

Opening Welcome: Chris Brown welcomed everyone. Teresa Benson added how important this partnership is for everyone involved. Thanks to everyone attending.

USFS Staffing Changes: Stephen Elgart went over the numerous staffing changes. The USFS staff is constantly changing. Elgart hopes the new hires are more permanent with room to grow in their roles. As far as 2022 staffing, they're in the process of hiring seasonal employees, currently have hired 2 seasonal employees, which is 1 more than last year. Eric Rios is our temporary river manager. Elgart stated they hope to fill this position by June. The New Special use administrator is, Courtney Reutzel. The new deputy ranger is Mitch (no last name). And Phillip DeSenze will be coming back to the district for a detailed position.

Also, Elgart announced Rocky Mountain Recreation Company is the new camp concessionaire. As the new concessionaire they'll be managing lake campsites, which is very helpful, can move USFS focus from the lake to the river. John Stallone asked, is Rocky Mountain Recreation Company taking over management of camp 9? Elgart answered, yes.

Luther Stephens added, even with all the changes, so much has been accomplished between the USFS and outfitters. Everyone that has come in temporarily has done a great job. This model of cooperation is something that other districts dream about. Stephen Elgart reiterated his commitment to a supportive partnership and gave out his cell phone number. Elgart said if anyone has a question please don't hesitate to reach out to him.

Kern River Ranger Program / Wilderness Resource Assistant: Eric Rios discussed what the program has been focusing on. Rios is working on detail and is hoping that what he has set up will help the new permanent hire. Rios targeted 3 areas of key interest. 1) Water quality monitoring. They now have a few years of collected samples. 2) User capacity. This involves collecting data on how use impacts our river values. Also, collecting better data on use. Making the private boaters permit system more intuitive and reporting. Rios also added user capacity includes campsite monitoring and examining the resource impact. Looking at pre and post-season campsite numbers. Replanting vegetation in areas where vegetation has been destroyed. Tulane Sheriff J. Ballie mentioned it's difficult to identify where the re-vegetation is planted. If possible, see where the campsites are before planting. If planted in the middle of a site, people will pull them out. 3) Create a visitor survey to see better data to support the management system. Rhonda Stallone asked, how will this survey be implemented? Rios answered, create a pamphlet and pass it along to the campers.

Account Status: Courtney Reutzel filled in for Karen Miller and discussed how outfitters should be reporting their accounts. Reutzel said, please mail a hard copy on official letterhead on when you plan to begin operations. For monthly use reports, mail to supervisors office, it does not need official letterhead. For reconciliation payments, mail hard copies on official letterhead. Reutzel added the letterhead is important. For year-end reports, please make sure they're segmented between, the Forks, Upper, and Lower. Also, photos sales should be segmented too.

Update on the USACOE Dam Reconstruction Project: Evan Nelson provided some dam history and construction updates. The original dam was built between 1951-1953. In 2005 a dam safety study gave the dam a DSAC 1 rating. The worst rating for a dam. 3 failure modes were identified overtopping, seepage, and seismic. All 3 problems required lots of work. In 2012 dam modification study looked at Mitigation for the dam. Borel abandonment, dam raises, filter/drain downstream embankment, ES/LW construction, SS improvements, and seismic considerations. Construction began in 2017. Overall Progress, 80% completion, expect to finish Aug-Nov 2022. By feature: east to west. Aux. Dam: 92% (topped out, upstream armoring). Boat Ramp 19: 38% (will not be open to the public until DSMP is complete). Labyrinth Weir: 93% left abutment wall and two cycles remaining. Emergency Spillway: 85% (excavation to complete) Service Spillway: 81% (ped. Bridge). Main Dam: 52% (downstream, upstream embankment, control tower). MDRA/HWY 155: 99% (seasonal punch list items). Fill Plan, as of 16th of February, will not be able to fill the lake to the gross pool this summer unless March miracle, 200-250K AC-FT storage max.

Luther Stephens asked, what are the odds they'll release the restrictions on the lake capacity next summer? Nelson answered, In order to complete our Post-Implementation Evaluation (PIE) and improve the DSAC rating, we first have to fill the lake to the Operating Restriction (~360k AC-FT). During this initial filling period, we will be monitoring our instruments to see how the dams perform, and if all goes as expected we will increase the fill up to the gross pool elevation and continue to monitor. The significance of this is that if we do not get sufficient snowpack to fill the lake to the Operating Restriction or gross pool, we will not be able to complete the PIE and thus will not be able to change our DSAC rating. From a construction progress standpoint, we will be ready, but we will still be dependent upon the amount of snow we get next year.

Rocky Mountain Camp Concessionaire: Judy Wilson of Rocky Mountain Recreation Company wasn't able to attend and Stephen then updated that as of very recently, she was no longer with the company. Brett Duxbury asked, in years past the non-commercial boaters had an arrangement with the camp concessionaire for access through some of the camps. There use to be signage. Duxbury would like to bring this to the attention of the new concessionaire. Duxbury said he has not been down at Sandy Flats to see if the signage is still there. Evan Moore added, the signage at Sandy Flats is old and needs to be replaced. Matt Volpert confirmed that the signage was there at Sandy Flats. Stephen Elgart answered we'll try and get any old or faded signs replaced. Please let him know of any signs needed to be replaced. Tom Moore asked, is the USFS managing both Hobo and Miracle campsites? Elgart answered, yes. Hobo will be operating year-round, with a Forest Service presence.

Fire Season Outlook: Teresa Benson gave an update on fires and what to expect this upcoming season. Benson said, in the past two years the forest has experienced so many fires, almost 300,000 acres have burned in Sequoia National Forest. Over 100 fires were reported last year. Most of those fires were caused by lightning. Every fire fought was under full

suppression. Benson is leaning towards this season also being fought under full suppression. For this season, they're very active with prescribed burns, and the long-term goal is to have a dedicated prescribed burn crew. Tom Moore commented, we understand the USFS has a difficult job in managing fires and dealing with closures. We would like it to be noted, that whenever a closure is issued it has a tremendous impact on not just our businesses, but the community as a whole. Our concern is that when a fire occurs, closures across the forest will be the first option. We ask for the closures to be more artfully managed. Benson answered, yes, I agree. We don't take those closures lightly. Our primary issue is keeping people safe, and evacuating them from hazards.

Forks of the Kern: Stephen Elgart discussed the Forks of the Kern closures. Elgart said, as of right now all the roads that typically open in April are on schedule to open. Elgart noted, that hazards still exist and closures could happen. Gary Ananian added, there's a fly fishing club out of San Diego that has been working on the trail down to the Forks. It sounds like the trail is in good shape. Elgart reminded everyone when walking down the trail to please use the switchbacks and not go down in a straight line. Elgart also mentioned he'll update everyone on the Fork permitting system for the 2022 season. Chris Brown asked, are the packers still able to operate? Teresa Benson answered, yes, we're working with the packers right now on getting a temporary permit. Chris Brown thanked Teresa for the effort to get the packers a temporary permit. Without the packers, we won't be able to operate on the Forks.

BLM Staffing Changes: Brian Ludt updated everyone on staffing and access points. There have been no staffing changes with management. With rec planners, those positions have been more fluid. There are no changes at Granite. The step on the ramp is fixed. Keysville, the good news is that there will be an increased presence, especially during busy weekends. The bad news is the road did not get grated, and it is not looking likely that it will happen this spring. Chris Brown added, this year many of the outfits are anticipating launching from Granite or Put-in B, basically any day the Lower is sub 800, which could be the whole season. Is there anything, the BLM can do to help alleviate congestion at those sites? Ludt answered, because it's an access point there's nothing we can do from prohibiting people from parking there. The BLM could set up temporary signage and we can continue to have boots on-site, and manage the congestion. Ludt noted, it's helpful to know that the outfitters plan on using the site for much of the season, which will help with planning. Brown also mentioned that the Slipperary access is starting to degrade and needs maintenance. Ludt answered, yes, the BLM has noticed that and has engineers working on it.

Hobo Access Improvements: Stephen Elgart updated the access and camping situation at Hobo. The Forest Service is opening the Hobo campground year-round. Elgart anticipates that with the opening there will be an increased presence, and someone will be stationed at Hobo on the busy days. Elgart asked the outfitters to set up a separate meeting to go over the parking, and access issues at Hobo. It would be helpful for the Forest Service to see the congestion

issues and understand better what is needed to help. Chris Brown and Skip Volpert volunteered to set up a meeting.

Limestone Railing: Matt Volpert talked about finishing the Limestone project. Volpert said the biggest issue has been solved, filling in the rocks, but we would love to complete the project and add the railing. Stephen Elgart asked the outfitters if someone would be willing to take a field trip up to Limestone. Evan Moore said he would be happy to. John Stallone asked, can we see how much of our 3% is available. Courtney Reutzler answered that she can reach back out to everyone with the amount.

Water Outlook for 2022: Luther Stephens gave an update on the water outlook. To better understand this year, Stephens highlighted a few key stats from 2021. Last year the lake was at 95K acre-feet, today, it's at 64K. Last year, the snowpack came in around 24% and because of the drought the runoff went back into the ground and not into the river, it was a perplexing water year. This year, Stephens has gone from pessimistic to optimistic. The snowpack is around 50-60%, which is much better than last year. Even with the low lake storage, Stephens is anticipating a longer and higher lower Kern season.

Outfitter Outlook, Whitewater Voyages: Luther Stephens is excited to offer the public a longer season on the Lower Kern. Being able to offer the entire two-day and class IV option is huge.

Outfitter Outlook, Mountain River Adventures: John and Rhonda Stallone are excited for the season and ready to offer outstanding trips.

Outfitter Outlook, Sierra South: Evan Moore said the last two years have been difficult, but Sierra South made the most out of what they had and continued to run great trips. They're anticipating a busy summer.

Brush Creek: Evan Moore also discussed the Brush Creek race, with the lack of snow he does not think the event will happen this year. It's hard to plan when there's not enough snow.

Outfitter Outlook, Kern River Outfitters: Matt Volpert said that last season showed KRO just how much the public loves rafting the Kern. Even with the low water, guests and guides had a great time. KRO is gearing up for another busy season.

Kern River Conservancy Update: Gary Ananian said that Kern River Conservancy has had a busy offseason. They've expanded to other drainages, under the umbrella of Southern Sierra Conservancy. Maria Ventura will be taking the lead for the Kern section. As far as the season outlook, Anania is anticipating a big rush of campers moving to the Upper Kern, looking for dispersed camping. For the Lower Kern, Ananian said, it's just busy year around. Lots of graffiti and illegal trash dumps. Anania said they have over 1300 volunteers. Let him know where the area of need is because they're ready to go. Anania also mentioned that he's looking forward to Lower Kern cleanups with the outfitters.

Ananian highlighted a few of the agency's issues. The biggest is the long-term staffing with the Forest Service. A lot of the big projects that can take many years to complete are often halted because of new staffing or no staffing. It's difficult to work together when it's a revolving door of people. Stephen Elgart agreed, and added, all the positions that the Forest Service is flying right now are growth positions. Elgart hopes this will encourage people to stay and be a part of the community. Luther Stephens noted how important it is to have the grassroots movement of the Kern River Conservancy. It is so effective and good for the Kern river community. Thank you Gary for all the dedicated hard work.

Tulare County Sheriff: Tulare Sheriff J. Ballie discussed the logistics of Tulare county Sheriff. He covers 1200 square miles, with 1 deputy. Communication can be difficult, based on lack of service. If you need assistance, line of sight is best, or contact dispatch in Porterville. They appreciate all the communication from the outfitters and the public, if you see something say something. Sheriff Ballie said he'll continue to keep the congestion at Johnsdalle bridge open. Also mentioned that they can only enforce CA law, not federal, and if you see him in Kern county unless it is life-threatening he cannot help.

Search and Rescue: Brian Baskin said the department is understaffed. They did however get a new truck which will help better serve the community and visitors. They're happy to respond to any issues, please let them know. Tom Moore said, that all the outfitters are willing to help and assist if needed too.

Bin Items, Partner Trip: Chris Brown said he would like to organize the partner's trip again. It's a great opportunity for everyone to experience the Kern together and see the trips firsthand. Teresa Benson said that would be terrific, what's a good month? Brown answered, June. They'll coordinate a time.

Stephen Elgart ended the meeting with his appreciation for the community and partners involved. He appreciated the willingness of everyone to be involved. Please don't hesitate to reach out to him if you have any questions or concerns.