

# Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

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## Present:

Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service), Derek Padilla (Dolores District Ranger, San Juan National Forest), Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist), Norm Bircher (Montrose Forest Products), Ashley Downing (Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado), Mike Preston (Dolores Water Conservancy District), Sonny Frazier (Town Manager, Dove Creek), Ann McCoy Harold (Sen. Cory Gardner's Office), Alex Graf (Montezuma County Coordinator for Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Mike Pasquin (Montezuma County), Ellen Roberts (Contractor with CSFS & SJNF), Stacy Beaugh (Strategic By Nature Consulting Services), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

## Updates

**WaterSMART grant:** Danny said the Coordinating Committee and another group are moving forward on the WaterSMART grant and developing RFQs or statements of interest to be put out for different positions.

**Rapid Risk Assessments:** Alex said he, Danny and Charles Lanoue of the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control completed rapid risk assessments in the Town of Dolores. Some assessments had been done in 2018, but about two-thirds of the total still needed to be completed. Those are now done.

Danny said essentially all properties within the town limits of Dolores now have a risk assessment. It still needs to be figured out how to communicate the information to all the households, especially the high-risk households, such as those close to steep slopes.

Becca said 400 homes in Dolores have major issues with wood siding or shingles. She suggested looking into FEMA cost-sharing for siding replacement.

Mike Preston said officials with local fire protection districts could help identify places in the unincorporated portions of the county that are at risk.

**Education:** Danny said he will be involved in additional conversations about developing educational materials for DWRF. He suggested creating a group that will meet just once or twice to identify educational needs in the community regarding wildfire and how DWRF can be involved.

Alex, Mike Preston, and Becca said they are willing to be in the education group.

**Federal Engagement:** Derek said the Forest Service received seven or eight comment letters in response to the Lone Pine EA and is working through those now. The Dolores District's goal is to have a final EA, a draft decision notice and a FONSI released by Aug. 23. Following the release, there is a 45-day objection period, after which the district processes any objections.

Derek said the comment period for the Dolores Aspen Landscape Vegetation Management EA ended a few weeks ago and the district received about half as many comments as it did regarding Lone Pine. A draft decision notice and final EA should be completed within two to three weeks.

Derek said the Doe Canyon Fire in Dolores County, which was caused by lightning, is basically out. Forest officials allowed it to play its natural role. They have plans to conduct additional prescribed burns as soon as conditions allow, including on one unit that lies just north of House Creek Road and north to 529 road as well as seven or eight units within the Boggy area.

In response to a question Derek said he would be happy to offer more tours of prescribed burn areas such as Boggy Draw. He said the Boggy Draw prescribed burn worked well and met the parameters set.

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative:** Ellen said she and Mike Preston both attended a meeting of the initiative in July. Region 2 of the Forest Service and the National Wild Turkey Federation have joined forces to evaluate where in Colorado they might be able to provide resources to accelerate the pace and scale of fuels treatment. Southwest Colorado had the most potential sites for projects.

Mike said the group is impressive. It is now in an outreach phase. Representatives will come to the local area and gather information. They are interested in not only DWRP and agencies such as the Forest Service, but the in the timber industry. The Colorado Water Congress is meeting Aug. 20 in Steamboat Springs and the agenda includes an entire session where the restoration initiative will be discussed. The group is moving fast.

Ellen said the initiative is an effort to turn things around regarding forest health by deciding how to be more targeted, which areas are most ready to receive more resources for fuels treatment, and so on.

Derek said the initiative is taking a very holistic view that includes not just mechanical treatment. In Southwest Colorado the Forest Service has prescribed burn opportunities ready on hundreds of thousands of acres.

Ellen said any help in identifying larger private parcels in this area is sought. She said the visit from initiative members will be in August.

Danny said he will be in touch with the collaborative regarding next steps.

### **Strategic Planning**

Stacy said the draft strategic plan for DWRP was released a couple of weeks ago and has drawn some helpful comments. She, Danny and the Coordinating Committee have been going through them. She would like to send out another version of the draft plan and offer stakeholders another chance to respond to it. This will be the final round of comments. She said the strategic plan is a working document that will evolve with the collaborative. She hopes to have it back to the group in the next couple of weeks so it can be wrapped up at the September meeting.

Stacy said the Coordinating Committee is working to decide the best organizational structure for DWRP. Three options are:

- Remain a collaborative
- Become a 501(c) 3
- Become a more formal program of an existing nonprofit.

She said there needs to be some sort of collaborative agreement to define DWRP's mission and who its stakeholders are. She will be developing that for the next stakeholder meeting and it will be a short document.

Stacy is also working on an outlook on the budget. She will draft it and Danny will probably work with the group to refine it.

Stacy said anyone who has additional comments on the strategic plan should send them to her or Danny as soon as possible. Those who already did submit comments should hear from her or Danny in the next week or so.

Stacy said she has been very impressed with the participation in this process and it's been very valuable.

### **Cortez Source Water Protection Plan**

Danny gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Cortez Source Water Protection Plan. He said Rich Landreth of the City of Cortez was not able to be present today but will be speaking more to the group about the plan at a later meeting. Rich would like some feedback from the collaborative, especially regarding the wildfire component, which is what Danny was to focus on today. Danny said people should give feedback to Rich on the other parts of the plan as well.

Danny said a previous draft of the plan came out around 2013 and there was feedback that the risk to water from wildfires wasn't incorporated. Wildfire is a factor that has been determined to pose a major risk to the water supply, along with aquatic nuisance species and abandoned mines.

Danny explained that the plan is not legally binding, but encourages education and voluntary solutions.

He discussed post-fire erosion effects such as chemical contamination and impacts from fire retardant. Danny said post-fire impacts are real.

Danny asked if there are other ways wildfire threatens Cortez's drinking water. Some responses were:

- Significant chemical changes to water will linger long-term after fire.
- Cortez will have to change its filtration process completely and that could be expensive.
- Some modeling would need to be done to provide good information on the reservoir.
- There are many hypothetical possibilities. Fire scars do put off a lot of toxins. Just because there is a "big bucket" it doesn't mean we don't need to protect the water supply.
- A lot of research has shown that water yields will increase as the stocking in these ponderosa pine stands is reduced. Cortez's water is probably secure but this is a huge component for water management and the Forest Service to look at.

Danny noted that the City of Cortez is an active participant in DWRP and will reference DWRP's wildfire risk reduction framework when making decisions about wildfire impacts to water sources. Cortez will share critical water infrastructure information with the Forest Service to incorporate into its wildland fire decision support system to enhance protection of valuable assets.

Danny said asked if there are other ways the Source Water Protection Plan could identify areas with high risk to drinking water.

Alex said private lands south of McPhee could be more represented in the plan. Having to fight a fire south of McPhee could affect infrastructure.

Bill said he has some concerns about the plan. He said the map shown in Figure 12 is not a good representation of the risk situation for the watershed except broadly. There is much more location knowledge than this and a lot more about the historical fire regimes. Also, he said a modern fire regime is increasingly influenced by human-set fires. The 416 and Missionary Ridge fires were both human-set. He said California is doing modeling based on humans.

Becca said there is a lot in the risk assessment modeling that was already done. She said it does incorporate the actual probability of fire starts.

**Next steps:**

→ Danny said he will send out the draft Source Water Protection Plan again as well as his PowerPoint. He said stakeholders should reach out to him with comments so he can coalesce the information and give to Rich, or people can send feedback directly to Rich.

**Adaptive Management**

Danny gave a brief presentation on Adaptive Management (AM). He said DWRF was involved in the Lone Pine EA as a partner and the Forest Service is seeking input from the collaborative regarding AM.

Mike Preston said prescribed fire is analyzed in a separate EA and was not described in the Lone Pine EA but there is a role for fire to play. Danny said that's an excellent point.

Danny said Mountain Studies Institute is going to contract with the Forest Service to do monitoring for the Lone Pine EA and developing AM. He hopes they create an AM group for DWRF to help define and flesh out AM.

Norm said in the past AM seems to have been very effective in monitoring and evaluating design criteria within the EA. The criteria adapted and changed over time based on what the group saw on the ground.

Becca said this is a fairly good list for this EA but she hopes it will evolve more. There may be room in this EA to do some economic monitoring.

Becca asked how the players at the table will be defined. Danny said they want to keep it open. A smaller group would look at the information closely and bring it back to the larger group. The Forest Service is still making the decisions on the ground, but they are seeking DWRF's input and feedback. Becca said the on-the-ground component is going to be critical in seeing over time where it's working.

Danny said he hopes everyone who was involved in developing resilience metrics will be involved with the AM framework.

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