

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative

11-7-18 Meeting, 1:30 - 3:30 at Dolores Water Conservancy District Office

In Attendance:

Eric Janes, Marl Loveall, Phil Ayers, Steve Garchar, Floyd Cook, Pam Wilson, Aaron Kimple, David Sitton, Sonny Frasier, Mike Preston, Bruce Short, Ashley Greco, Ashley Downing, Duncan Rose, Garrett Hanks, Tom Hooten, David Casey, Jim Dietrich, Pat Seekins, Ian Barrett, Rachael Medina, Amanda Brenner, Jimbo Buickerood, Ryan Cox, Mike Pasquin, Thurman Wilson, Rebecca Samulski, Jim Mimeaga, and Danny Margoles (facilitating)

Introductions

Danny Margoles introduced himself as the new DWRF Coordinator, taking over that role from Rebecca Samulski. Danny has been living in Mancos for about a year and was in Hesperus for a couple of years before that. He first came to southwest Colorado in 2005 as a Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) intern in 2005 and has returned to the area off and on since then to lead SCC crews. Danny has a bachelor's degree in geography and anthropology and a master's in geography from the University of Minnesota. The thesis for his master's degree was on the long-term effects of mountain pine beetles in subalpine forest of Montana. That led to an interest in fire ecology and climate change throughout the west. Since Danny moved here full-time in 2015 he has led courses in natural resources management and environmental studies for Wild Rockies Field Institute and Fort Lewis College. He will continue to work with the Stewards Individual Placement Program, coordinating national environmental intern programs through AmeriCorps with federal land management agencies.

Danny noted that there are big shoes to fill from Becca and thanked her for helping him get started and working with the DWRF Coordinating Team. Becca is moving on to a position with Fire Adapted Colorado. It is a state-level organization but she will continue to live here. We should still see her at some of our meetings and related activities. Becca added that she thinks we were lucky to find Danny with his background in pine beetles and fire.

Danny asked the other people attending to briefly introduce themselves and mention interests or skills that they bring to DWRF. Interested people that missed this meeting should feel free to contact Danny and introduce themselves. Email: dwarfcollaborative@gmail.com, phone: 952-457-8586.

Thurman Wilson – Retired from the US Forest Service (USFS) and helped start the Mountain Studies Institute and the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership. He brings experience with similar collaborative groups and obtaining grants and other partnership funding.

Mark Loveall – Supervisory Forester with the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS). He can help with grant funding, education, and forestry knowledge.

Bruce Short – Retired from the USFS and currently has a forestry consulting company. He has a good bit of local forestry experience from working here and is interested in the Dolores Watershed.

Rebecca Samulski – Previous DWRF Coordinator and worked for FireWise of Southwest Colorado until moving into new position recently. She can help Danny find things and pass on knowledge.

Eric Janes – Retired BLM hydrologist; former soil, water, air program leader in BLM Washington Office. He has an interest in wildfire from working on the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

Jimbo Buickerood – San Juan Citizens Alliance. He has lived in Montezuma and La Plata Counties and has been involved with the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership as well as this group. He is especially interested in helping the group pay attention to research and climate change issues.

Duncan Rose – retired city/county management consultant and a board member for Trout Unlimited and Montezuma Land Conservancy. He represented Trout Unlimited on a major climate change study, partnered with MSI, which has lead to stream temperature monitoring on 30 sites. He is now involved with launching a stream protection working group and is on the DWRF Steering Committee.

David Casey – USFS Dolores Ranger District. He thinks DWRF is a great opportunity to get together with people on issues that the Ranger District is working on. He brings forestry knowledge and information, field trip organization, and project implementation connections to the group.

Mike Pasquin – Montezuma County Emergency Manager – He is working on the County’s Hazard Mitigation Plan which just got funding approval.

Ashley Greco – Representative Scott Tipton’s staffer for this area. She provides a connection to Representative Tipton, a member of the Natural Resources Committee, and can provide a link to legislative processes.

Ashley Downing – Executive Director of Fire Adapted Partnership (formerly Firewise of Southwestern Colorado). She administers the USFS grant that currently contains the funding for the DWRF Coordinator. Danny works as a contractor through Fire Adapted Partnership.

Pam Wilson – Retired Director of FireWise of Southwest Colorado and retired USFS. She helped with the initial funding for DWRF. She is still tied in with wildfire prevention and mitigation as a board member of Fire Adapted Colorado and as a contractor.

Aaron Kimple – Forest Health Program Director of Mountain Studies Institute. He also serves as Coordinator for the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership and for the 2-3-2 Cohesive Partnership Strategy. He brings science connections.

Steve Garcher and Floyd Cook – Dolores County Commissioners. Dolores County comprises a large part of the Dolores Watershed. Steve and Floyd want to do their part in protection the river, forest and watershed.

Amanda Brenner – Ambassador Coordinator for Fire Adapted Partnership in Montezuma and Dolores Counties. She has attended some DWRF meetings, field trips and events in the past and will probably be more involved in the future due to their organizational changes.

Sonny Frasier – Dove Creek Town Manager. He is working on water issues.

David Sitton – owner of Aspen Wall Wood, Aspen Wood Products and SNS Logging. He brings wood product business knowledge to DWRF and provides markets for wood removed in the Dolores Watershed.

Mike Preston – Manager of the Dolores Water Conservancy District and Chair of the Southwest Basin Roundtable. He was involved in the creation of the Ponderosa Pine Partnership in the 1990’s when he worked for Montezuma County in a role similar to James Dietrich’s current position. He brings experience with collaborative forest partnerships, forest health and water issues to DWRF. The WaterSMART grant funding for DWRF is managed through the Conservancy District.

Phil Ayers – retired National Park Service civil engineer. He is on the board for Wildfire Adapted Partnerships.

James Dietrich – Montezuma County Natural Resources Planning and Public Lands Coordinator. He serves as the natural resources interface for Montezuma County elected officials.

Rachael Medina – Montezuma County GIS. She brings mapping skills and has assisted DWRF on assessment work.

Pat Seekins – Fire Management Officer for the USFS on the west side of the San Juan National Forest.

Ian Barrett – Prescribed Fire Specialist for the BLM Tres Rios Field Office.

Ryan Cox – CSFS Forester. He has been working with DWRF and with local landowners.

Updates

David Sitton thanked the group and said that he thinks good things are coming from the DWRP partnership. He has owned Aspen Wall Wood since purchasing it in 2016 from the Findleys. The beetle infestation has had a positive impact on that business, increasing the opportunities for paneling because the blue stain left by the beetles creates attractive wood.

David bought the assets and log decks in Mancos from Western Excelsior (which is still in business in other locations) after the fire at that facility. The new business is named Aspen Wood Products. He is basically building a new excelsior plant from the ground up. There is interest in products from as far away as Germany and the Ukraine. Other potential markets are in the US, Mexico and the Middle East. Potential products besides erosion control and packing materials are acoustic panels and fake moss for egg baskets. Product demand looks so good that they will probably run double shifts from the outset and are already looking into adding equipment. Some of the original equipment in the plant included old cast iron machines from 1896 through 1903 that had been modernized. They were too damaged in the fire to be useable but some parts were salvaged from them. Six or seven newer machines are in useable condition. They are close to starting production.

Western Excelsior defaulted on their USFS aspen sales. Those need to be reappraised and reoffered by the Forest Service. There were 1,200 truckloads in the Mancos log decks. He originally agreed to buy 700 but may end up with about 1,000. He is now hauling some products other than logs (POL) from earlier sales (Groundhog, Sudden Aspen Decline [SAD], others) to the Mancos yard after acquiring them.

Aspen Wall Wood can sell more beetle-killed pine than they can handle. Blue stained pine is a beautiful product that is in high demand. They need to find an additional logger so that they can get more logs to the mill. They currently don't have the facilities to make paneling out of green pine but there is also a market for it.

Jimbo asked about pursuing USDA wood products grants. David has put some effort into that but hasn't found much funding available for purchasing equipment, which is his biggest need. There was also a question about whether the age of log decks affects how they can be used. David said the logs need the proper moisture content for the product being manufactured. Water has to be added back if they dry too much. A 65-pound bail of excelsior looks like a hay bail and it has to be pliable to spread it out to use as a cooling mat.

David had hopes of adding a small pellet mill. There is a big price jump to go from small to mid-size. He doesn't think that is happening, at least for now.

David said he is thinking a lot about how to do things differently. There aren't many examples for him to look at. Western and American excelsior are really the only other US companies in the business.

Mike Preston began his update by commenting that we need more David Sittons (a nod to David but also a comment that we need more industry to provide a market for forest management products). Mike said we are ready to launch a fiber utilization study, looking at what is coming off of the forest for forest health treatments and what you can produce from them. Mike mentioned that he had just commented on the Lone Pine EA, one in a series of NEPA projects that the Dolores Ranger District is working on. He also noted that work is getting going on strategic planning with the WaterSMART grant funding.

Dave Casey noted that the Dolores Landscape Aspen EA, covering 6,000 to 8,000 acres, was nearing the end of its comment period. A link to the comment package went out to DWRP participants. The District currently has about 500 acres of aspen with completed NEPA but there is a need to move around in a larger landscape. He noted that Aspen Wall Wood and Western Excelsior had a symbiotic relationship with the former needing quality sawlogs for paneling and the later able to use POL for excelsior. The fire at Western Excelsior created a problem with existing timber sales because they needed the logs out of the woods to weigh them for (weight) scaling (which is how the timber was sold).

Dave explained that the aspen forests in our area don't have much young cohort so they want to use coppice cuts to start them. There are also stands with sudden aspen decline (SAD) that need to be regenerated. David Sitton noted that he is finding more and more rot. There are still high quality trees but fewer than before. He attributed that to age and soil quality. Dave Casey said that by the time aspen gets about 70 years old it starts to get conks and rot.

Pat Seekins stated that the Dolores District will continue doing a lot of pile burning. He thinks we will see more broadcast burning in the future as well.

Jimbo and David Sitton mentioned that there is a company that buys sawdust and aspen waste to use in livestock feed after they add minerals.

Becca said the October event went well, people came for the tours education presentations and some came later for the beer. She thanked Mark, Tom, Ryan, Dave and Amanda for helping. She also thanked James for the map graphic, which will also be useful in the future. Amanda added that she found it helpful in her workshop.

Becca hopes that we can try again for a Cherry Creek beetle impact tour when the entomologists are down here. Duncan asked if an updated beetle map would be available. Bruce said there is one on the USFS website and he can send a link to it. Mark added that the latest CSFS forest health report will be out soon. Dave Casey mentioned that beetles were already present in Plateau Creek but it is spreading faster in fire-damaged areas (live trees with a portion of the crown burned).

A proposal for an Action for Implementation and Mitigation (AIM) grant offered by Coalitions and Collaboratives (a Colorado nonprofit) was put forward for a VISTA person to study forest health. We should hear if it is awarded in a few weeks. It would be a year-long position, good learning but not high pay.

Review and Update of Challenges and Information Gaps (from 2015)

Danny split the group into three smaller groups and assigned a portion of the 2015 list of challenges and information gaps to each. He asked participants to individually write where we currently are at on sticky notes then discuss them within the smaller groups. We then concluded by reading the notes and posting them on the wall.

See the challenges and information gaps activity notes below.

Ian asked what the goals of the group are. The stated goals are:

- Stimulate adaptive management across vegetation types and ownership boundaries to reduce threats from wildfire and other natural disasters to lives, property, water supplies, infrastructure, and other community assets while improving ecosystem health.
- Increase capacity and viability of local wood product industries to complete cost-effective forest management projects.
- Foster a network of professionals and residents in order to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from catastrophic wildfires and resulting post-fire effects.

Pat suggested focusing more on private lands because USFS and BLM already have people and money and most of the risk is on private lands.

Mike and Aaron discussed exploring private sector funding such as Walton. They also mentioned the potential for more funding from ski area donations, starting a San Juan Stewardship Fund.

Closeout

Please log volunteer hours on the DWRP website at dwrpcollaborative.org/volunteer-hour-log/. Or, type dwrpcollaborative.org into your browser, then click on "Take Action" on the top of the home page, followed by "Log Your Hours" on the dropdown menu that appears. Then fill in the requested information.

We will have a December meeting. The agenda will be out the week after Thanksgiving.

Notes by Thurman Wilson with Danny Margoles edits.

What outstanding information gaps, capacity or resource shortfalls, challenges or threats do we know about?	
2015	2018 (update)
Scaling up will be a challenge	Scaling up will be a challenge
Lack of a collaborative group in the area- Build partnership to cooperate on pilot efforts	Well underway and growing - DWRF! Collaborations and interconnections with other groups improved.
Limited forest product industry, especially for ponderosa pine, to utilize and pay for wood products, no long-term industry stability, lack of capacity and transportation infrastructure;	Renewed interest in industry; markets up (Montrose Forest Products, David Sitton's businesses); interest in logging pine and the creation of beetle kill products; not much new expansion but current operators are busy.
Limited forest products markets/ demand for local products	Mills still here are fairly successful but there are no replacements for lost industries.
Slope- topographic and other practical constraints to commercial timber harvest	Lots of aspen on steep slopes with low values; ponderosa pine is mostly on easier terrain. Not much we can do to affect topography and timber on steep slopes isn't valuable enough to justify.
Community education and outreach - Make the public more aware of the danger of what could happen and work to get support from them	Recent fires, drought, and beetle disturbance helps create awareness of forest health issues. Continued outreach still needed to communicate ecology, forest health, treatment, and industry overlaps.
People that don't want to see or support timber harvest or thinning	In practice there, has not generally been a roadblock recently. Probably changing with some people, especially after recent wildfires. <u>How to communicate</u> Brings in jobs Economic assistance <u>Still needed</u> Continued education - framing treatments as an overall forest health project <u>Movement</u> Drought/fires/insects changing minds Industry embracing need for aesthetics
Limited manpower, need a way to fund activities, including personnel; Limited CSFS and USFS personnel	Capacity is still an issue but partnering helps; There is increased regional investment by industry; still needing skilled participants; need to pursue more investment from private individuals.

Planning/ NEPA efforts take time	Larger scale efforts and more landscape-scale analysis is always good; still time consuming
Inadequate funding from current sources to treat on a large scale; Limited grant money – Need funding to pay for stewardship or service contracts where we can't sell products	Still an issue but might improve with fire borrowing going away; bringing more dollars through collaboration; keep going after private funding sources.
Need mapping support and targets	Have a lot of data pulled together; DWRF has partnered with MSI on mapping; need to continue building a geodatabase with partners and make it practical for users.
Information gaps:	Information gaps:
Which treatments should get highest priority? Highest risk areas to McPhee? Prioritize risk areas feasible for treatment	Have gathered HVRA data but need to plan and prioritize; working on Watershed Wildfire Protection Plan.
Where can we treat?	
What is industry demand and capacity?	Address with fiber utilization study.
What is potential local market for wood products?	Begin to address with fiber utilization study.
How can we get community buy-in?	Tours help. Also newspaper articles, one-page info sheets, website, annual report. WaterSMART funds towards outreach will be important. Use recent and ongoing disturbances for learning opps.
How will we monitor progress of our efforts and success of treatments?	Now we have some disturbances we can look at monitor past/future effects. Activities like this help monitor our progress of the collaborative.
GIS data for private lands not as good as on Natl. Forest lands	Data is scattered; better coordinate; field truth when out.
Relevant info and data is scattered across different agencies and governments	Data still scattered but working with Montezuma Co, MSI, FS, and WAP to collect data. Good amount of data already compiled and FIA data is available for private land. Stakeholders meetings important to maintain relationships between entities.
Challenges out of our control	
Insect and disease issues in addition to wildfire threats to forest	

No major local catalyzing events/ large wildfires lately

How future will look – climate, insects and disease, etc. how fires may change in response