**GOB Meeting with USFS 1/21/25**

**Participants:**

Carolyn Koury

Stacia Backensto

Elizabeth Sorrels

Marty Eberhardt

Denise Smith

Marcia Stout

Donna Gianoulis

Diane Smith

1. **How are the FS budget and priorities going to change due to the new administration?**

* In reality no one knows how this will play out
* Unfilled FS positions will not be filled; seasonals are no longer being hired
* Our monitoring agreement still holds
* Some riparian exclosures we might add include: Bloodgood, Bar 6, Adair Springs, Dorsey Springs (not fenced yet), Allen Spring, N. Fork Negrito (not fenced yet)
* GOBs will be provided with new updated list
* GOBs will also be provided with list of Forest Rangers and Forest Conservationists for reference
* Some FS retirees are still offering strategic support
* FS Watershed team is down to 50%
* Brainstormed some ideas about adding important tasks to GOBs scope including photo monitoring in strategic areas (tracking noxious weeds), and willow planting projects
* Discussed that this would make the most sense to include when we are already visiting a particular area so as not to spread GOBs too thin
* Monitoring riparian exclosures will continue to be our priority
* Brief discussion near the end of meeting touched on water rights to NM springs; in 2011 State Engineer in Deming wrote water rights document granting springs on public lands accessible to ranchers; many ranchers laid claims to springs in the Gila Watershed during this time
* Challenges to the above water rights matter have been deflected by State Engineer stating this is a civil matter

1. **FS Best Practice management – making sure that any activity or project does not negatively impact water quality**

* Stacia offered to take GOBs out on water quality monitoring project next time she goes
* She can demonstrate how water quality samples are taken
* GOBs have the option to add these tasks to the riparian areas we are already monitoring
* Trenda oversees downloading data from wildlife cameras; Stacia will ask her if we could help download data when geographically feasible
* GOBs briefly discussed that we may draw from our larger listserv to find members who could help with these additional tasks and projects if needed

1. **NEPA currently being done in Black Fire region**

* Watershed restoration action plan in progress
* This year NEPA will be completed; then for the next 3 years related projects will be implemented
* Black Canyon and Tularosa (Eagle Peak area) were identified as good places to set up photo points
* FS will organize all key discussed in points 1, 2 and 3 on maps and will provide (at least a first draft) to GOBs before our Feb. 20th annual planning meeting

1. **Bird Area concerns**

* Many fences have been fixed and the fences themselves were not a problem when we last went out Jan. 13, just gates and the turnstile
* The Pancho Canyon fence will go down every time there is a lot of water in the river, and it is inevitable that over time other fences will be problem areas, since a large number of cattle are often immediately adjacent to the exclosure
* A few days after the January monitoring trip, we were told that there were cows in the exclosure past the end of the road, downstream from Ira Canyon. There is probably another fence or gate problem down there
* Although over the past summer there was no cattle presence, there continue to be violations
* Gate into exclosure continues to be broken down or propped open with heavy cattle sign on both sides
* Gate from parking area to hiking trail is not aligned and takes extreme effort to close
* By late October, some of the problem areas identified were breached by cattle as predicted
* People on December Bird Count relayed to GOB members that cattle were seen in lower Gila River
* Communication with Naomi has been an ongoing challenge in that minimalistic responses to our detailed questions are not helpful or efficient, requiring multiple emails to get clarification
* Charlie, who works with Naomi, was identified as the person who implements repairs and is usually good at follow-up; including her on Bird Area emails would prompt repairs
* Tony Ybarra, Deputy Ranger for Silver City and Glenwood can also be CC’d
* Range Manager protocol; letters should be going out to offending ranchers but often are not sent
* FS administrators attribute this to not wanting an adversarial relationship with most ranchers
* Those ranchers who are flagrant offenders have been pursued more aggressively by FS
* Carolyn recommended that Camille, Forest Supervisor, should be contacted via email about Bird Area concerns; she also suggested that Liz and Tony be included (cc Carolyn and Camille on these)
* Above communications to be solutions focused; emphasis on fact that part of GOB mission and protocol are to follow up and make sure things are fixed
* Stacia recommended that these communications be succinct and in bullet format
* Stacia offered to provide GOBs with a summary of our reports on the Bird Area, dating back to 2022
* Revisited past GOB recommendation of pursuing collars for cattle in Bird Area but this was not pursued
* FS reported that collar programs have been successful in the Black Range and by word of mouth amongst ranchers, the idea is starting to spread
* Overall, the expense of collar programs can be prohibitive once funding runs out but grants from local and regional organizations could offset this

1. **Survey Tools**

* Kaitlyn from Glenwood and Kent from Regional Office are overseeing this
* A new APP version for Survey 123 will be available soon for all FS partners; Kaitlyn will be in touch with GOBs soon about this
* Okay to go ahead and update Survey 123 when prompted to do so
* Stacia is tracking survey reports in an Excel format to summarize; Kaitlyn has also been consistently reviewing our surveys
* Not all FS staff are reading GOB reports because they are hard to locate and open
* Continuing to email a summary to key FS staff following our monitoring trips is still a good way to keep them all updated