

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative
Stakeholders Meeting
April 1, 2020
dwrfcollaborative.org
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The meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom. Present were:

Tim Kylo (Montrose Forest Products); David Sitton (Aspen Wall Wood); Molly Pitts (Executive Director, Colorado Timber Industry Association); Andy Hawk (Timber Age Systems of Durango); Eric Janes (Retired, Bureau of Land Management); Ashley Downing, Phil Ayers and Alex Graf (Wildfire Adapted Partnership); Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado); Derek Padilla and David Casey (Dolores Ranger District, San Juan National Forest); Ryan Cox, Melissa Simmons and Tim Reader (Colorado State Forest Service); Rich Landreth (City of Cortez); Ed Millard (Southwest Basin Roundtable); Luke Kline (Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cortez); Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited); Mike Preston (Dolores Water Conservancy District); Ellen Roberts (Natural Resources Consultant); Randy Johnson working with CSFS; Anthony Culpepper (Mountain Studies Institute); Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited); Jamie Johnson (Montezuma Land Conservancy); Robert Meyer (Mancos Trails Group); Steve Garcher (Dolores County Commissioner); James Dietrich (Public Lands Coordinator, Montezuma County); Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

Dolores Ranger District: Derek said the district has suspended all spring prescribed fire plans for now. How they move forward will depend on when they feel conditions are favorable and they are able to implement prescribed burning safely with people in the field social-distancing measures.

The district office is technically closed and no one is staffing the front desk, but the office is open virtually. The staff is working from home. Signs out front provide a phone number to call. All access to the office requires an appointment.

Derek said since the governor's stay-at-home order the district suspended all personnel from going into the field until there was more direction. The state has designated support for the timber industry as well as natural resource management as critical. Firefighters have an exemption to the state's stay-at-home order. National forests in Colorado are allowed to have personnel going out in the field to resume work related to vegetation management, and the Dolores District will be commencing that as soon as conditions allow. Over the next couple of weeks, it is likely that the forest will dry out sufficiently so people can get into the field. Some projects include laying out plots for monitoring sites related to Lone Pine, necessary work for the timber sale associated with the Lone Pine EA, and other vegetation-management projects.

The district is still in discussions regarding recreational opportunities. The opening of the main boat ramp at McPhee has been delayed until at least April 30. Developed recreation sites remain closed because they traditionally don't open until May 1. As that date approaches, staff will review the situation. Over the next week and a half, staff will be assessing road conditions to see whether it's acceptable to open the roads. People are understandably eager to get outdoors, but the district has a responsibility to manage natural resources according to regular protocol and it will not be adjusting the procedures because of the COVID-19 situation.

Derek said he does not expect delays regarding timber sales.

Colorado State Forest Service: Ryan said he has been doing minimal field work over the last couple of weeks. CSFS has received an official two-week exemption from the travel ban starting Monday so they will be able to do some field work.

Wildfire Adapted Partnership and Fire Adapted Colorado: Ashley said WAP staff members are all working from home and have had virtual meetings with some wildfire ambassadors. Any site visits are on hold until the governor lifts the order.

Becca said she has been thinking about how local wildfire councils can adjust their practices in order to work at home. A great deal of prescribed burning is being halted right now, so it is more important than ever for people to do household preparedness. She has also been having an email conversation with Montezuma Inspire Coalition partners regarding providing youth lessons virtually. She will probably offer some wildfire lessons as well.

Timber industry: Molly said the state has clarified that businesses in the timber industry are considered essential businesses.

Andy Hawk said he and Kyle Hanson have had no major disruptions and are working from home.

Tim said when Montrose Forest Products heard the order last Wednesday to halt everything, they didn't operate logging crews or the sawmill that Thursday, but then it was clarified that these are essential businesses. They returned to work Friday morning and have been working steadily ever since.

David said operations at Aspen Wall Wood are moving forward normally but some buyers are closing their doors, so some shipments are not going forward.

Ellen said the [Environmental Impact Fund](#) continues to move forward. Last week she did a virtual presentation to the La Plata County commissioners discussing it with them. They are doing outreach and anyone who knows of a group they should be presenting to is asked to please inform Ellen. They are forming the legal entity that would be the center of the hub for the Environmental Impact Fund. A first draft of that is expected next week.

MSI: Anthony said MSI will be hosting its [Forest and Fire Learning Series](#) via the Facebook Live platform.

DWRF: Danny said DWRF is moving to online platforms. In-person field tours are on hold for now. He hopes a tour of the Salter EA area can happen in June. The draft EA is supposed to be released in June with the standard 30-day comment period. The Outreach Committee will be meeting in a couple of weeks and he hopes there will be more clarity at that time about social-distancing measures and how long they may be in place. If DWRF needs to move most of its efforts to online platforms, it will have to decide how to do that most effectively. Danny would like everyone to consider what outreach opportunities are available using online platforms and to offer suggestions to him.

Four Corners Free Press opinion piece that mentioned RMRI

The group discussed an opinion column that was printed in the Four Corners Free Press in February. Eric said there were a number of points that warrant clarification or weren't entirely accurate, including:

- A statement that \$50 million was to be allocated out of the Forest Service budget. The National Wild Turkey Federation is a major partner in RMRI and there must be many other organizations providing funding as well.
- The implication that options for forest management on the San Juan National Forest are extremely limited because three-quarters of the forest is either wilderness or roadless. Eric doubts that is correct.
- The geography of RMRI is the southern edge of the SJNF and private/state lands, not the entire national forest.
- The writer expressed concern that NEPA and environmental analyses could hinder the ability of forest management projects to go forward because of litigation by environmental groups. They did not seem aware that there are other projects that have already gone through NEPA that are shelf-ready. Additionally, the writer also did not seem to be aware that Montezuma and Dolores counties were actually sitting at the table discussing forest management efforts.

There was discussion about the column and the need to make sure that information disseminated about RMRI is on-point and accurate, but there was also general agreement that DWRP shouldn't publicly clarify RMRI on its own. There was general consensus that this would be a good time to submit one or more articles to the Cortez Journal and Durango Herald regarding DWRP. The pieces could explain what the DWRP collaborative is and what work it is doing, describe the wood products industry and forest restoration work, and discuss the benefits these offer to Southwest Colorado. The articles could note that this effort is being done collaboratively and is science-based.

Next steps:

→ It was decided that Becca will write an initial draft of the article and she and Danny will decide how to proceed from there. Eric, Melissa, Robert and others said they could help. Danny has a list of the people who want to be involved. He will be in touch about that.

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)

Mike said one of the key areas to be worked out for both RMRI Southwest Colorado and RMRI Colorado is governance. RMRI Southwest Colorado's Steering Committee is writing a draft charter and trying to make sure it aligns with the outcomes RMRI Colorado is seeking.

Funding for the initiative was discussed. It was noted that, although it was reported in local newspapers that Southwest Colorado will be receiving \$50 million over 10 years, that amount of money is not available to spend. Molly said the \$50 million figure came from the Southwest Colorado proposal but there isn't a guarantee that a certain amount of funding will be granted every year.

Mike said for wildfire mitigation projects that take place on non-federal rather than Forest Service lands, the Steering Committee will basically have to build the structure by formulating projects, taking them through review criteria and seeing where there are specific gaps that RMRI could potentially fill. Then presumably the funding commitments from the Wild Turkey Federation, Gates Family Foundation and others will be applied to a very specific project formulated out of the local process. The level of coordination this will require is considerable and the Steering Committee will rely heavily on leaders of the collaborative.

2019 Monitoring

Anthony showed a PowerPoint on “DWRf 2019 Monitoring, Desired Conditions and Adaptive Management Update” and discussed the progress that has been made to date. A DWRf resilience metrics table was developed last summer, and he would like to convene another resilience metrics workgroup meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend. An adaptive management monitoring table was developed for the Lone Pine area. Work has been done tying the goals of the Lone Pine EA to monitoring objectives and deciding what thresholds are triggers or sideboards as monitoring is done.

Anthony said some benchmarks have changed because of information about the Salter timeline.

Danny said a major portion of upcoming stakeholder meetings will be devoted to this topic. What are the treatments on the ground? Are they having the desired impacts? If not, what can we do better?

Next steps:

→ Danny will be sending out information about the resilience metrics group’s meeting, which will be open to everyone.

Review of DWRf’s Work in 2019

Danny showed a PowerPoint with the results of a survey he sent to all members of DWRf asking for their feedback on its work so far. There were strong positive responses to all quantitative questions. Respondents said there was good communication and that DWRf advanced its mission fairly well in 2019. He said this is heartening feedback.

The RMRI proposal and award were at the top of the list of DWRf’s accomplishments in 2019.

Ways that DWRf did not meet its goals, and areas that need work, included:

- Limited outreach
- Lack of biomass
- Industry participation
- More direction from the Coordinating Committee
- Identifying landscape priority areas for treatment
- More forest products industry participation
- More engagement with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Lack of secured funds for ongoing coordination
- Need movement on Wildfire Risk Reduction Framework and monitoring approach.

Danny said DWRf does have secured funds through the beginning of 2021.

Next steps:

→ Anyone with any questions should contact Danny.

Next meeting: The next DWRf meeting will be Wednesday, May 6, at 1:30 p.m. and it will take place online. You can access the meeting through this link:

DWRf is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

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<https://zoom.us/j/369432085>

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