

Minutes  
New Mexico Prescribed Fire Council  
Annual Meeting – Bosque del Apache Refuge  
December 3, 2013

Minutes compiled by Jack Dickey acting for Doug Boykin, Secretary, who was unable to attend.

Introductions:

Kent Reid, Chairman, welcomed the group and lead introductions. Kevin Cobble, Refuge Manager, welcomed all and gave a quick facility briefing. See attached attendance roster.

NM Interagency Coordinating Group Update - Provided by Jake Nuttall:

Work is continuing on revision of the smoke management agreement between federal agencies and State. Issues that are being worked on include problems with wording (MOU vs. agreement), NMED AQB inclusion as a signatory, and format. USFS grants and agreements personnel are working to develop a document that USFS can readily sign. No major changes in the document are anticipated.

With current budget constraints, all agencies need to be innovative in their approach to get funding for Rx fire projects including collaborative approaches utilizing CFRP grants and NRCS funding.

NM Rx Fire Council By-Laws and History – Provided by Kent Reid:

This meeting is the fourth annual meeting of the council. The first meeting was held in Albuquerque in 2009. July 10, 2010 is the official start date of the council.

Council by-laws indicate that for four officers will be elected annually. A steering committee is in place to handle business during the year.

NM Rx Fire Council Business:

Treasurer Report: No report - Jeremy Krueger, Treasurer was unable to attend. Kent Reid indicated that the council has not accumulated any money. Kent advised although the by-laws have a provision for collection of membership dues, that the council postpone collection of dues at this time. Attendees appeared to be in agreement as no dissention was expressed.

Elections: Kent Reid presented the following recommended slate of officers for 2014:

Chairperson - Don Kearney  
Chairperson Elect – vacant  
Secretary – Doug Boykin  
Treasurer – Jeremy Krueger

Kent asked attendees for a volunteer for chairperson elect position. No one volunteered. Kent asked the group for approval of the recommend slate to be present to the steering committee. Attendees appeared to be in agreement as no dissention was expressed. Election of the chairperson elect can take place at a future date through e-mail voting.

#### Sub-committee Reports:

Archaeology: Lisa Bye, Sub-committee Chairperson provided the following:

There have been no changes in SHPO rules over the last year. When obtaining SHPO clearance for Rx burns, it appears that a burner's past relationship/performance does come into play.

Liability: No report - Brent Racher, Sub-committee Chairperson was unable to attend. General discussion was that contractors burning on private land bare liability, but that there is a shared liability with both the contractor and landowner.

Building Capacity/Joint Powers Agreement: Don Kearney, Sub-committee Chairperson

Don provided the group with copies of a paper he prepared titled: *Response to New Mexico Prescribe Fire Council, Building RX Capacity, April 2013* – attached to minutes.

Don led a group discussion about building capacity and JPA. This discussion was intermixed with general group discussion items.

Federal agencies can assist each other with Rx burns as stated in the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA). Most often agencies cover their own costs as exchanging funds for prescribed burning is time consuming and cumbersome.

Compared to other states, many areas of New Mexico have a high percentage of private lands intermixed or adjoining federal lands. State Forestry provides information and technical review of agency burn plans involving private lands. However, due to the State's anti-donation clause and liability concerns, State Forestry cannot prepare plans or implement Rx burns for private landowners.

Insurance – In some states, burners have created premium pools to help with insurance costs. This has been accomplished by banding together. Individual Rx burn associations or multiple burn associations under the umbrella of that states prescribed fire council are able to reduce costs by shared expenditures and adherence to common operational standards.

Standards for Burners – Obtaining NWCG certifications is time consuming and expensive for private burners. Some states are providing burner education/training and have standards in place requiring training, experience, and preparation of burn plans as part of statewide burner certification programs.

Building Capacity – Landowners in southern states have formed Rx burn associations to assist each other with costs and equipment. Where in New Mexico would a burn association be viable? Possibly between the large ranges in the northeastern part: CS, UU Bar, Vermejo, Philmont. Jack Dickey, NMSF Socorro District, noted the Malpai Borderland Group has designated fire management areas in the Bootheel area of New Mexico. The Diamond A and other ranches are managing wildfires using contain/confine/control strategies as designated in the Malpai Borderland Fire Management Plan. Mark Meyers, State Land Office, indicated these strategies are also planned for State Trust lands in the Luera Mountain area.

Claudia Standish indicated that the NMED AQB has noted an increase in private landowner registrations of Rx burns. Landowners are utilizing contractors for some of these burns. Claudia reminded the group that when wildfires are managed for resource benefit, the smoke regulations require daily reporting.

Some states have “right to burn” laws.

Group Discussion Items: Don Kearney continued to lead the general discussion:

T & E Species: There was general discussion about Willow Fly Catcher, Mexican Spotted Owl, and Jemez Salamander impacts on Rx. Impacts to these species can be mitigated with proper planning and implementation.

Outreach and Education:

Jake Nuttall reported that during the Bosque del Apache Festival of Cranes a demonstration Rx is conducted for the public to observe. This burn, even with weather and smoke management challenges, has been a tremendous opportunity to educate the public about Rx and has been met with great enthusiasm from the attendees. Additionally during the festival, attendees can attend a field presentation on implementation of Rx on Unit 19 in the refuge

The group had discussions about implementing a demonstration Rx burn on private land:

Sue Hansen Putze, Ciudad SWCD and Krista Bonfantine, Arid Land Innovation indicated that they know of a landowner in the David Canyon area of Bernalillo County east mountains that may be interested in an Rx. The McBrides have up to 40 acres that have previously treated by thinning and could be considered for Rx.

Don asked the group if this is a project worth pursuing for on the ground education and outreach. Attendees appeared to be in agreement as no dissention was expressed. Sue and Don agreed to work together to start this project. Contacts to be made include:

- McBride, landowner
- Bernalillo County Fire Department

- State Forestry Bernalillo District
- East Mountain Interagency Fire Protection Association (EMIFPA)
- USFS Sandia Ranger District

Mark Meyers said he could provide information about the council to the Southwest Fire Science Consortium.

Funding Opportunities:

Lincoln NF has been successful in conducting Rx burns utilizing CFRP funding for Rx burns on adjoining federal and private lands. A burn boss is hired and local VFD resources are used.

Jake Nuttall reported that under the Partners for Wildlife program the USFWS has been able to do salt cedar removal on private land in the Broad Canyon area south of Hatch. The project involved mechanical removal and piling and subsequent Rx pile burning.

John Tunberg, NRCS, reported that the NRCS can assist private landowners with Rx burns under a “cost share” program. He and his staff can prepare and/or review Rx burn plans and assist with implementation. John indicated that demand across the state is greater than their funding. These burns are good training opportunities for local fire departments.

Sue Hansen Putze, Ciudad SWCD indicated that landowners have been able to use pile/slash burning as cost share under WUI grants funded by State Forestry.

Common Goals and Coordinated Projects:

Discussion about Rx burn associations continued.

John Caid, FMO for Express UU Bar Ranches, indicated that he would be willing to contact various ranches in northeast New Mexico (CS, UU Bar, Vermejo, Philmont) and explore the possibility of forming an association. The area around Clayton NM was also mentioned as a possible location where there might be interest in developing a burn association.

Jack Dickey commented that fire department capacity varies by county. Depending on the county, the decision to participate in an Rx burn could be up to the district chief or the county fire marshal/chief. The fire department’s priorities are fire protection/suppression and EMS. Listing a fire department as a contingency resource for and Rx burn could be risky considering their priorities.

Jack Dickey agreed to prepare contact list of county fire marshals/chiefs for landowners to inquire about the availability of fire departments for Rx burns.

Mark Meyers agreed to prepare a list of Rx Burn contractors for landowners.

### Smoke Management and Public Perception:

The discussion was generally about the frustration with seasonal fire restrictions and the difficulty in trying to implement Rx burns. One example expressed is when State Forestry initiates statewide restrictions when a specific area may not have that great of fire danger. It was noted that an exception could be applied for. There was discussion about the politics involved when State Forestry implements restrictions. The idea of a letter from this organization to the NM State Forester recommending the local NM District Forester have more influence in implementing fire restrictions was raised.

### Council Website:

It was agreed to continue to pursue this in the next year. Ideas discussed included:

- A link on the National Prescribed Fire Council website
- Using the free Google site to create a page

### Group Direction:

Goals for 2014

- **Pursue the McBride Rx Burn as an on the ground education and outreach program**
- **Create a New Mexico Prescribed Fire Council website as a resource for Rx burners**

Lunch: provided by Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute

Enchilada Casseroles, beans, rice, chips and salsa catered by San Antonio Crane restaurant

### Field Trip:

First Stop – Unit 19, Rx burn for restoration

Second Stop – North side fuel breaks, results of different types of mechanical treatments

Third Stop – Festival of Cranes Rx burn demo site

### Follow-up Discussion/Close Out

- How to promote our successes?
- Opportunities for speakers to talk about RX Fire at the NM Museum of Natural History.
- Involve NM state legislators. Invite to RX burns to demonstrate the usefulness of fire as a resource tool.
- Update e-mail list.
- Explore membership fee topic