

DWaRF Collaborative – Field Tour
Wednesday June 1, 2016 1pm-4pm

In attendance: Ryan Cox, Kevin Heiner, Eric Janes, Derek Padilla, Dave Casey, Martin Astowitz, Pat Kantor, Tanner Hutt, Pam Wilson, Thurman Wilson, Bruce Short, Phil Kemp, Phil Ayers, Duncan Rose, James Dietrich, Becca Samulski, Jim Mimiaga, Sam Greene

Stop 1 – Dolores water tanks – The group got an overview of the Town of Dolores from the hillside where the water tank stands. Fire hazards around dense housing were apparent from this perspective. This stop also provided a good perspective on the vegetated canyon slopes. The north facing canyon slope is densely forested but has pockets of lower brush and grassy areas, possibly where past fires have burned.



[View to the top of the watershed, east end of Dolores and canyon slopes from the town water tank. Photo by Thurman Wilson.](#)

R.J. Cross spoke about the Town of Dolores water supply. The town draws most of its water from a well that covers drinking water demand through the winter. Water drawn from the Dolores River covers increased summer water demands. The town storage tank can hold enough water to supply drinking water for the town for approximately 5 days, or 1-2 days of summer demand if irrigation watering restrictions aren't put in place. The County, DWCD, Division of Water Resources, and other water users have also been working on a water diversion plan to close water outtakes from Dolores River in the event of a debris flow or other water contamination.

Stop 2 – Intersection of Road 526 (Dolores-Norwood) and Road 528 (House Creek) Ponderosa Pine Partnership treatment



Participants list attributes of the treatment area that they liked or didn't like after spending some time walking through the unit. Photo by Thurman Wilson.

Phil Kemp shared some background about the project area. This 10-12 acre unit was thinned in the mid-late 1990s, a prescribed burn was conducted within a couple of years of thinning, and some planting has been done by students. The project had been marked to create groups of trees and openings. One or two clumps (3-6 trees each) were torched during the prescribed burn. Today, most of those trees have fallen



Snag burned in prescribed fire has many bird homes in it. Photo by Thurman Wilson.

over with a couple of burned snags left standing. This represents some loss of timber. The group noted that timber was harvested from the site prior to the prescribed burn, and that this represents less than a dozen trees lost on 10 acres out of 92,000 acres of Ponderosa dominant forest in the DWaRF landscape. The thinking at the time was that another stage of timber harvest could occur approx. 40 years after project implementation.

This treatment site set a perfect backdrop for beginning to list Key Attributes that might indicate successful forest treatment. This list naturally began with ecological attributes given the participants and backdrop, but we hope to add some economic considerations as we move toward projects on the ground together.

Key Ecological Attributes (Things the group liked, or would have liked, to see at this ponderosa pine site)

- Trees are oriented in clumps, openings and individuals
- Shrubs are healthy throughout
- Big meadows (could be bigger, especially in drainages to allow re-development of riparian areas)
- Lots of birds and bugs
- Genetic diversity – more noticeable in canopy openings
- Robust root systems
- Seedlings present
- Presence of grasses (increase in grazing land)
- Presence of duff, but not too thick
- Presence of woody debris
- Edges are created for wildlife
- Lack of invasive and non-native species (some cheatgrass and thistle on site)

Stop 3 – McPhee Reservoir at House Creek campground

At House Creek, the group observed the vast piñon/ juniper shrublands surrounding the reservoir. The group discussed the need to know more about how sedimentation and settling occur within the reservoir to better understand how fires of different sizes and intensity around different areas of the reservoir might differently impact the water source. The group wants to learn more about how much water MWC has in storage.

Whereas ponderosa pine is adapted to low-intensity fire, piñon and juniper will generally burn as a high-intensity, stand replacing fire when the wind moves the fire beyond a single tree. An objective of working in the piñon/juniper is to limit the size of fires. More info about sedimentation and predicted post-fire effects could help determine appropriate sized pockets of forest to strive toward.

Updates and Next Steps:

Derek Padilla reported that the Forest Service is initiating their High Valued Resources and Assets inventory and analysis for Dolores and Columbine Districts.

Becca asked for guidance on any specifics that the group would like to see us share at the Dolores River Festival. She also asked if anyone had expertise in go fund me pages. A few fundraising ideas were shared, including making fundraising for DWaRF competitive with a fun prize for the biggest fundraiser such as shaving someone's head.



Finding the shade while viewing the P/J slopes surrounding McPhee Reservoir. Photo by Thurman Wilson.