

**Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative
Stakeholders Meeting
July 8, 2020
dwrfcollaborative.org
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The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:

Mike Preston (RMRI Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee), Tim Reader, Ryan Cox, and Melissa Simmons (Colorado State Forest Service), Tim Kylo (Montrose Forest Products), Ellen Roberts (Southwest Colorado Environmental Impact Fund), Molly Pitts (Colorado Timber Industry Association), Derek Padilla and David Casey (Dolores District, San Juan National Forest), Jason Lawhon (RMRI Project Manager for U.S. Forest Service), James Dietrich (Coordinator, Montezuma County Natural Resources), Mike Remke and Dana Hayward (Mountain Studies Institute), Ed Millard (Montezuma County Representative to Southwest Basin Roundtable), Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission), Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist), Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited), Alex Graf (Wildfire Adapted Partnership), Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist), Andrew Hawk (Timber Age System), Matt Sturdevant (Colorado Parks and Wildlife), Rich Landreth (City of Cortez), Jamie Johnson (Montezuma Land Conservancy), Ken Curtis (Dolores Water Conservancy District), Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator), and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

Community education and outreach: Danny said he, Wildfire Adapted Partnership, the Town of Dolores, and Dolores Fire and Rescue are planning outreach on the rapid risk assessments done in Dolores. The Town of Dolores will pay some of the cost of mailing postcards to every house in Dolores on which an assessment was done. Those postcards will have a unique I.D. and a link to the website where property owners can find out more about their particular risk and the follow-up resources available.

A tour of the Salter area is still planned for some time after the draft Salter EA is released by the Dolores District. The draft EA has been delayed further, so the tour may take place in September at the earliest.

Danny reminded everyone of the science meeting coming up Friday, July 10, at 1:30 p.m. using Zoom. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

Bruce said Becca Samulski of Fire Adapted Colorado is gathering signatures in an effort to be placed on the November ballot as an unaffiliated candidate for the Montezuma County Commission.

Resilient Forests and Communities: Derek reported on recent wildfires in the area.

- The East Canyon Fire took place on Bureau of Land Management and private lands near Mancos. It burned about 2900 acres and is now fully contained.
- The Loading Pen Fire burned 42 acres on San Juan National Forest land northeast of Dolores along the Highway 145 corridor near Loading Pen trail, a mile or two beyond Stoner. It is 95 percent contained.
- In the western part of Montezuma County there were two fires, Yellow Jacket and Spring. The Yellow Jacket Fire grew to approximately 850 acres. The Spring Fire was in the 125-acre range. Both are contained.

Derek said all those wildfires were lightning-caused; so far there have not been any significant fires resulting from human activity in the immediate area. The San Juan National Forest has been under fire restrictions since April – first because of the COVID-19 pandemic and now because of weather and fuel conditions. Early on, forest managers saw some incidences of people not adhering to fire restrictions, but over the Fourth of July there was very good compliance with the rules. This year the SJNF is fully suppressing all fire starts because the coronavirus introduces complexity into management of fires; bringing in resources means more chance of exposure to the virus by firefighters. The Forest Service is trying to avoid that by keeping all fires small. It is hoped that next year it will be possible to return to taking advantage of some natural fires under the right conditions.

In answer to a question about detection of lightning-caused ignitions, Derek said technology now enables the detection of lightning strikes with good accuracy. Both the SJNF and the state have aircraft that can then be used to fly over the area of a strike to see if there was ignition.

Molly Pitts commented that it is very detrimental to the logging industry when wildfires burning in areas of beetle kill are identified as burning in “heavy logging slash”. The industry has been trying to address this nationally so that fires can be classified as occurring in areas of beetle kill rather than just “heavy logging slash”.

Forest products industry: Ellen said that at yesterday’s meeting there was robust discussion about the development of a long-term sustainable workforce in Southwest Colorado. Pueblo Community College is looking closely at developing a forestry program. Fort Lewis College is looking at some topics such as water and air quality and others. Ellen said there was strong participation by representatives of state higher education and state workforce development at the meeting.

Melissa said CSFS published a press release last week, available at (<https://csfs.colostate.edu/2020/07/01/loan-program-helping-mitigate-economic-impacts-to-colorados-forest-products-businesses/>) regarding the fact that the agency has money to lend to wood-products producers using Colorado wood.

Duncan gave an update on efforts to have Outstanding Waters designations placed on some streams in the Dolores River and Animas River basins. On Monday of next week, those involved in the effort will begin taking samples in the streams. The Colorado Water Conservation Board

will make the final decision on whether a stream merits the designation. Once a designation is in place, it protects the water quality of that stream for future generations. Any development that occurs after the designation cannot degrade the stream's quality.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and FACA

Danny said the appropriation from CFLRP will determine how much money is disbursed to all the different areas, but it will be some time before this is decided. The FACA committee provided feedback on the proposal itself and its strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths were a valid ecological case for management, a strong demonstration of match, a good framework and key people at the table. Some of the weaknesses were the reality of local geography, its relative remoteness, the fact that transportation is difficult and expensive, and how the local collaboratives will be able to work together. Danny said collaboration is difficult and when three different collaborative are brought in to work together, this must be worked through. He has great relationships with the coordinators of the other collaboratives and some people involved with DWRF are also part of the other collaboratives, but the way in which the entities mesh still needs to be talked through. In addition, how RMRI will interface with CFLRP if the CFLRP funding comes through will need to be discussed.

Mike Preston said all these things fit together well. This is a focal area within RMRI and what is learned can be shared across RMRI and the state of Colorado. CFLRP and RMRI will help implement the vision DWRF has laid out in its strategic plan and provide the support needed to make things happen.

Some areas that need to be worked on are:

- Communication infrastructure.
- Monitoring, particularly socioeconomic monitoring.

Duncan asked when funding might be confirmed and projects started on the ground. Danny said the local proposal was recommended for FY 2021 funding, so it would be some time in the fiscal year. What that means is unclear.

Derek said the SJNF has a list of projects already identified for the CFLRP proposal, and many of those overlap with RMRI, so the Forest Service may get started on those projects using that funding source.

It was asked whether the money must be spent in the same year that it is received. Derek said the funds would need at least to be obligated in that year. Money can be put into a contract and doing so will secure those funds into the future. Most likely the funding will be FY-specific but obligating money is one way to deal with that.

Salter EA Collaborative Priority Identification

The group took part in marking areas on maps of the Salter area that should have priority for work. The maps were prepared by Mike Remke. Maps covered the following factors:

Burn probability. Mike Remke said the area between Haycamp and Stoner Mesa is mostly covered by aspen and therefore has a low likelihood of burning, but if there is a lightning strike in a group of conifers, there can be a wildfire. Where there are ponderosa pine and low ladder fuels, there can be a high probability of fire. He said fire is not necessarily undesirable in every place and it might even be desirable in areas with high burn probability.

WUI. Areas in the wildland-urban interface should be prioritized according to their need for treatment.

Mechanical treatment priority. Mike said this is weighted by fire risk. Areas that are adjacent to communities have a higher weight. The fire risk that is a human ignition zone is higher priority. Many other factors are also considered. This shows where mechanical treatments are a priority on the landscape. Areas marked in green on the map may not be high priority for mechanical treatments but this doesn't mean such treatments should not be done. If there is timber of commercial value on suitable slopes it might be very useful to use those because of the economic benefits.

Insect occurrence. The group was asked to identify priority treatment areas based on insect occurrence and where there is the possibility of a severe beetle outbreak.

Ed asked whether maps are available that show high-density areas on the forest. David Casey said it would be difficult to display that at this scale.

Melissa said she has watched presentations by the state entomologist and generally the patterns for the next beetle outbreaks are that they tend to go in a northeastern direction, following the wind, although it depends on the beetle. Mike R. said the roundheaded pine beetle doesn't necessarily follow that trend. It tends to move where there is continuous vegetation that can provide hosts for the insects. Some complexity is not well understood.

Tim Kylo asked how recent the insect mortality is that is shown on the map. Mike said this is generally interpreted as mortality occurring in the past one to two years. The areas marked as red on the map aren't pockets of total mortality, just notable mortality.

Melissa said the 2019 Forest Health Report has an Insect and Disease Update for the state of Colorado and you can zoom in on Southwest Colorado. In a few areas, there was smoke from fires that prohibited some flyovers, so there are some data gaps.

<https://csfs.colostate.edu/forest-management/2019-forest-health-report-story-map/>

Drinking water importance areas. This map is intended to show which areas would have higher impacts on drinking-water systems if there was a high-severity fire. Downstream from McPhee Reservoir there would not be as much impact on drinking-water quality because there aren't intakes for drinking water. The areas that would have the highest impact are where the precipitation is and where there are steep slopes.

Recreation, trails and roads. Danny said the trails that are widely used are important economic drivers for the area. This map is intended to show where there could be important losses to recreation values if there was a wildfire.

Wildlife. Matt of CPW said habitat treatments are very beneficial for wildlife if done correctly. Mosaic-type treatments that leave pockets and cover are desirable. Most deer and elk in the region will migrate from the Lizard Head Wilderness to winter in the Yellow Jacket area and will travel through the Salter area. There is considerable regrowth in burned areas that provides grasses for elk. Regrowth of forbs that provide food for deer takes longer. Elk herds have been generally on the decline in the region. May 15 through June 30 is a crucial time for them because of their calving. Elk don't react well to trail construction and other disturbances, so it is best not to do habitat treatments during those times. Matt said much of the Salter area needs treatments and CPW is in favor of them but wants to make sure they are done in a smart way.

David said the Forest Service is taking a multiple-objective approach to Salter and a lot of the desired conditions they are creating will benefit wildlife.

Mike said much of what the Forest Service is doing on the Salter EA is conditional-based forestry. The result will be a heterogeneous landscape rather than a homogenous one. Important to wildlife. He believe they are aiming for a complex array of treatments and desired conditions.

Next steps:

→ Danny will compile the maps and disseminate them to the group. Anyone who wants to help is welcome.

→ Danny will work on producing a draft of resilience metrics and desired conditions. Tim and Melissa volunteered to help with socioeconomic metrics. Matt and Derek will help with wildlife metrics. Eric, Mike Preston, and Ken will work on water metrics.