

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

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dwrfcollaborative.org

draft – 4 pages

Present: Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance), Eric Janes (retired, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation), David Casey (San Juan National Forest), Bruce Short (Retired, U.S. Forest Service); Brad Pietruszka (BLM Tres Rios Field Office and San Juan National Forest), Charles Lanoue (Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control), Norm Bircher (Montrose Forest Products), Steve Underwood (Underwood Forestry), Anthony Culpepper (Mountain Studies Institute), Ashley Downey (Executive Director, Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Mike Preston and Ken Charles (Dolores Water Conservancy District), Derek Padilla (Dolores District Ranger), Rich Landreth (City of Cortez), Floyd Cook and Steve Garcher (Dolores County Commissioners), Alex Graf (new Montezuma County Coordinator for WAP), Greg Kemp (interested citizen), David Sitton (Aspen Wall Wood), Sonny Frazier (Town Manager, Dove Creek), Ann McCoy-Harold (Sen. Cory Gardner's office), James Dietrich (Montezuma County), Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado), Stacy Beaugh (Strategic By Nature Consulting Services), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Strategic Planning Discussion

Stacy gave a recap of DWRF's April 3 strategic planning retreat. She said it was very productive and that the Coordinating Committee also said it was great to have a diversity of people contributing to the meeting. Stacy said she and others are synthesizing everything out of the retreat and putting together the draft strategic plan. The stakeholders probably will not see it until July.

The notes from the retreat are lengthy but Danny will send them to people who request them from him.

One of the main things discussed at the retreat was the following question: *What is a resilient forest, what is DWRF trying to achieve, and how are we going to measure that?* Stacy said the people organizing the strategic plan would like to have a small group to work on that question over the next six weeks. Part of the effort will involve gleaning goals and metrics from the San Juan National Forest plan.

Stacy noted that at the retreat people said a resilient forest is ecologically diverse, adaptive, able to recover after a high-intensity disturbance, and supportive of local communities' economies. The task of this small group will be to refine that language and determine the metrics.

Derek Padilla, Anthony Culpepper and Jimbo Buickerood have volunteered to be on the small group and will be receiving an email from Stacy and Danny. If anyone else is interested in participating, let Stacy know.

Stacy said a second major issue discussed at the retreat is how the DWRF stakeholder group will be engaged in NEPA processes. Weighing in on the public process on how the forest is managed is a big part of what this group can do. There are two types of engagement possible:

- Pre and during an environmental assessment (EA)
- After an EA is approved

The process of engagement “pre” an EA would entail the DWRF collaborative commenting as a single entity during the scoping period. Scoping allows interested parties to provide input before the EA is written. Later on, as draft EAs are released, the collaborative can have conversations and possibly come up with agreed-upon responses to those EAs, but reaching an agreement among different parties may not be possible.

Stacy said the collaborative is committed to bringing educational opportunities, including site tours, to the whole group. She said the Forest Service, BLM and Colorado Parks and Wildlife are committed to bringing relevant conversations to the collaborative. Although CPW is not really a regular part of the DWRF conversation now, it is hoped that they will be.

Jimbo said he has a question about getting information to different constituencies.

Danny said one obvious way is to speak up. He said If anyone notices a missing component they should bring it up with him. As EAs are being developed the DWRF Coordinating Committee wants to make sure conversations are happening and they are getting feedback. Danny can coordinate the information on this and they will discuss it in the CC.

Becca asked if there is a way to offer invitations to a broader group of people than those on the DWRF email list. If something legislative is happening, a special tour is planned, or another event of broad interest is coming up, maybe there could be a way to invite a larger group of people.

Danny and Stacy said that makes sense.

Mike Preston said that morning the Coordinating Committee talked about grazing and recreation. Although these two constituencies are not regular members of the DWRF collaborative the CC wants to invite them in and find a way to give them access to the process.

Stacy said the Coordinating Committee also talked that morning about the role of DWRF in commenting after the release of draft EAs. The Forest Service requested more involvement from DWRF to help the agency assess whether it is being effective in meeting metrics. The CC said they could play a more formal advisory role in that process. The CC and anyone else interested could play a committed role to help the Forest Service work through the timeline on the projects.

Danny said the idea of that happening within the CC is because they are the most identifiable people coming to the DWRF meetings every month and the CC has a broad mix of voices, views and expertise. The CC will be the more formal communication link to the Forest Service, but conversations will take place among the whole stakeholder group.

Becca said this sounds like a very big job for a Coordinating Committee that is trying to keep the organization rolling. It may be a heavy burden for a small number of people.

Mike said it is a matter of consistency and diversity. They want an identifiable group to vet and prep discussions for the collaborative, reach out to the stakeholders and organize events. If there is a lack of agreement among the collaborative everybody is free to go their own way.

Becca said her concern is if some robust metrics are developed by that team most funding places don't have a lot of money budgeted. If there is a lot of monitoring beyond the minimum going on, that might be more to implement than what the Forest Service is able to do. Actually monitoring something in a way to inform adaptive management may be a heavy effort.

David Casey said he is sure the agency will pursue any unanswered questions even if it takes more money.

Derek said as the Forest Service develops an EA they include what they can realistically do. If the collaborative wants more, the Forest Service can say that's not something that can be done on the Forest Service side alone. He believes they will be able to work through such issues.

Danny said Becca was asking about the ideal vs. the practical. He said it is good to have Derek Padilla on that working group to identify metrics.

Stacy said it's a work in progress. The Forest Service sees an opportunity to get information and advice. The CC is saying they will figure out how to provide that effectively and in a productive manner.

Anthony C. said the Pagosa Ranger District is adopting protocols for silviculture for timber crews that can be added on without adding much work to their operations. They have been asking whether they can spread this across the San Juan National Forest.

Ann McCoy-Harold asked whether DWRF has a way to let the community know about something important that has happened.

Danny said DWRF needs to improve its outreach and ability to communicate successes. That was written into the WaterSMART planning grant. DWRF is planning to do a field trip June 18 to the Lone Pine area to show on the ground what the Forest Service is proposing and what is part of the EA. Danny said he will send information out about the field trip. The Salter EA is coming up and DWRF will be doing a field trip this summer in that area as well.

David Casey said the Lone Pine EA should be finalized in the next couple of weeks. He will put out an itinerary for the day for that field trip.

Stacy said if people have other thoughts about how DWRF should be engaged in EA processes or other processes on Colorado State Forest Service land, let her or Danny know.

In general for the strategic plan she is working on the draft now and will send it to the DWRF stakeholders for review and will probably spend the July meeting talking through the strategic plan. The organizational structure work is being spearheaded by the Coordinating Committee and will be developed over the next month or so and then they will bring in the metric setting work from the small group. This is all going well.

Brad asked whether the boundaries of DWRF had been talked out. Stacy said it is on the docket to be discussed. Brad said none of the irrigators are captured within the boundaries of DWRF, and that is an important constituency, plus the cross-boundary of private land and the Forest Service.

Jimbo asked Brad what boundaries he is suggesting. Brad said he likes using the highways because that captures the private land. Water users, people who are logging and people who own grazing animals live in that area. Rico might be within it. But right now there is only one town that this group officially captures.

Becca said she does think the downstream users have always been a part of the conversation but haven't been the focus of DWRF. She noted that Rich Landreth is present at many meetings.

Stacy said DWRF can figure out how to address this.

Mike P. said it is the wildland-urban interface (WUI) that is the forested interface. If DWRF can take in the forest areas adjacent to what they are looking at, that is a good bite. They are very interested in water quality and quantity and in protecting the power grid.

Derek said this group needs to focus its work so it doesn't have too big a bite to handle.

Updates

- Danny said DWRF did not receive two grants it applied for. He has applied for two other grants, one a national one and from the Ballantine Foundation. He also discussed DWRF clarifying its fiscal relationship with WAP.
- Danny said work was accomplished recently at Butler Corner. Bruce said they did burn about 45 piles. There are another 50 to 75 piles to do but he thinks these will have to wait until fall.
- Danny will have a table at the Dolores River Festival, which is June 1. Anyone who want to help can do so.
- Brad said the Forest Service started prescribed burning on the Pagosa Ranger District and locally. The plans are to burn at least 7,000 acres within the DWRF landscape. He believes it will be possible to burn all the way to the monsoons this year. There will be a lot of smoke this year. There will be a vocal minority among the public that questions why the prescribed burns are being done, so there is a huge outreach need
- Danny said there will be area closures in Boggy Draw for one to three days for prescribed burns there. Signs will be posted prior to the full burns.
- Charles said SB 19-040, a bill that establishes the Colorado fire commission in the division of fire prevention and control in the department of public safety, has been put on the governor's desk.
- Norm said Montezuma Forest Products broke ground on schedule last year for a new planning mill. They are on schedule to have the mill completed by October. They have a contract with two loggers in Cortez to do logging in ponderosa pine if they are able to purchase some leases from the Forest Service and hope to be able to start logging this fall. They would like to saw ponderosa pine 25 percent of the time in their mill to start out with and to gradually increase ponderosa pine to about 50 percent.
- Rich said the City of Cortez hopes to have its source water protection plan with Colorado Rural Water Association completed by September. Then there will be some implementation money available in this watershed.
- Ann said Senator Gardner is continuing to push to relocate the BLM's headquarters to the West. Grand Junction is his first choice.
- Dave Sitton said they are out of logs. They have been selling the green pine trees to smaller mills.
- Ken Charles predicted June 1 will be the date for high water. The low-elevation melt is coming down very nicely. There will be a release from McPhee Reservoir at some point. There are no flooding concerns.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 5. In July the meeting will be July 17th.