University of Nevada, Reno
Research & Innovation

Whittell Forest & Wildlife Area Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 20th, 2021

Present: Sarah Bisbing (Chair); Hunter Noble (Secretary), Anna Belle Monti (Fuels Forester, USDA), Pat King (Community Member), Tom Hall (Community Member), John Christopherson (Deputy Administrator, NV Division of Forestry), Chris Pritsos, (Associate Dean, College of Agriculture Biotechnology and Natural Resources), Vic Redding (VP, Administration and Finance), Ahmad Itani (AVP, Research), Mridul Gautam (VP, Research & Innovation)
Absent: None

Welcome & Introductions

1. Dr. Sarah Bisbing, Director of the Whittell Forest and Wildlife Area welcomed everyone.
2. Sarah Bisbing then introduced Mr. Tom Hall as the newest member of Advisory Committee. Tom is a West Washoe Valley community member who has practiced real estate law for decades in Nevada. He is a UNR graduate and former member of the Whittell Board and has been a strong supporter of UNR's research and academic missions for many years.
3. Tom introduced himself and shared some of his previous experience working with UNR, the former director of Whittell, and the WWV community's past interactions with the University, including before and after the Little Valley Fire. He hopes to be a liaison between the community and University and is happy to be working with everyone and make their acquaintance.
4. Dr. Mridul Gautum thanked Tom for his long-term support of the University. He emphasized the University's goals of using Whittell to foster the next generation of scientists, managers, and foresters, and that Tom's help will be crucial to this.
5. Dr. Ahmad Itani emphasized the desire to reach out and rebuild relationships with community members as well as UNR's mission of teaching and research. He explained that with new leadership, the addition of Sarah and Hunter Noble, we can work to be good neighbors to the community. He ended by thanking Tom and Dr. Pat King for their participation and perspective as community members, Ms. Anna Belle Monti and Mr. John Christopherson as agency partners, and Dr. Chris Pritsos, Mridul, and Mr. Vic Redding for their internal support.
6. Everyone then introduced themselves, and Sarah thanked everyone for their participation and kind words.

Previous Meeting Minutes

1. Sarah briefly reviewed and summarized the previous meeting minutes (09/2020).
2. The floor was opened for any additional comments, edits, or questions. None were brought forth.
3. Sarah brought forth a motion to approve the meeting minutes.
4. Pat seconded, and the motion passed.

Forest Planning & Progress Updates

1. Master Plan
    a. Sarah Bisbing briefly reviewed the history of the Master Plan, including the money allocated from the Office of the President and the work being performed by H&K Architects to perform a feasibility and cost/benefit analysis of all potential points of access and infrastructure. No decision or action has been taken, as the scope of the plan is only to analyze all routes.

b. Potential access points include:
    i. Southern Route through Hobart Rd.
    ii. Big Canyon/Musgrove Canyon Rd.
    iii. Cliff Brothers Ranch Rd.
    iv. Access through the "arm" of Whittell
c. H&K will analyze economic, social, political, operational, and ecological constraints of each option and some have already been ruled out for these reasons.
d. H&K plans to have a draft Master Plan ready by mid-March

Discussion:
- Vic emphasized that Whittell is a University Core Research Facility and is at the same level and prominence as all other University research facilities. He also emphasized that the Master Plan is a cornerstone document for all University facilities and displays the importance of Whittell as a research facility.

2. Strategic Plan Updates
    a. Sarah briefly reviewed and summarized the updated strategic plan document.
        i. Changes in the order of goals and priorities
        ii. Changes in languages regarding mission & guiding principles per suggestions from Advisory committee members

Discussion:
- Pat suggested some verbiage changing for greater inclusivity.
- Sarah reiterated that this is a 5-year document that will evolve as conditions change.
- John asked about controlling access to Whittell to prevent damage to sensitive areas and reduce trespassing.
- Sarah explained that adjacent private landowners sometimes access the property with ATVs.
- There is concern that vehicle use on sensitive habitats (e.g., meadow) can lead to long-term damage.
- There is also the bigger question of the type of long-term access that Whittell Forest will have.
- Questions were raised about the current fence infrastructure, where areas of concern are, and whether or not a fence would stop trespassing. It was also brought up that there had been previous burglary attempts.
- John emphasized the potential ecological damage to ecosystems from uncontrolled vehicular access and usage. Group discussed that no fence will keep everyone off and that if people really want to get in, they will, but a fence can act as a deterrent and that ultimately vehicles are the main concern, not day hikers/horse riders/bikers.
- Pat, Tom, and Chris brought up that Whittell Forest is a research facility and that research and teaching should be primary goals and research integrity needs to be protected.
- Opening the area to recreation for local community members should not take priority over research and education. There are also several other recreation options surrounding Whittell.
- Hunter and Sarah provided background on similar western research forests and their access types, indicating that they are often controlled and not completely open to public use.
- This conversation led into the next discussion point on Forest Use.

3. Whittell Forest Use Policy
    a. Sarah provided information on the development of the use policy and noted that it is a draft document based on similar documents developed for UC Berkeley and University of

Montana forests.
   b. Sarah suggested that each member review the draft policy and provide comments and feedback, which will then be compiled into a new draft.
   c. Sarah proposed the motion to have committee members review on their own time and edit.
   d. John seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. Funding & Grants in Review
   a. Sarah detailed the Western States Fire Managers grant in review, which includes up to $300,000 of fuels reduction and restoration for the eastern portions of Whittell.
   b. Hunter provided details on additional funding opportunities:
      i. Nevada Dream Tags – provides funds to restore resilience in at-risk Nevada habitat damaged by drought and wildfire to support wildlife and their habitat.
      ii. NDF grants – up to $292,000
         1. Landscape Scale Restoration
         2. Hazardous Fuels-Community Protection,
         3. Western States Fire Managers
      iii. New Beginning for Tribal Students - $100,000 for indigenous student support
      iv. NV Energy Foundation Grant – up to $25,000 for Environment/Community Enhancement or Education/STEM, but current priority is covid mitigation
      v. Robert F. Schumann Foundation – No ask limit and provides support for environmental and educational activities as well as cultural organizations and agencies.
      vi. RREA-NFF – USDA grant for up to $300,000 comprehensive extension programs that focus on forest and rangeland renewable resources.
   c. Sarah presented the three legs of funding for Whittell Forest
      i. Community Outreach, Education, and Extension
      ii. Access and Infrastructure
      iii. Research and Management

5. Teaching Opportunities
   a. Sarah and Hunter are working on reinvigorating teaching opportunities at Whittell but are limited by access (and COVID) at this time.
   b. They have developed an independent study course focused on wildfire restoration that will integrate learning about social and ecological aspects of restoration and integrate hands-on training .
      i. The course will use the Little Valley Fire burn scar as an opportunity to provide training to students and continue burn scar restoration efforts.
      ii. Hunter and Sarah will work with community members to identify areas of property for restoration work.
      iii. At this time, 15 students are registered.
   c. The course will ultimately be made into an internship opportunity to support student development and community recovery.

Discussion:
- Tom emphasized the need to increase the perception of the value of Whittell by the community, as it has often been viewed as an ivory tower as has the University. Working in the community will start to rebuild relationships.
- Sarah and Mridul emphasized the desire to work with community members and get things done.
- Sarah also emphasized that there is a lot of work to be done and limited resources at the moment, including funding, so volunteers and students are the best choice. She also reiterated that we must

be realistic about what can be accomplished but there are opportunities with student training, collaborating with partners, and working with outside groups like DroneSeed.

- John brought up a potential labor force by using the work as saw training for NDF staff. He also described potential for drone aerial imagery to be taken to help identify priority restoration areas.
- Chris asked about what types seed will be used, and Sarah explained that native seed would be utilized with help from the Sugar Pine foundation.
- Pat also noted natural regen is occurring.
- Sarah noted that Dr. Christina Restaino is working on generating a fact sheet about Little Valley fire restoration efforts with the help of Hunter and agency partners.

Forest Outreach

1. Letter to WWV Community
    a. Sarah detailed the letter that was sent to roughly 300 addresses in the WWV community.
    b. The letter explained changes in leadership and new developments at Whittell.
    c. It also included a listserv that community members can sign up for to receive emails regarding updates about Whittell.
    d. There have not been many responses yet, but those received have been positive.

2. Community Meeting with Little Valley Fire Plaintiffs
    a. Meeting was held on Jan 8th with several plaintiffs and UNR representatives as well as agency partners from NDF USFS, and LWF
    b. Discussion was centered around burn scar remediation, rebuilding trust with the community, and potential collaborations.
    c. Overall there was positive and productive discussion within this small group, with hope to expand for a larger community meeting.

3. Washoe Tribe of Nevada & California
    a. Hunter and Sarah have been in contact with representatives of the Washoe Tribe about collaborating and using Whittell Forest.
    b. Whittell Forest falls in the historic occupancy range of the Washoe.
    c. The Washoe are looking to conduct research in fire reconstruction to aid them in learning about their historic cultural burning practices. No fire would be used on Whittell but rather coring of trees and soils to determine past fire use.
    d. Sarah and Hunter discussed other opportunities for supporting a Washoe grad student and collaborative research using Whittell.
        i. This included research on meadow and streambank restoration, conifer encroachment, ethnobotany, and surveying of pre-historic sites

Forest Research

1. Wildlife Cameras
    a. Sarah and Hunter are collaborating with Wildlife professors from UNR to set up dozens of wildlife cameras across Whittell.
    b. They will be used to better monitor population numbers and movement of wildlife.
    c. Sarah recognized the support that Chris and CABNR provided to this project.
2. Wildfire Cameras
    a. Sarah explained that Dr. Graham Kent has agreed to install fire cameras on Whittell Forest.
    b. These cameras are used across CA & NV to monitor for wildfire activity and support suppression efforts
    c. A camera on Whittell will help protect the Little Valley and the WWV
    d. Link to the Nevada fire camera website.

3. Archeology
    a. Sarah and Hunter have been working with archeology professors on campus to facilitate a comprehensive cultural resource assessment on the property in collaboration with the Washoe.
    b. This assessment will help identify important cultural resources so that they can be protected appropriately.
4. Basque Studies
    a. Hunter has discussed collaborating with the Center for Basque Studies to bring students to Whittell to conduct research on historic Basque use of the property.

Open Discussion on Agenda Items

1. Tom requested a contact information sheet for all members of the Advisory Committee.
2. Pat suggested that once everything is established, especially access, that a semi-annual or annual open house should be held so that community members are kept in the loop on what is going on and understand the importance of the research forest.
3. John suggested adding the emails of advisory committee members to the website.
4. John also detailed some other potential funding opportunities and that he would be happy to assist.
5. Sarah reminded everyone to please review the draft documents and sends comments.
6. Ahmad suggested a one month deadline for review and submission of comments.
7. Sarah thanked everyone for being at the meeting.

Meeting Adjourns