

Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

April 7, 2021

dwrfcollaborative.org

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The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:

Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission); Jim Spratlen (Emergency Manager, Montezuma County); Rich Landreth (City of Cortez); Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service); Mike Preston (Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee); Derek Padilla, Travis Bruch, Lo Williams, Brad Pietruszka, and Keith Fox (San Juan National Forest); Jason Lawhon (RMRI Project Manager for U.S. Forest Service); Mike Battaglia (Rocky Mountain Research Station); Ken Curtis (Dolores Water Conservancy District); Molly Pitts (Colorado Timber Industry Association); Kyle Hanson (Timber Age Systems); Aaron Kimple, Anthony Culpepper, and Mike Remke (Mountain Studies Institute); Matt Sturdevant and Becca Divergi (Colorado Parks and Wildlife); Bruce Short (Consulting Forester, Short Forestry LLC); Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist); Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist); Jordan Van Sickle (Natural Resources Conservation Service); Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Jamie Johnson (Montezuma Land Conservancy); Steve Monroe (Hydrologist, National Park Service Southern Colorado Plateau Network); Justin Ross; Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

Community Education and Outreach: Danny said there will be a community tour in the Chicken Creek area toward the end of April. It will be focused on community and recreation concerns that were expressed in some DWRF meetings and in written comments on the Salter EA. Anyone is welcome to attend. This is an area that has experienced implementation work, so tour participants can see the effects of on-the-ground treatment.

The San Juan Mountains Association and DWRF will have a community bike ride in Boggy Draw on May 15. It will be focused on education about forest ecology and management. The event will be free, but the number of participants may be capped.

Danny has been working with DWRF outreach groups including Mancos Trails Group, SJMA, MSI and others on developing language for a Boggy Draw-Chicken Creek sign focused on the management work. The work is progressing fairly pretty well. They are doing edits and rewrites of the sign.

DWRF is embarking on a collaborative video. Danny and some members of the Coordinating Committee are working on this. A videographer who has worked with the Montezuma Land Conservancy is under contract to make the video.

Anthony said MSI is having its fourth annual Forest and Fire Learning Series, and recordings of the lectures will be available. Information is available at <http://www.mountainstudies.org/events>

Lo Williams said MSI and the San Juan National Forest will celebrate Arbor Day by doing tree planting in the 416 Fire burn area on April 17.

Rich Landreth said the final version of Cortez's Source Water Protection Plan will be presented to the city council on Tuesday, April 13, and if council approves it, it will go to the state for approval. After that, grant monies can be sought for educational opportunities, signage and other needs. He will send the document to Danny.

Collaboration with land management agencies: Derek said the Forest Service is assessing the windows of time for opportunities for prescribed fires, mostly in the Haycamp, Boggy and Salter Y areas. Danny said some DWRF folks may have the opportunity to go out in the field to observe the prescribed burns.

Danny said during the last Coordinating Committee meetings they identified next steps for engagement with the Salter EA. The Forest Service is working through comments it received on the EA. The committee will be putting together language in regard to the decision notice and during the next DWRF stakeholder meeting some issues raised during the comment period will be presented for discussion.

CFLRP: Danny said the group that is focused on seeking a facilitator met again this week. They have secured one funding source and there will be an LPEA grant that may help fund a facilitator as well. RMRI is expected to provide money also. That means the group is close to having the funds needed to secure a facilitator. The group is brainstorming what an RFP will look like. Onward! A Legacy Foundation may be one of the fiscal agents for the facilitator.

Danny said many DWRF stakeholders joined an RMRI meeting and helped to identify core priority areas. Jason Lawhon thanked participants for completing the surveys. He said more than 1700 comments were received and these will be very valuable in refining the mission and scope. About 10 Potential Operational Delineation (PODs) have risen up that are strong priorities. They will evaluate these, then bring the information back to the collaborative and their partners.

Forest products industry development: Kyle said the wood innovation grant to study the feasibility of cross-laminated timber panels that was awarded to the Forest Service in 2018 was just closed out. Timber Age would not exist if the grant hadn't been awarded. Ponderosa pine was harvested, and the longest distance it had to be transported was about 50 miles. The first structure they built utilizing the panels has been completed and was made to code. More projects are in the planning. Most of the material is from smaller-scale thinning. He would like to offer a tour for DWRF stakeholders.

Other: Bruce said the logging season is about to get under way. Winter logging on private lands was fairly scanty. Short Forestry is getting another grant and will be doing more thinning, but they are starting to run short of contractors. However, they are getting started again and getting to private landowners and that is a good thing.

Overview of the DWRF and San Juan National Forest Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessments

Danny said the over-arching goal is to reduce Highly Valued Resources and Assets (HVRA) losses within the DWRF landscape, with a particular focus on the private land component and cross-boundary areas. The core of the framework was a quantitative wildfire risk assessment that many of the collaborative's stakeholders were involved in early on, combined with the watershed erosion model. The key goals are consolidating what's in hand in terms of models, layers, and resources, and housing them in two different ways – one useful internally to the collaborative and another useful to landowners and the community.

Brad, who is fuels program manager for the San Juan National Forest, gave a PowerPoint offering an overview regarding:

- Wildfire simulation
- HVRA identification and characterization
- Exposure and effects analysis (how likely are HVRA's to burn and at what intensity)

Assumptions and limitations:

- Fuelscape is representative of the area
- Selected Remote Automatic Weather Stations (RAWS) sites are representative of weather conditions that could occur (more and more that is a key limitation)
- No HVRA spatial data is missing
- HVRA response functions are accurately represented
- FSim cannot be used to determine where a fire is most likely to start, only which portions are most likely to burn annually

Large Fire Simulator: He displayed a map and explained that FSim is a fire simulator which uses thousands of unique weather and fuel moisture scenarios combined with historic ignitions to simulate large fires. Each simulation lasts one year. Results include annual burn and fire intensity probabilities.

He said four HVRA's were left:

- WUI/ residential and commercial structures
- Municipal drinking water importance
- Ecological values
- Infrastructure

Brad said having a map like this can help guide decision-making.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding the burn probability map. Bill Baker questioned the map's validity, saying the highest probability of fire should be recognized as being in the ponderosa pine zone. The shortest fire rotation period in the San Juans is in the ponderosa pine zone. He said there is a need to have a group of people with different expertise see what concerns there might be with models presented to DWRP.

Danny said these models are what the collaborative has in hand. It is important to recognize their limitations, but they are valuable resources.

Bill said his concern could be resolved by having the Science Committee look at the model.

Mike Battaglia said he is on the Science Committee and although he knows something about these matters, he doesn't know enough to say whether the model is right. He suggested bringing in experts trained in landscape-level fire probability and having a separate meeting with interested people. He is not comfortable saying yes or no on this.

Bill said as long as there is a separate meeting involving experts he has no problem with the map, but he thinks this type of examination should be done before such items are presented to the entire collaborative.

Danny said this was a valid conversation. The Science Committee should not be a hard-and-fast firewall to what the collaborative hears. He doesn't want to limit what the collaborative hears, but it is good to have these things worked out in a science group.

Mike Preston said this model is one tool, and Bill had pointed out some shortcomings with it. The fine details need to be handled by a smaller group. He doesn't think these highly technical discussions can take place within the entire collaborative. This model is used every year to deal with fire season. It may not be perfect but it's a tool worth understanding.

Kyle stressed the importance of treating people with respect during such discussions. He said one of his mentors said that when there is a group of people trying to work well together, it's best to assume a positive intent on their part.

Bruce commented that Bill's thoughts on how the ponderosa pine zone is being modeled are valid. He would like to have more expert discussion and more finessing of the modeling as time passes. The model does show how much at risk the transmission lines and gas pipelines, as well as the town of Dolores and the Summit Ridge area, are.

Mike Battaglia said having expert discussion on identifying areas where the model is working and not working is an important part of calibrating a model.

Brad said although the group became wrapped up in the burn probability map, a different map provides an idea of fire intensity. Conditional net value change is the one he uses more often. He said every model is wrong. However, some are useful.

Bill said he does not accept the idea that it is wise for the collaborative to accept all models, then refer them to the Science Committee if a problem is identified. The reason that nearly all collaborative groups create a technical working group is that a preview and critique of the models by technical people is a key step in reaching agreement. He said the smaller group wouldn't make decisions, just identify potential problems, then bring the model forward to the main group.

Anthony said there has been a discussion about RADS (risk assessment decision support). It is based on the wildfire risk model and looking at that risk in relation to HVRAs. There are some significant differences with Brad's model regarding burn probability and fire intensity inputs into RADS. The current way RADS is constructed, it uses coarser, less refined input. They are working with Brad to get the best input into RADS. They are currently looking at DWRF's list of HVRAs. Anthony has a preliminary list of HVRAs and will be sending an online survey to the full collaborative.

Aaron said they started exploring the possibility of RADS to offer people in municipalities and the county a cost estimate to support this community work on private land. They did not want to just go forth and create something, they wanted the community to develop the cost estimate. They are very early in that stage, merely soliciting input at this time.

Bill Baker questioned whether the focus should be on cost rather than forest health.

Anthony said the cost component is something they are concerned about. There is a dollars-and-cents component that can't be shuffled aside.

Mike Remke said he is not an expert in wildfire risk modeling. He is learning about these tools, such as what RADS is and other factors in wildfire risk. RADS is a tool to help prioritize different areas with the intent of protecting HVRAs in response to wildfire. It is not an aid in deciding priorities of sustainable forestry or how to restore ponderosa pine forests. The San Juan National Forest and surrounding areas are a large, complex landscape with a mosaic of forest types. RADS is a tool to help in deciding, if there is a fire, where will you have the best influences on preventing loss of life, property and HVRAs if you have a limited amount of money? It hones in on wildfire risk. It is not a holistic forest-health decision-making tool. It helps us hone in on where treatments would be most impactful and cost-efficient.

Eric Janes commented that it was valuable to have heard and seen Brad Pietruska's presentation. This is a complex topic, and he does not think that the Science Committee should be, or is necessarily qualified to be, a technical screening process for what models are brought to the collaborative.

Bill agreed that the Science Committee should not screen, but it should look at these models and bring forward its assessment of their strengths, limitations, data needs, etc., for the collaborative to evaluate.

Mike Remke provided a link to a peer-reviewed paper where Benjamin M. Gannon and others used RADS as a tool to protect water values in Chaffee County:

<https://www.publish.csiro.au/wf/WF18182>

Danny said he wants this group to help him decide whether he should be bringing these matters to the technical group. There are significant limitations to the HVRA aspect. It is being used for a risk reduction framework. It is not being proposed that it guide all decisions. One of the key components of DWRP's mission is to think of the local community. RADS adds a great deal. It can help identify what treatment types would be useful on private land.

Bill said it is important to do the kind of wildfire risk assessment Brad did, but it had the wrong burn probability. It is a widely used tool and a great start. The HVRA analysis needs work. Brad is allocating where the treatments will be done based only on cost, but this is a good start.

Jimbo said the HVRA's come from DWRP because stakeholders sat down and talked about what they thought was important. He would like more work and improvement on the HVRA aspect.

Mike Preston said when the group had those HVRA discussions several years ago, the stakeholders were coming from a qualitative standpoint. Some of these additional tools help sharpen those broader quality objectives and make practical applications with the resources that are available to work with.

Danny said he had not heard any concerns about moving forward with this.

Next steps:

→ Danny will pull together conversations this month regarding HVRA input, so stakeholders should anticipate some emails.