

Conservation Committee Minutes—August 4, 2015 - FINAL

Attendees: Jim Daniel, John Parker, Cherry Payne, Mary Clark, Tom Brimacombe, Tom Bredenberg, John Cannella, Jerry Gulseth, Greg Colello (Board Liaison)

1. Guests: Bob Sandlin (second meeting), Roger Clark, Carol Clark, Dillon Gonzales, Torin Sanneth, Jan-Willem Jansens

2. July minutes: Cherry moved to approve, Tom Bredenberg seconded, unanimously approved.

3. Jan-Willem Jansens-Trail 101 project and annual report to USACE: two items remain to undertake on this year's work plan regarding trail improvements:

-Trail 101 between 1E and 1F is badly eroded and rutted. We are ready to commence work on this section of trail which entails brushing, grubbing a new trail tread for a short distance and installing minor erosion control features. We also need to close about 250 feet of existing trail to construct some rock dams, walls, fill ruts with debris, etc. Estimated resources are 4 yards of rock and 20-25 hours of labor.

-downstream to the south of this point, the trail is also rutted; we need to construct some rolling dips, water bars, one-rock dams, and rock bowls near the old stock tank at 1E and alongside the wetland area. Need: 4 yards of rock and 20-25 hours of labor.

Pending inspection, and due to rains, we may have had more erosion. Both sites are accessible for rock delivery pending permission to cross private property.

Boy Scout Eagle candidates from Troop #414 (Torin Sanneth, Dylan Gonzales) were at the meeting and think that they might be able to provide as many as 20 workers for these projects. A discussion with them indicated that these two projects might be likely Eagle projects. They think that their Scoutmaster would approve them. The Scouts would be responsible for not only organizing people, but also to bring tools that would be needed.

There was a discussion about possible work dates. It was decided that either Oct. 3 or Oct. 17 would work. We will shoot for Oct. 3rd, and keep Oct. 17th as a back up. The Scouts will need to write up a proposal which Jan-Willem can help with. The Scouts will send Jan-Willem the basic requirements of that write-up, and they will do a site visit with Jan-Willem. There was then a discussion about what is required of the Scouts in terms of leadership.

-USACE report: Next Tuesday, there will be a visit by representatives from the USACE to look at the wetlands and the work we've done. They require annual reporting for 5 years. We have submitted three reports as required; we are eligible for an exemption from reporting the final two years. If we receive that, we could free up some funds for another little project.

Jan-Willem looked at what the county did regarding the berms along the road by Trailhead 3; they did minimal work, but it seems to be holding for now. We might want to put something on the budget for next year.

4. Roger Clark-Bluebird Box Maintenance: The Bluebird trail that Roger knows about is the one along the Rail Trail. A resident spearheaded placing the boxes there. John Parker noted that the boxes may actually be creating habitat for English Sparrows. Roger said that maintaining Bluebird boxes is a lot of work. They must be checked weekly to prevent Sparrows and Starlings from taking up residence. Roger is constantly removing nests built by non-Bluebirds, which actually does not help them, but contributes to population growth that displaces the Bluebirds. Roger suggested the possibility of a local Bluebird Association taking over the

maintenance. If the boxes cannot be maintained, they should be taken down. The boxes need to be cleaned at the end of the season and checked in late winter to ensure they are ready to receive birds which can be as soon as next March. The nests need to be checked for ants and flies or the nest will fail. House Sparrows will invade and kill the adult Bluebirds and then usurp nest. Bluebirds usually raise two broods a year: May and late July. They are usually done by mid-September. Roger cautioned us that they can be a lot of work.

There is no local Bluebird Association, and as best we know, there is no one maintaining the boxes along the Rail Trail. Roger also noted that it does require someone who knows what they are doing—for instance, if the fledglings are large enough to fledge but not quite ready, they can flush and be jeopardized. Roger said that Eldorado is absolutely filled with Sparrows. Over 150 spp. of birds have been identified locally. The issue is people don't realize the importance of maintaining Bluebird boxes—Roger suggested that we offer an educational program on maintenance. Previously, a resident came to the Conservation Committee to ask permission to build and install 3 boxes in the Greenbelt which was approved. The specs on a Bluebird box are also pretty critical in order to exempt other birds from entering the cavity (but Sparrows can get into them even if built to specs).

The boxes along the Rail Trail are on County property. John will bring it up at the COLTPAC meeting. Nonetheless, there are hundreds of boxes in Eldorado. We should write a Vistas article to advise people about maintenance, etc. Roger will write something to run in the winter (maybe January).

5. Roger Clark-September greenbelt birding outing: Roger knows that there are lots of birders in Eldorado and suggested a birdwalk or series of birdwalks. We could try doing one and see how it goes. John said we have done them in the area of the Community Center. There was a discussion about doing something in either the Greenbelt or Trail 201 area of the Preserve. Roger would be willing to lead a walk. Anytime from last-half of September to first half of October could work. We will tentatively schedule it for October 10th.

6. Status of Greenbelt Work-VGPL to Rail trail: Most of this project is on County property. A trail was marked and they will do the bulk of the work. Steve Griego has completed paperwork the county required. The question is should we install a sign to direct people to the correct trail? There was some discussion about the routing of the trail to the Senior Center, but that has been resolved. There is one small section of trail where it is unclear if the proposed trail would be on county or ECIA property. Cherry raised the issue of a sign installed by a property owner living on Cuesta Lane in which they say that the currently used access is not the official easement into the Greenbelt. We will talk with Mark about that. We await the county to commence work.

7. Crossvane Repair: Tom Brimacombe reports that the new crossvane is holding up, although we have not had a major storm this year like the one from last September.

8. Quivera Coalition Grant (Trail 401): We received word that we did not receive this grant.

9. PNM Utility Easement (Trail 401): John wrote some modifications that Cherry added to the language of the draft agreement. Mark has the changes and it needs to go to the Board. We agreed to put this on next month's agenda to determine status.

10. Erosion control features near start of Greenbelt Pilot project: We have had three work sessions where several small structures were built and some seeding was done. All structures seem to be holding, but we have yet to see signs of seed germination.

11. COLTPAC: There was no meeting last month, but they will meet tomorrow. The Rail Trail is open from Santa Fe to Ave. Vista Grande. There does not seem to be any immediate movement to begin work south of Avenida Vista Grande which is the next phase of the project.

There was some discussion about a severe erosional gully by the southernmost trestle on the Rail Trail between Vista Grande and Ave. Eldorado.

12. The state of Los Alamos Park Greenbelt and Trail: A resident has advised the committee that this trail is in poor shape. Jim made a map. There is a lot of cholla in the area. The trail is in the bottom of the swale and is filled with cholla. There is only about 1/3 of a mile of trail tread that needs to be rerouted. Jim suggests we have a field day to look at it and assess feasibility. We will meet on August 19th at 9:00 at the foot of Reno Place to assess.

13. Report on Progress of Installation of remaining Trail Signs: The previous vendor is incommunicado. Cherry, Mark and a possible new designer/vendor will be meeting.

14. Status of budget expenditures YTD: To date we have spent \$4238. Less what we have committed for Trail 101 and the USACE report, we have a balance of about \$800.

15. Discussion of Mowing Pilot Project Trail: John Parker took some photos of weeds on the Pilot Project Trail. The trail tread is down to about 1-2 feet in width because of weeds along the edge. It is forcing people to walk single file. Mowing is somewhat controversial, but he thinks that in this case this might be worthwhile. Cherry suggested that we move to ask the Board for permission to mow the trail to a 4 foot width or the width of the smallest Kubota mowing attachment, and support the request with John's photos.

John Parker moved that we submit to the board a proposal to mow the Pilot Project trail in the Greenbelt using a riding mower to reinstate the trail to its original width. John will provide photos to Mark. Tom Bredenberg seconded and it carried unanimously.

16. Other Business: Mary has pointed out that there has been ATV use on the 105 Trail up an arroyo to Trail 101.

Tom Brimacombe says we can spend about \$200 to get a good camera that includes night-vision, high resolution, motion sensor camera. We agreed to purchase one camera to deploy as a test. Tom will pick out the model, etc. John Cannella suggested we get a cable lock for it too.

Tom and Jim will walk the boundary on the south side of Trail 400.

Scotch thistle issue: Over the weekend, a resident sent an email to the Roads Committee requesting they address the issue of Scotch Thistle, an invasive, growing along roadsides. Though ECIA does some mowing along the roadsides, this is a county issue. The conservation committee felt we could collaborate with the Roads Committee and send a proposal to the board to develop an education effort for residents, perhaps using the web site as a portal for this effort. It was noted that the scale of the issue is beyond our capability, and that a one-time education effort would not be adequate. Tom Brimacombe reported that he regularly cuts Scotch Thistle as he encounters it.

Tom Brimacombe has done erosion control work this past month on the 100, 200 and 300 trails.

17. Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Next Meeting: September 1st at 7:00 pm