

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative

10-3-18 Meeting, 1:30 - 3:30 at Dolores Water Conservancy District Office

In Attendance:

James Dietrich, Al Myatt, Derek Padilla, Floyd Cook, Steve Garchar, Rich Landreth, Anthony Culpepper, Matt Cook, Rebecca Samulski, Ken Curtis, Jimbo Buickerood (by phone)

Derek asked to add expedited NEPA for Plateau Fire beetle outbreak to today's agenda.

Updates:

Becca remains on contract through November and she is working on finding a replacement with Wildfire Adapted Partnership & the DWRF Coordinating Team. Becca will attend and present at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference in Avon, October 9-11. No one else from our area is attending. DWRF was invited to apply for a grant by Coalitions and Collaboratives that could help with fiber study and a Vista volunteer. Becca will take the lead on an application and may reach out for letters of support and match (Submitted October 15th: [View Proposal Here.](#))

Rich & City of Cortez are working on planning scenarios for drought and are reviewing pilot studies from Steamboat, Carbondale & Durango for possible guidance.

Steve & Floyd reported that Dolores County is looking at weight limits on their County Roads. The County crews are also continuing road maintenance wash boarded due to drought.

James reported that Montezuma County is on board with higher weight limits for logging trucks.

Anthony reported that MSI is contracted for HVRA analysis to delineate monitoring design & technology. MSI also working with Animas Community Forum on 416 post fire issues, working with neighborhoods & schools on science data collection. 232 collaborative hosting a meeting for Regional, Forest & District USFS officials from CO & NM covering San Juan & Rio Grande Forests including around Chama. The 232 has many partners, and meeting will happen in 2 weeks with Anthony Madrid on point.

There is a prescribed fire event with TNC funding, San Juan TREX (training exchange), that provides training for local fire professionals on prescribed fire, currently postponed based on conditions. These folks may be able to work on active prescribed fires on SJNF, including Dolores District.

Anthony spoke about JR Ford contracts. He usually handles small diameter ponderosa under a stewardship contract making chips to producing bio-char because currently power generation numbers don't work. There is a good market in cattle feed. Colorado Forest Restoration Institute at CSU is monitoring 4 experimental plots, 40 acres each. JR's planned experiment with CSU will test & monitor different stewardship practices for cool moist mixed conifer 9 – 10,000' feet elevation to fill data gaps.

Al reported that there will be Climate change meeting at Ft Lewis concert hall on 10/30, 5:30 – 9:00 PM.

Matt- MSI has a scheduled 10/22 event with Lois Benitez at the Durango Powerhouse, PBS Forest of America, on recreation resilience.

Jimbo reported that the scheduled hike to see the 416 fire area on Monday was postponed due to weather.

Derek reported that Dolores District (DD) is looking to do some prescribed burns after recent rains, targeting 1200 acres on Haycamp. The Carver Burn is 2-3 weeks away, pending conditions, wind & forecasted smoke impacts. The Lake Canyon burn, 2700 acres, was too dry earlier and may come available if conditions are correct but is too wet now. The smaller Carver burn may take around 10 fire staff while the Lake Canyon may take up to 30 people. Staff comes from neighboring Districts & Forests.

Beetle infestation has been found in the Plateau Fire footprint. There are 200 acres of bark beetle infestation, probably Round-headed or Western, in 5-6 separate patches, maybe 40 – 50 acres each. The beetles likely moved or expanded into Plateau Fire Area due to the stressed conditions. Now SJNF has an opportunity to

remove infested and likely to become infested trees with significant fire damage until May-June of 2019 when the beetles will fly again. DD is looking to an expedited environmental analysis given the time sensitive nature of beetle removal. Derek presented this project to the group as a diverse group of community stakeholders to expedite a Sanitation Categorical Exclusion. There is some commercial interest in these currently green trees. There will be no need for new roads. Some skidding will be needed to pull logs to existing roads. Becca asked if there would be cutting of burned, not infested trees with this analysis. Derek indicated that there may be other salvage logging opportunities, but DD has more time on those. Fire weakened trees that are considered to be highly susceptible to beetles may be removed as part of salvage operation, even if beetles have not yet attacked the trees. The only high intensity Plateau burn that is easily visible is along 524. BAER is not initiated for Plateau Fire yet and the timing has not been finalized for completing that, but rains have shown that hydrologic impacts are expected to be minimal.

Steve Garchar asked how the Lake Canyon prescribed burn would affect the DC intake? Derek answered that there shouldn't be any impact as it would only burn at low to moderate intensities.

SJNF, Dolores District, needs some more public outreach & input on the Plateau Sanitation CE NEPA to expedite the removal before the beetles fly next May/June.

MSI is getting under contract through DWRP funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board for monitoring beetle kill. It may be worth adding the work in the Plateau Fire footprint to the monitoring plan.

Dolores County is still on fire restrictions, but will re-visit soon.

Lone Pine Scoping:

Lone Pine draft scoping comments are due 10/18 then DD will start formal EA prep with a formal comment period later. One goal is to move from mature closed to mature open ponderosa forests. Derek was asked if it will protect from beetles. It should help, but that is not what the thinning guidance is based on. DD is trying to achieve % targets for different ponderosa pine age classes. Becca indicated that in her review, it appears that the proposed cutting would lead to a disproportional level of mature-open pine stands relative to the percent of forest targeted in the forest plan. She suggested that these numbers be revisited and the explanation and plan adjusted to be consistent with the targets. Becca also asked if there is a reason to expand the aerial extent of the scoping. The Lone Pine area does not take in significant portions of area identified as high risk relative to wildfire and post-fire impacts to identified assets and resources. However, it is a critical area for addressing an active bark beetle epidemic.

Derek outlined some DD plans. After 62,000 acre Lone Pine EA, the Dolores District will move focus to Salter area next year, east from Lone Pine to the Haycamp area. They plan to continue scoping landscape scale ponderosa pine vegetation management east from haycamp to effectively cover the DD SJNF pine zone. Given this planning horizon, it was concluded that DWRP does not need to recommend a larger scope.

Lone Pine scoping was originally planned to be done by November of 2018, but the district is now targeting March or April of 2019. Once this is complete, they will move planning efforts east to the Salter area.

Derek stated that this scoping is for all mechanical treatments for ecological stewardship & commercial ecological restoration. Prior to this round, the SJNF had done smaller acreages to match logging capacity. Now, with new industry capacity, DD wants to plan larger scale efforts to improve efficiencies. He anticipated that they may see some resistance due to scale, but analysis still requires individual, site specific surveys and prescriptions to protect other forest values. Derek believes they can address hydrology & wildlife habitat mitigation suitably. It was asked whether prescribed fire is included in the EA. Broadcast burning is already covered under the recently signed prescribed fire decision, but this EA should cover some additional pile burning of project fuels.

A DWRP letter would be positive. Becca will consider drafting, depending on work load. If she gets a joint letter done she will email it out for review & get multiple signatures. In the past, the group has discussed

sending letters by group consensus, but this was clarified that letters of support should have specific signatories or be from the DWRF Coordinator, not indicating that all DWRF participants agree with the opinion.

Follow up items:

Becca brought up a Durango Herald article that also appeared on the front page of The Journal. There was some disappointment in the story's portrayal of logging, and Becca asked if or how the group should respond. The group felt it was a good idea, but not an emergency that needed a direct response. It would be more beneficial to work on another article that paints the picture of timber industry opportunity on the west end of the SJNF. Aaron Kimple felt some of his remarks were taken out of context, and he would be good to include in any follow up opportunity. (Becca drafted content and sent to the Journal along with OktoberForest schedule. The schedule was published, but the Journal decided to hold the remaining content for additional stories.)

Derek pointed out that controlled burns during hunt could raise public concerns. USFS tries not to cause problems. They looked at break between archery & rifle season, but it was too dry to conduct a controlled burn then.

Becca brought up the big DWRF public outreach event on October 20th. She requested that stakeholders review the schedule for plugging any volunteer gap. She may need coordination help. Rich agreed to coordinate getting water for water tasting from different water treatment facilities. The group also decided that the "Healthy Forests Take Everyone" 3pm time slot would be a great introduction to the DWRF Collaborative opportunity. She requested diverse participation in this to share different perspectives on the collaborative.

Notes by Ken Curtis w/ edits by Rebecca Samulski.