



**DWC Stakeholder Meeting NOTES Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 1:30-3:30pm Hybrid**  
*In person: Dolores Water Conservancy District – [60 Cactus St., Cortez, CO 81321](#)*

*Virtual: Zoom login info at the end of agenda*

### **Agenda - ZOOM link below**

Robert Meyer (Mancos Trails, WAP Ambassador), Duncan Rose (TU), Bruce Short (Short Forestry), Caleb Schutz (SJNF), Tom Rice (SJNF), Doug Muscanell (Muscanell Millworks), Anthony Culpepper (MSI), Wade Bentley (Ironwood and BiocharNow), Mark Hartman (Ironwood), Tyler Corbin (BLM), Logan Davis (DFPG), Emma Reinemann (SJNF), Nina Williams (DWC), Ken Curtis (DWCD), Carly Pierson (NAU), James Gaspard (BiocharNow), Sheryl Gunn (SJNF), Justin Pitts (MCD Americorps), Bill Smith (MSI), Celeste Moore (WAP), Leigh Reeves (Town of Dolores), James Dietrich (Montezuma County), Steve Garchar (Dolores County), Melissa Gould (Chicken Ck Trails), Ryan Cox (CSFS), Danny Margoles (MCD), Tara Harris (MCD)

#### Time Topic

1:30-1:40 **Introductions, check-ins, meeting agreements**

1:40-1:45 **Approve/amend agenda** - Nina requested OK to change agenda order around to facilitate better flow between topics. All OK

1:45-2:00 **Salter EA After Action Review - Bruce Short - Incorporating what we've learned going forward.**

Bruce presented the revised Salter AAR, focusing on recommendations generated for working with agencies on current and future activities, especially in a NEPA process. Bruce highlighted:

- DWC to establish a decision-making process
- Comment tracking - improve record keeping of collaborative process, making sure to record dissenting opinions
- Updates to collaborative agreements document
- Improve collaborative data sharing - Nina to work on getting Collaborative Exchange Folder updated and functioning on website.
- Annual project reviews
- Adaptive Mgmt and Monitoring

Ken, grateful to AAR working group, noted capacity issues to implement. Recommended Coordinating Team consider how to implement going forward. Could working groups formulate to take on tracking/documenting during NEPA processes? New assistant? Emphasized collaborative buy in on implementation not punting it all to coordinator.

Sheryl will run AAR by SO staff to seek input/alignment on recommendations

Robert would like to see decision-making process work start soon. Get on agenda of

2:00-2:50 **Dolores Ranger District Presentation and Discussion on 2 proposed actions**

1. Emma Reinemann and Caleb Schutz from the Dolores Ranger District presented on a proposed change to the 2017 **Dolores Prescribed Fire Pine Ecosystem Restoration Project Environmental Assessment** to authorize the use of dozers, skid steers with dozer attachments, and masticators with dozer attachments (collectively referred to as “dozers”), for Rx fire control line construction within the boundaries of the existing Pine Rx Fire EA. Dozer lines would be up to 12 feet in width and would scrape down to the mineral soil.
  - 2018 decision to allow a controlled burn - constructed control lines built by hand or by UTV drag lines - and a 200 ft masticated fuel break. 10,000-15,000 acres were planned for controlled burns, but Covid and the escaped controlled burn in NM slowed down what was possible between 2018 and now.
  - New proposal - additional use of dozers, masticators with dozer attachment, and skid steers with dozer attachment to construct control lines, especially in canyon rim areas and around private lands
  - NEPA will be revisited
  - Questions -
    - Duncan: What precautions for protecting streams and riparian habitat? 100 ft buffer around all riparian-wetland areas for all ground-disturbing activities. UTV and ATV use is prohibited in wetland areas. There are some stipulations for needing to cross streams with UTV/ATV.
    - Steve Garchar: Supportive of going back to dozer lines for efficiency
    - Danny M: Timeline? Next year, maybe 10 miles of dozer line would be put in. Using a dozer does not mean it has to put the whole blade down. It does speed up the work, though. Full blade dozer lines would be used more around private boundaries.
    - Robert: Previous mastication was done on forest boundary, but not around inholdings (Chicken Ck area). Robert is supportive of lines around inholdings, but what will USFS do about weed control and UTV access prevention? NEPA process will help determine and address both weeds and recreational use on dozer lines. Dozer lines can potentially go before burn is possible, and to mitigate rec use on dozer lines, fuel crews can leave a 100-200m buffer between existing roads and dozer lines until they are needed to reduce visibility of cleared area and potential recreational use.
    - Were dozers omitted for a reason in the initial NEPA? Not apparently, not clear on why
    - USFS can incorporate piles that have been left from previous thinning activities. If they are close to a holding feature, the piles will be moved further in unit
    - Robert: Are POD boundaries in the EA? POD came after this EA. POD= a natural start fire that is allowed to burn and treated as a controlled burn.
    - Dozer lines preferably follow old roads, private boundaries, canyon edges.
  - Supplemental EA is the likely next step, but a different tool could be identified as the USFS continues to work collaboratively with all groups involved. Timeline: ballpark 1 year
  - Next steps for the Collaborative: needs more work on USFS end before more meaningful collaboration can occur. Will check back in a few months. Keep discussions going in the meantime.

- Suggestions for collaborative review of original NEPA. Send EA and design features to Nina. Nina will distribute to stakeholders

## 2. District-wide Mixed Conifer Fire EA - Dolores Ranger District considering NEPA process

- Purpose: to restore natural processes using wildfire, approx. 320,000 acres. EA would serve as an analysis for this.
- Wet-mixed conifer occurs between 5,500-10,000 feet. Disturbances generally occur as large scale infrequent disturbances (mostly fire) and small scale frequent disturbances (fire, insect, disease, wind).
- Fire regimes are generally low frequency and mixed severity, ranging from 20 to 150+ year cycles.
- Heavy accumulations resulting from fire suppression result in high severity stand replacing fires
- Logistics - utilize existing roads, trails, and natural barriers as much as possible
- Ignition would be aerial and ground, targeting south facing slopes to utilize possible snow on north facing slopes as a control feature.
- Programmatic burn plans: unit plans will be at least a few years out. Starts with ground truthing, gathering and analyzing transect data (fuel loading).
- Mechanical treatments (mastication, hand thinning) will be incorporated before prescribed fire
- Dozer lines will be included in EA as a possible tool not a requirement
- Duncan: Prioritize protection of Colorado cutthroat stream habitat
- Danny: For the collaborative - These ecosystems are quite different from Ponderosa ecosystems - proactive education and outreach will be vital. Develop materials around fire severity, how different forests experience disturbance differently
- Collaborative field trip to Burro Fire - What did we learn from that fire?
- USFS has other mixed-conifer EAs to look toward for guidance
- Literature: Anthony shared **Mixed Conifer Forests in the San Juan Mountain Region of Colorado** report. Nina will share and post to website
- DWC does not have DFCs for mixed-conifer at this time.
- DRD will stay in touch with the collaborative as this progresses

## 2:50-3:05 Presentation from Jason Gaspard of BiocharNow on facility proposal at Ironwood Mill site [BiocharNow](#)

- Working on preliminary grants with the USFS for equipment to bring down non-merchantable timber to create Biochar. They prefer dead trees, but will also take charred logs.
- Will take 80 tons a day of non-merchantable timber
- Planning for 6 facilities throughout CO, including one in at the Ironwood site in Dolores. Existing site in Berthoud.
- Questions
  - Duncan: Short or long-term? They use portable equipment, but look for long-term sites. Foresee having the materials to stay in the area long-term
  - How long until operations begin? When the permit is issued, operational within 90-120 days. When they will get through the permitting is questionable.
  - Are they able to take P/J? Yes. Can work with any kind of tree, even tamarisk. Can't be chipped. Must be shredded.
  - What are the emissions from kilns? Clean emissions, but they do emit some thermalnox. Allowed 100 tons of emissions of Thermal NOx (nitrous oxides).

They have the same permitting as oil and gas, but put out in what year what drilling will in one day.

- County hearing from March? We have to close the chapter on what is there to move forward with something new. Separate from Ironwood. Didn't realize how sticky the situation was with Ironwood.
- Company pays \$60 a ton for the non-merchantable wood. Making a market for something that has no market.
- Will you be able to collect slash from private landowners and contractors who work on private lands? Yes. They will ideally have trucks to haul slash back to biochar site.
- The land use issue is about what is going on with the veneer that was leftover from ironwood.
- May 9th, next hearing, individuals can engage with the county to weigh in on Biochar

**3:05-3:15 Name Change – Hear and Consider name change objection. See background in email. Decide.**

- Robert - uneasy with the Dolores Watershed Collaborative because it doesn't encompass that the Dolores Ranger District encompasses more than one watershed and that the collaborative works in both. Suggesting Dolores Watersheds Collaborative. Nina asked if anyone was opposed to making watersheds plural. No one indicated they were. Decided to use Dolores Watersheds Collaborative.

**3:20-3:30 Updates**

- MCD Annual Meeting Saturday **Apr 13, 2024** . Speaker from Northern Water will address post-fire impacts from the East Troublesome Fire. Contact Danny for info
- MCD board of supervisors put in comments for a proposed Substitute Water Use Plan for mining/preliminary drilling that will replace water from the Mancos River with water from somewhere else. MCD has significant concerns about this process. Comment period ends April 17.
- New round of COSWAP is open, stakeholders meeting to strategize on a new proposal to be submitted by MCD
- WAP - All programs opened on April 1st
- USFS has plans to burn toward the end of the month as long as conditions allow. One unit in Haycamp and in Boggy Draw. Possibly more Haycamp and Boggy units depending on conditions
- Fire risk for this spring/summer: It's hard to predict. High elevation has snow pack, but low to middle elevation drier. Chances of fires potentially higher.
- Options should be open for public tours post prescribed fire or during burn
- Get Nina on USFS press release
- MSI is hosting a Dry Lake (in between Bayfield and Pagosa) fire tour on May 17th
- Dolores RD hosting a beetle tour and forest health workshop of July 12-13
- Empire Electric reached out about help facilitating collaborative planning for burying West Fork of Dolores powerlines
- CFLRP Blobs will be going to USFS this week with geo-spatial data Nina has digitized all stakeholder input
- Positive meetings with LOR and MightyArrow Foundations to match CWCB grant
- Please fill out stakeholder survey, only 8 responses so far, but they are good! Would like to have more
- **May 18, 2024** Landowner Fire Preparedness Bootcamp - near Jackson Lake

- June 11th, CFLRP Full constellation of stakeholders meeting
- Apr 23, 2024 Interrelationships of forest management and the water cycle meeting

3:30 **Next steps and adjourn**

**PARKING LOT** (Future agenda items) : Field Trips, Collaborative Decision-Making Process