

Minutes
Arana Gulch Adaptive Management Working Group Meeting

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on May 3, 2024

MEETING

Working Group Members present:

Travis Beck, City of SC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Ako Culver, City of SC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Kathy Lyons, Biotic Resources Group
Bill Davilla, EcoSystems West
Suzanne Schettler, CA Native Plant Society
Sylvie Childress, UCSC Greenhouses
Rachel Pausch, CA Coastal Commission
Teresa and Frank Locatelli, Ranchers
Mandy Culpepper, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife

AMWG Members Absent:

Devii Rao, USDA
Todd Lemein, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Other Attendees:

Kristy Young
Mark Locatelli
Justin Davilla, EcoSystems West
Ricardo Valdes, City of Santa Cruz Public Works Department

The meeting was held at the Santa Cruz Bible Church coffee room (9:00 -10:30) then at Arana Gulch (10:30 – 12:00). Travis Beck facilitated the meeting, representing the City of Santa Cruz Department of Parks and Recreation.

Meeting at SC Bible Church

Welcome and Meeting Objectives. Travis opened the meeting. Travis announced that he is leaving his position at the City of Santa Cruz so this will be his last AMWG meeting. The City will be recruiting a person, possibly a position focused on open space management and resource management and this person would take over AMWG facilitation.

The minutes from the November 7, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved.

1. Report on Fall 2023 Santa Cruz tarplant (SCT) management. Kathy reported on the fall management with Area A and C. The cross fence in Area A was installed in January and cows were placed into Area A South – West pasture. This was later than originally designed as the intent at the November AMWG meeting was to have cows into this SCT occupied areas in October 2023 to facilitate SCT seed/soil contact and seed dispersal and to experimentally compare grazing and mowing treatments. Cattle grazed this pasture for approx. 3 weeks in January/February and were then moved to Area A North. In fall 2023, some on-site SCT seed head/plants were hand-spread onto raked unoccupied areas outward of the 2023 plots to facilitate spread of the species. Cows were allowed to enter the Area C SCT Outplanting Area from November to mid-February to graze on grass and thatch and facilitate SCT seed/soil contact and seed dispersal.
2. Summary of 2024 SCT Out Planting. Kathy reported on the outplantings of SCT. 1,078 SCT plugs were installed over two days in February 2024. Most plants were installed in the Area A South-East pasture; however over 290 SCT were installed in the cattle enclosure in Area C. A map was presented showing the location of the install plots.
3. Summary of Spring Grassland/Prairie Monitoring. Kathy presented summary data from the grassland monitoring transects. A chart was presented showing the data. Similar to previous years, Area C and D are dominated by non-native grasses and forbs. Area C has 58 % cover by annual exotic grasses and 42 % cover by exotic annual forbs. Area D has 74 % cover by annual exotic grasses and 24 % cover by exotic annual forbs. More native species were found in Area A, with native perennial grasses proving 16 % cover in Area A South East and 33% in Area A South West, with native grass cover proved mostly by California oatgrass and purple needlegrass. Area A South West has 30 % cover by annual exotic grasses, 30% cover by exotic annual forbs, 8% cover by exotic perennial forbs, 0% cover by native annual forbs and 33 % cover by native perennial grasses. Area A South East has 38 % cover by annual exotic grasses, 31% cover by exotic annual forbs, 12% cover by exotic perennial forbs, 2% cover by native annual forbs and 16 % cover by native perennial grasses.
4. Summary of Canopy Height. Kathy report on canopy heights in February and April and a chart was presented showing the data. The target height from November to April is 5-8 cm. Area A North and Area A South West were in target in February as these pastures were grazed. Other pastures were above the target. In April, all sites were above target; measurements were taken prior to seasonal mowing in Area A South West and East.
5. Rail Trail Mitigation Projects. Justin Davilla and Ricardo Valdes reported on the status of the rail trail from San Lorenzo River to 17th Avenue (Segment 9); the environmental review has been completed and the project is in the design phase. There is the need to mitigate for impact to sensitive habitats and compensate for tree removal. Justin presented a summary table of project impacts to habitat types and a tree removal table.

Most of the tree removal will occur between East Cliff and 17th Avenue. Most oak tree removal will occur in the Schwann Lagoon area and in mixed riparian areas. Justin presented the mitigation requirements for impacts to environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHA) and the mitigation ratios being used. Ratios developed in the Gleason Beach memo from the Coastal Commission are being proposed; this includes categories for creation (3:1), substantial restoration (3:1) enhancement (6:1) and preservation (9:1). There is a minimum 1:1 ratio for wetlands. The agencies have requested the mitigation occur on City or County lands in close proximity to the project site and the Arana Gulch Open Space was identified as a potential site. Justin presented a figure depicting possible mitigation actions within Arana Gulch, focused on coastal prairie restoration, oak woodland creation, oak woodland enhancement and riparian creation. The actions would be consistent with the Arana Gulch Management Plan yet would not be double-listing actions required in the Plan. Justin anticipates there would be 10 years of active maintenance and monitoring of any mitigation actions. Mitigation would need to be implemented within one year of project initiation. Permits to regulatory agencies have not been submitted; so, the proposed actions in Arana Gulch are just preliminary and for discussion. Rachel requested the priorities of the Arana Gulch Management Plan be revisited at the next AMWG meeting and relook at Master Plan priorities in light of proposed rail trail mitigation opportunities. Travis reported that that would be a task for the new person hired by the City.

Field meeting

Site Tour, Updates and Discussion. Travis opened the field meeting with a walk over Hagemann Gulch, then to Area C SCT Outplanting Area, Area A South East and West, and then perimeter trail to view potential rail trail mitigation areas.

1. Field Observation of Hagemann Gulch: Group viewed eucalyptus tree falls and cleanup. There are opportunities for removal of non-native elms and ivy.
2. Area C SCT Outplanting Area: Viewed installed plants. Management action is to weed whip to the height of the SCT plants. Ako and crew will do this work.
3. Area A South East SCT Outplanting Area: Viewed installed plants. Management action is to weed whip to the height of the SCT plants. Ako and crew will do this work.
4. Area A South West and East: Mow all of area (excluding SCT outplantings) to 8". Ako and crew will do this work. One mowing has already occurred this spring (April).
5. Mowing and Cattle Management in Area A. Group discussed mowing and cattle management in Area A. Consensus is to keep mowing Area A South (East and West) through September to 8-inch canopy height. Allow cattle access to both east and west pastures in October after SCT have dropped seed. Allow cattle to compact seed into soil and create open ground.

6. SCT Seed Collection: Consensus is to do SCT seed collection in 2024 for additional seed increase. Consensus to evaluate the need for another outplanting of SCT plugs in 2025 based on results of SCT census in 2024. The AMWG should reconvene in September to review results of SCT census and decide on fall actions.
7. Rail Trail Mitigation – Prairie Enhancement Area: Group viewed area south of pasture fence and Justin discussed additional enhancement actions that could occur here, such as additional mowing, over seeding, outplantings and weed control. Potential for enhancement of area with butterfly nectar plant species.
8. Rail Trail Mitigation – Wetland Enhancement Area: Group viewed potential wetland enhancement area and Justin discussed possible enhancement actions that could occur here, such as invasive weed control, improving hydroperiod and possible trail improvements.
9. Rail Trail Mitigation – Riparian Creation Area: Group viewed grassy area on higher elevation along Arana Creek for riparian creation and Justin discussed possible enhancement actions that could occur here, such as invasive weed control, installation of woody trees and shrubs.
10. Rail Trail Mitigation – Overall Concept: Voting members of the group presented a general consensus that the mitigation plan is appropriate and consistent with the Arana Gulch Management Plan, subject to Coastal Commission, CDFW permit review and approvals.

Next Meeting: Not determined, but desired to be at the end of September 2024.