My name is Brian Miller. I used to manage the Wind River Ranch where we had extensive projects for river and arroyo restoration. All restoration is a long-term endeavor, and planning should include a consistent and sustained commitment towards recovery. Recovery will take decades. Recovery can be difficult to see in short-time spans. While a single year may accumulate say, three inches of sediment deposition, several decades of three-inch gains is significant.

It seems to me that restoration is the top priority. The damage from flooding will last several more years. With hydrophobic soils after the burn, run-off after rain poses many risks. One is arroyo formation with associated erosion and lowering the water table. The Santa Clara Pueblo did a good job of reducing that damage after the Las Conchas fire by using Bill Zeedyk’s techniques, and both Bill and the Santa Clara Pueblo could offer good advice. So could Hermit’s Peak Watershed Alliance. Areas outside of the Santa Clara Pueblo that were left untreated produced arroyos up to 15 feet deep in a short period of time. Where arroyos have already started, rock and log structures can capture sediment and raise the floor of the arroyo, thus raising the water table. It can recharge dried springs. Rocks and burned logs can be used to build erosion control structures.

Some techniques, like gabions or dirt dams, can cause future problems, even though many people still use them. The goal is not to stop the water. It is to slow the flow so that water seeps into the soil and sediment is retained behind the rock structures.

The Gallinas River needs care, but the efforts on the river during the fire were unsound and were unproductive—even damaging. There is a bullet addressing this concern in the initial ideas document, but the key is “how” it is addressed. The “how” applies to all bullets in the Watershed, Riparian, Aquatic, Wetland section and in the Engineering section. It will be important to have ecological expertise evaluate what engineers propose. Engineering goals can be at odds with ecological goals. Road design is an excellent example of this conflict, and that includes placing culvert crossings, hardening roads, and improving existing roads.

In the Forestry section goals are also important. Is the goal to be fuel reduction or a forest that has ecological function? Wildlife management concerns should be more than just the game species, or even simply targeting a few protected species. It should be restoring the ecological community of plants, animals, and insects. It is the community interactions of all parts that produces a healthy system. Insects are frequently overlooked, or detested, but important in so many ways. They are declining internationally at rapid rates, and spraying is a major factor.

How will tree removal be addressed? Will it be done by timber beasts / corporate interests? How is a hazardous tree defined? Plus, dead snags are important to wildlife. Will some dead trees be left standing? Lewis’ woodpeckers love a stand of burned snags. It makes perfect sense to have fuel reduction efforts around residential areas but have a goal of ecological function outside of residential boundaries. Some of the recreational structures, and seasonal residences, could be decommissioned. If there is fuel reduction around all isolated structures, it increases habitat fragmentation, something that is already a threat to nature. All in all, recreation should be a lower priority than ecologically healthy forests and reducing the impact of future fire.

Thinning heavily in older growth areas is harmful to some species like goshawks and spotted owls. Heavy thinning should be avoided except in residential areas with multiple houses. We should support cross-boundary activities for fire and erosion control. In areas where fire has been suppressed and are overgrown, light thinning and removing ladder fuels, will be necessary along with prescribed burns to prevent crown fires.

We can’t stop wildfires. Trying to do that produced the dense forests we have today. We can, however, learn to better live with fire, which is an important ecological factor.

Fencing should be wildlife friendly. There should be an 18-to-20-inch gap between the bottom wire and the ground with a 12-inch gap between the upper wire and the second wire (to prevent a hoof being entangled between those two wires). The gap between the bottom wire and the ground allows animals as large as deer, pronghorn, and bear to slide underneath. Livestock use should be excluded from areas undergoing restoration. The fewer fences, the better for wildlife.

I know nothing about Chloeta. Searching the internet seems like they are a large company that relies on government contracts. They are owned by a Cherokee man. The rest of the senior staff are non-native. Some of their senior staff have backgrounds in extraction industries. You should investigate their overall philosophy. Their internet reviews seemed to be either 1 star or 5 stars. Reviews are difficult to judge. I have been dealing with a solar company that had the same rating dichotomy and discovered that the 5-star reviews were self-written. The 1-star reviews were accurate to my experience. Chloeta may be good (even if out-of-state and corporate), but I would still like to see more local expertise involved. Corporate strategies can sometimes be influenced by profit instead of the community (ecological and human).