

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

September 5, 2019

dwrfcollaborative.org

draft - 4 pages

Present:

Derek Padilla (Dolores District Ranger, San Juan National Forest), David Casey (Dolores District, SJNF), Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited), Rich Landreth (Water Plant Superintendent, City Of Cortez), Floyd Cook and Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commissioners), Sonny Frazier (Town Manager, Dove Creek), Ryan Cox, Mark Loveall and Luke Dittrich (Colorado State Forest Service), Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist), Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado), Ashley Downey (Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Alex Graf (Montezuma County Coordinator for WAP), Rachel Medina (GIS Specialist, Montezuma County), Bruce Short (Retired, U.S. Forest Service), Mike Preston and Ken Curtis (Dolores Water Conservancy District), Jerald Peabody (Natural Resources Director, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe), Brian Rose (Region 9 Economic Development District), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

Dolores District of the San Juan National Forest: Derek said the district completed Unit 35 of the Boggy Draw prescribed burn about 1 ½ weeks ago. It went well, burning on the hotter end of the prescription. The effects achieved were excellent, as 80 to 90 percent of the surface fuels were consumed. However, the burn site is very visible from the Dove Creek and Dolores-Norwood roads and currently doesn't look good aesthetically, which may prompt some public concern. During the burn, there were many calls from people, but just eight of them were complaints, mostly regarding the smoke. The rest were from people simply wanting to know what was happening.

Derek said there is another site just north of Butler Corner and more acres in Boggy Draw on which the district would like to implement a prescribed burn if there is precipitation in September or October.

The Dolores District has released the final EA and decision notice for the Lone Pine project, triggering an objection period that will end Oct. 15. Anyone who needs more information should contact either Derek or David Casey.

The district is reviewing the final EA for the Dolores Aspen Landscape Vegetation Management project and hopes to release it in the next couple of weeks.

David said the district was able to collect 40 bushels of ponderosa pine seed over the last few days on Haycamp Mesa and half has gone to the nursery. Next year the district plans to put a large chunk of money into seed collection.

Collaborative Forest Landscapes Restoration Program: Derek distributed a handout explaining about the program. The CFLRP, established by Congress in 2009, encourages science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes. The program provides funding for ecological restoration treatments on national forest lands. The benefiting forest must provide 50 percent of the funds for any project. The San Juan National Forest has been asked to put in for a project that would complement the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative's efforts. It would target the non-commercial aspect of forest

treatment, such as thinning and prescribed fire, efforts that there is no industry in place to accomplish. RMRI would complement that.

Prescribed fire tour in Boggy Draw: Alex said six people from DWRP and WAP took part in a tour of the burn in Boggy Draw while it was occurring.

Source Water Protection Plan: Rich said he received some feedback regarding Cortez's Source Water Protection Plan following the presentation given by Danny at last month's DWRP meeting. If anyone has more input to offer, they should send it to him before the end of September. The City's goal is to have the plan completed by the end of the year. He said he can send out a revised draft of the plan.

Danny suggested that the HVRA map would provide more robust information than what is currently in the plan. Rich said that was good information.

Watershed coordinator and monitoring person: Mike said the Coordinating Committee sent out an RFQ for a watershed coordinator. The committee received three responses and is evaluating those.

Danny said a small group is putting together a monitoring RFQ. Whoever is chosen for the position would make a database, collect information and help provide a better picture of the ecological conditions in the watershed. More details about this are within the strategic plan.

Trout Unlimited: Duncan said TU took 32 fin samples from area cutthroat streams and sent them to Colorado Parks and Wildlife so they can map DNA. TU also took readings from temperature sensors. He said all streams below the West Fork to the top of McPhee Reservoir had serious heat issues through July and August, which has implications for trout.

Colorado State Forest Service: Mark said CSFS's Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grant program has been announced. Applications are due mid-October for the grants, which provide 50 percent of the funding for mitigation projects. The link will be sent out.

Strategic planning

Danny said comments were received from several people on the second draft of the strategic plan and most of what was identified will be incorporated. He said anyone who still wanted to provide comments on the second draft should do it before the end of the day.

He said the term "forest health" will not be defined in the plan at present because it is a loaded term that has been defined by so many that it is difficult to use effectively.

DWRP's organizational structure: Danny said this morning he and others met with members of the Onward! A Legacy Foundation to discuss options for DWRP's organizational structure if DWRP should move under Onward. At present WAP is DWRP's fiscal sponsor, but the collaborative isn't a program of WAP.

Danny said Stacy has spoken with an attorney regarding the issue of liability. What was recommended was putting together an MOU to help formalize who is a part of the collaborative. Individual participants would sign on to say they are a member of DWRP and would possibly renew annually.

Danny said no one wants an overly formalized structure for DWRF. He doesn't envision much of a structural change.

Duncan said Onward could provide accounting and liability for DWRF. That is the foundation's role, to provide such services for small groups.

Next steps:

→ Danny said to let him know if anyone believes the Coordinating Committee is doing too much without involving the larger stakeholder group. He said anyone who has a strong feeling about DWRF's structure should let him know.

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative

Danny and Mike gave a brief background on the initiative. RMRI is a partnership between the National Wild Turkey Federation and Region 2 of the U.S. Forest Service. Its goal is to accomplish substantial forest health work at a discrete location and then to use that work as an example moving forward. Colorado's I-70 corridor, the central Front Range, and Southwest Colorado are three areas being considered for such work. When RMRI identified the three areas, they set up meetings in each area. A week ago Monday, there was a meeting in Durango, with a number of members of DWRF present. RMRI will choose one or two areas where to concentrate its resources initially. The selection process will be in October. RMRI's efforts will not be focused solely on federal lands

Mike said RMRI first focused on the Rocky Mountain region for these efforts, then on Colorado, because of the presence of so many critical headwaters. RMRI appointed a statewide group, and Mike as well as Ellen Roberts are serving as members.

Mike said some reasons Southwest Colorado deserves to be considered are that it includes both the San Juan and Rio Grande national forests. Other pluses are:

- Shared stewardship
- Landscape pace and scale
- On the Western Slope, commercial value is key to accomplishing any substantial forest treatments, and Southwest Colorado has an active timber industry.

Derek said another important factor is the level of accomplishment everybody at the table contributes to the effort. There are similar discussions going on elsewhere, but not much is being done on the ground in the other places.

Priorities on the DWRF landscape: The group discussed priorities for treatment on the local landscape. Some comments were:

- It's important to think about broader issues than just about what acres need to be treated.
- Roughly half of Montezuma County is within DWRF's boundaries. But the McElmo and Mancos watersheds, which aren't within DWRF's area, are of great importance to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Could those watersheds be considered for treatment efforts?
- It's likely that treatment priorities would sit near the national forest, which would mean the Mancos watershed could be considered but not likely the McElmo one, because it is mainly surrounded by BLM land.

- The wildland-urban interface lies primarily outside national forest lands. Most of the tribal lands are outside the forest. How far do we want to go?
- DWRF's priority area includes most of the WUI so it's important not to limit ourselves to the watershed.
- A key question is which sites are ready for fuels treatment to start.
- On private lands there are no NEPA requirements so if it's important to get started quickly, that's the place to go.
- What are critical landscapes? What needs to be restored? The word "critical" is not defined.
- Natural resources are not necessarily the only thing involved; natural and mineral resources could be involved. No one wants another Gold King Mine disaster.
- RMRI is more focused on forest restoration than on preventing mining/mineral problems.
- On the other hand, protecting water quality is important.
- It's difficult to have every place fit every objective. The WUI won't always capture the water component but there is a need to think about a slightly broader landscape and a 10-year project.
- Some priorities for protection, including the WUI, electrical grid, and national forest, all come together in the Rico and Dolores areas.

Mike and Ken said the collaborative should reach out to the recreation community for input, as recreation is very important to community economics.

Danny said the broader conversation will be about the priorities for each given landscape and the priorities for the whole Southwest region in general.

Becca said the RMRI group that met last week will meet again in South Fork on Sept. 20. She has put together a spreadsheet to show what projects DWRF has in mind.

Ashley said WAP already has programs and structure in place but limited funding to do anything. A lack of capacity and funding for that capacity are the two things really that limit WAP. There are many places on the Highway 184 corridor that need treatment and a few in Dolores County as well.

Bruce said there are two limiting factors right now:

- The ability of people to take advice from programs that are out there.
- The fact that the utilization capacity still needs to be built. Timber buyers are not knocking on doors.

Jerald said Selwyn Whiteskunk is the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's spokesperson on natural resources so he wants to talk to him before making a statement, but the tribe wants to help and be involved. Danny said he would reach out to Selwyn.

Next steps:

→ Danny said anyone who doesn't want emails from him on this topic should let him know ASAP. He will share Becca's spreadsheet of DWRF treatment priorities and will send out an email calling for anyone who wants to be more involved in this conversation.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be Oct. 2 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the DWCD offices.