

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

December 5, 2018
dwrfcollaborative.org

Present: Garrett Hanks (Southwest Public Lands Coordinator, Trout Unlimited), Duncan Rose (Coordinating Committee Member, TU), Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance), Stacy Beagh (Strategic By Nature Consulting Services), Rich Landreth (Water Treatment Plant Superintendent, City Of Cortez), Floyd Cook (Dolores County Commissioner), Amanda Brenner-Cannon (Montezuma County Coordinator, Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Matt Cook (Forest Health and GIS Specialist, Mountain Studies Institute), Mike Preston (General Manager, DWCD), Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist), Irvin Frazier (Dove Creek Town Manager and Member of Southwest Basin Roundtable), Derek Padilla (Dolores District Ranger, San Juan National Forest), Bruce Short (Retired, U.S. Forest Service), James Dietrich (Natural Resource Planning and Public Lands Coordinator, Montezuma County), Tom Hooten (CSU Extension Agent, Montezuma County), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Introduction

Danny said “resilient” is the word in the collaborative’s name that is most open to interpretation, and asked for individual comments on what that concept means in the contest of this particular group of forests. Following brief discussions in small groups, participants made comments including:

- There are different applicabilities of resilience.
- The collaborative avoided using the word “health” because it is a bit loaded in regards to forest health. Resilience represents a more dynamic, active approach and speaks to ecological functioning.
- The word “resilient” could play a stronger role if it were in front of “watershed” but that would mangle the collaborative’s name.
- Resilience relates to the ecosystem’s ability to absorb or deal with any threat so the threat doesn’t take down the entire system at one time. In regards to DWRF, resilience could mean that the collaborative has a diversity of funding sources and individual members, meaning it is not relying on one person, entity or funding source to accomplish its goals.
- Resilience represents a system’s ability to withstand disturbance.
- Resilience means the ability to create resilient communities and forests that can withstand wildfire. It speaks to community and forest health.
- On a broad scale, it involves the ability of a system to maintain normal function after being disturbed.
- Locally, resilience means that when there is a lightning strike in a ponderosa pine forest, it can burn naturally. This would translate to better water quality and improved yields for the Dolores River.
- Forest products, grazing, recreation and other forest uses all work together and a resilient forest is able to absorb all impacts from those uses as well as wildfire.
- “Resilient” is replacing “sustainable” in many such uses. In general, resilience is the ability to recover from a stressful condition rather than just a disturbance. “Recovery” can mean improving beyond the conditions that previously existed. The problem with the word “sustainable” is that it implies mere maintenance, not improvement.

- Maintaining is a goal of resilience because without that, conditions could change. For instance, the forest could change to a non-forested ecosystem.

Updates

▪ Rich said the Cortez City Council at its most recent meeting approved an updated water conservation plan, the first completed since 2010. The city is required to have such a plan in place. It is to be revised on a seven-year cycle and the city is late in finishing this one. They will be submitting it to the Colorado Water Conservation Board within a few weeks. Now the city has started moving forward with some of the goals set in the plan. Rich said he will be working on a city drought contingency plan and on completing a source water protection plan in coordination with that. The city began work on a source water protection plan five or six years ago but never finished it, so he will update and complete it. There will be public meetings and a public process. Rich said he will bring the plan to the collaborative at a later date.

In response to questions, Rich said the city's per capita water consumption is 200 gallons per day, which is quite high. However, it was about 230 in 2010. The city's goal at that time was to reduce to 200, and it achieved that. The new goal is 180 gallons per day, and he believes that will be easy to attain. Rich said the city treats just short of 1 billion gallons annually.

▪ Duncan said Dolores River Anglers, the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, is working closely with staff from the San Juan National Forest to place temporary sensors in eight streams/tributaries to see:

- What is the relationship between water and air temperature and elevation?
- Do tributaries have a different model/relationship among those factors?

Duncan said they want to understand how stream temperatures are changing. Preliminary data shows that at an elevation of 8500 feet, which is a mile below Rico, temperatures during one week last July exceeded the CWCB's standard for chronic temperatures, meaning there was stress to trout populations. He said this means streams at elevations below 8500 feet violated both chronic and acute temperature standards at times this year. The chronic temperature standard is based on a maximum weekly average temperature, while the acute standard is based on a daily maximum water temperature. Duncan said there were 40 days this summer during which fishing should have been stopped at 8500 feet elevation and down and a few days where it should have been halted as high as 9500 feet elevation. TU is looking for funding to start statistical modeling for stream characteristics.

Duncan said on Nov. 2, representatives of the San Juan National Forest, Dolores Water Conservancy District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Trout Unlimited formed an Upper Dolores Stream Protection Working Group. He said there are 44 streams in the Upper Dolores (upstream from the Highway 145 bridge) and the goal is to take those streams and match them to techniques to begin protection for the individual streams. He said this year there were six streams that were dewatered to the point where it destroyed trout habitat. Many were pure cutthroat streams. He saw algae in moving streams choking what little pools were left. He said this year has been a bitter lesson in what climate-change projections suggest is only the beginning of major changes.

In answer to a question, Mike said he doesn't think the DWCD monitors water temperatures in McPhee Reservoir.

Rich said algae was a major concern at the city's water-treatment plant this year because temperatures were so high. Normally in the summer the water temperature at the plant is in the upper 50s but this year it was close to 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mike said Anthony Madrid of the San Juan National Forest says one of the most important protective measures that could be implemented on some trout streams is vegetation management.

Bruce said a study in Montana of sloped wet meadow restoration found an increase of ½ cfs per restored river mile per day.

Jimbo said a major watershed assessment was done on the Mancos River about eight years ago. It found that much riparian cover including willow had been lost. After the Mancos River crosses the valley a huge percent of the shading had been lost and that was identified as a key piece to maintaining lower temperatures and higher flows.

Mike said determining the most effective way of protecting trout strongholds is a big challenge that will take a major investment.

Duncan said Dolores River Anglers and Mountain Studies Institute spent three years studying how climate change will affect this area. He said their presentation on the subject is extremely informative and could be shown to the collaborative. Danny said that would be excellent.

- Bill brought up the juniper die-off in southeastern Utah. Juniper is declining in parts of Cedar Mesa. The phenomenon is puzzling because piñon was thought to be more vulnerable to drought, but in southeast Utah the piñons are alive but the junipers are in decline.

Bruce said there are increased levels of juniper twig borers and the area is seeing more black stain/piñon ips root rot complex.

Amanda said junipers in Southwest Colorado aren't dying yet, but are stressed from the drought. She said cedar-apple rust is a problem as well. Kent Grant of the Colorado State Forest Service has told her they're more worried that drought will leave junipers vulnerable to attack than that the trees will die directly from drought.

Jimbo said local juniper seems to be rebounding, but in southeast Utah the situation is jaw-dropping. The die-off is occurring in both large and small trees. Piñons are not responding the same way.

Tom said some researchers believe the juniper die-off might be related to warmer, drier winters.

Bill said Dr. William Anderegg of the University of Utah, who conducted research into Sudden Aspen Decline, is looking at the juniper situation.

- Matt said the Mountain Studies Institute and other entities participated recently in beetle monitoring efforts on the area burned in the Plateau Fire. Some plots were established to look at long-term changes over time. Although future goals are a bit nebulous, it was a good start. He looks forward to additional monitoring in this landscape and identifying which direction they want to go. There were some areas where the beetles had attacked first and then the beetle-infested trees burned, and some where beetle kill was after the fire. However, he did not see a great deal of beetle damage.

Bruce said he looked at the affected area around Thanksgiving and doesn't believe the fire had a big impact in relation to beetle kill.

Derek said the San Juan National Forest devised an expedited NEPA process for a plan to treat some of the areas affected by the fire, but after looking at the data, it became apparent the beetle damage was not specifically related to fire. In addition, the extent of the beetle activity in that area is beyond the ability of current industry to address quickly. He said the area will be included in the Salter analysis and the Forest Service is not going to divert resources to take action quickly on beetle activity in the Plateau Fire area.

Derek said the Lone Pine NEPA process is about two months behind schedule because of the Plateau and other fires. The San Juan National Forest is now anticipating having the draft environmental assessment ready in January or February. The comment periods for the Aspen and Lone Pine EAs have been completed and comments are being incorporated into the analysis. The target is March or April for the final EA and draft decision notice. If there are no objections, the final decision will likely be released in May. If there are objections, it should be released in early June.

Derek said forest officials want to be able to tailor their units to fit whatever the decision is and implement appropriate treatments, whether through timber sales, contractors, or other measures. There is only one company in the area that could conduct anything resembling a large-scale, traditional lumber sale and it could not start until the fall of 2019. Derek said with contractors there would be a continuation of activities already going on in other areas.

Mike said the Lone Pine EA was well written and asked whether DWRP could write a letter of support. He said he doesn't believe there would have to be unanimous consent from all DWRP stakeholders to write such a letter. Alternatively, a letter of support could be written and individuals could sign it if they pleased. He asked whether it is helpful if DWRP engages in the comment process.

Derek said it is helpful. When forest officials can demonstrate that there is support for such projects from collaborative efforts such as DWRP, that is definitely a benefit. It's good to know the work the Forest Service is doing is supported by the entities represented by the people in the room. The Forest Service would like to see a letter of support from the counties, Trout Unlimited, etc.

Jimbo said in this group setting there hasn't been a vigorous discussion of the issues involved. He said the pine meeting in Dolores was a good evening of discussion but there were many issues that could have been pulled out for further talk. Derek can be in a tricky position listening to input from a collaborative group and needing to make a decision. The way that happens is through a thorough discussion and Jimbo does not believe this group has had one regarding the Lone Pine project. He has significant concerns about whether all relevant information was incorporated into the EA – for example, regarding climate change and its impacts to ponderosa pine.

Mike agreed. He said DWRP is setting up a coordinating committee to sequence how this information comes to the collaborative so there is time to digest it. He said regarding the Salter EA, the collaborative will have a chance to start from the beginning of the sequence and work through the entire process.

Danny said the collaborative is a place for education. He said Mike's question was a good one. How does DWRP write a letter together? Does everyone need to be on board for DWRP to write a letter to the Forest Service? This is a conversation they will have moving forward.

- Amanda said Montezuma County is updating its emergency management plan and wildfire is emergency manager Mike Pasquin's biggest concern. She will be working closely with the county on that effort. She would like to have a community wildfire protection plan put together for the West Fork area. She is finishing assessments she did at Dunton Hot Springs and Dunton River Camp. She is completing her own projects from the summer as well as projects former coordinator Becca Samulski could not complete.

Amanda said she has spoken with reporter Jim Mimiaga of the Journal about another article regarding wildfire preparedness within municipalities. She said wildfire risk is high for the towns of Dolores and Mancos. People may believe they're safe from wildfires if they live in town, but the disastrous fire in Paradise, California, this summer demonstrated the fallacy of that thinking.

Strategic Planning Process and WaterSMART

Danny said DWRF wasn't successful in obtaining an Action for Implementation and Mitigation (AIM) grant for a year-long VISTA person to study forest health, but he will be talking about it in coming weeks and maybe can apply again later in the winter. He has submitted a grant to Wildfire Adapted Colorado for funding to finish burning brush piles.

Danny discussed the WaterSMART grant, which would be a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation grant administered by the DWCD for a strategic planning effort for DWRF. The aim is to help DWRF identify clear, coherent direction as an entity. At present DWRF is an ad hoc entity without rules or governance. DWRF has goals and a mission, but more vision and values work must be done and an organizational structure needs to be created. A facilitator will be hired as a contractor to help with the strategic planning process, which will encompass original structure, outreach planning, materials and graphic design. That facilitator will be working with the Coordinating Committee and this group.

Danny's position is paid for by Cohesive Strategy funding from the Forest Service through the Wildfire Adapted Partnership, which is not a fiscal agent of the group itself.

Mike said the WaterSMART grant is a two-year grant, with second-year funding contingent on showing progress the first year. The two-year cycle will begin from the launch of the contract. Some activity can begin at the first of the year, and a signed contract should be in place by late February or early March. He said funding to pay Danny as coordinator is in place for about a year. Mike said DWRF has just under \$100,000 and can't start spending Year 2 money until Year 2.

Danny said a portion of the WaterSMART grant is for the development of a watershed-wide wildfire protection plan. That is part of the Year 2 funding. The Coordinating Committee will be taking a much more active role in how the WaterSMART grant will be managed and in visioning and directing the DWRF collaborative. A goal is signing off on the RFPs for the WaterSMART grant going forward and talking about the applicants.

Wrap-Up

- Members of the Coordinating Committee are Duncan, Jimbo, Derek (in an advisory capacity), Floyd, Mike, Ashley Downing of Wildfire Adapted Partnership, and David Sitton of Aspen Wallwood. Becca Samulski will play a role as well. The next committee meeting will be Thursday, Dec. 13, at 10 a.m. and anyone can attend. If anyone is interested in serving on the committee, they should see Danny.

- Danny thanked people for their volunteer hours and efforts. He reminded people to log their volunteer hours, which can be done on the DWRF website.

- Floyd said Dolores County is still trying to acquire the land for the West Fork Fire Station and should know whether they were successful by the first of the year. Legislation for the land transfer was attached to the federal Farm Bill.

Next meeting: The next stakeholders meeting is set for Wednesday, Jan. 9, at 1:30 p.m. at the Dolores Public Lands Office conference room. (Note: This is the second Wednesday of the month rather than the first and a different location than normal.)