**Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest (DWRF) Collaborative**
**Stakeholders Meeting**
**February 9, 2022**
**dwrfcollaborative.org**

Participants

Dan Kaufenberger – Fuels AFO Dolores RD; Dani Gregory – Southwest Colorado Cycling Association; Derek Padilla – DR Dolores RD; Emma Reineman – NEPA Planner, Dolores RD; Eric Janes – Ret BLM; James Dietrich – Nat Ressources Montezuma Co; Jim Spratlen – Emergency Manager Montezuma Co; Alex Graf – Wildfire Adapted Partnership; Ken Curtis – Dolores Water Conservancy District; Steve Garchar – Dolores Co Commissioner; Mike Bettaglia – USFS RMRS; Pat Seekins – Fuels FMO Dolores RD; Rich Landreth – City of Cortez Water; Andy Hawk – Timber Age Systems; Sensa Wolcott – Mancos Watershed Coordinator MCD; Travis Bruch – SJNF Timber Program; Bruce Short – Consulting Forester; Anthony Culpepper – MSI/Four Rivers; Jimbo Buikerood – San Juan Citizens Alliance; Mike Preston – RMRI Steering Comm; Doug Muscanell

**Program Area Updates**

- Community Edu and Outreach
    - Danny presented to Montezuma BOCC on 08 Feb 2022; introduced the collaborative to the new County Commissioners
    - Community meeting with WAP, DFPC, Town of Dolores, DWRF focused on Merritt Way outreach; this is the most concerning risk location within the town; overview of rapid risk assessments; WAP presenting on cost sharing opportunities; identify opportunities
    - There could be a larger outreach effort for the Town of Dolores later in the year.
    - DWRF and SJMA Forest Ambassador training similar to 2021; program funded via RMRI and Ambassadors are located at trailheads throughout the San Juan
    - Alex/WAP – Beetle virtual meeting, part of bi-monthly ambassador meeting; Amy Lockner with RMRS Gunnison Entomologist; talk focused on pinion Ips due to ambassador interest; slides will be on WAP site and presentation on youtube.
    - MSI hosting Forest and Fire Learning Series in April; virtual presentations with one workshop at the Powerhouse; dates TBD

- Public Agency Outreach/Updates
    - CFRLP – SW CO CFRLP was formally accepted as a program in January; funding is still awaiting Congress budget votes (held up by Continuing Resolutions at present)
    - CFRLP Governance – there was a small group of stakeholders pulled to develop the governance structure – DWRF reps are Danny, Ken, Jimbo – the charge of the group is to develop the structure of how our CFRLP works; it will be iterative and will seek feedback from the broader stakeholder base
    - RMRI

        - 17 Feb, Thurs 3-4:45pm follow up to POD survey meeting, this meeting will focus on really setting projects with the priority PODS; key actions for the next 10 years; what are the barriers; what are our individual and shared goals for the PODs; development of the workplan for the PODs

- Wood Products
    - Wood Innovation Grant – Timber Age – applied for PRG320 certification for CLT production; the ask is for assistance with that engineering standard; also applied to a CSFS program to increase wood testing at FLC to increase ability for destructive testing – working on plans for new facility near La Plata Co airport
        - There is still a need for a small self-loading truck; if anyone has a connection please let Andy know. Critical for increase in hauling capacity.
    - David Sitton – looking into a pellet mill

- DWRF
    - $1250 from the City of Cortez for general operations
    - Advancing conversation on collaborative trust as an outcome of the year end survey; working with a researcher who studies trust and forest collaboratives (CFLRP); presentation to come.
    - Welcome Dani Gregory to the DWRF coordinating committee to provide the rec voice

## Mixed Conifer Prescribed Fire EA Introduction

Please refer to the Mixed Conifer Synthesis from Remke, Chambers, and others as a resource.

- This will be landscape scale – 320000ac planning area

## Purpose and Need

- This purposed EA would serve as an analysis for Prescribed Fire within the proposed planning area (**approximately 320,000 acres**) to achieve a balance of natural resources, improve wildlife habitat, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, to regulate/reduce fuel loadings, and maintain healthy ecosystems and vegetation conditions in areas where fire had a historic role in the ecosystem.
- Fire is an essential ecological process in many fire-dependent ecosystems. In large areas of the country, fire exclusion from these ecosystems has led to unhealthy forest, woodland and rangeland conditions. These areas are at risk of intense, severe wildfires that threaten communities and cause significant damage to key ecological components.
- As one component of fire management, prescribed fire is used to alter, maintain, or restore vegetative communities; achieve desired resource conditions; and to protect life, property, and values that would be degraded or destroyed by wildfire.
- Under the No Action Alternative, fuels would continue to accumulate, and fire intensity and severity would continue to increase and pose a risk to catastrophic (High severity) wildfires.

Contoso Suites 2

## Mixed Conifer Disturbance & Desired Conditions

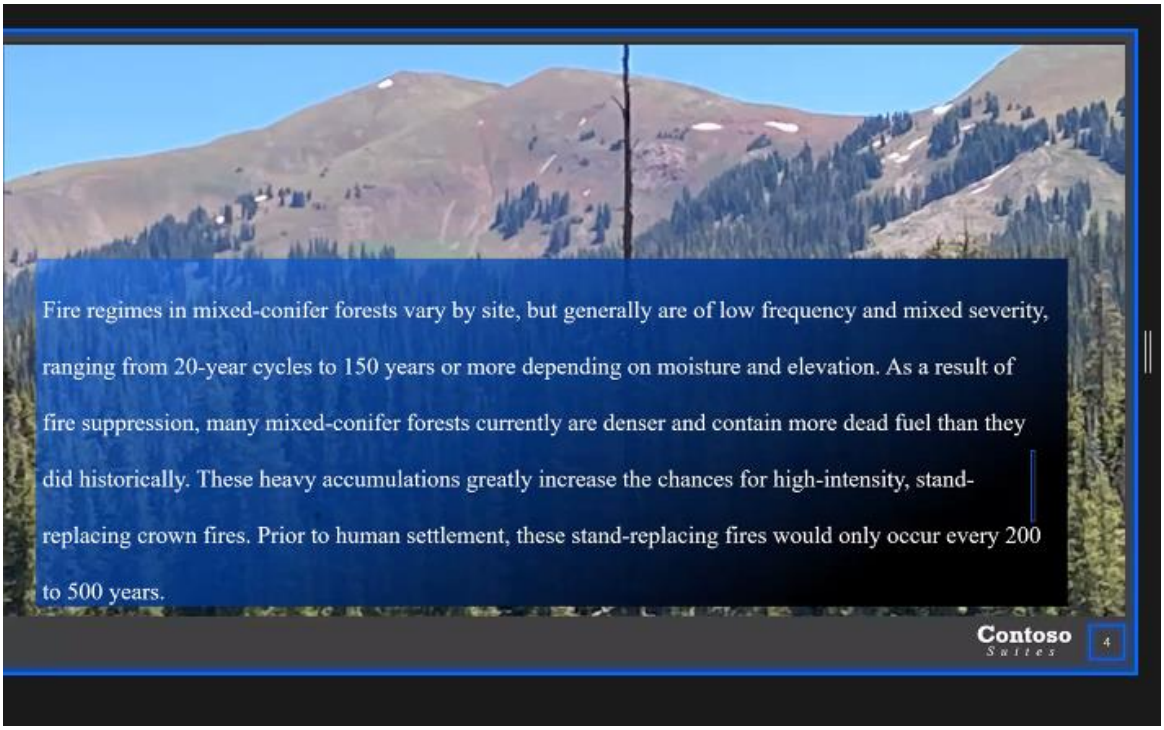
- Disturbances typically occur at two temporal and spatial scales; large scale infrequent disturbances (mostly fire) and …….
- Small scale frequent disturbances (fire, insect, disease, wind). This forest has an understory of a wide variety of shrubs grasses, and forbs depending on soil type, aspect, elevation, disturbance, and other factors.
- The Wet Mixed Conifer forest vegetation community generally occurs at elevations ranging from approximately 5,500 to 10,000 feet.
- The Wet Mixed Conifer forest vegetation community is a mosaic of structural and seral stages ranging from young trees through old.
- At the mid-scale, the size and number of groups and patches vary depending on disturbance, elevation, soil type, aspect, and site productivity.

Contoso Suites 3

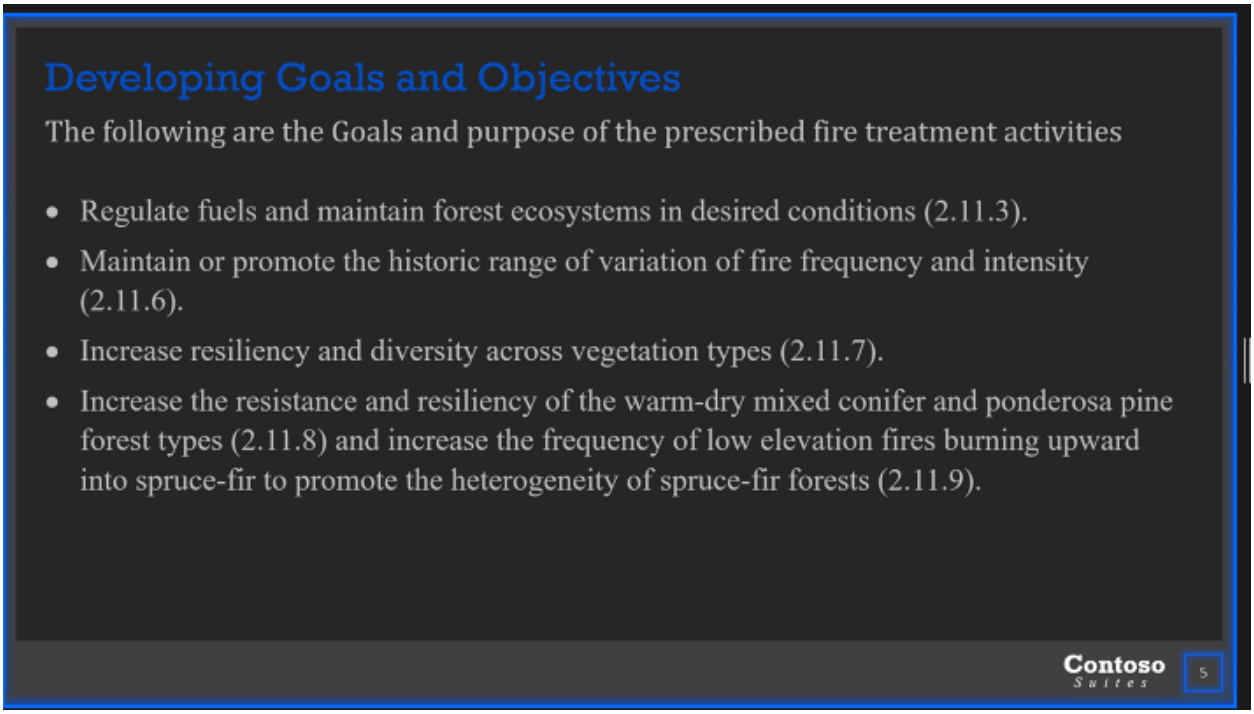
Desired conditions are very complex for mixed conifer; we might not fully know what these are.

Focus would likely be at the mid-scale points

Fire regimes are variable lower frequency but with mixed severity




Goals:



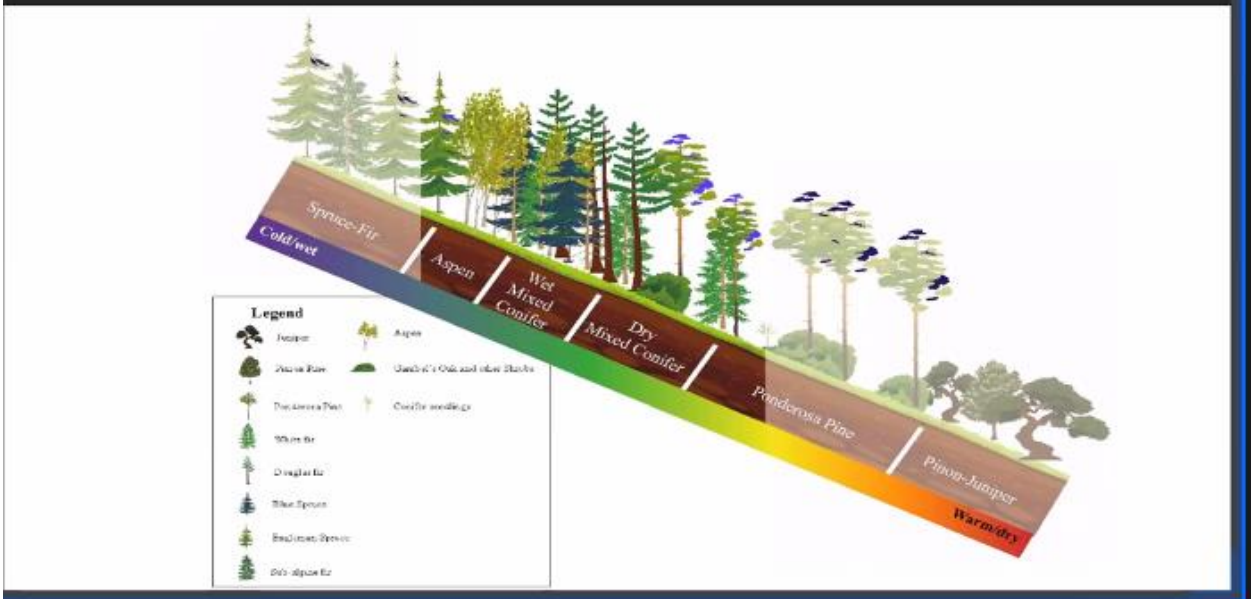
## Prescribed Fire (Mixed Conifer) Prep & Implementation

- Control features: Utilize natural barriers, existing roads and system trails to the extent possible when planning burn unit boundaries to reduce ground disturbance.
- Ignition methods: Ground ignition and aerial ignition (helicopter and/or UAS Drone).
- Aspect burning: Target south facing slopes while utilizing snow as a natural control feature.
- Develop Prescribed Fire Prescription parameters: Temperature, Relative Humidity, wind speed, fuel moistures.

Contoso

Implementation will be very site specific due to variability

## Transition of Warm/dry to Wet Mixed Conifer Fuel types




Geography – see map sent earlier –

- Each polygon will be covered by an individual burn plan (10 total) – these will be programmatic burn plans

Questions –

- Bruce – Are you looking at planned and unplanned ignitions (lightning, highway)? From a planned side will benefit for unplanned in the future.
- Jimbo – forest wide HVRA, is part of this idea to move beyond just high value focus, ie. moving further into the woods? This does tie together and will highlight the values at a landscape level. Will tie to PODs and burn units.
- Mike B – Interested in the discussion of plans and how to monitor fire effects as low an moderate severity fire is missing. RMRS is there to help.
- Looking at the Fishlake NF for example of high elevation Rx fire
- Small scale with smaller units within the larger polygons.
- Jimbo – Piedra and Hermosa aspect burning as examples of warm0dry mixed conifer Rx successes

How does the collab want to engage with this EA?

- Key milestones and dates in email updates due to the many components moving in SW Colorado/SJNF.
- Smaller group focused on more technical discussions alongside SJNF staff.
- DWRF to target outreach to interested folks, especially those that may have on the ground knowledge of potentially affected areas.

## Montezuma County CWPP Updates

- CWPP update has been in process for about a year. This is 4$^{th}$ iteration of the county CWPP.
- Review existing min standards set by the state, following state template, the CWPP document grew due to this process.
- Changes to mapping will occur
- Past accomplishments from 2011 CWPP; evaluate what is still relevant from the 2011 CWPP
- Final draft has been completed and is in circulation internally for review

## PLANNING PROCESS

- Met with the Board of County Commissioners to secure authorization and support for the for the current (CWPP) update.
- Held over 25 virtual meetings with local agency stakeholders, under COVD restrictions, to review the existing CWPP and solicit input on updates.
- Evaluated new mapping resources including the Wildfire Risk Viewer.
- Reviewed current County wildfire regulations with the Planning Department and Emergency Manger.
- Post notification in the Local Newspaper regarding the proposed CWPP update and allowed a 45 day public comment period

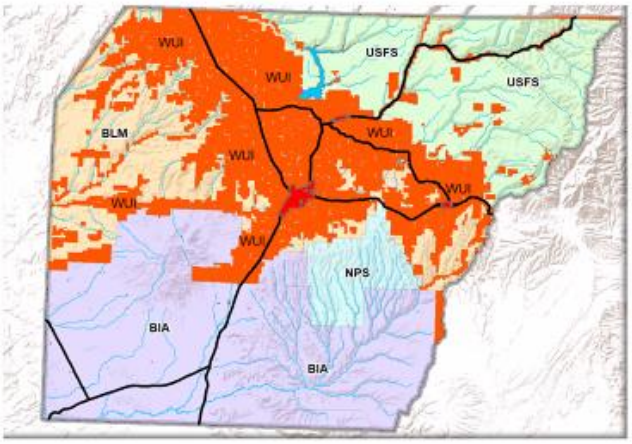
Will be done when final draft is completed. →

- Utilized all of the new mapping tools from state and Feds

Background

- We live with wildfire in the county, 58 records (more than that), with 43 events since 2000. The three largest fires have been the last 20 years. These fires are generally associated with public lands.
- Points of origin on public lands and a lot along highways. There is a lot of potential data lacking in the mid band of the county due to how data is collected/reported (BIA vs unincorporated Montezuma Co)
- WUI – holding the 2005 definitions

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY




### Montezuma County WUI

**All areas of rural Montezuma County are at some level of risk from wildfire.**

**Therefore the 2005 Montezuma County CWPP defined the WUI as;**

***"all unincorporated lands within the County."***

**The 2011 Update found the situation to be unchanged and the 2021 Update also concurs.**

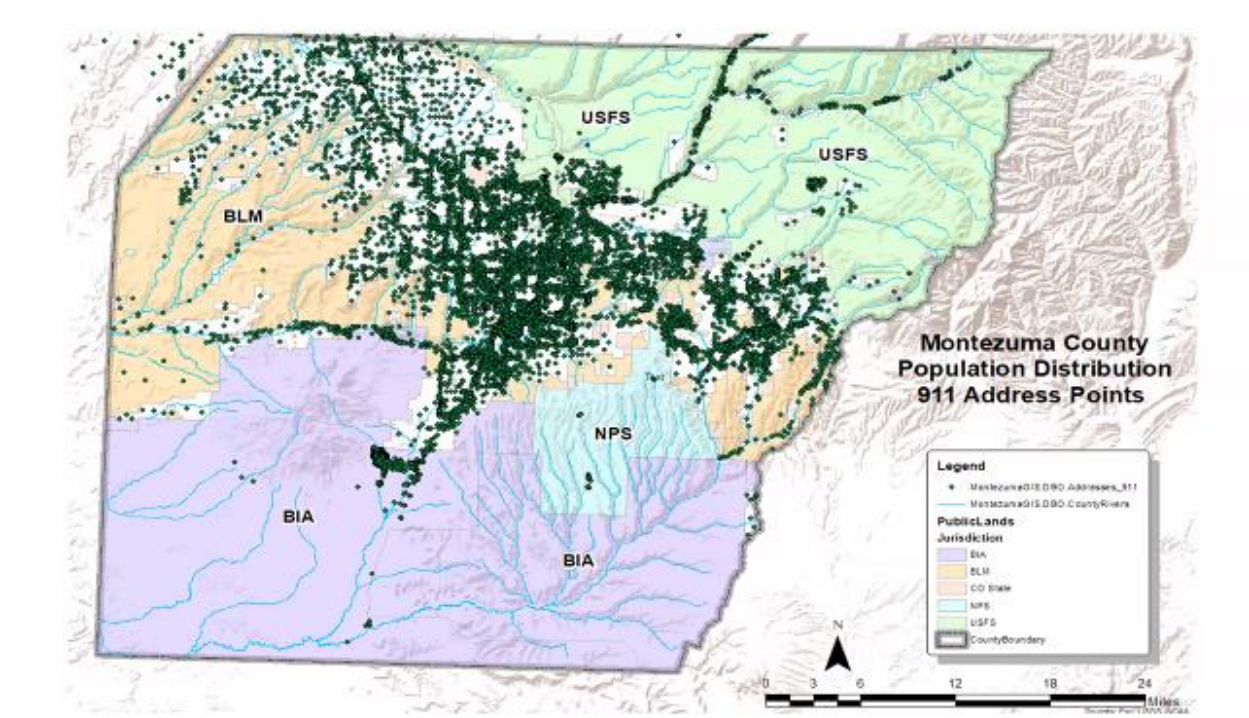
- 

Population Growth

### Montezuma County Population Growth

- **Like much of Colorado over the last two decades, Montezuma County has experienced rapid growth, especially in the County's unincorporated areas.**
- **According to the Colorado State Demography Office, the Montezuma County Population has increased by 2.4% annually, going from 25,532 in 2010 to 26,160 in 2019.**
- **This growth rate accelerated during the COVID 19 Epidemic of 2020-2021.**
- **Colorado Department of Local Affairs population projections indicate that the population of the County will increase by approximately 8,000 people by 2050.**
- **The most growth in Montezuma County has occurred in the unincorporated area of the county. Population in the incorporated areas grew by 277 individuals, or 1.8% annually between 2010 and 2019. Montezuma County population is 47% urban and 53% rural.**
- **Over the past twenty years, much of the home building activity has occurred in naturally vegetated regions that newcomers hold in high regard.**

- Tracking growth related to sub-division locations; not a perfect instrument for predicating growth though
- Use of 911 address points




- Areas of water service will be a likely driver of future growth. Less growth in Mancos but more in the central part of county and up US491 corridor

## WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT

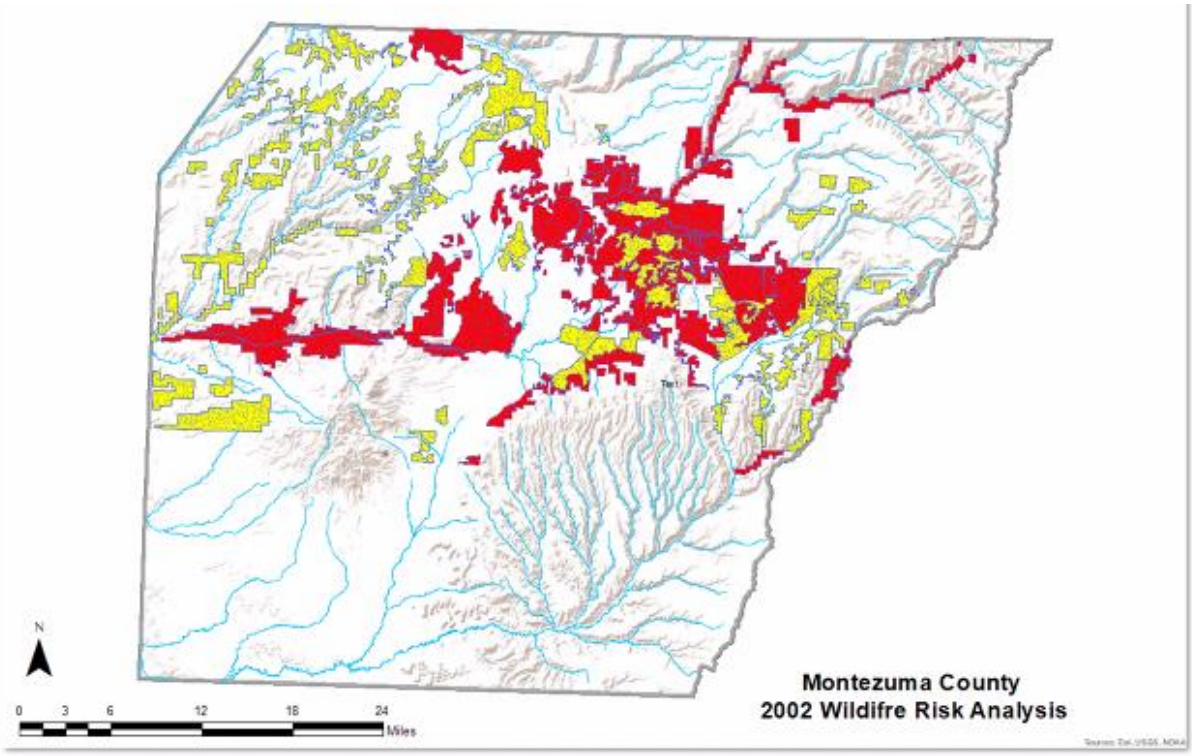
- **Wildfire Risk assessments have been ongoing throughout Montezuma County since the early 2000's.**
- **The first Community Wildfire Protection Plan completed in 2002 was the product of a wildfire risk effort started in 1999 called the "Red-zone Project."**
- **Montezuma County created a series of district polygons using mappable landscape features. Polygons were analyzed for fire susceptibility, likelihood, intensity, fuel type, accessibility, and proximity to residential or other structures. Other values were also considered, including scenic value, and cultural considerations. Polygons were ranked into High, Medium, and Low Risk categories.**
- **The United States Forest Service maintains a website in which wildfire risk has been analyzed across the nation. This website is intended to help communities understand, explore and reduce wildfire risk. A nationwide data set is available and was used in this 2021 CWPP update.**

**VALUES AT RISK**

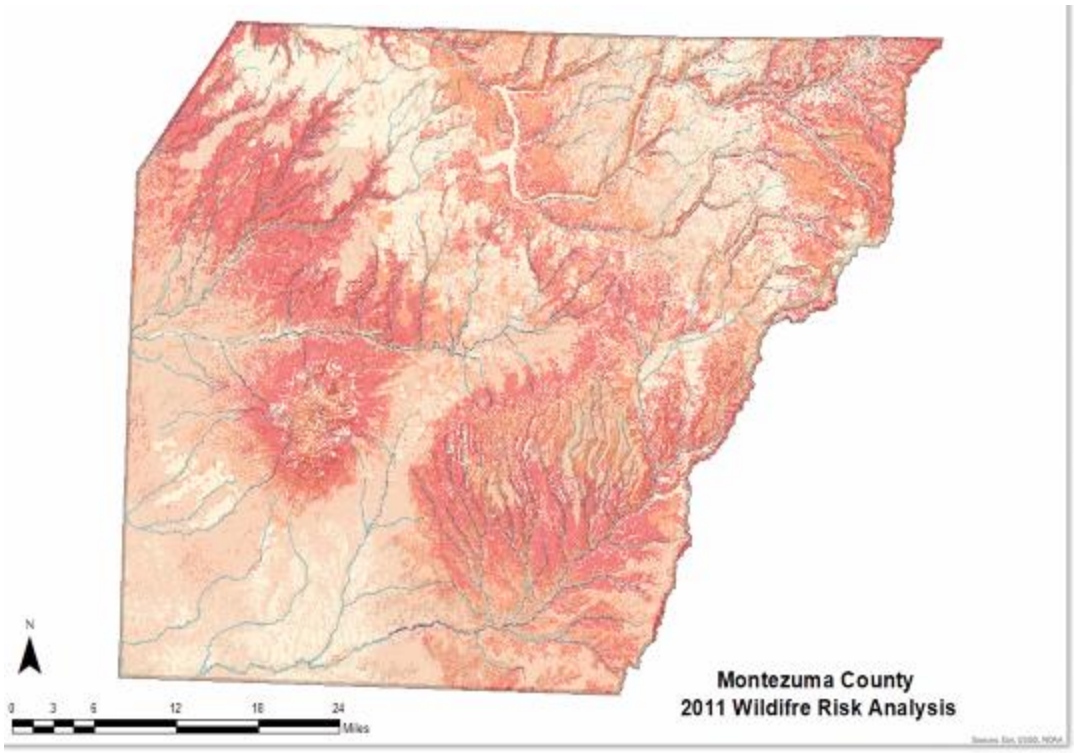
Through stakeholder input, the following values were identified as being at risk in Montezuma County;

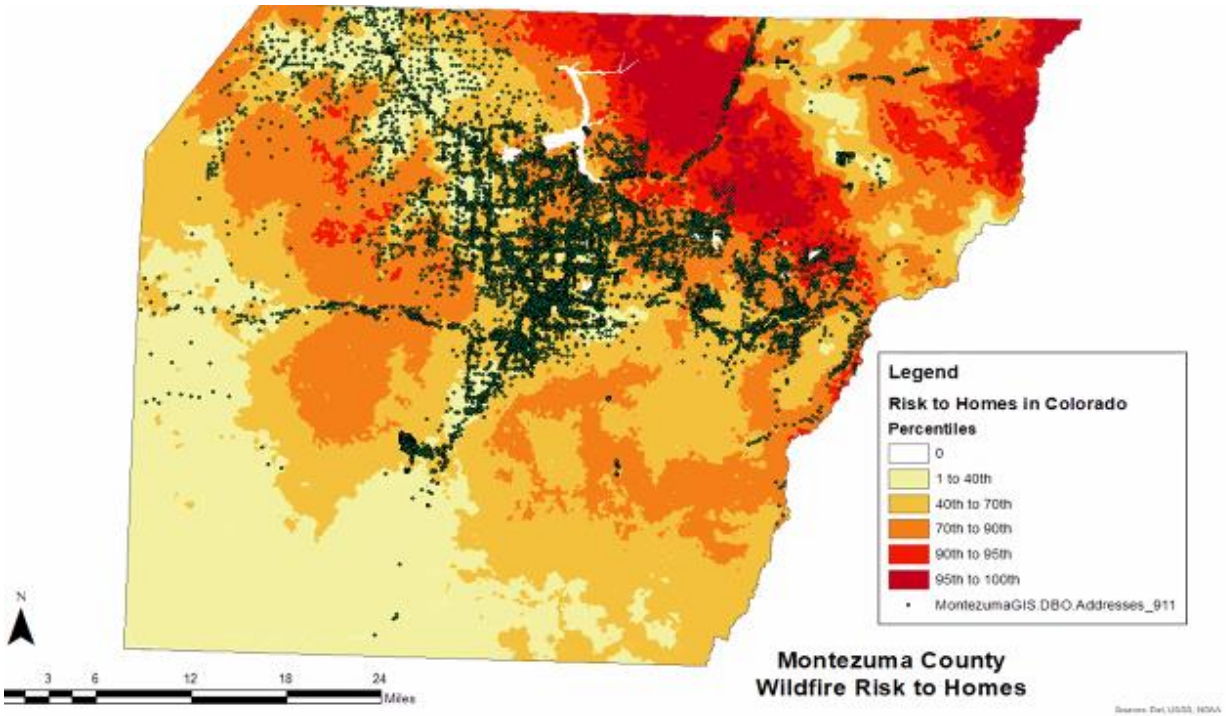
- **Lives:** firefighters and the public but also livestock and pets
- **Private & Public Property:** homes, businesses, public buildings
- **Public Health:** air quality, water quality
- **Critical Infrastructure:** emergency services, hospitals, electric transmission, pipelines, irrigation ditches, compressor stations, well pads, roads etc.
- **Ecosystem:** McPhee Reservoir and watershed protection, wildlife, stable plant communities
- **Local and Regional Economies:** tourism, timber, and grazing, mineral production, hunting and fishing
- **Natural and Cultural Amenities:** views, historic structures, pre-historic structures and artifacts
- **Local Tax Base & Basic Services:** risk to property values, prohibitive costs associated with fighting wildfires, drain on community resource

Previous Analysis




Any new development is currently paired and evaluated with these polygons. Determines level of scrutiny with development.




Integration of 2021 assessment and homes.

## BROAD MITIGATION GOALS THE COUNTY SUPPORTS

**1.) Implement Landscape Level Fuels Treatment Projects on Public Land Adjacent to Private Land.**

**2.) Implement Landscape Level Fuels Treatment Projects on Private Lands adjacent to Public Land.**

**3.) Enhance the use of mitigation and forestry contractors.**

**4.) Increase mitigation by rental and absentee home and property owners.**

## SPECIFIC MITIGATION ACTIONS THE COUNTY SUPPORTS

**1.) Master Planning**
Pre-construction planning and design can often play a significant role in increasing a home or subdivision's resistance to wildfire. The County Planning Department and Road Department play a role here.

**2.) Reducing Structural Ignitability Using Fire Safe Construction Materials and Techniques**
Montezuma County does not currently have a building department or building codes. Therefore it is up to the individual to educate themselves about Firewise construction.

**3.) Reducing Structural Ignitability using Fire safe Landscaping**

**4.) Creating Defensible Space;** This is the number one thing everyone who lives in Montezuma County should do.

**5.) Public Awareness**
Both public and private lands are at increased risk of wildfire partly due to changing climatic conditions, and partly due to increased visitation. It is important to maintain a campaign of public awareness surrounding the risk of wildfire on both private and public lands.

- The County does not have a building department and codes are really only for commercial development. It will be up to the public to lean on defensible space.
- Personal responsibility is paramount for residents.

## CURRENT COUNTY POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Montezuma County maintains a policy of personal responsibility for people who choose to live in the county's unincorporated areas. Rural living comes with various benefits and risks, but it is up to the landowner to advocate for their own personal safety.

The Montezuma County Land Use Code requires an evaluation of wildfire risk when subdivisions are proposed. Subdivisions within areas determined to be at high risk receive extra scrutiny. Proposed subdivisions deemed to be at an increased risk of wildfire are required to prepare a wildfire mitigation plan.

However, even if wildfire mitigation plans are implemented when a subdivision is created, ongoing maintenance must continue to follow the mitigation plan regularly. Only an HOA can provide regulatory oversight within existing subdivisions.

**LAND USE CODE 2020** **Wildfire Mitigation.** All new subdivisions which are located completely or partially within areas identified as the A or B zone on the Community at Risk Map, or other areas that fall outside of the A or B zone of the Community at Risk Map that have native vegetative cover deemed to be a wildfire risk, will be reviewed for a recommendation of a Wildfire Mitigation Plan or a waiver. Wildfire Mitigation in the subdivision should take place upon development of each lot and overseen by the developer or established HOA, as recommended in Colorado State Forest Service, wildfire mitigation publications.

## SIX ACTION CATAGORIES

| | |
|---|---|
| *PREVENTION* | The Montezuma County Fire Protection Districts, Sheriff's Department (Fire Warden), Federal Land Agencies, and the Board of County Commissioners coordinate very effectively to implement fire bans when conditions merit the extra precaution. |
| *EDUCATION* | The coordinated wildfire education program that has been developed in Montezuma County between the Land Managers, Fire Districts, and the Firewise Council of Southwest Colorado needs to be continued and strengthened. |
| *MITIGATION* | Land managers can modify fuel sources to maintain a healthy forest that is more resistant to fire, insects, and diseases. Actions include fuels reductions, defensible space and fire resistant planning and construction |
| COORDINATION | Close coordination of activities between the Fire Protection Districts and Fire-Wise Council of Southwest Colorado needs to continue. |
| SUPRESSION | The initial interagency attack and mutual aid provided are well-coordinated and supported by all agencies. The land management agencies and fire districts are well equipped with just a few additional equipment needs. |
| APPROPRIATION | All fire management entities and the FireWise Council should be active in identifying, pursuing, and managing grants that contribute toward the goals of this CWPP. |

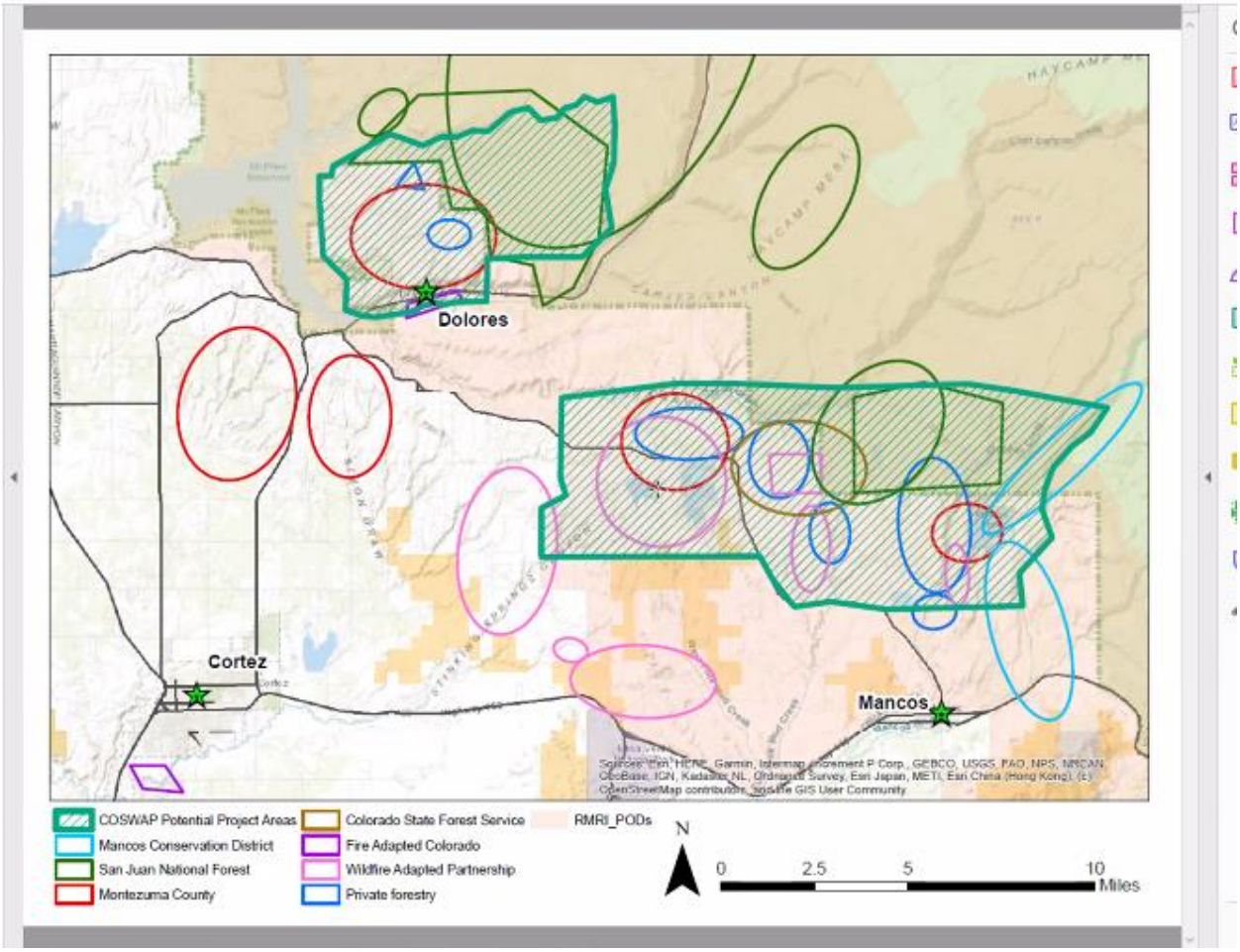
- Multiple goals and objectives per category; really need to focus on the outreach and education and acknowledged the key roles of WAP in this process.

Questions:

- Steve – Go into the Mancos water supply issue. Mancos rural water has reached capacity with their Jackson allocation. Possibility of moving Montezuma rural east but this is not set.
- Jimbo – You modified CWPP to get grant funding? Yes.
    - Legislature – three bills 1007, 1011, 1012 – all bills that will bring monies to wildfire education
    - https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1012
    - https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1007
    - https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1011
- Bruce – For existing sub-divisions who were developed under old rules what support will there be, also county roads not under county maintenance? Jim, Cedar Mesa included but difficult to do "after the fact". Can use the CWPP to pull in grant funding for these needs.
- Jim – Congratulations to James for the great work!

**DNR COSWAP Update**

- https://dnr.colorado.gov/divisions/forestry/co-strategic-wildfire-action-program
- Focus on the Landscape Fuels Reduction component
    - Fund projects with planning and implementation and stitch cross-boundary work.
    - Not open. The three RMRIs and 11 counties.
- Several planning meetings; "circles on the map" to outline shovel ready projects
- Aggregation into two potential project areas:




-
- The likely focus will be on the Summit-Jackson-Mancos area;
- RFP will be out in March
- Application due in April
- Funds focused on private lands

Feedback/Questions:

Please reach out to Danny with any feedback. We will cover updates with the March and April meetings.

Next Steps