

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative
Stakeholders Meeting
Oct. 7, 2020
dwrforcollaborative.org
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The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:

Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission); James Dietrich (Natural Resources Coordinator, Montezuma County); Tim Kylo (Montrose Forest Products); Molly Pitts (Colorado Timber Industry Association); Bruce Short (Consulting Forester, Short Forestry LLC); Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist); Michael Remke (Mountain Studies Institute); Ryan Cox and Tim Reader (Colorado State Forest Service); Shawn Gregory and Phil Ayers (Southwest Colorado Cycling Association); Ken Charles (Dolores Town Manager); Chad Wheelus (Mayor, Town of Dolores); Latifia Rodriguez (Back Country Horsemen of Colorado); Ellen Roberts (Southwest Colorado Wildfire Mitigation Impact Fund); Jason Lawhon (Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Project Manager for the U.S. Forest Service); Keith Fox (San Juan National Forest); Tom Rice (Dolores Ranger District, San Juan National Forest); Rebecca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado); Rich Landreth (City of Cortez); Robert Meyer (Mancos Trails Group); Mike Preston (Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee); Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Update on Fiscal Agency

Danny said beginning about a year ago, conversations began regarding DWRF's organizational structure and whether Wildfire Adapted Partnership should remain the collaborative's fiscal sponsor or whether DWRF should shift to another entity. The Coordinating Committee has decided to move DWRF's fiscal agency to Onward! A Legacy Foundation. The foundation provides fiscal agency to many organizations so that they do not have to become their own nonprofits but instead are able to do business as nonprofits through Onward. DWRF is about to fully transition to Onward's agency. Onward charges a 5 percent fee, which is relatively low. It will run DWRF's books and provide many other services. All DWRF funds will be focused under the foundation. But there will be lingering administrative ties to WAP, especially in regards to Forest Service funding. This change will not alter the dynamics of DWRF, and both Alex Graf and Ashley Downing of WAP will remain full participants in the collaborative.

Danny expressed appreciation for everything WAP has done for DWRF for the past several years.

Danny said DWRF will be applying for all-new funding as it moves forward, including a grant that the Onward foundation itself gives out for ongoing operations. DWRF received one last year and will apply again this year. DWRF's other major funding source is the WaterSMART grant, which has funded the collaborative's strategic planning efforts, many conversations about desired conditions, Gail's time as a notetaker and Danny's time. The Coordinating

Committee is discussing how to best use the remaining WaterSMART funding of approximately \$30,000, which will end June 2021.

Danny said that Mountain Studies Institute was submitting a grant with multiple partners, including DWRF, for the National Fish and Wildlife Federation RESTORE initiative. DWRF would be involved with a component to bring prescribed fire onto private lands near the Forest Service boundary. The focal area would be the north side of the 184 corridor, focusing on the Mancos Watershed specifically. The other component of the proposal is riparian restoration efforts on and along the Mancos River, spearheaded by the Mancos Watershed Group. This is an exciting landscape-scale proposal that involves numerous local partners and could be an important demonstration project for other areas.

Recreation in the DWRF Landscape

Danny said there are multiple values across the DWRF landscape. The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative has identified water resources, wildlife, recreation, forest health, and communities as values. Ecological, economic and social values comprise a three-legged stool in the DWRF landscape. All are clearly critical to the community and ecosystems.

Danny discussed a conceptual diagram regarding where different values exist on the landscape and how the benefits of those values can be maximized. He said it isn't a formal document, but he believes the topic is an important one for consideration. These values aren't spread evenly over the landscape. The goal is to mesh all of them as much as possible.

Tom Rice said a case study done by the Forest Service in 2007 as part of NEPA work in Chicken Creek near Mancos found that in some cases timber operations could take place without problems, but as these operations expand into the recreational trail system, there can be conflicts. That balance of values needs to be considered much more closely. Impacts to social values and aesthetics need to be addressed. A closer look needs to be taken at how to mesh the timber and recreation industries while trying to achieve other watershed values. This will be a major challenge, but if this issue is not approached right, people will lose faith in the Forest Service and in DWRF.

Danny commented that the Salter project is a very large one involving every type of land from the "back 40" to the wildland-urban interface.

Molly said the question of short-term vs. long-term impacts is key. The overall objective is a healthier landscape. The timber industry recognizes it has impacts to recreation, but they are short-term impacts. There will be times when recreationists can't access a trail for a particular season, but logging operations get into an area, do their work, and then are finished. However, the industry is seeing restrictions on its operations that make them less feasible. She hopes there will be more discussion about short-term vs. long-term impacts and communicating that distinction to the public.

Tom agreed. As the Forest Service looks at recreation areas within the Salter planning area, they are finding that perhaps 2-3 percent of that planning area impacts the logistics of timber operations. It's best to focus on the places of concern, where it is clear there will be some conflicts between recreational users and industry. It's important to focus on such particular areas and try to mitigate impacts to recreation while supporting the timber industry.

Mike Preston said DWRP and forest managers are trying to achieve an alignment of desired outcomes. Boggy Draw north of Dolores is a good example. Because it is so desirable for recreation, there have been years of thinning and prescribed-fire treatments done in that area. Had those treatments not occurred, it would not be a desired recreation setting. Keeping forest health treatments and recreational uses aligned is the key. Through good communication, people can become educated on each other's interests and values.

Jimbo said another challenge is how to conduct logging operations so there can be a 200-foot-wide fuel break on the edge of forest lands. Cross-country skiers, hikers, and bikers are willing to give up access for the short term, but he is hearing concerns from them regarding the longer-term effects of forest treatments. It should be possible to do treatments that are reasonably aesthetic and do not leave people saying, "Boggy is really stripped-down". Aspects such as leaving trees for shading need to be considered. Mountain bikers don't want an area to be left looking like a southern plantation. Aesthetics is a major factor that deserves attention.

Tim said it seems that every environmental assessment done over the last 6-12 months contains provisions specifying no holiday hauling, no hauling during big-game rifle seasons, etc. Such provisions are taking 30 to 40 days of timber operations out of the season. In the pine zone, logging has just 200 operating days a year. Many EAs do not allow logging in winter because of snowmobiling. Tim said winter logging is critical. Pine grows at lower elevations where there is typically less snow, so it's easier for loggers to operate. When you combine restrictions implemented for human activities with wildlife restrictions, 80 percent of timber-sale areas can be logged only three months out of the year. This is not viable for operators. Such restrictions should be dealt with on a sale level, not the EA or NEPA level.

Jimbo asked how other interests such as recreation and wildlife can be folded in to find a balance. Tim said there will be some pushback if these types of provisions are not included in the EAs. But if they are in an EA they are locked in and can't be changed on a sale-by-sale basis. He suggested contracts might say "no weekend hauling unless agreed to by the Forest Service". If such restrictions are in an EA, there is no latitude.

In answer to a question, Molly said the main issue for winter logging is whether the roads are frozen and will stay that way. The amount of snow is also critical. If there is too much snow and the roads have to be plowed every day, it's not economical.

Becca said she appreciates the idea of flexibility. She commented that it's easier to educate local recreationists rather than visitors from out of town who are here hunting or camping. She said the prescribed-fire aspect must also be considered when talking about recreation. The

prescribed-fire treatments at House Creek turned out in a positive way, but the visual impacts were not socially acceptable to the public and this was not weighed before the treatment was done. As managers move to more regular prescribed fires in those landscapes, it is critically important to consider the visual impacts and the windows that will be socially acceptable.

Bruce said placing a 200-yard buffer between the harvest area and the road so no one can see what is going on actually contributes to distrust because people can't see what is happening. This also creates an area where there is a lack of treatment, and that can add up. Sites alongside road and trail systems are often where a fire starts, so there are good reasons to have the logging area extend all the way to the road system. Regarding House Creek, he believes the prescription was a little heavy for that area. It will recover but was a bit uglier than he would like to have seen it. At Chicken Creek there is logging taking place on forest and private lands, and cyclists going up and down the road too. In winter, logging operations will affect parking on the road for cross-country skiers. These things need to be discussed. There needs to be more flexibility within the contract situation. The reason these provisions are in the EA is public trust and information.

Robert Meyer suggested seeking a partnership with an organization focused on outreach and education. That isn't DWR's mission. The Mancos Trails Group is partnering with San Juan Mountains Association regarding education on Chicken Creek. Maybe people acting as emissaries or ambassadors could be stationed at trailheads at busy times to provide information and explanations. Robert said he prefers the idea of logging operations moving into and out of areas quickly. It might be best to have a temporary closure of places that support recreation so the timber industry can finish its work quickly and do restoration.

James agreed with the "get-in-get-out" concept. It might be good to identify areas that are the most socially sensitive and try to conduct operations on those as quickly as possible.

Shawn said recreational opportunities are an aspect that local businesses use to attract talented employees to the area. He believes many people would trade winter skiing or biking in order to have areas open in the summer.

Bruce asked whether cyclists using the Boggy area could be moved somewhere else for a time. There are people coming here specifically for that kind of recreational experience. The difficult part is trying to work out some of those scheduling problems and balancing the different uses.

Chad said this is the backyard of the Town of Dolores. All these values, whether ecological, economic or social, are incredibly important to the town.

Ken Charles said the wood-products industry is also important to Dolores.

Tom said when the Dolores District started to look at the timber-sale units in the "Boggy block", which is a neighborhood of the Salter project area, they overlaid the proposed units with trails. Then they reduced the size of the units proposed to be cut. That affected about 3 percent of

that Boggy area. They were able to do some up-front exercises to reduce the footprints and preserve some unique aspects of that trail system. Anyone interested should look at the EA for more details. He said a staggered approach where only part of a trail is closed at any time is one approach for high-use recreation areas.

Danny said he will try to schedule a tour of the area in question sooner rather than later.

Next steps:

→ Danny will be sending out information on ongoing efforts regarding the Salter EA.

→ He would like to have a presentation from Mike Remke on Lone Pine before the Salter EA tour.