

# Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

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## **Present:**

Derek Padilla and David Casey (San Juan National Forest), Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service), Anthony Culpepper (Mountain Studies Institute), Sonny Frazier (Town Manager, Dove Creek), Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist), Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado), Ashley Downey (Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Ellen Roberts (Natural Resources Consultant), Alex Graf (Montezuma County Coordinator for Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Rachel Medina and James Dietrich (Montezuma County), Mike Preston (Dolores Water Conservancy District), Ann McCoy Harold (Senator Cory Gardner's Office), Eric Janes (Retired, Bureau of Land Management), Rich Landreth (City Of Cortez), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

## **Updates**

**Funding:** Danny said Cohesive Strategy (National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy) funding is finite and DWRF is working through it. At present it looks as if it will last through late spring. This funding is paying for Danny's services as well as items such as the logo. Danny is moving under contract for the WaterSMART grant and that will help considerably.

Danny said DWRF will be putting out two RFPs under WaterSMART funding. One may be a direct contract for developing a watershed monitoring plan. The other will be for a GIS assistant employed on an as-needed basis to help with specific requests such as maps and outreach materials.

Becca said the WaterSMART grant was tilted toward water quality and quantity metrics, so she wonders how components of this will be met. Danny said a major part of the grant proposal was for the Mountain Studies Institute to make Colorado Forest Restoration Institute methods applicable to the DWRF landscape and much of that has happened. Water quality and quantity are a component of the resilience metrics.

Derek said CFRI and the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station work with each other.

Eric asked whether the draft RFP will be circulated among members of the collaborative before it goes out. Danny said he will send it to Eric and see how broadly it can be circulated. If anyone else wants it they should let him know.

Danny said the WaterSMART grant is solely a planning grant. There is no implementation component; that would follow after a planning grant. The DWRF Coordinating Committee is still deciding whether DWRF can apply for Part 2 of a WaterSMART grant because in order to qualify, an entity must be a nonprofit or part of another nonprofit.

Danny said DWRF has applied for the Onward! A Legacy Foundation community grant for general operating expenses. There is also a grant proposal pending with the Laura Jane Musser Fund, which assists with projects in rural areas, for rapid risk assessments throughout Dolores County.

**Proposed work on Empire Electric's powerline corridors:** DWRF and other partners are considering applying for a FEMA pre-disaster mitigation grant for Montezuma County. Becca said at a meeting on Oct. 24 among interested parties, the group came up with the idea of a project that would expand Empire Electric Association's powerline corridors and do more mitigation work within those easements.

Mike said the corridors currently are 30 feet wide, but in places that isn't sufficient. What's being proposed is to assess the corridor. This proposal is for work that would take place on national forest land, so there are NEPA considerations.

Becca said Empire is doing some LIDAR work using drones to measure vegetation. The state has said it will not fund any drone work. FEMA also will not fund work being done on federal lands because their focus is on state and private lands. The group's hope is to continue the conversation and move the powerline project forward with whatever funding sources are available.

Rachel said the state just collected LIDAR data for this area and it will be available next year. Becca said that may eliminate the need for drone-flying along the local Empire lines.

**RFPs for woody biomass utilization:** Eric said he received an update on the University of California Cooperative Extension woody biomass utilization RFP. The Forest Service is requesting proposals to expand wood energy and wood products throughout the U.S. Proposals are due Jan. 15.

David said they are seeking large projects and the general feeling is that there isn't such a project ready locally.

**Southwest Colorado Wildfire Mitigation Environmental Impact Fund:** Ellen said tomorrow there would be a work-study session with the La Plata County commissioners regarding their participation in the Environmental Impact Fund. The City of Durango wants to schedule a work-study session with the full city council.

**Dolores Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest:** David said the district tried a new approach with some stewardship contractors this year and it worked out well. The contractors installed three new culverts in the Chicken Creek Trail area.

Derek said conditions are very dry for this time of year so the district has not been able to do any prescribed burning or pile burning this fall.

He said the district received four objections to the draft Lone Pine EA decision. District personnel have met with all the objectors and discussed possible resolutions. Dec. 6 is the end of the resolution period but it can be extended for 30 days. The objection period for the Dolores Aspen Landscape Vegetation Management EA ends this week.

Anthony said MSI has been working with David Casey and the timber crew to update their monitoring protocol.

**Collaborative Forest Landscapes Restoration Program  
and Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative**

Danny said several documents related to CFLRP and RMRI were sent to DWRF members a few weeks ago

and he received a modest amount of feedback. The next round of documents will go out in a couple of weeks.

**CFLRP:** Derek discussed CFLRP, which is a landscape restoration program for national forests. Congress doubled the total amount of money that can be allocated each year under the program, but the maximum per project remains at \$4 million. The funding is limited to work on federal lands, but such work can reinvigorate the timber industry in the area, which can help with work on non-federal lands. The SJNF is applying for funding under the program. The final proposal is due to the Forest Service's Washington office on Jan. 24.

**RMRI:** RMRI is a partnership between the National Wild Turkey Federation and Region 2 of the U.S. Forest Service whose goal is to provide substantial funding for major forest health work. Southwest Colorado is being considered for such funding. The San Juan National Forest and Rio Grande National Forest are putting in separate proposals.

Danny said in October there was a cross-collaborative meeting in Durango with members of DWRF, the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership and the Columbine Forest Collaborative, all of which are supporting the SJNF's proposal. Some directions and the landscapes the collaboratives wanted to prioritize were identified. It was the first time these collaboratives met together.

Danny said the full proposal for the Southwest Colorado Restoration Initiative is contained in a PowerPoint presentation. He sent out the draft presentation to DWRF stakeholders a day before it was finished and received a small amount of feedback.

There was discussion about the landscape chosen for treatment in the initiative proposal. Becca said she wondered why the area around McPhee Reservoir wasn't included. Mike said while there is piñon-juniper around McPhee that could burn, the most important goal is protecting the watershed leading into McPhee.

Ellen said ponderosa pine forests are the focal area. The Highway 160 corridor is also important.

Bill Baker asked whether the map or the contents in the proposal could be changed now. Danny said this is the final version. However, he doesn't know how locked in to the proposed areas the Southwest Colorado Restoration Initiative will be if it is funded. Ellen said she thinks the actual work will have to align closely to what was proposed, but there is flexibility as to the starting place and the sequence of work.

Bill said he would have challenged the inclusion of the Lone Pine area if he were part of the small group that made the selection. He said the San Juan Citizens Alliance also should have been included.

Danny said while the collaboratives weighed in, the decision about the landscape was primarily made by the Forest Service.

Anthony said not every acre in that polygon will be treated, but any funding would be beneficial.

### **DWRF Operating Principles**

Danny showed the draft operating principles on screen. He said he has not sent these out to the collaborative yet but he will. The strategic plan guides DWRF's direction, while the operating principles

lay out how DWRP operates internally.

**Decision-making:** Danny said the Coordinating Committee doesn't have consensus on how to approach this. It will be something they have to approach in the future. Right now there are not mechanisms in place to identify whether there is consensus in the group. Voting does not take place.

Ellen said she values the collaborative for not voting. Sharing a common ground is a high value. This group has had a lot of robust discussion but she believes voting is choosing and not what she thinks is truly valuable.

**Stakeholder responsibilities and expectations:** Danny presented these, of which there are seven.

Eric raised a question about No. 7 (talking to media). He asked whether individual DWRP members should be able to talk to the media.

Danny said it would be fine to talk to the media about factual things, but not to speak for the group's position. Ellen suggested just stating that general media inquiries should go to Danny.

Danny will send the draft operating principles out and request feedback.

**Next meeting:** The next meeting will be Dec. 4 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the DWCD offices.