

**Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative**  
**Stakeholders Meeting**  
**Jan. 13, 2021**  
**dwrffcollaborative.org**  
**6 pages**

**The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:**

Pat Donovan (representing Sen. Michael Bennet's Office in Washington, D.C.); John Whitney (Western Slope Regional Director for Senator Bennet); Molly Pitts (Colorado Timber Industry Association); Tim Kylo (Montrose Forest Products and Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Steering Committee); Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission); Gigi Richard (Fort Lewis College Four Corners Water Center); Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist); Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist); Bruce Short (Consulting Forester, Short Forestry LLC); Ken Curtis (Dolores Water Conservancy District); Gretchen Rank (Mancos Conservation District and Mancos Watershed Group); Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited); Alex Graf (Wildfire Adapted Partnership); Phil Ayers (Wildfire Adapted Partnership board and Southwest Colorado Cycling Association); Derek Padilla, Travis Bruch and Matthew Tuten (San Juan National Forest); Jason Lawhon (RMRI Project Manager for U.S. Forest Service); Mike Battaglia (Rocky Mountain Research Station); Jamie Johnson (Montezuma Land Conservancy); Mark Loveall and Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service); Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Jordan Van Sickle (Natural Resources Conservation Service in Cortez); Brandy Richardson (San Juan National Forest); Mike Preston (RMRI Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee); Anthony Culpepper, Dana Hayward, Michael Remke, and Aaron Kimple (Mountain Studies Institute); Jim Spratlen (Emergency Manager, Montezuma County); James Dietrich (Natural Resources Coordinator, Montezuma County); Ken Charles (Dolores Town Manager); Patt Dorsey (Wild Turkey Federation); Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

**Outdoor Restoration Force Act**

John Whitney spoke about the Outdoor Restoration Force Act that Sen. Michael Bennet introduced late last year. The senator believes that forests and watersheds are foundations of the economies in the West. They are a key part of the nation's infrastructure but have been too long neglected in terms of funding and resources. When Senator Bennet toured the state this summer he saw the devastation resulting from mega-fires. Considering climate change and the ongoing drought, it's clear that the danger of such wildfires will continue, so he believes a better approach is needed. The knowledge of how to do forest restoration certainly exists, but often the funding and means to take action are lacking. This bill offers the way to make the investment needed for restoration and resilience projects.

Pat Donovan said this bill, which would establish a \$60 billion outdoor restoration fund, would create a vast and flexible funding stream to provide money quickly for projects across public and private land that are ready to implement or are in the planning stage. This could create or sustain up to 2 million good-paying jobs. It would save money overall because mitigation and

prevention are less costly than combating and recovering from natural disasters such as wildfires and floods. The bill's backers hope to introduce it in the next few weeks.

Mike Preston asked where collaboratives fit in with this funding. Pat said the bill would make \$20 billion directly available to state and local governments, tribes, special districts, and non-profits to hire individuals. It would be administered by an advisory council that would include representatives from industry and various experts who could prioritize projects and move money where it's needed most. The other \$40 billion is in a partnership for supplemental funding for the agencies to meet a broad set of goals.

John spoke about the importance of the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership, which involves the U.S. Forest Service and NRCS. Senator Bennet and others are working to enshrine that initiative into federal law and give it a solid funding stream. They are also keeping an eye on funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscapes Restoration Program (CFLRP).

Mike Preston recommended that DWRF stakeholders consider what they can do to support this. DWRF is one of the collaboratives that would benefit from it. Jimbo said beyond the collaborative his organization and possibly other organizations and entities would fully support this.

John said if anyone's organization wants to send a formal letter of support, that is fine, or the senator's staff can include the names of supporting organizations in a press release.

#### **Next steps:**

- Danny offered to draft a general letter of support and circulate it within the collaborative.
- This conversation will continue.

#### **Updates**

**Community education and outreach:** Ken asked whether DWRF has gotten many responses from the postcards it sent out promoting rapid risk assessments in Dolores.

Danny said they have received few responses, not as many as he had hoped for or anticipated. He said they sent information to property owners but many actual owners live outside of the area and the people actually in the homes are renters. He has not yet checked to see how many people have visited the website yet.

#### **Collaboration with Land Management Agencies:**

**Salter EA Timeline:** Derek said Dolores District officials are addressing some elements of the EA and this will push the timeline back. They are aiming for Jan. 27 as the new target date for the release. Danny said space will be made in the next DWRF stakeholder meeting agenda to discuss the EA if it is released by then, or the discussion can be pushed back another month. Derek discussed concerns about truck traffic through the Town of Dolores that would result from logging operations. The analysis done for the Salter EA concluded that there could be

about nine loads of material going through the town on any given day. The district also did an analysis of actual loads from other projects they have going on. The highest number they have seen on any day is 16. That does not factor in other logging activities taking place on private land, the potential for more than one timber sale, or stewardship contracts, but they do not anticipate a level of traffic that will be very impactful to the town.

**Next steps:**

→ When the EA is released Danny will send a link to the group.

**RMRI PODs prioritization process:** Danny thanked everyone who filled out the survey. The survey has space for comments and these will all become part of the permanent record, providing a great deal of context. DWRP will be able to use all this information. Danny said to reach out to him directly with questions about filling out the survey. The survey was due on Friday, Jan. 15.

**Resilient forests and communities:** Ken Charles said Dolores town officials are interested in discussing fire mitigation activities on the northern edge of the town. The town is purchasing the Harris property and has purchased a great deal of canyon wall property on the northern edge of town. It now owns a sizable swath from the water dock to Tenth Street. Danny said this is a huge opportunity for the collaborative to work with the town on fire mitigation. Danny, Ken and anyone else who is interested will be discussing this further.

**Collaboration and Public Participation with the SJNF**

Danny said the coordinators of different local collaboratives met with the Forest Leadership Team on Dec. 17 to begin discussing how the collaboratives and Forest Service work together and to provide some sideboards and common language. The conversation is happening but is not far along. This is a very important conversation that will help with aligning expectations. Derek said this is largely about developing common language so when the parties do engage they are speaking the same way about terms such as “collaborate,” “inform” and others.

**COVID’s Impacts on Colorado’s Forest Products Industry**

Molly presented a PowerPoint on how COVID-19 has affected the timber industry.

The stay-at-home order issued by Colorado Gov. Jared Polis on March 25 left questions about what were essential businesses. Some timber businesses shut down, while others did not. Others shut down for just a day or so. Molly worked closely with State Forester Mike Lester, the director of the Colorado State Forest Service, to get logging and wood products identified as essential.

All timber businesses implemented safety protocols. Most mills involve socially distanced work.

Initially, the lumber market dropped significantly. The Forest Service issued a SOPI (Substantial Overriding Public Interest). which allows timber-sale contracts to be extended. The markets stayed down in April and May, partly because housing starts had dropped 30 percent. But June

brought significant improvement, and from July through September everything kept rising. Prices for some types of wood were up as much as 88 percent in the last six months. Colorado's industry didn't slow down much, but some large businesses in the Northwest shut down for extended periods. Washington, Oregon and California had significant fire seasons that impacted some of the manufacturing.

Molly said a huge migration from cities to rural areas is taking place because many people are now working remotely. The demand for homes in rural communities is skyrocketing. Also, because people are spending so much time at home, renovations of existing houses have gone through the roof.

In addition, many consumers are ordering goods online and those products arrive in cardboard boxes, requiring more timber.

**Looking forward:**

- Prices are likely to stay up in the short term. Housing starts are still growing. The availability of homes is tight.
- Production is still impacted
- This is not necessarily sustainable long-term. New mills are coming online. Increased production will create more supply.

**2020 Colorado Forest Action Plan Overview and Local CSFS Updates**

Mark Loveall, supervisory forester of forest planning and implementation with CSFS in Durango, gave a PowerPoint on the 2020 Colorado Forest Action Plan.

Mark said the plan has been well over a year in production. The first scoping meetings took place in 2019. This plan is a road map for CSFS and partners to improve forest health in Colorado. It includes analysis of forest trends statewide, solutions and guidance for producing forest health. It was created by CSFS staff both state and local. Partners' and shareholders' input was essential.

The preparation of the plan is mandated by Congress. All state and forestry agencies are required to produce an action plan at a minimum of every 10 years. The last one for Colorado was done in 2010.

Much of the forest acreage in the state is not healthy because of beetle kill, wildfires, or other problems. More than 22 percent of standing tree volume statewide now is dead wood. There is a great need to invest in the forests. The action plan is a guide for stewardship. Through proactive, collaborative forest management, managers hope to improve health, reduce fire risk, and protect communities and resources.

When updating the plan they began by holding stakeholder meetings throughout the state in 2019. More than 90 partners were involved. This document was informed not just by CSFS foresters but by many outside experts in different fields working to identify priorities and goals

in a collaborative fashion. The idea was to have a tool where activities will have the greatest impacts, and to work with partners to create projects that address mutual priorities.

Six themes emerged:

- forest conditions
- living with wildfire
- watershed protection
- forest wildlife
- urban and community forestry
- forest products

Each of those themes has a priority map.

The online tool is at <https://coloradoforestatlas.org/>

### **2020 End of the Year Survey Results and Discussion**

Danny presented a PowerPoint on results of the survey about DWRF. He thanked everyone who responded, particularly considering they had a short window of time to do so. A total of 16 people responded, rating different factors on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 as the best. All answers were 4 or above. These are strong responses. People believe that DWRF advanced its mission, activities and meetings moved the program areas forward, the organizations and individuals that are needed to be members of this group are engaged or have been invited, individuals are willing to work toward agreement on important topics, individuals in this group communicated openly with one another (there were a few lower scores), and the DWRF coordinator communicates well with all stakeholders.

Top successes were:

- CFLRP selection
- Moving forward with RMRI
- Science/monitoring conversations
- Field trips
- Collaboration
- Monthly stakeholder meetings
- Refining organizational structure by moving to Onward! A Legacy Foundation
- Maintaining relationships in spite of the pandemic
- Rapid Risk Assessment outreach to Dolores
- Advancing the watershed and forest conversation through Southwest Basin Roundtable

Top assets were:

- Diverse and committed stakeholder group
- Coordinator
- Strong SJNF staff participation and support
- Strong coordinating committee
- Partnership with the DWCD and Mountain Studies Institute
- Good open communication

Ways we did not meet our goals were:

- Insufficient outreach (Danny said anyone who wants to participate on the Outreach Committee should let him know.)
- Large initiatives (Some people felt that these conversations have come at the expense of having other conversations. People have limited time and resources.)
- Monitoring (Socioeconomic monitoring metrics need a lot of work.)
- Considerable time focused on niche concerns

Opportunities for 2021

- Meeting again in person
- More on-the-ground tours
- Enhanced community education/outreach/engagement
- Further integration with RMRI
- Continued collaboration on EAs
- Monitoring
- More work (advance private lands work, other opportunities, WaterSMART Phase II, water plan implementation grants, etc.)

Danny said this is all helpful information for him to have.