

**Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative
Stakeholders Meeting
Aug. 11, 2021
dwrfcollaborative.org
6 pages**

The meeting was conducted via Zoom. Present were:

Steve Garchar (Dolores County Commission); Ken Charles (Town of Dolores); John Whitney (Sen. Michael Bennet's Durango office); Derek Padilla and David Casey (San Juan National Forest); Ryan Cox (Colorado State Forest Service); Matt Sturdevant (Colorado Parks and Wildlife); Molly Pitts (Colorado Industry Timber Association); Aaron Kimple (Mountain Studies Institute); Jimbo Buickerood (San Juan Citizens Alliance); Gretchen Rank (Mancos Conservation District and Southwest Basin Roundtable); Robert Meyer (Mancos Trails Group); Alex Graf (Wildfire Adapted Partnership); Nick Olson (Forest Health Partnerships Program Manager, Southwest Conservation Corps); Ken Curtis (Dolores Water Conservancy District); Mike Preston (Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Steering Committee and DWRF Coordinating Committee); Nicci Crowley (Cortez Community Officer, LOR Foundation); Phil Ayers (Wildfire Adapted Partnership Board and Southwest Colorado Cycling Association); Bill Baker (Retired Ecologist); Eric Janes (Retired BLM Hydrologist); Nathan McGrath; Danny Margoles (DWRF Coordinator); and Gail Binkly (Meeting Recorder).

Updates

Community education and outreach:

- **DWRF tours and events:** There will be a tour at Chicken Creek on Saturday, Aug. 28, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Danny will send out an email with more information. DWRF will have a booth at Escalante Days in Dolores this coming weekend. Anyone who wants to staff the DWRF booth for a brief time is welcome. DWRF will have a collaborative tour in September. The scope is not fully identified yet but anyone with ideas should let Danny know.
- **Visit from RMRI leadership:** At the last DWRF stakeholder meeting, there was discussion about a visit from the RMRI leadership team at the end of August, but it has been postponed indefinitely because of COVID-19.
- **Mancos Trails Group:** The second work day on the Blue Jay Trail will be Saturday, Aug. 14, beginning at 8:30 a.m., Robert said. More information is on their website.
- **Watershed tour:** The Watershed Restoration Assessment Plan tour that was to be hosted by Shauna Jensen of the San Juan National Forest has been delayed. Shauna is out on fire assignments, Gretchen said.
- **Mancos Watershed Group meeting:** The Mancos Watershed Group will host its fall meeting on Sept. 21, Gretchen said. Further information will be sent out.

Collaborate with land management agencies:

- **CFLRP:** Danny said the regional project remains one of the top two projects recommended for funding this fall. The number of projects receiving money will depend on congressional funding.

Aaron said he has heard no funding is likely to come until March of next year.

John said the bipartisan infrastructure bill in Congress contains an additional \$100 million for CFLRP. He hopes that may mean some funding will arrive sooner than March. The bill hasn't officially become law yet.

Danny said 12 individuals have applied to be a CFLRP facilitator for helping a cross-collaborative group develop a governance structure. They are all strong candidates and it will be a tough decision. About eight people have agreed to evaluate the candidates. The hope is they can select a facilitator by the end of September.

Aaron said the next RMRI meeting will be virtual.

John said there is a great deal happening in Washington, D.C., and Senator Bennet is very excited. The Outdoor Restoration Partnership Act of 2021, which is sponsored by Senator Bennet, has been introduced. It would create an Outdoor Restoration Fund. The Senate recently passed a bipartisan infrastructure bill, which includes approximately \$46 billion in funding for foresters. Some \$3.37 billion of that is restoration funding. It includes funding for work on about 10 million acres of WUI and watersheds, money for training for firefighters and forestry work, \$100 million for CFLRP, \$500 million for general forest-thinning and timber-harvesting, \$500 million for prescribed burns, \$500 million for fuel breaks, \$200 million for removal of flammable vegetation, \$200 million for post-fire restoration, \$225 million for burned-area rehabilitation, and more. Senator Bennet wants to make it even better and has brought an amendment to the floor that would provide additional money. Now the bill has to go to the House, which may reconvene in the next two or three weeks to take it up. Last night the Senate passed a \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation bill. It will soon be headed to the House for more negotiation. John said they hope to secure far more funding for forestry restoration. These two bills might provide the most significant investment in our forests that has been seen in our lifetimes. It is hoped this process will wrap up in six or seven weeks.

Mike Preston said that earlier today the DWRP Coordinating Committee had a discussion about two things that are needed in order to make the most of the incredible opportunity provided through CFLRP:

1. An improved capacity to write proposals. More capacity-building resources are needed so the responsibility for writing proposals does not fall solely on collaborative coordinators;
2. More NRCS staffing in the forestry area, because much of this funding will be through NRCS.

Resilient forests and communities: Danny said the snow and soil-moisture monitoring work that was discussed at last month's DWRP stakeholder meeting is moving forward. It involves the Nature Conservancy, Western Water Assessment at CU-Boulder, and USDA Agricultural Research Service. The plan is to do transects of treated and untreated areas to see the effects of treatment on snow and soil moisture.

Collaborative effectiveness and sustainability: Danny said in concert with the Mancos Conservation District and Wildfire Adapted Partnership, DWRF had put in a request for congressionally directed funding through Sen. John Hickenlooper's office for some outreach and coordination work. He does not know what the status of the request is.

John said Senator Bennet's office also submitted it to the Appropriations Committee. They hope to hear in September whether the request was granted. This year the Colorado State Forest Service came in with a comprehensive, statewide request, so that might be more likely to win support from the committee. John suggested DWRF should consider coordinating with them next year.

Danny said there are still BLM grant requests pending for opportunities for prescribed fire on private land. A new round of Forest Restoration grants will be upcoming. DWRF is chatting with MSI and other partners about putting in another proposal for such a grant.

LOR Foundation

Danny introduced Nicci Crowley, Cortez coordinator for the LOR Foundation. Previously she worked with Onward! A Legacy Foundation.

Nicci said she is a 15-year resident of the Cortez community. LOR was started about 20 years ago. In the past LOR provided large land grant funding, but their board decided giving a large grant to one entity does not truly benefit the community. Now they operate like a start-up accelerator for community-driven ideas identified as priorities, sometimes providing funding for specific projects, and sometimes working to connect people and entities with resources. LOR launched in Cortez in April. As the community officer, Nicci reaches out to collaboratives, nonprofits and individuals. LOR does not operate according to grant cycles, but by fund requests. The foundation provides funding in amounts ranging from as little as \$500 to requests in the tens of thousands of dollars. Since Nicci came on board they have given two grants to the community: one to the Cortez Cultural Center for encouraging entrepreneurship for Native youth, and one to Cortez's southside community garden to bring healthful food to that side of the community. LOR can be a community matching partner. Right now they are staying focused on the Cortez area (which they generally define as the area covered by Montezuma-Cortez School District Re-1). After the first year or two, they will consider how the boundaries might expand. She sees this as a Montezuma County/Cortez-focused area.

Mike Preston asked whether DWRF could be granted capacity-building money for putting together these kinds of applications. Nicci said she will have to dig a little deeper to see if that would be appropriate. LOR does not provide funding for general operating support, but the foundation does fund specific projects, such as a contract for focused grant-writing.

Chicken Creek update

Danny said DWRF has done a number of tours in the Chicken Creek area in the past year because of all the different values and work coalescing there, including thinning and mastication projects. An EA was approved a little over a decade ago and it had a restoration

component as well as a thinning component. The EA attempted to balance values around the Nordic area there. Part of the goal was to retain as much snow as possible on the trails, which is difficult because this is a low-elevation, southeast-facing location. Retaining trees to shade the trails helps.

Derek said because of some issues in a different EA that was also in the Chicken Creek area, some mitigations have been placed in the document Danny is talking about so that a slightly higher density of trees would be left along the Nordic trails. For the most part the Forest Service has done a good job of ensuring that has occurred in a variety of locations throughout this landscape, but recently a three-quarter-mile section of trail had about a quarter-mile section where mitigation measures weren't met. The district had some good discussion about it. They don't want this to happen on a regular basis. Dexter thanked Robert Meyer for having that discussion with them. This was basically a unit in which the operator does his thinning based on the specifications of the prescription and it isn't marked. From here on, whenever there is a special feature in a unit, the agency will mark where they want a higher density of trees. Even though it's only a quarter-mile, that is important and they will see whether that thinning will have a negative effect. Some concerns have also been raised about the appearance of the area now that material has been piled, so the agency is having discussions about that. In the short term the area looks a little rough but in the long term the benefits of the treatment outweigh the short-term impacts to aesthetics.

Robert Meyer thanked people for coming out on short notice and seeing what he has seen. There was a previous sale where shading was not retained on a former ski loop on the lower Little Bauer Loop, so that portion of the trail had to be relocated. In another place it was used for a haul road, and the operator didn't know to use shading. Other concerns were aesthetics. Robert said Chicken Creek to Mancos residents is the equivalent of Boggy Draw to the Town of Dolores, although Chicken Creek is used less for mountain-biking than Boggy. People are very protective of the landscape and are disturbed when things happen that affect it, especially aesthetically. Robert said he has visited all the forest treatments in the area since 1998 and has been pleasantly surprised at how fast areas can recover, usually in three to five years. However, he is concerned about what has happened in the last three weeks since the meeting in the field. He said the previous method of piling left little disturbance to the area. That process carried through the fall of 2020. When things got rolling in May, both on Unit 5 just south of the Millwood road and Unit 16 in the heart of Chicken Creek, the piling didn't occur when the logs were hauled out, so slash was left to dry on the ground. David Casey told him the units need to be piled by certain dates. Recently Robert made a couple tours of the area in question. He said operators are now using a John Deere bulldozer and the disturbance to the landscape is beyond anything he has seen in 25 years. Perhaps this method was used in the past and was grandfathered into a contract, but he believes it's really inappropriate and shouldn't be used in any setting in any national forest. Fifty to 75 percent of the acreage seems affected by the 20,000-pound machine. The ground has been churned up and also compacted, all during the recent monsoon event. Robert has spent 25 years advocating for fuel-reduction treatments, saying the treated areas will look good again in just a few years, but he has lost a lot of credibility over the past three weeks. He believes it will take a decade to heal this area. He also

is concerned about the burn piles because they contain a great deal of dirt and will burn black, leaving a mark. Robert said he has a 78-year-old neighbor whose property borders the unit. Her husband is in the hospital in Denver and probably will not survive. She returned home after being by his side, and was so upset by the condition of the treated unit that she will not speak to Robert any longer. She can't go out her back door and ride her horse as she used to, because the forest is now completely unusable for that. Robert said we are trying to be stewards of public lands and take care of precious resources for all types of users. If people drove a bulldozer around Boggy for three weeks, all hell would break loose. This is a serious transgression of trust and it reflects badly on everyone here.

Jimbo asked what can be done differently to avoid such situations. He said we have to recognize a new way forward. We shouldn't be doing things out of a book with a 1970s approach. There needs to be a workforce that is educated and sees the big picture. It's necessary to look beyond just the cheapest and fastest way to do something.

Molly said his remarks seemed derogatory to loggers. She said loggers go through continuing education every year and are certified. The Chicken Creek area's not being marked was a Forest Service mistake, not an industry mistake. In most timber sales on the San Juan National Forest, industry is actually paying for that wood. If you put more and more restrictions on operators, it will come to a point where the Forest Service will have to pay for work to be done, thus moving from timber sales to stewardship work, and there may not be enough money to get the work done. She said the industry's crews follow best management practices.

David said operators were not working outside of the contract requirements. There was a delay in the contract, which played a role in having to use the bulldozer more. The prescription met the intent. The Forest Service tries to keep things flexible for industry because otherwise the agency receives complaints and threats of no bid, but they try not to damage the resource either. He believes the agency can improve the way it describe its contracts. He agreed with Molly that if mitigations are added, it will cost money.

Derek agreed. He said you can't plan for what you don't know. In this instance the agency has some egg on its face. However, Robert started off by discussing what he has seen in the past 25 years and he didn't have major concerns until the last three weeks. For the most part the agency has been successfully implementing these prescriptions without major snafus. They have had one during Derek's 12 years here. Derek said they can try to do better and specify things in contracts regarding how and when piling will occur. Prior to 2015 the timber industry wasn't in place to do the needed work. The agency can look at potential options to address current conditions in Units 5 and 16, but this isn't something they anticipated at all.

Jimbo said he is sorry Molly thought he was calling the loggers ignorant. That was not what he meant. He was asking how to do things better and avoid situations like this. If it costs more to do some of these things then that is the reality. He is just trying to find a better way forward.

Danny said one of DWRP's core values is a sustainable wood-products industry that has the economic viability to do the treatments.

Steve said he has been involved in soil mitigation his entire life. Mistakes may have been made in the area Robert described, but people can go back in and rake and harrow so the soil is usable again. It will cost money. He reminded people to consider how this landscape would look had it burned in a wildfire.

David said he and his foresters can walk through and look at the compaction, perhaps put out grass seed, and look at contracts for units that have not been done yet. Everything cut previously on the contract was acceptable. He will review it and see what mitigations may be necessary.

Robert said this is a good process. People outside the Forest Service need to be looking at this. He said there is a risk of sedimentation entering Joe Moore Reservoir from rain from some of the treated areas. If we want to support the recreation economy we need the forest looking as attractive as possible after treatments.

Danny said this is an example of the unknowns involved in high-visibility areas. The prescriptions for Boggy won't be implemented for a while, but this is a good learning experience for DWRP. He appreciates everyone being willing to have this conversation.