

San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area – Resource Management Plan
Adaptive Management Educational Forum
July 22nd, 2014 * 6:00pm-8:00pm

NOTES

Questions/comments from participants are italicized

Participants:

Gene Fenstermacher, SV EAC
Thomas Armstrong, Cochise Bicycle Advocates
Ron Serviss, Friends of the San Pedro River
Eric Andersen
Ian Tomlinson, Vera Earl Ranch
Shar Porier, Sierra Vista Herald
Doug Duncan, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Tricia Gerrodette, Huachuca Audubon
Kate Connor, RECON Environmental
Sheridan Stone, Fort Huachuca Wildlife Biologist
Linda Kennedy, Audubon
Amy Carter, SV EAC
Kim Mulhern, Cochise County
Amy Markstein, BLM
David McIntyre, BLM
Karen Simms, BLM
Jim Mahoney, BLM
Linda Dunlavey, BLM
Matt Petersen, AECOM
Julia Sittig, SDR (facilitator)
Larry Fisher, SDR (facilitator)
Colleen Whitaker, SDR (facilitator)

Overview and Update (David McIntyre, BLM)

- Next public meeting will be mid-late September, to look at draft alternative themes and components.
- BLM received useful input from public and partners during meetings and field trips. This has been very beneficial to the process of crafting the alternatives.
- Travel Management Plan: The supplemental NOI (Notice of Intent) has been submitted. Once it is published in the federal register a public meeting will be announced with 30 days notice.

Adaptive Management Overview (Matt Petersen, AECOM)

To see the full presentation go to: (bit.ly/SPRNCARMPdocuments)

Questions/Discussion:

What about positive impacts that exceed your expectations? Shouldn't you plan for those?

- Yes, but you wouldn't take any management actions to minimize or change those.

But you could take some of those resources and put them somewhere else. It could provide an opportunity to take some action.

- True. For example in the Carlsbad, NM RMP they were worried about Lehmanns lovegrass. They were working through alternatives to take advantage of some opportunities to keep it from getting a hold. In that example they were taking the opportunity to be proactive to prevent something.

How specific do the measurements/indicators you use need to be?

- Need to be as specific as possible. As an example on SPRNCA we've discussed that potential indicator for negative impacts on cultural sites could be that they are degraded to the point that they can no longer be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In general do oil and gas have carte blanche no matter what the conditions are?

- No. Happy to discuss this more later if desired.

Isn't the essence of Adaptive Management that it entails site-specific areas and measurements?

- Yes, the planning area is site specific. Anything developed for Adaptive Management on the SPRNCA would be unique to here and not from another area.

On the water field trip we saw ponds that are naturally filling in. Could an application of Adaptive Management be that some ponds would be maintained and others would be allowed to fill? Can you set up criteria to weigh uses?

- That may not actually be Adaptive Management. For example, if the pond is a recreational pond and it's decided to dredge it, that's not Adaptive Management. You've already decided to do it. Adaptive Management could be something like waiting to see which fill in, *if* some become habitat for important species, *then* we will no longer use them recreationally. (This is a made up example).

How can we integrate Adaptive Management into SPRNCA? (David McIntyre)

To see the full presentation go to: (bit.ly/SPRNCARMPdocuments)

Questions/Discussion:

Is there a corresponding set of benefits when you consider an action? (with respect to Boquillas)

- We're trying to mitigate the negative impacts, not the positive ones, so that's why there is a focus on them.

But if you have 5 people drive out there on a weekend, and one person fills their trunk up with stuff was the 4 worth it? How do you look at the trade-offs?

- Consider the Moon House example (from Matt Petersen's presentation). It is a prehistoric site that is open to public access. There is a lot of positive benefit to having public access. But people tend to touch the mud plaster and can cause problems. We have to think about the trade-offs. That's where thresholds come in.
- The thresholds that SPRNCA have to deal with are in the enabling legislation, and beyond that, federal mandates and regulations. For example, collection of arrowheads and prehistoric items are illegal, so that is a trade-off that BLM can't make.
- In terms of recognizing the impacts – that comes in the benefits analysis. There is an inherent recognition of benefits because (in the Boquillas example) the management actions start with least restrictive first.

In these examples, is there any monitoring going on now on cultural and riparian?

- Yes there is some now. For example, the BLM Archaeologist goes out to Fairbank fairly regularly and there is a site host that can report on day-to-day changes. Biologists monitor the riparian area. Rangeland health is monitored in sites.

I'm just thinking about how much capacity there is to do all this. How can this be tweaked to take advantage of what is happening already?

- Need to be very clear the examples presented here are only examples – nothing has been finalized. Once we start looking at this more closely it may turn out that it is not a reasonable/feasible thing to do.
- BLM will build into the plan what monitoring has to be done. BLM have to figure out what has to be legally done, and what is feasible.

The Adaptive Management seems to be pretty dependent on monitoring for the triggers and thresholds. In an ideal world you'd have all the resources to do that monitoring. But we probably don't. Will the Adaptive Management plan prioritize the monitoring based on funding? Given limited funding, what would be monitored first?

- For each resource area BLM will have to identify the priorities. And that already happens now. We will build on what is already happening, and look to partners as well.

- There is no point in doing Adaptive Management if you're not monitoring, because the adaptation is arbitrary. If you have no ability to monitor then you choose the action that you think will be the best and you stick with it.

Panel Discussion: Reflections on Adaptive Management in Las Cienegas NCA, and how it might be applied in SPRNCA

(LCNCA = Las Cienegas National Conservation Area)

Questions for the panel are presented in **bold**.

Questions from participants are presented in *italics*.

Panelists

Doug Duncan, *US Fish and Wildlife*

Ian Tomlinson, *Lessee: Empire-Cienega allotment on LCNCA*

Gita Bodner, *The Nature Conservancy*

Karen Simms, *BLM*

Self-introductions and background:

Simms:

- 20+ years of experience working on the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA).
- LCNCA is a high desert grassland, higher elevation than here in Sierra Vista. In addition to native grasslands (floodplain and uplands), there are very significant riparian areas, nine federally listed threatened and endangered species, active livestock grazing (5 allotments), diverse recreational use, a National Register historic site, important cultural resources, and on-going restoration work.
- There has been a lot of work with local community.

Tomlinson:

- We use Adaptive Management on all our ranches and allotments (although not all as structured as the NEPA process).
- I'm very much proponent of it. Making decisions based on data/information entails a large commitment to monitoring. We've done that because we've seen the benefits. We use year-round monitoring.
- It can be hard to talk to some government agencies about it, because it's not rigid. It is "if, then" but you can't say exactly what you're going to do on each day. And that is the best situation for our management.

Bodner:

- Work with partners on LCNCA and other BLM sites as a "science advisor" to the process. Helping group figure out what kinds of data will be most useful, and how to most effectively/efficiently get the information.

Duncan:

- Have spent a lot of time on LCNCA. It is very important for listed species. USFWS involvement is required under Endangered Species Act. USFWS have to be consulted to analyze impacts of potential actions (such as an RMP).

Question 1: Can you share an example where Adaptive Management has been particularly successful and why?

Bodner:

- TNC got involved before our work on LCNCA on the Muleshoe Ranch to develop ecosystem based goals and more specific objectives. This grew into some work on prescribed burns and native fish. There was a lot of controversy about whether prescribed burning was going to be okay for native species. We laid out how we would know (by tracking vegetation, fish numbers, etc.). We decided fish were doing better after prescribed fire than they were before. That was a great outcome. And it worked so well that we wanted to try it in other places.

Duncan:

- There are no requirements for USFWS to do Adaptive Management, but we have been involved a lot on LCNCA. It allows more management flexibility. It reduces the workload later, even though it takes a lot of work upfront.

Tomlinson:

- This last 5-year drought is a good example. It's been good having all the data and having a group to work through things together. It's helpful to be able to put forth ideas that are supported by stakeholders and participants.

Simms:

- On LCNCA we started Adaptive Management with grazing. There were very divergent views about grazing there in the beginning. Through the process everyone agreed they were supportive of it continuing it, if it was done in a flexible way that involved monitoring. The flexibility was built into the grazing lease. Ian's lease says that he has to participate in the flexible grazing program, so that if the lease is it's transferred, that will continue.
- One of the most effective things has been the Biological Planning process built around grazing. It allows collaboration and public engagement in grazing and other activities. We meet twice yearly, and all are welcome. Monitoring results are presented. Ian discusses grazing. BLM discusses what they see and adjustments that may need to be made.

- The whole process itself is flexible and has continued to develop and change (e.g. development of technical teams to help with monitoring and informing decision-making).

Is there an Adaptive Management approach to the reintroduction of the prairie dogs?

Simms:

- Yes. One caveat is that on LCNCA we talk about Adaptive Management and the thing we didn't identify clearly enough in the plan are thresholds and triggers. We've also added more details as we've gone along.
- In the prairie dog example there was support and opposition. We've looked at it as experimental. There is monitoring of populations, recruitment, expansion from original sites, and effects on habitat. Some things we've noticed are positive (new burrowing owls and pronghorn moving in), but also some negative things (AZGF have learned that source prairie dogs are hard to find. There is high mortality due to predation and other factors and supplemental feeding has been necessary to maintain the reintroduced population. AZGF have had to do some mowing in areas with small populations).
- There are some thresholds for prairie dogs (e.g. if they go beyond 1,000 acres or onto private land, they are to be controlled).

Question 2: What are the most important components of Adaptive Management on LCNCA that could be brought into SPRNCA?

Duncan:

- Matt covered a lot of it. Monitoring, science – especially for endangered species management – these things are important.
- We look for plans and objectives that are specific with thresholds, triggers and boundaries and associated monitoring. Flexibility can be analyzed in ESA (Endangered Species Act) compliance issues.

Bodner:

- Shared goals and measurable objectives. It's hard to overemphasize how important that was and continues to be on LCNCA. As a group we collectively identified conditions we all want to see. There is a lot of buy-in that we're all willing to work toward something.

- It also gives us a benchmark of what we want to see, so we know whether we are moving off course. This has helped to foster collaboration and problem-solving.

Simms:

- The livestock ponds project has been one of the most successful Adaptive Management projects. No exotic fish in the watershed – worried about those being brought in.
- We've done a lot of monitoring on this. There were a lot of uncertainties. Lots of interesting things going on that we didn't predict.

Tomlinson:

- Communication, relationships, trust and hard work. BLM can't do it all by themselves. Stakeholders and partners are what make it work. The more trust there is between groups and BLM, the more successful Adaptive Management is going to be.

Duncan:

- The collaborative aspect of conservation and work at LCNCA has been even more important than Adaptive Management. Crucial for agencies to work collaboratively – they can't do it all themselves. It may take longer but you get a better result. And there are less concerns after the plan is done.

Bodner:

- Focus on results and outcomes. If a broad group of people agrees they want a certain set of results and agree to help, and to track the results, and check back in and see how it worked – this is the best situation.
- This is what makes Adaptive Management most different – the attention to results. What actually came out of the actions you took?

Tomlinson:

- I agree, but because there is so much information/data, there is a realization that there is not a *single* causal factor for the result you've seen. The Hardest part is teasing out all the factors. It's not just one thing. When we assess our success we are looking at all factors, not just one.

Can you give some examples of the kinds of things that are being monitored?

Simms:

- To put this in perspective - LCNCA has a ½ time manager, an outdoor recreation manager, and a part-time biological technician. That's it. So keep that in mind when thinking about resources to do monitoring. A lot of the monitoring is done through partnerships

- Things that are being monitored:
 - Range: Production, utilization and standard rangeland metrics;
 - Riparian: proper functioning condition (periodic cross-sections and how channel is changing), wet-dry monitoring, woody species density changes;
 - Fish: Every fall there is a fish count – population numbers and habitat. The initial two rounds of monitoring were done on the whole 10 miles of Cienega Creek;
 - Endangered Species: Mapping patches of Huachuca water umble, also agave for bats; and
 - Veg treatments: lots of monitoring and two research projects.

Question 3: What challenges are presented by the opportunity to bring Adaptive Management into the SPRNCA?

Simms:

- SPRNCA is a fairly fast-paced planning process. We've all done a good job working together.
- It will be a challenge to come up with adaptations for the management strategies. Need to prioritize and agree on what are the most important areas in which to incorporate Adaptive Management, this will help us focus on working through those. That will tie into the monitoring and how to prioritize/emphasize where the monitoring needs to happen.
- There are a lot of opportunities to use Adaptive Management on SPRNCA, and to do so even better than we did on LCNCA. Need to focus on identifying, and being specific about triggers.

Duncan:

- A challenge and opportunity is that the interest on LCNCA pales in comparison to SPRNCA. Lots of partners can also mean there are lots of divergent ideas/opinions.
- The Mexican border issue is yet another level of complexity and a challenge.

Simms:

- Things that are totally outside the control of this process are not things we should focus on for Adaptive Management (e.g. things that are happening in Mexico, or climate issues).

Bodner:

- Adaptive Management is always about a trade-off between flexibility in actions, and accountability for results of actions. In any place this balance and trade-off is different.
- LCNCA was very collegial – extra flexibility has worked there. That may be different here.
- The overall challenge is capacity. Adaptive Management efforts that have worked especially well have started out with what they could do. Those that bit off too much in the beginning have worked out poorly.

Tomlinson:

- Don't be afraid to screw up. It's not a reflection on the group or the plan – it doesn't mean it's a failure. There will be screw-ups. It's how you address them, and learn from them, that matters.

Bodner:

- Over the years at LCNCA I have witnessed a change in how people react to the “screw-ups.” Early on people were afraid of the data showing negative trends. As time passed, people got more comfortable talking about *why* things weren't working well. The Group figured out ways to take screw-ups and use them as learning opportunities. This cultural change has made it easier to recognize when things are going wrong or right.

Simms:

- The learning is a huge piece of Adaptive Management. Collecting data is great, but if you don't evaluate it, look at it, and learn from it, you're not doing Adaptive Management. It can be challenging.
- LCNCA has a website we post data on (www.lascienegasadaptivemanagement.net). There are Newsletters sent out. The data is out there for people to see. We've done lots of educational forums (Science on Sonoita Plain is done yearly).

Participant Questions for Panel

Where will we see Adaptive Management vs. Scenario Planning in the SPRNCA RMP? There are issues where you have low controllability and high uncertainty. How will these be identified and dealt with?

- (Simms) On LCNCA we've only started the scenario planning effort – it's new for us. It's probably the hardest thing to figure out how to put into an RMP. We may not achieve it up front, but may be able to bring it in afterwards. The best thing we can do in the RMP is to delineate some things that will be useful regardless of what path we go down.

In the plan will it be clear that something is an Adaptive Management strategy, and what things don't fall under Adaptive Management?

- (Simms) We should try to do that. Having cooperators and stakeholders involved will help us. When we share the alternatives we'd like that kind of feedback.

I (Audubon Research Ranch) came in half way through the planning for the Las Cienegas RMP. What did happen over that long period was that trust was built. BLM deserves credit – they stood up and had mud thrown at them and kept smiling. With SPRNCA I understand the need to get it done quickly, but don't forget about the need to build the trust with the larger community. The development of the plan is just another step in the management. It's not enough to just send in comments and then complain when it doesn't turn out the way they want. There needs to be a mechanism for people to maintain involvement.

Simms:

- In the beginning of the LCNCA process we didn't even realize what we were building and how much support we were building. 11 years into Biological Planning we have more people participating now than at the start.
- There are big opportunities in SPRNCA. Compared to almost any area we manage there is more data, science and baseline information in this watershed that could be used to help establish monitoring, thresholds and triggers. Amazing resources (people and information) here.

I am a bit alarmed by the shying away from the uncertainty issues, particularly climate, hopefully that will go into the plan.

- (Simms) There are pieces that lend themselves to Adaptive Management. Didn't mean to imply that climate will not be addressed, just that there are parts of it that are very uncertain (one is the rainfall patterns – and we don't know how that will play out in the future).

On political-social side, it seems that certain triggers would entail involvement and interaction with community.

I don't see anything in here that can address the real problem of the aquifer dropping. Hope RMP will address what BLM's plans are to mitigate that, because they're not doing much right now. (Reference to shocking results in latest United States Geological Survey [USGS] report).

- (Simms): We anticipate there will be strategies that BLM will look at in the RMP that should help mitigate that concern. If there are strategies anyone here thinks we should consider that we're not, please tell us.

There are 26 washes into the SPRNCA - BLM should be prioritizing which ones would be most effective to put detention bases in to help sustain the flow of the river. Army Core of Engineers could build detention bases with very little cost to the community. I mean real detention bases and not just storm water management facilitates.