

Dolores Watershed and Resilient Forest (DWaRF) Collaborative

Meeting 16

6-7-17, 1:30-3:30 at Dolores Water Conservancy District Office

In Attendance:

Dwayne Findley, Mike Preston, Rich Landreth, Misty Fowlds, Greg Kemp, Eric Janes, Pam Wilson, Thurman Wilson, Mike Znerold, Thurman Wilson, Bill Baker, David Sitton, Debbie Kill, Rebecca Samulski

UPDATES

Historic Montezuma National Forest

Bill Baker shared some historic forest inventory maps for the “Montezuma National Forest” and some other historic forest research he has been compiling. These show the changing nature of the forest. Dwayne mentioned that the County may be interested in these.

Washington D.C.

Eric spent a ½ hour on June 5th with Shawna Legarza, the Director of Fire and Aviation at her office on his recent trip to Washington D.C.. He got a tour and gave a 6-7 minute introduction of DWaRF to Shawna using [this two sided overview paper](#). Shawna sent Becca an email that afternoon and Becca replied with an offer to show her work in our area sometime when she is at her Mancos home.

Western Excelsior

The fire at Western Excelsior is already having ripple effects in the timber industry. Craig Muzzy, David Sitton, and Dwayne Findley have shut down aspen logging for the summer because there is nothing to do with the Products Other than Logs. All of Excelsior’s aspen sales have been put on hold and/or are requesting extensions from the Forest Service. Eddie Comisky did not feel comfortable coming to speak on the fire and future plans, yet, as he doesn’t have any new information on whether or not Western Excelsior will be building back. The industry is concerned that FS may not put up new timber sales with the diminished demand, and Wall Wood can’t take all of the wood from the aspen sales that are currently available. Wall Wood is transitioning to the extent possible to the beetle killed pine. Forest Service has been willing to extend the sales.

The loggers are requesting that the aspen sales use a sawlog specification rather than P.O.L. specifications. They are also trying to get P.O.L. size reduced from 6” to 5” for purchasers. The aspen loggers and processors are going to submit a letter with a formal request to change P.O.L. specifications to the Forest Service. They want to leave that timber in the woods’ maybe some option like cutting and skidding for firewood program. Is there a way to do this in the aspen by felling and yarding it for people to come up and get. The San Juan National Forest is interested in working with industry, and hopefully the letter will help Travis Bruch and Kara Chadwick take the request up the chain of command.

Aspen Wall wood is also looking for a way to utilize some of the P.O.L. in order to keep the aspen industry alive.

Forest Health Advisory Committee

Mike Preston attended his first State Forest Health Advisory Committee. It is made up of diverse participants and is interested in moving toward action quickly. The group has started with three key recommendations:

1. Need to get the burn program going in Colorado again.
2. Develop and share a strong statement of need for a fix to fire borrowing.
3. Make a statement about what is a sustainable timber harvest program.

FHAC plans to review the biomass bill and consider trying to bring that back.

Stewardship contracting is really starting to take hold and forests are seeing a lot of savings through prescriptions by description rather than full harvest marking. Mike Preston thinks it will be helpful if DWaRF can frame our timber problem toward creating strategies to sustain timber industry following the Western Excelsior Fire.

Mike Preston is tasked with reviewing watershed health actions in the Colorado Water Plan and identifying the actions that are applicable to forest health. He shared these sections of the Colorado Water Plan. The [Colorado Water Plan](#) is available online.

The State Forester expressed that he isn't able to make unilateral recommendations on forest policy, so it is very useful to have a group like the FHAC to develop and put a voice behind recommendations. Mike also sat next to Nellie Goodwin with WAPA, and he suggests connecting with her to figure out if we can get creative and expand work along powerlines. Bill Baker mentioned that power lines have been a major cause of wildfire starts. Becca mentioned that while working with WAPA and Tri-State to fully mitigate their easements or right-of-ways and beyond is a great effort. However, they actually do not make great fire break locations because of the risk to firefighters of electricity arcing to the ground through the smoke.

The Forest Health Advisory Committee wants to endorse the Colorado Water Plan and look for ways to create stronger ties between the water plan and forest health. Mike Lester, the State Forester, plans to write a State Forestry amendment to the Colorado Water Plan. This year the state put \$1 million in the budget for watershed restoration.

San Juan National Forest

Debbie came on behalf of Derek. The Trimble Prescribed burn went well and met the objectives on a little over 1,500 acres.

On June 2nd, a 30 day comment period was opened for prescribed fire NEPA across Dolores District Pine Zone. They are striving to expand acres of prescribed fire each year and some oak mastication for wildlife habitat benefit is also included in the proposal. The oak mastication could potentially be matched with Habitat Partnership Program funds to get more accomplished. **Becca needs to send this out for comment to DWaRF Collaborative.**

Pam added that the SJNF is getting \$1m for Good Neighbor Authority projects, and at least \$80,000 will go toward work in Chicken Creek area and will enable State Forest Service to do the contracting on those federal lands. This project will tie in and be additional matching funds toward our CAFA funding for private lands in the Joe Moore Reservoir area.

Mike Preston expressed that there is so much planned and happening on the ground that it would be great to have all of these projects and potential projects on a map? We need to know where work is happening and be able to share this information easily among our group.

Mike also asked if comments on the intent of the SJNF Landscape Rx Burn area will be accepted at this time. The group discussed having a letter on the prescribed fire plan drafted for comments by the group collectively, and only if there is unanimous consent on sending a letter will we send one. If even one member dissents, then members are free to submit their comments independently. Everyone who is active needs to agree unanimously if we are going to submit a letter in the name of the DWaRF collaborative.

Workshops – Water Fund and Open Standards for Conservation Practice

Becca Samulski traveled with Aaron Kimple, Celene Hawkins, and Ann Oliver to Santa Fe in the beginning of May for a water fund workshop put on by The Nature Conservancy. It was a world class workshop with five groups accepted to attend. Our team went down to explore a San Juan/Four Corner water fund. We realized that any drainages west of the Mancos weren't going to be of interest to Farmington or industrial water users in that area, and that the Navajo Nation and Lake Powell water users may be too big of a stretch at this time. So for the Dolores we will focus on continued and hopefully stable support from the immediate water users in the near term. Becca will set up a presentation to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council with Richard Morris.

The Open Standards for Conservation training had Aaron Kimple, Misty and Jeffrey Fowlds (Jeffrey works for the Mancos Conservation District), and Janet Kask (open space in San Miguel County) participating in addition to Becca Samulski. The presenters were very good and gave us a lot of tools to plan our watershed wildfire risk reduction work moving forward. It highlighted a need for a smaller group of DWaRF stakeholder to spend a little time crafting a vision and working through a strategic planning progress that better defines our targets and actions to achieve them.

FINANCIALS

Another \$14,972 that will come in from the Cohesive Strategy funding this year, then that allocation will be finished. The carryover from 2016 was not shown on the June financial statement (updated) shared with the group. That carryover was \$13,419.46 for a balance of \$18,075.74 in the DWaRF account as of May 21, 2017 with \$6,039.59 already allocated. This leaves \$12,036.15 currently available with an anticipated \$18,473 to be added by September. [This revised June financial statement](#) provides a more accurate financial picture for the DWaRF Collaborative. No other fund or grant requests have been made yet. Becca requested a fund development team that can help assess grant opportunities and review applications prior to submittal. Mike Znerold and Mike Preston are willing to look at a compilation of what is available and provide fiscal direction. In order to get continued support from SJNF, it is

important to more directly engage agency leadership in DWaRF so they may advocate for partnership funding to funnel our way.

NEXT STEPS

Field Trip

The group decided to set a field trip to Lake Canyon logging units and a nearby prescribed burn area for July 6th, from 9am – 2pm. Beetle activity is really strong up at Lake Canyon with both the round headed pine beetle and mountain pine beetle. Dave Sitton and Dwayne Findley expressed that the cutting isn't sufficient to exterminate the beetle activity. The beetle activity is several steps ahead of the logging.

In lieu of the field trip in May, Becca took Cortez Kiva middle school students to Hawkins Preserve to learn a little about forestry and forest health monitoring. Thanks to Ryan Cox, Mike Znerold, Phil Kemp, and Ken Quigley for helping with that field trip.

Connections

Becca asked about connections that participants have with people or entities that should know more and possibly get engaged with the DWaRF Collaborative. The business community came up, and Becca will outreach to the Montezuma Community Economic Development Association to try to get on their agenda.

Dwayne has relationships around groundhog and said he could connect with Bonnie at the Groundhog Store. The store makes a lot of sense as a hub of watershed wildfire risk reduction efforts for the extensive private lands in those upper reaches.

Watershed Wildfire Risk Assessment Team

Post fire sediment and erosion modeling using the Automated Geospatial Watershed Assessment (AGWA) tool should be done by the end of July with a draft by the end of this month. Members of the risk assessment team and any interested participants can review the draft model and report in first half of July and return comments for the final report back to the AGWA team. Please fill out this [doodle poll](#) by June 23rd for availability the second week of July if you have been a participant in the watershed wildfire risk assessment process or are interested in engaging with that group to select a date to compile our feedback to the AGWA team for their final report.

Outreach Events

Becca will be at the **Dolores River Festival** and could use another member or two. (Thanks to Celene, Eric, and Amanda!) She will also be working with FireWise and Colorado State Forest Service to provide targeted landowner outreach in **Rico during the Independence Day** holiday weekend. If you know someone in Rico, they may sign up for [site visits here](#). The Dolores Library is sponsoring trivia nights at the Dolores River Brewery on Tuesday nights through June. Becca has coordinated with the Library to include water and wildfire trivia on June 27th.

Notes by Rebecca Samulski with Thurman Wilson input