

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative
Stakeholders Meeting
May 6, 2020
dwrfcollaborative.org
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The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:

Eric Janes (Retired BLM hydrologist); Bruce Short (Consulting Forester); Pat Seekins (Fire Management Officer for the Dolores District of the San Juan National Forest); Derek Padilla (Dolores District Ranger); Keith Fox (NEPA Planner for the Dolores District); David Casey (Forester, Dolores District); Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commissioner); Rachel Medina (GIS Specialist for Montezuma County, and Cortez City Councilor); Ken Curtis and Mike Preston (Dolores Water Conservancy District); Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited); Molly Pitts (Colorado Timber Industry Association); Andy Hawk (Timber Age Systems of Durango); Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado); Ashley Downing and Alex Graf (Wildfire Adapted Partnership); Anthony Culpepper and Mike Remke (Mountain Studies Institute); Weston Toll (Watershed Program Specialist, Colorado State Forest Service); Tim Reader (Forest Products Utilization and Marketing Forester, CSFS); Melissa Simmons and Mark Loveall (Durango Field Office, CSFS); Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Patt Dorsey (National Wild Turkey Federation); Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

DWRF: Danny said he is working on a webinar scheduled for Thursday, May 21, probably during the evening, that will focus on rapid risk assessments done for the Town of Dolores, as well as technical and financial resources to help with mitigation efforts. He has asked Pat Seekins to participate in the webinar and there may be additional individuals.

Education and outreach: Becca noted that there has been discussion about disseminating positive information about DWRF and encouraging local residents to become engaged. With substantial input and edits from some collaborative members, she wrote an article about DWRF that has been published in the *May Four Corners Free Press*. Meanwhile, Danny has been working with reporter Jim Mimiaga of the *Cortez Journal* so Jim can write a general article. There is a great deal of important work being done by the collaborative and many different topics that should be covered and shared, such as wood utilization, the timber industry, vegetation management on public lands, what residential homeowners can do, and impacts to water resources. It is hoped that specific DWRF members will write op-eds on those subjects for publication in the *Journal*. Robert Meyer, who has brought up a concern about people venturing into the woods this summer and being worried about how different the forest may look after mitigation efforts, was planning to draft an article.

Wildfires: Pat Seekins discussed the 84 Fire burning northeast of Durango, which was later contained after burning less than 100 acres. He said our fire season is here and firefighters are ready. Mike Remke said he has built an automated map that shows fires as well as smoke plumes, giving information on current smoke and fire conditions. He provides a morning and an afternoon update.

Pat said from his understanding, TRX training for local firefighters will not happen this year.

WAP: Alex said WAP is in full stride, with site visits open across the five-county region. Site-visit signup is available on their website. They are getting some new signups and also working on some from last year. He said WAP's cost-share program is somewhat limited by geography but includes the area from

Mancos to Dolores north of Highway 184, a portion of the region south of 184 extending to the neighborhood near McPhee Reservoir, and some of Cash Canyon. This represents a fairly wide geography across Montezuma County.

Alex said the chipper-rental rebate program that WAP has offered in the past will only be open for Archuleta and La Plata counties this year. Ashley said if WAP gets additional funding, the program might be available in Montezuma County as well.

Evacuation drill: Bruce said plans for an evacuation drill in the Cedar Mesa Ranches subdivision have been delayed because of safety concerns about having evacuated people crowded into the parking lot near the college, but the drill may take place later this summer or even this winter.

Wildfire Awareness Month: Becca noted that May is Wildfire Awareness Month. She hopes it can be promoted locally. Awareness Month outreach opportunities are at:

- <https://drive.google.com/open?id=15xwLQY8ydQCRh9bHE2G2dYpQx25XDp6P>
- Social Media #BeFireAdapted Challenges - tag your friends!
- https://drive.google.com/open?id=1UNN_azcGtZNfRPPir7v7n8G8BOctssW8

Forest products industry: Molly said COVID-19 has impacted the industry because much construction has been shut down nationwide.

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative: Mike Preston said that at an RMRI Colorado full partner meeting on May 1, Patt Dorsey provided an update on refinements to the RMRI Southwest Colorado Charter. Mike presented a draft Capacity Building Proposal for RMRI Southwest Colorado which outlines organizational strategy, staffing and a Year One budget to achieve forest resilience treatment pace and scale on national forest land in the Dolores Ranger District and strategies for treating non-federal land in La Plata, Montezuma and Dolores Counties.

The RMRI Southwest Colorado Charter is in final form, which includes an eight-member Steering Committee that will process recommended projects and methods brought forward by an Advisory Network led by the Collaborative coordinators, as well as the Ute Mountain and Southern Ute tribes, a conservation representative, a wood products industry representative and other key stakeholders.

2020 Southwest Colorado Fire Season Outlook

Pat Seekins said a good comparison for this season is the 2018 fire season, which saw the 358, 416 and Burro fires, all of them major wildfires. 2020 appears to be headed in a similar direction. A strong warm and dry pattern has been in place the last couple of weeks with considerable wind. Snow is melting fast and all the available fuels are drying out quickly. Fuels below 10,000 feet are snow-free or will be very soon.

The snowpack peaked April 1. During the last couple of weeks the combined basin lost more than half of the snow water equivalent present on that date. There are some higher flows in major rivers but it is anticipated that they are going to drop soon. Many streams appear to have peaked significantly below average peak flows.

Under the U.S. Drought Monitor, the local area is currently rated at D2 (severe drought) and moving toward D3 (extreme drought).

Pat said current conditions are typical of what conditions would be during the first week in June. Precipitation outlooks for the next 16 days are generally bleak, as most moisture systems will stay well north of this area. The region had a wetter-than-normal winter and spring which promoted the growth of grass. It is now tall and dried-out. There is some green-up at lower elevations, but it will be short-lived this year without additional moisture.

Although it is three weeks to a month before the onset of the normal fire season in the area, current fire danger is comparable to that of mid-June. Conditions seem to be worsening beyond those of 2018.

May 10-13 will be the first chance for widespread lightning strikes. When fire starts do occur, fairly extreme fire behavior can be expected. For late May through the first half of July, above-average fire potential is forecast.

In summary, Pat said green-up has begun but the large amount of carryover fuel will limit any positive impact. Southwest Colorado is entering a hot and dry year, where fuels dry rapidly. Any relief will be temporary until the onset of monsoons, but the area has not had a normal monsoon season since 2017.

In response to a question about predictions for this summer's monsoon, Pat said it's too early for predictions. In 2018 forecasters predicted an above-average monsoon for the Southwest but no true monsoon ever developed.

Pat was asked how the coronavirus will affect the response to fires. He said response times and efficiency will not change.

Danny said he would like to share with collaborative members a PowerPoint presentation titled "2020 Southwest Colorado Fire Season Outlook" by Brad Pietruszka, fuels programs manager for the SJNF. Pat said he would like Brad to check the PowerPoint before it's sent out.

DWRF Resilience Metrics and Desired Conditions

Anthony showed a table on draft Ecosystem Integrity Metrics that was included in the DWRF Strategic Plan. He said it served as the starting point for analyzing desired conditions, particularly their vegetative component. He gave a brief overview of the table and said water, wildlife and recreation are three areas researchers need to regroup on. The table is currently being reviewed and refined. Anyone who wants to be involved in this effort should let Danny or Anthony know.

Vegetation Management Environmental Assessments

Mike Remke showed a PowerPoint on "The Bradfield Unit – Lone Pine." Lone Pine is scheduled for 2020 implementation and is open for bid now.

Bradfield Project objectives are:

- increasing forest resilience to insects, drought and fire
- facilitating uneven-aged stand development.

He discussed tree density and forest floor litter, noting that there is very little bare soil in the area, as litter levels are extremely high. A fire could help remove some of that litter.

Duncan raised concerns about the ramifications for soil moisture of removing litter. Mike said that is a valid point, but a forest cover of 98 percent is too high. Removing all the litter in a ponderosa-dominated system certainly would not be desirable, but all the litter will never be eliminated, even with prescribed fire. However, it can be reduced.

Becca said that would be a good topic to earmark for discussion at the webinar.

Next steps:

→ Danny will send out information to stakeholders about the rapid risk assessment webinar.

Next meeting:

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 3, at 1:30 p.m. and will likely also be conducted via Zoom.