

Burro Fire Tour and Mixed Conifer Rx Fire Pre-Scoping Presentation and Discussions
Hillside Drive 10/3/24 - **NOTES CAPTURED BY AMORINA AND NINA**

Speakers:

Pat Seekins - Prescribed Fire and Fuels Program Manager, SJNF Dolores

Matt Tuten - Regional Forest Stewardship Program Manager, SJNF Pagosa

Todd Gardiner - Wood Innovations and Biomass Utilization, GMUG Ridgway

Attendees: 26

Fire management Acronyms:

PODs - Potential Operational Delineations

RX Fire - Prescribed Fire

VARs - Values at Risk

Burro Fire, 2018 - started 4 days after 416 fire during extreme drought conditions

- Started on lower end of Gold Run TH - undetermined cause, presumed human-caused
- 5,000 acres burned,
- burned for 2 months
- was tucked away, limited visibility
- Mosaic burn, low complexity, some stand-replacing burn - Polly Creek to east of Bear Creek was the most intense burn area
- Limited Values at Risk (VARs) - firefighter risk versus VARs informs firefighting decisions.
 - For Burro Fire, the greatest VARs were the firefighters, therefore intensive firefighting was not carried out
- A type 1 team that came for 416 fire branched and came on to Burro then returned to 416 - had this team on to “protect what?”. Had a type 3 team on the Burro fire after that.
- From strategy standpoint - conducted monitoring, had point-people in place, dug a dozer line to stop fire spread west to Haycamp Mesa - that line is beginning to recover
- A lot of opportunities to replicate Burro fire-style mgmt - “let the fire do it’s thing”
- *Desire to be proactive, not reactive*

Proposed RX Fire EA

- **EA intent**
 - Put fire on ground under fire manager terms
 - Maintain mosaic of mixed con types -
 - Treat boundaries mechanically
 - If wildfire starts, proactive work creates clear burn units - manageable
 - POD boundaries - “10 steps ahead of the game”
 - Beginning to implement boundaries so they are in place before fires
- Shrunk mgmt area significantly from ~400,000 acres to ~200,000 acres - more realistic

- Clipped out areas with high VARs to reduce control features that have to be managed
- **RX fire**
 - Limited mortality of trees - punch some holes in canopies to add structural diversity to the forest
 - Reduce forest floor fuels by 80%-100% - ground fuels, dead and down removed
 - Limited intensity
 - Temp, humidity, dew points and other data points inform firefighters on the days to burn
 - Utilize PODs - roads, fences, powerlines, etc, and other natural control features (aspens). for managing fire
 - What are consequences of RX fire? Another question is: what are the consequences if we *don't* do anything to reintroduce fire?
 - 9 years ago there were no RX fire plans at Dolores Field Office
 - Now cranking out ~18,000 acres of RX fire a year
 - Impacts of grazing post-fire?
 - Not a regional policy in place
 - Potential for temporary fences until aspens regenerate to a point
 - Higher precip >30" limits burn windows
 - Madden Peak/Jersey Jim - potential site to manage transitional ponderosa pine
- **Aspect Burning in spring**
 - Introduce aspect burning at Taylor Mesa and Fish Creek areas
 - South aspect - snow melts off the south slope first
 - Introduce fire top down - fire is checked by snow
- **Pagosa Objectives in silviculture**
 - What future conditions are expected in our climate?
 - Expecting warmer climate
 - Variable weather
 - Longer fire seasons
 - Wet years create more fuel for dry year fires
 - [Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change](#)
 - Looking at three types of experimental treatments
 - Resistant to climate change - retain the same species composition as in pre-harvest stand
 - Resilient - heavily favor fire-adapted and drought tolerant species across all size classes and create openings in the stand
 - Transitional - cuts designed to support stand in moving towards a warmer dryer community type in the future
 - Sustainable wood harvesting
 - *What is the plan for fires that haven't started yet?*
 - Need a POD network to be ready for fires

- RX fire and mechanical cutting both as tools for limiting catastrophic fire
 - Anticipating that the worst $\frac{1}{3}$ of known fires may be more like $\frac{2}{3}$ of fires we will see in the future
 - More fires, more disturbance, more droughts
 - Move mgmt up in elevation
 - Need more frequent fires in system like in the 1890s
 - But what about climate change since then?
- **GMUG**
 - Using mechanical Tx exclusively (thinning and commercial) in mixed con to mimic mixed severity type fire.
 - Islands of large trees, aspen regen
 - Salvage and cutting in green spruce/fir

Spruce/Fir forest - “tricky system”

- Ecologically difficult to manage because slow to recover
- Economically not most valuable
- Doug Fir getting taken out by doug beetle and spruce budworm is causing problems too
- Not a part of the Mixed Con Rx Fire program

Standing dead trees

- With red needles = fire hazard
- No needles = reduced fire hazard, not a fire issue like people think

Aspen

- Can act as a fire barrier especially with little dead and down
- Aspen responds well to disturbance

Questions -

- **What are the vegetation objectives of Rx fire in mixed conifer?**
- **How will we ensure streams and tributaries are protected?**
- **What sort of post-fire protocols will minimized repeat disturbances (weeds, grazing...)**
- **What do we want the mixed con mosaic patchiness to look like?**
- **What are the critical ecosystem components and functions we don't want to lose?**
- **Can SJNF incorporate mechanical into the EA?**
- **How much do we manage for fire adapted species and move them up in elevation?**