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Whittell Forest & Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes Thursday, May 7th, 2020

Advisory Committee: Sarah Bisbing (Chair); Members: Norm Azevedo, John Christopherson, Anna Belle Monti, Pat King, Chris Pritsos, Vic Redding; Administrative Assistant: Kayla Armbruster

Guests: Ahmad Itani & Mridul Gautam

Welcome & Introductions

Committee was welcomed by the Vice President for Research & Innovation (VPRI) Mridul Gautam; the Associate Vice President for Research (AVPR) Ahmad Itani; and the Whittell Forest & Wildlife Area (WFWA) Director, Sarah Bisbing. Purpose of committee was reviewed as stated in the University Administrative Manual 7,010: Management of George Whittell Forest and Wildlife Area to make recommendations regarding the management, academic supervision, and management in alignment with the mission of WFWA and UNR. Committee members serve a renewable two-year term to and will meet quarterly or more often when needed to advise the University on matters related to WFWA.

a) Committee member introductions
    i. Sarah Bisbing, Ph.D., Director of WFWA and Chair of Advisory Committee.
    ii. Vic Redding- Vice President for Administration and Finance.
    iii. Norm Azevedo, Esq, community member and UNR alumni.
    iv. John Christopherson-Deputy Administrator of Operations for the Nevada State Division of Forestry.
    v. Annabelle Monti, Zone vegetation Manager for U.S. Forest Service.
    vi. Pat King, Ph.D., community member and UNR alumni.
    vii. Chris Pritsos, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Research, College of Agriculture and Biotechnology Natural Recourses (CABNR).
b) Kayla Armbruster, Administrative Assistant Research & Innovation at UNR

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Forest Planning & Progress Updates

a) Reviewed the current access to WFWA as the vision for the future is to allow access to University researchers and students.

   There are three potential access points to WFWA:

   i. Current access point is on the south end of WFWA through Hobart-Tanks road. A rugged road through state and federal land takes approximately 1.5 hours from UNR's main campus. Major barriers to access via this road include locking gates (n = 3) and rough terrain, which is not passable without a 4-wheel drive vehicle in spots (i.e., not passable by student vans).
   ii. Former access point on the east end of WFWA via Cliff Brothers Ranch road, which previously provided access rights via a formal agreement through private property. This short, direct route took about 45 minutes from UNR's main campus into WFWA but did require substantial financial investment from UNR to keep the road functioning. Prior to the fire and two heavy runoff years, the road already provided challenges, including a steep grade and washed out sections. Post-fire erosion has made the road impassable, and, even with repairs, will continue to wash out.
   iii. The third option into WFWA is via an alternative access point on the south end of WFWA via Franktown and Musgrove Canyon Roads. The road currently crosses private property, making it inaccessible. The road is, however, in the best condition and well-maintained by the private landowner and USFS. Access via this road would provide the shortest drive time and highest road quality in the short-term.

b) Discussed long-term options for access, including potential road access on the east end of WFWA. Access via the east arm of WFWA would be the shortest route from UNR and provide direct access from Franktown road. Route would require parcel property purchase and construction of a road through 7,000 linear feet of elevation from Franktown road to the Little Valley Meadow. A rough estimate has been provided by Granite Construction of $1.5-2 million to build a road through the eastern arm of WFWA.
   i. N. Azevedo- Expressed the importance of the WFWA for the University and a reliable access point into the forest as fundamental for the long-term use of the valley to secure permeant access so that that the university may do its work. Has had discussions with UNR legal about the possibility of trading land with the University of a 285-acre parcel, which includes an expressed easement that

gives access into the Big Canyon Road which is a good access road that has little erosion issues and would be passable by passenger vans.

ii. Discussion of additional access points: Northern access point Ridgeline road, has been taken over by the creek, it was the original historic road and is currently impassable. Additionally, it was discussed that Hobbart/Tanks Road has the potential to wash out in heavy snowfall seasons. Alternative historic road from Old Town road through the Hall parcel takes you up to the ridgeline but would require connection of roads.

iii. Next steps, create cost benefit analysis of each of the potential access points to compare financial, legal, and long-term viability constraints.

c) Update on Whittell Forest & Wildlife Area website redesign and making public information available including research, publications, and Geographic Information System (GIS) data which will be made available to the committee to review prior to public publication

d) Funding & Proposals in Review-

i. Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF) proposal through Western States Fire Managers Association Grants for additional fuels reduction on the eastern side of the area and a complete forest inventory on a regular period, which is critical to future forest management plans.

ii. Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) funding for reducing hazardous fuels for the forest similar to collaborative projects that have occurred in the West Lake Tahoe region.

e) Forest Manager position posting of full-time manager, 75% of time working on forest land and with community and agency partners writing protocols, 25% of time teaching forestry and advising Society of American Foresters Club.

f) Forest Management Plan and WFWA documents in progress

i. A forest management plan is being drafted, and Forest Service and sub-committee will review the management plan. Key missing detail is a comprehensive forest inventory.

ii. A use policy document- to determine policies, organizational structure, and liability forms for future use. Working closely with UNR legal to ensure legal liability to protect the future of WFWA

iii. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is in UNR legal review to collaborate with outside agencies.

g) Long-term development and fundraising goals

i. Maintenance on existing road network to build educational trails to include old Comstock trails.

ii. Repair the campground and have a sustainable facility for researchers and students.
iii. Funding to support land acquisitions and road construction to enable direct property access.

h) Discussion about the public access, signage, and fencing to designate the Area and reduce liability. It was suggested the Forest Manager stay on the property full time during the summer to monitor the property. A wildfire monitoring camera will be installed in June by Gram Kent, Director of the Nevada Seismological Laboratory and ALERT Wildfire to look into the Little Valley and send data. It was suggested that a patrol wildland fire engine could be staged on the property for the Forest Manger through the Federal Access Property Program.

Strategic Plan Overview

Open to the committees' suggestions and input into the draft of the Strategic plan which will be shared with the Committee.
Looking at other University models that have a user fee system to provide a small revenue stream to be used for maintenance of the WFWA

Open discussion

a) Committee members expressed the importance of preserving the Area as a research opportunity and for the students of the University. Committee discussed the history of fire in the area and that outreach to the community is needed as there have been damaged relationships.
b) N. Azevedo offered to discuss with UNR legal a limited license agreement for the Forest Manager, Director, AVPR and VPRI to access the Area.
c) Plans for a community meeting with the West Washoe Valley Fire Preparedness group are currently on hold because of COVID-19 restrictions. But would like to gather the community to share plans of forest treatment.
d) Nevada Division of Forestry is supportive of the direction the WF&WA and supporting undergraduate education in natural resources. Mission of NDF to provide technical assistance, staffing, and resources.
e) U.S. Forest Service surrounds the WF&WA and would like to collaborate, advise, and partner for management plans.
f) Access to UNR property is a primary issue that needs to be resolved. Evaluate access options with cost estimate for future fund-raising activities.

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Meeting adjourned

a) Thank you to the committee members for their willingness to serve and provide advice to the University on matters related to WFWA.
b) Quarterly meetings: The Committee will be contacted about next dates by Kayla Armbruster. Potential meeting dates in September and December.
c) To receive supplemental meeting document, map of Whittell, contact Sarah Bisbing