

Tuscarora Greenstrip Discussion and Tour  
Wednesday, August 26, 2009

Attending: Mike McCarty, Fire Safe Council; Ryan Shane, NDF; Ron Arthaud, Vivian Schupback, Sid Teske, Tuscarora residents; Tom Reid, BLM Fire rehab, Jeff Arnberger, Elko BLM Fire Specialist; Otis Tipton, Elko County Road Supervisor, Leta Collord, NNSG

Jeff Arneberger started the meeting off with an overview of the need for the greenstrip in 2001, and also spoke to how the greenstrip would have been used if the 2005 Esmeralda Fire had continued into the town of Tuscarora, which it was threatening to do. The greenstrip serves as a buffer between the rangeland environment that the town is set in, and also serves to contain fire that might ignite within the town confines. BLM, NDF, and Elko County were signatory to the 2001 agreements. It has been decided that agreement is out of date, and will not serve for the town's 2009 needs. Jeff Arnberger has been asked to draw up the 2009 agreement using the old agreement as a template. However, the citizens of Tuscarora will need to craft their goals and objectives for the agreement.

Mike McCarty, NV Fire Safe Council (Council) gave an overview of the operating parameters of the Council's around Nevada. The mission of Council is to protect humans and create "defensible space" to thwart the threat of fire. Mike is presenting the Tuscarora Fire Safe Council petition in Reno tomorrow, and doesn't expect any delays. He will return to Tuscarora at the request of the community and conduct an orientation to how FSC's function. Ron and Sid reported that all the full-time residents were in favor of the Council. Mike emphasized the importance of gaining community cohesiveness in the success of the Council. It was mentioned that the Owyhee Conservation District would make a good partner for the Council, and the Council would make a good participant in the District work. There are broad mutual interests of the ranching community, and the town of Tuscarora.

Everyone agrees that reaching out to all potential partners as the process moves forward, will be a benefit to all of the various types of projects that the group is interested in pursuing.

A discussion around the requirements of NEPA for all public land projects ensued. Tom and Jeff expressed that those steps for archeological, and sensitive evaluations should go smoothly. In part, that is attributed to the fact that the greenstrip was analyzed in 2001; if new disturbance on BLM lands occur then new NEPA would be required. Tom expressed that BLM is much better equipped in 2009 than it was previously, so their assistance would be more varied. They carry a responsibility for weed containment. There is a 17 state agreement on the use of Plateau, stating a "determination for NEPA adequacy". Plateau is a weed retardent, reportedly it works against cheat grass effectively, and possibly other weeds. Hoary cress, or low white top prevails across all properties in the region. Private lots, and public lands are infested and it is moving into new regions regularly. It is a huge problem.

A first step in the containment of the weed infestation will be to get a good mapping project so the Council and its members know the extent of acres involved, and can move forward with plans to begin the hoary cress spread. All agreed, it will be a long-term project, requiring many partners, regular monitoring, and follow-on activities each year. The nature of the weed containment techniques will be discussed by the professionals with the community as soon as basic plans are made. Kent McAdoo, UNR Cooperative Extension specialist, will be needed to help design the project and possible approaches for various areas. Kent's presence at the next meeting will be essential. Leta is checking with Kent for a date later in September, or early October.

The group was reminded that the project proposal needs to be well along for presentation to the Elko County commission in November.

Ryan Shane spoke to the need of the Tuscarora residents to identify what the true relics of their town are. Many fire hazards exist within the town properties, and would need to be evaluated. That would be a part of the basis for building their plan. Elko County holds title to three parcels in town, and would be involved with the citizens to work out a planned use for those areas, and a maintenance plan in an interim period. It was pointed out that perhaps the town would want to sell a parcel, based on their cohesive plan. One of the county lots was thought to be suitable for a fire station. In the meantime, it needs

weed and trash control. Sid Teske spoke to the elevated threat of fire in winter months as all the residents relied on wood for fuel, and most of the homes are wood, old wood.

Mike indicated that some of the Council's in NV had weed concerns associated with their fire threats just as we are experiencing. He encouraged the group to reference and tie together the science relating good ecosystem composition and health, the needs of wildlife, and human safety. They are all connected. Leta referenced the Elko County Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Strategy (2004) and the Tuscarora Watershed/Population Management Unit Assessment as the initiating document stating, that within the Tuscarora basin the weed infestation is the preeminent danger to ecosystem health. Other restoration projects would be useless without the containment of the weeds. The Assessment spawned the projects being discussed currently.

Jeff Arneberger and Tom directed the planning group to the acting Tuscarora Field manager, Steve Dondero for special petition of help as the planning comes together. Also, Mark Coca, Tyson Gripp, and Tom Warren are weed specialists who might help move the process along.

All arrows are leading to a common theme. "What do we want this region to look like in the next 5, 10, 20 years." Ryan Shane and Leta Collord will work together on the meeting plans and scheduling, for now. As the Tuscarora Fire Safe Council gets established, they will be directly involved, and others of us, will be participants. Leta will resend the list of Tuscarora project participants to Ron and Sid.

The group broke with some heading to look at the current condition of the greenstrip. It is reportedly a bit hard to find. Staking and further on the ground work will be needed.

Submitted: Leta Collord