

# Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative Stakeholders Meeting

May 5, 2021

[dwrfcollaborative.org](http://dwrfcollaborative.org)

6 pages

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

Ellen Roberts (Southwest Wildfire Impact Fund); Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission); Rich Landreth (City of Cortez); Rachel Medina (Montezuma County); Brian Rose (Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado); Aaron Kimple, Anthony Culpepper, and Mike Remke (Mountain Studies Institute); Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Helen Katich (Sen. John Hickenlooper's office); Rebecca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado); Jordan Van Sickle (Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cortez); Robert Meyer (Mancos Trails Group); Phil Ayers (Wildfire Adapted Partnership Board and Southwest Colorado Cycling Association); Jason Lawhon (RMRI Project Manager for U.S. Forest Service); Travis Bruch, Derek Padilla, and Shauna Jensen (San Juan National Forest); Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service); Mike Preston (Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee); Ed Millard (Southwest Basin Roundtable); Jamie Johnson (Montezuma Land Conservancy); Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist); Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist); Duncan Rose (Trout Unlimited); Hilary Byerly (Post-doctoral Researcher, University of Colorado); Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

## **Operating Principles**

Danny briefly discussed the DWRF operating principles. He said there is no purpose to collaborating if everyone already agrees with each other. It's important to have constructive dialogue in the group. People need to communicate in a way that genuinely tries to build trust. These meetings are meant to provide a safe and supportive space for difficult conversations. He will hold everyone to these agreements. He said no one should hesitate to give him feedback.

## **Updates**

### **Community education and outreach:**

- **Mancos trails:** Robert Meyer said Mancos opened the town trail system a week ago after an effort involving a great collaboration between the town, Mancos schools, the Mancos Trails Group, and SJMA. In addition, there will be 12 new miles of single-track bike trail, the Aqueduct Trail, tying into the ski area. The trails group is hosting monthly workdays on the second Saturday of the months of June through October.

- **"Feel the burn" mountain bike ride:** Danny said he has been working with SJMA to put together an informal bike tour in the Boggy Draw area on May 15. This educational ride will present a basic overview of the ecology of the ponderosa pine zone, management actions and goals, and some areas with recent prescribed fires. It will take place on the Maverick trail. Interested persons can sign up through SJMA at <https://sjma.org/event/feel-the-burn-interpretive-mountain-bike-ride/>

- **Forest Ambassador Program:** Danny has been working with SJMA to provide training for the Forest Ambassador Program. Ambassadors will be stationed at high-use recreation areas in the forest as a resource for visitors. He and Anthony have put together a training topics list.
- **DWRF video:** Danny said all the shooting for the DWRF video has been completed. He believes it's an excellent video.

#### **Resilient forests and communities:**

- **Wildfire risk reduction framework and HVRA/RADS update:** Danny said there are lingering thoughts and questions from many stakeholders on this issue. He, Brad Pietruszka, and others will convene a larger stakeholder conversation for as many individuals who want to participate to help refine and review HVRA input, knowing that DWRF has already had great collaborative input into HVRA over the years. Stakeholders should anticipate an invitation later this month.

Aaron said Brad Pietruszka and Mike Remke have been working to align layers so everyone will be operating on the same assumptions.

Bill commented that it would be good to engage the Science Committee along with the working group. He said MSI is just a stakeholder here and shouldn't be developing the framework. The Science Team has experience and this should be developed within DWRF. DWRF's resilience metric was developed by the interaction of the group together. This led to a successful outcome everyone can be proud of. HVRA is an equally complex matter, and this should be being developed by the collaborative in the same way that it developed the metric.

Aaron said this absolutely would not be developed by MSI. They are mostly inputting what the DWRF group provides and putting it into the model. This is designed to be a community-driven process.

Danny said Bill isn't the only one who has expressed concern to Danny. There will be a stakeholder working group focused on the HVRA input. He will facilitate a dialogue from the DWRF side. There will be more open conversation in coming months.

#### **Collaborate with land management agencies:**

- **Salter EA:** Danny said because of a delay, the discussion about changes and updates to the Salter EA will probably take place in the DWRF stakeholders meeting next month. Some loose ends are being tied up but some remain. There needs to be discussion about how to advance. The Town of Dolores and the Forest Service have lingering concerns around truck traffic. Derek said he received a draft of the EA yesterday that incorporated many changes based on comments received, but he has not had a chance to take a hard look at it yet. They are also looking at potentially having to do a 30-day tribal consultation process. He hopes to have the opportunity to provide an update to DWRF in June.

- **CFLRP:** The working group is developing an RFQ for a facilitator. Not all of the funding has been finalized. Collaborative feedback about some global monitoring metrics is being consolidated.

- **Prescribed fires:** Derek said this spring has posed a considerable challenge to the Forest Service as far as finding conditions conducive for burning. The Boggy Draw units appear ready to go starting tomorrow but the area is experiencing single-digit relative humidity, so that might preclude the burn. The Forest Service tried burning on Haycamp yesterday but couldn't because of the storm on Monday.

**Collaborative effectiveness and sustainability:** Danny said DWRF will be submitting several grant proposals. DWRF did not receive the National Fish and Wildlife Federation grant it applied for. He is putting together another grant proposal with MSI and the Ember Alliance, an offshoot of The Nature Conservancy, to develop an inventory of opportunities for prescribed fire on private land. They put in a Catalyst Fund proposal with the Montezuma Land Conservancy to build on this. He would be happy to share any of these proposals with anyone interested. He is working with the Mancos Conservation District, MSI and other partners on a CSFS Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation grant, focused on larger properties in the West Mancos Watershed.

**Next steps:**

→ Anyone interested in being a part of any of these grant proposals should let Danny know. He encourages additional grant-writing support from stakeholders.

**Outcomes from the Rapid Risk Assessment Outreach  
in Dolores and Other Areas**

Hilary Bylery, a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Colorado with expertise in environmental economics, gave a presentation titled, "Your Property or Our Community" about the effectiveness of different messages regarding wildfire risk mitigation on private property. She works closely with the West Region Wildfire Council, which works to reduce wildfire risk throughout Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel counties.

She said wildfire risk mitigation on private property has private and social benefits. She sought to answer the question: *For low-cost actions, which benefits are more motivating?* Homeowners often underestimate wildfire risk. People also have "optimism bias" – the belief that bad things are more likely to happen to other people.

Given all this, she and others asked whether homeowners respond more to messages that highlight private benefits or social benefits, and if it matters whether they reside in their community full-time. The researchers partnered with DWRF and others to look at 10 communities in western Colorado. All had data from rapid risk assessments.

For each community they built webpages that described all the risk factors for a parcel. These were meant to be a resource for the homeowner. They sent out mailings over the course of last

fall. Postcards had information about the risk assessments and encouraged homeowners to visit their specially tailored webpage. The cards provided them an access code, to protect their privacy.

Researchers created two versions of the postcard with the following messages:

- Wildfire season is here. You can help protect *your property*.
- Wildfire season is here. You can help protect *our community*.

The two designs went out to a total of nearly 3,000 homeowners in 10 communities in Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montezuma, and Eagle counties. Researchers then tracked webpage visits, knowing that any difference in response is viewed as the result of the messaging. They grouped households according to their wildfire risks. The sample included a good proportion of out-of-town owners.

Some key results were:

- Overall, there was an 11 percent response rate, meaning 11 percent of those receiving postcards visited the personalized webpage.
- The Town of Dolores had a 10 percent response rate, meaning 90 percent didn't visit their webpage.
- It made no real difference which message the homeowners received. Overall, slightly more people who received the card saying *our community* visited, but the difference was not statistically significant.
- Among in-town owners, there was a small but statistically significant increase in response for the *our community* message.

A postcard researchers sent out in Ashland, Oregon, used different imagery, with one postcard showing a picture of a fire, another postcard bearing an image of a "status quo" city. About 6,000 parcels in Ashland received one version or the other. There was no significant difference in the overall response rate. About 19 percent on average visited the webpage. Low-risk households were more likely to respond to the photo of the flames than high-risk households.

#### Q & A

Rebecca Samulski asked about the number of property owners in Dolores that followed up after visiting the webpage by reaching out to WAP or DWRF. She also asked whether there were any other good outcomes, such as potential projects on town lands and support for mitigation work in town.

Danny said he tried to follow up with people. A number didn't seem to know about the mailing, especially the renters. There were some people who followed up with WAP and DWRF. This mailing spurred conversations with the town itself and that was probably one of the best outcomes.

Bill asked whether there has been research into using human messengers or more personal messages, such as a photo of a town mayor on a postcard. Hilary said this could warrant investigation.

Jimbo asked whether radio or print ads might be more effective than mailings. Hilary said that would be more difficult to research.

Danny said this provides food for thought moving forward.

**Next steps:**

→ To contact Hilary about the research, email her at [hilaryb@colorado.edu](mailto:hilaryb@colorado.edu)

**Watershed Condition Framework Development for the San Juan National Forest**

Shauna gave a presentation on the Watershed Condition Framework, a comprehensive approach for proactively integrating restoration on priority watersheds on national forests and grasslands. This is a six-step adaptive management process.

The focus is on the aquatic habitat and less on the terrestrial/biological. However, that may change soon because this process may be updated.

They assessed all the national forest watersheds across the nation in 2010 and 2011 and put the results into a database. There were two impaired waters on the San Juan National Forest: Stockman Draw and a portion of Chicken Creek.

After classifications are made, prioritization for watershed restoration is done. Chicken Creek was a priority watershed. The next step is to develop a watershed restoration action plan (WRAP).

Shauna discussed the framework effort in 2021. She said Chicken Creek has gone from impaired to at-risk. When RMRI did the prioritization process RMRI POD 14 came back as a priority. They decided to keep Chicken Creek as a priority and update the WRAP. They are working with the Mancos Watershed Group. POD 17 in the House Creek area is also a priority. The As they talk about assessments and priority watersheds they are coinciding as well as possible with RMRI.

In answer to a question about whether these projects involve Categorical Exclusions, Derek said it will be variable. The Forest Service identifies projects that will improve the condition of the watershed and use that to inform the level of analysis that will be required. If a CE might be applicable they might go that route, but if all the projects they identify are similar, they might do a watershed-level analysis, which would push them into an EA or even an EIS.

**San Juan Mountain Science Network Draft Structure**

Danny discussed the draft San Juan Mountain Science Network Structure, which he sent out to stakeholders recently. Last July there was a meeting about the science network and it became

clear there was some desire from stakeholders in different collaboratives to tighten up and reform the idea. The coordinators were to get feedback from the various collaboratives.

Bill said he is a member of the Science Committee but he was not aware that this existed, and doesn't believe the rest of the team was aware. He asked what value the network adds. Does it replace the science team?

Eric also asked about the distinction between this and the science team.

Danny said it doesn't replace the Science Committee. This is more of a group committed to looking across the entire San Juan Mountains and being as inclusive of different specialties as possible. A major goal is trying to align approaches across different districts, not just the DWR landscape.

Bill suggested creating a working group across collaboratives. This could be important but it's too preliminary to be putting it out there for discussion.

Jimbo said a network like this was a good idea and could provide greater diversity among the science.

Mike said the forest health efforts going on all over the state should be linked. A lot will be learned in the next 10 years. There is real value in exposure to a broad array of efforts to monitor, research and evaluate these factors. The Science Committee built other people into its efforts. They want to be exposed to what others are doing, what else is emerging in science and monitoring. This is a good science team but there are things it can learn from other efforts.

Bill said he is fine with that but the working group should operate in a transparent way.

Danny said it isn't a fully formed structure. It's to be an open group. This isn't the last iteration of it. There will be other conversations about this group.

Duncan praised MSI and said he personally has trust in them. They present to the group and ask, "What do you think?"

Bill said he is grateful to MSI as well and respects the scientists there but doesn't respect the process that went into developing this science network.

**Next steps:**

→ Danny said there will be more outreach on this.