokane
- Elsa Bowen: Lincoln County Conservation District. District manager
- Bonda Habits: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). State resource conservationist, does post-fire work in Spokane
- Chris Branch: Okanogan County Commissioner
- Randi Shaw: The Nature Conservancy. Primarily in Moses Coulee area
- Gregg Kurz: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. supervises team responsible for ESA wildlife
- Mike Atamian: WDFW. District wildlife biologist in Spokane/Whitman/Lincoln counties
- Jon Gallie: WDFW. Pygmy rabbit recovery coordinator out of Ephrata
- Kurt Merg: WDFW. Now becoming the shrubsteppe restoration coordinator
- Gerry Hayes: WDFW. Nongame wildlife biologist based out of Olympia HQ, shrubsteppe species lead and team lead for species recovery tech group
- Tip Hudson: Washington State University Extension. Professor, rangeland & livestock management
- TC Peterson: Yakama Nation. Lead range biologist for reservation
- Colin Leingang: Yakima Training Center. Involved in shrub management in Kittitas and

Yakima counties, on several near-term tech teams and committees

- Janet Gorrell: WDFW. Landscape conservation section manager, supports the steering committee and near-term action teams

## Ground Rule Generation

We wanted to take a few minutes to do a group brainstorm and get down on paper what our important ground rules are. We listed out a couple to get us started:

Our starters are:

- Please remain muted until recognized to speak
- Please don't interrupt
- Listen to understand – this one is important, that you might have to bite your tongue for a moment and put yourself in that person's shoes when they are expressing themselves
- Disagree respectfully – we don't expect to always be on the same page, so let's be respectful when we disagree

Added:

- Stay relevant
- Keep purpose in mind
- Knowing and respecting the decision-making process
- Turn off/mute cell phones
- Keep discussion out of the chat – participate verbally
- Respect diverse perspectives
- Avoid looking email – stay focused/engaged

## Advisory Group Expectations

- The idea of the advisory groups is to have representation of diverse interests.
- We all care about shrubsteppe landscape and are concerned about threat of wildfire. We have different communities, landowners, and land managers here today so I'm excited about that.
- Each of us have a vested interest in shrubsteppe and that is demonstrated in our work. (e.g., landowner, land manager, staff in shrubsteppe, programs or resources focused on shrubsteppe)
- We have the capacity to commit to this process. It is a lot of work and we need to make space and commit to it so we can realize a vision of this bigger outcome.
- We are all going to come prepared and provide timely feedback.
- The purpose of this group is to inform and make recommendations to the steering committee on near-term actions. Help us decide on:
  - Best delivery mechanism
  - Spatial priorities
  - Project solicitation – how do we get the word out, how should we evaluate where to deliver, and how to specifically select projects.

- The advisor’s job= about making recommendations to the steering committee so we can make definitive decisions.
  - Please speak up; we want to hear and make space for everyone to contribute.
  - Group meetings are a forum for discussion and making recommendations, not a forum for decisions.
  - The steering committee would make decisions in a separate forum.
  - Steering committee will strive for consensus. That is the objective. Every decision so far, that is where we landed.
    - If we get to a place where we can’t reach consensus, we will bring in a third-party facilitator. We can bring to an executive level of our entities to reach consensus. Ultimately, the decision would fall to our DFW director if all else fails. But we want advisors to make recommendations, steering committee consider the input, and come to a consensus decision. That is in a perfect world, but so far, we have had success.

Question: Is there going to be a formal process within our group here, or just individual recommendations from everybody? What will that process be in this group for moving recommendations to the steering committee?

Answer: Good question. We haven’t formally discussed that. As we go through today and talk about key decision points in front of us, I think what we will see is individual points of view. And maybe also, “We hear strong support for x or y, is there any strong opposition?”-type facilitation. If everyone can at least live with the recommendations that helps.

Comment: We are the advisory committee, correct? So as the advisory committee, when we present consensus-based recommendations, it would be helpful in having a process to know we are reaching consensus. In getting a sense of where people are at, or serious concerns, using \*fist to five. Where 2s or 1s are serious concerns or they can’t agree. Does that sound helpful?

**\*Fist to Five:**

*Fist: “I veto this decision. I cannot support this decision under any circumstances.*

*1 finger – index finger: “I have (major) concerns that need to be heard and resolved immediately.”*

*2 Fingers – index finger and middle finger or thumb and index finger: “I have (minor) concerns that we need to resolve now.”*

*3 fingers – thumb, index finger and middle finger or index finger, middle finger and ring finger: “I have (minor) concerns but can live with the proposal. My concerns should be resolved soon.”*

*4 Fingers – Index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger or thumb, index finger, middle finger, and ring finger: “I vote in favor.”*

*5 fingers (Five) – Showing open hand: “I am enthusiastic and will actively support implementation.*

Comment: I think that sounds like a really great way to stay on track. If we reach a point where the conversation isn’t progressing, it is a good metric. Numbers are easy.

**Agreement expressed in chat and via thumbs ups**

**Break**

## Advisory Meeting Recommendations

Now we will talk about our technical teams and what is coming in next meetings.

Dates:

- Sept 30 – understand technical teams and shovel-ready projects
- Oct 19 – near-term teams give draft recommendations, advisors give feedback
- Nov 18 – near-term teams come back with final recommendations, advisors finalize
- Dec 16 – make decisions based on recommendations, talk through project selection criteria, and create Communications plan (key messages, audience, etc.)

Those dates are set, but we are waiting to see how much more we should meet. Near-term action advisory group (this group) may have less frequency moving forward. Maybe less than monthly, maybe even quarterly, undecided.

- Technical Teams
  - Tech teams are subject-matter experts and each one has a lead that is part of this advisory group.
  - They address geography, the application of where this should occur, what is the best way, and what is the mechanism for delivery.
  - They also answer specific questions, like “which plants? Which species and how many? To what life stage?” “what are the specifications of wildlife friendly fence? What does that mean exactly?”
  - They then bring those recommendations (no more than 5-page written document) and provide a presentation to us here at that October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- The technical teams have three specific tasks:
  1. Create a priority list *with* costs of needs/projects for year 1 and year 2 (fiscal year ends June 30).
    - a. Is it a product? Is it a process?
    - b. What is the right time we should do it?
    - c. Cost?
    - d. Anticipated outcome?
  2. Create priority list of needs/projects *without* costs.
    - e. For example, for the cultural resources review team maybe one of those outcomes is an agreement between the state and the tribes around certain actions. That may or may not have costs.
  3. Think about what are other funding/incentives?
    - a. What are the circumstances that could influence this?
    - b. Identify those relationships between teams.
- There are six technical teams:
  1. Species Recovery
    - a. Led by Gerry Hayes, WDFW.
    - b. We asked about project priorities. For year 1 to year 2, what can you do with \$50k-100k a year? Are there things we can do to support the critters?
    - c. Second piece is around directing species-specific habitat restoration activity within fire perimeters.

2. Cultural Resources
  - a. Led by Janet Gorrell, WDFW.
  - b. Same 50k – 100k/yr. What are the things we can do to ensure we are protecting cultural resources while restoring habitat at scale?
  - c. Incorporating the [Executive Order 21-02](#), understanding limitations among partners, solutions we can build through relationships, sharing capacity, if contract is the right way to go, etc.
3. Deferred Wildland Grazing
  - a. Led by Allissa Carlson, SCC.
  - b. The idea to temporarily defer grazing to restore burned habitat and promote recovery.
  - c. \$50-100k, so questions are geography and timing. Do you get the wildlife benefit if you push it far out?
  - d. How much does hay cost? Where can we store it? Logistics? Do we deliver hay to their door? Funds?
4. Wildlife-Friendly Fencing
  - a. Led by Jay Kehne, CNW.
  - b. This one has capital budget, \$1.5 million dedicated towards this action. We ask for \$600k year because the WCC can charge to that capital budget to put fence in ground.
  - c. Questions here are around what does a wildlife-friendly fence look like? Smooth top and bottom wire? Virtual fence? Delivery?
5. Native Plant Production
  - a. Led by Kurt Merg, WDFW.
  - b. The idea is to plan which plants, how many, seed storage, and how do we do it?
  - c. What about other contracts? What is the best way to accomplish?
  - d. Nexus between this group and the species group (they will consult and coordinate recommendations)
6. Technical Tool Development
  - a. Led by Janet Gorrell, WDFW.
  - b. The idea is we can create mechanisms we need to intake projects, guide priority locations, track delivery, get resources to right places.
  - c. This natural tension between making something useful and making it too complex.
  - d. What about complimentary funding sources?
  - e. After last year's fires, WDFW did build an existing tool. There are improvements needed so it is a start. Project intake tool and underlying databases for resources and capacity.

Question: What does the figure of \$50-100k means?

Answer: Overall 2.35 billion per biennium, minus WDFW indirect, so leaves us with some 900k in direct dollars per year. Because we are waiting to hear recommendations before pre-determining how much money to direct toward which action, we provided a range of funding to each group. It may be that we invest more heavily in different aspects in each year. For example, maybe we want to focus effort on the cultural resource review on the 1<sup>st</sup> fiscal year so we can free up projects to be able to move. Maybe for a species recovery project, there is a time delay to getting it underway and we want to use those dollars somewhere else. Technical teams were asked to give us a range so we can make fiscal decisions based on recommendations. Fencing is a little different because it is a



capital budget dedicated to just that.

Question: Species recovery \$50-100k per year, I'm making the assumption that is above and beyond the Department plan budget. This isn't necessarily replacing money on a sage grouse program or pygmy rabbit program, it is "in addition to," correct?

Answer: That is where it is at now. There may be expanded work that isn't covered by grants but yes, you're right. This is new money; it is not our existing budget.

Question: I was confused about the \$50k-\$100k. It sounded like you just wanted proposals to be non-restoration, so we have been coming up with restoration but where do those projects get funded?

Answer: I think those should still come out. Providing species-specific recommendations is a good outcome but are there animal manipulation-supported projects needed that aren't habitat restoration? We wanted to save space for those.

Question: What committee has money for habitat restoration? There are costs with tractors and actual projects so haven't figured out that piece yet.

Answer: There is no technical team that is focused on restoration in particular. The overall proviso is focused on habitat restoration actions – expanding capacity of on-the-ground support. There is the WCC, so we are giving that service to get that accomplished.

Question: I get confused on the project selection process. We are already a year out from the fires, so if we were to be ready by spring, we have to sign up as soon as recommendations are approved? Or are we waiting for this committee to approve?

Answer: October 19<sup>th</sup> – draft recommendations presented. There may be more to work through. November will be final recommendations and the steering committee will make decisions soon afterward. The vision of what we are looking for in the December date is the whole package. To help us make actual selections. Your group might be different because it has its own budget, so not a clear answer.

Comment: comment about nexus between teams. I'm working with folks on cultural resources. As we build recommendations there will be more nexuses. I want to create tools to support recommendations for the fence group for example. I will preemptively schedule a meeting with team leads so we can all think about what relationships between the groups might be.

## Shovel-ready Projects

- We used our networks to ask folks to bring forward on-the-ground needs for habitat restoration to support species recovery.
  - The WCC crew is starting in October and WDFW has sagebrush/bitterbrush plugs that we ordered last year that are ready to be planted so we offered those up too.
  - We asked that projects submitted have already completed cultural resources reviews and consultations, and that they be within the Pearl Hill or Whitney Fire boundaries.
  - We also ask they aim to be completed between October and January.
- The steering committee has had conversations around ideally funding it all, but we need to make decisions. Some considerations are:

- Do projects meet the intent of the proviso?
  - Do they provide direct wildlife benefits? Protect high quality habitat? Enhance quality?
- Another consideration is around being flexible early on. We know we are all working together to provide recommendations and, in the desire to put dollars to work, need flexibility.
- The other piece is our WCC availability and their availability.
  - In this first year, because we had to apply to Ecology for WCC in April, before we knew proviso dollars were real, rather than applying for one or two dedicated crews, we are utilizing portions of existing crews in Wenatchee and Spokane not fully subscribed. Next year we could get a dedicated crew or even two if that makes sense
- We had 11 project proposals that were submitted (\*note that we learned that there were actually 13 submitted, but due to incorrect email was not received. Those 2 additional projects have been incorporated, but are not reflected here in the notes)
  - All projects met the intent of the proviso.
  - Only one met all criteria we asked for, which was pearl hill/whitney geography, cultural resources review was complete, and they requested resources offered (i.e., WCC crew time).
  - 2 projects had completed cultural review, asked for WCC crew, but were outside burn boundaries.
  - 7 projects were in the right geography but did not have a cultural resource review and consultation. There were some misconceptions here, all submitted projects *thought* they would not need cultural review due to land ownership or limited ground disturbance.
  - Two projects asked for a WCC crew and fencing materials.
  - One asked just for cash.
- Cultural resources reviews and consultation= we want to make sure we are doing the right thing by the resources on our landscape.
  - We had conversations with archaeologists to make sure we understood. Given things we are seeing in proposals, there are misconceptions.
  - Anything we do with these state dollars, a cultural resource review and consultations are required.
    - Even if the project is on private land, even if there is limited ground disturbance, even if fence posts are put in the same holes, you still must document and submit through the process.
- Details of the proposals submitted:
  - 1 habitat enhancement project, about plantings and invasive control
  - 2 pygmy rabbit projects outside the burn boundary – one is building new breeding enclosures and one is habitat enhancement. Both have cultural resources review completed. This is an immediate need
  - 5 projects with limited ground disturbance; those still need cultural resources review. The review might not be a site visit or expensive long process, it may just be an archeologist doing a desktop review and writing a letter to tribes and asks for

- their input.
- 2 projects were about removing and rebuilding fence, requested WCC and fence materials
- 1 planting project request \$6,000. For reimbursing plants and salary for volunteer coordinator. It was outside what we asked for and outside what we are trying to set up.
- Short-term solution: expedited cultural reviews
  - WDFW has a professional intern on contract. The intern is a professional archeologist who could do expedited desktop reviews of these shovel-ready projects and could start next week.
  - We still need to go through consultation with the Tribes, but we have an opportunity to spend proviso dollars to expedite shovel-ready projects review.
- We are now seeking advisor advice/thoughts/comments on those overarching considerations (meets intent, flexibility, etc.) and looking for input on these specific considerations (pygmy projects outside of burn boundary, expedited cultural resource review, providing fencing materials, and cash ask).

Comment: We have the funding to support all of these projects. So, we don't have to choose winners and losers out of these. We can afford it, but there are the other considerations that we put out our best guess with what would be needed.

Comment: That is an important consideration. We are not choosing to not fund projects, because there is adequate resource to fund them all. It is not which one will we or won't we fund.

Comment: The funding is there, but the WCC resources in the right windows may become limited. In general, you're right. We can make projects go but it does depend *when* we can.

Comment: Thank you, that was informative. I would say for these shovel-ready projects we should get through as many aspects of the proviso with samples of what we will be doing. Whether it is restoration activities or whatever, we will run into problems and be able to solve them. I would really do the expedited cultural resource review to clear up processes and so in the future we don't run into landscape-scale category exclusion. In terms of the WCC crew, for a lot of these looking at a narrow fall window maybe a bigger spring window could get things done. If other things could wait until spring, maybe that is the way to do it. Cultural review may be the hang-up of this whole program.

Question: These seven projects needed cultural review, so the fencing one...

Answer: None of the fencing projects are past the cultural review. There was only one project that had all the criteria. There are four of them that do have the cultural resource review.

Comment: I have no judge for how to assess, but how many projects did we not get because we said we wanted a cultural resource review completed? That is one concern I have there since getting projects done is worthwhile. On the fencing side, we don't have a "wildlife-friendly fencing" definition yet, so I don't know how we fund that fence unless we just go with what we think the definition is.

Question: All these projects that still need cultural review, was it because they don't really have ground disturbance?

Answer: Yes, only five of them have critical ground disturbance.

Comment: With those, maybe there is a sense of those are projects that don't typically need cultural reviews.

Response: Right, or thought fence in the same place would be enough. Jason?

Comment: Input on the bullet points.

- Pygmy rabbit projects outside burn boundary – I don't think there should be any problem with that. It meets intent, so no problem being high priority.
- The expedite cultural review – a lot of opinions. I would say do what you got to do.
- Fencing materials – both the BLM proposals included us providing the fencing materials, so I didn't understand when you said people are requesting fencing materials.
- Cash issue – there is talk about a delivery process, so maybe it more appropriate for the proviso to somehow buy the product for that project instead of just giving cash.

Comment: I agree as far as the pygmy rabbit outside burn boundaries.

- On the cultural resource review, it is a desktop review, but what about survey and monitoring? Is that recommended or going to be covered? I'm also curious when comes to the desktop review. I assume that is sent to tribal historical reservation officers.
- TNC submitted a project but we definitely did not submit a shovel-ready project request because we knew cultural resource review is needed and would be too much. I'm not saying TNC wants to supply more, but if there are other projects that didn't even put name in the hat, if there is still some funding, we should be letting people know to give them an opportunity to apply.

Response: I'm writing down the survey and monitoring piece. We will look into that and also the suggestion of creating an opening around other shovel-ready projects.

Question: Question on pygmy rabbit projects. Are these projects outside the burn area a result of the fires? Or is this work that we had to do and just haven't gotten to yet?

Response: It is all stuff that would be replacing capacity and infrastructure lost from the Pearl Hill fire. To build a population we need space to build rabbits, to rebuild what we lost in other areas. All of these are to rebuild the capacity we lost.

Response: So, even though it is outside of the Pearl Hill and Whitney zone, this is a Pearl Hill and Whitney fire-caused need?

Response: Yes. The entire thing burned up in the Pearl Hill fire. There is nothing we can do right now to benefit rabbits anytime soon. It will take 10-15 years minimum for brush to regrow. Our concern is that they might not even live or be in existence until habitat is recovered. It does force us to work outside of those boundaries. We need more breeding enclosures, or rabbit hatcheries, and we need more spots to put them. If we don't, chances of extinction are high. If we don't do the near-term now, they might not make it.

Comment: This is what this meeting is about. We need near-term action advisors. One important comment is we don't want to build a fence that isn't an appropriate fence because we don't have

appropriate design. That is where we count on advisors to say, “that is a good fencing project,” or, “no it is not a good place to put it.” We have seen problem fences, so we want to make sure we don’t fund those projects.

We also want it to be at appropriate time. If we are trying to rush putting these projects on the ground but force one to take place at a time of year where it is not effective, did we really accomplish anything? The steering committee talked about having a queue. That is something to consider. Even though we want them on the ground right away, it may not be right time. There were comments in the chat, one about grazing costs that at some point we might want to talk about.

Comment: I also support the pygmy rabbit outside of burn boundary project. That totally makes sense. Question on fencing design. There is plenty of design out there, and for the most part we said we want the Cadillac. We say that because if we get these fences accepted on private ground, we have to supply a project that exceeds or gives other options. We don’t have that definition locked in yet. But we wouldn’t be paying for things substandard.

Comment: There was mention of putting fence in the wrong place, and a boundary fence. Those exterior boundary fences need to be put up and not virtual. So maybe potential for agreement on that.

Response: That is where we were heading. We would love to see interior fences disappear, but there is not that trust for exterior.

Input:

I heard general support for the pygmy rabbit project outside of boundary. With the fist of five, how do folks feel? Any 1s or 2s? **All 5s in the chat**

The other idea on the table is providing expedited cultural review for seven projects. **Mostly 5s, a few 4s**

The next one is about fencing materials, given it would be the Cadillac version. How do folks feel about fencing materials? **5s, 4s, 3s**

Question: What are we voting on? Do we want to fund fencing materials?

Answer: Yes, even though it is outside of what we asked for. We asked for WCC.

Response: I guess I would also want to know the price of those fence materials.

Response: Combined, less than \$20,000.

Response: Yes, I guess with those forms there was rationale for the project, but I’m not even sure what it is for this. I guess it must be important. I will give it a 3 since I don’t know.

Comment: My concern, if any, with the fencing project would probably mirror the recent comment of is it the best use of limited resources? If we find we can only fence a certain amount, is this the best place?

Response: Those are great comments and something the steering committee can follow-up with.

We are out of time. Really quick, the idea of delivering cash. How do folks feel? For a planting project in the Pearl Hill boundary? **5s, 4s, 3s**

Wrap up:

Interesting discussion and thank you to everyone. I know there is limited information, so it is challenging. I think there are a few folks I would like to create space for a public comment with us.

**No public comments**

**Meeting adjourned**