

Forest Health Advisory Council

May 25, 2017

Frisco, CO

Meeting Summary – FINAL

Attendance

Carolyn Aspelin
Norm Birtcher
J. Paul Brown
Joe Duda
Carol Ekarius
Neillie Goodwin

Scott Jones
Aaron Kimple
Jason Lawhon
Doug Lempke
Mike Lester
Mark Morgan

Mike Preston
Chuck Rhoades
Rick Seymour
Travis Smith
Tom Spezze

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Katie Waller

Action Items

Heather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise agreements document and create a table that outlines the obstacles and opportunities for each topic. Send to Travis, Tom, and Carol for their review. • Send revised agreements document and table to the Council. • Send a link to the Colorado Water Plan. • Send a link to the CFLRP legislation. • Work with Mike Preston to identify portions of the Colorado Water Plan that are pertinent to forest health and send out to the FHAC.
Mike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide FHAC with information about the cost, authority, and duties of a State fire marshal. • Continue work to get an attendee from the USFS to attend meetings.
Norm	Send Heather the CTIA numbers regarding sustainable levels for the existing timber industry, as well as what would be needed to support an expansion.
Jason	Send Heather an example of a burn permit, as well as any other support documents that exemplify the CDPHE permitting process and its challenges.
Carol	Send Heather a copy of Senator Roberts’ bill.

Draft Protocols

The Forest Health Advisory Council members reviewed and approved the draft protocols.

Preliminary Agreements

At the previous meeting, FHAC members agreed that the best starting place for their work would be to identify the points of agreement between the different members. Based on pre-meeting interviews that the facilitator conducted with each of the members, the facilitator developed a draft document summarizing potential agreements for the FHAC to address. The FHAC discussed each proposed agreement area in depth. This discussion is outlined below. Each draft point of agreement is listed below and is noted in *italics*; each is followed by the Council’s discussion on that item.

Colorado’s forests are not healthy. There are too many trees overall. Additionally, our forests lack diversity in species, age, and size and are plagued by insect infestations.

- There are some aspects of Colorado’s forests that are healthy; it is unwise to use a blanket statement assessing all of the forests in the same manner.
- The issue is more the wrong species composition rather than a lack of diversity.

- Recent forest health regimes have brought attention to insect infestation; however, the issue of forest health is much more complicated than that.
- It is a struggle to capture the necessary nuances of forest health in only one sentence, but it is important that this document is succinct and approachable for anyone who might read it.
- Insect infestation and high-severity fires are a concern because of humans' interactions with the forest. It is important for the document to refer to human values.
- There are some places around the state where the forests are healthy; however, there is more unhealthy ecosystems than healthy ecosystems.
- Poor forest management is also a reason for poor forest health.
- It is more accurate to say that Colorado's forests are in transition due to disease, drought, and lack of active management, rather than that there are too many trees.
- There are no truly healthy ecosystems or species compositions in all of Colorado.
- This statement must capture the sense of urgency.
- Healthy forest conditions used to be the rule, but now they are the exception.
- While insect infestations and fire are a part of a healthy ecosystem, how they appear now does not align with human values and needs.

Colorado's forests are at high risk of immediate and catastrophic fire. These large fires will not only affect our communities and residents, but also our watershed health and water quality. In addition to the loss of and impacts to human lives, the financial cost to our state from wildfires is extremely high and includes fire response and suppression, loss of structures and infrastructure, impacts to our recreation economy, reservoir dredging, water quality treatments, and many others.

- The values that will be impacted by an immediate and catastrophic fire should be bulleted out so that the reader understands their importance immediately.
- The most important impact is that catastrophic fires drain resources from other efforts, including proactive and active management.
- It is important for the list of impacts to include agriculture, wildlife habitat, the power grid, homeowner's insurance.
- Catastrophic fires play a huge role in the homeowner's insurance market, and living in an area with high risk can increase premiums or preclude the owner from coverage altogether. A previous statewide advisory group discussed this, but they were told that their ideas were too progressive at the time. The Council should deal with the issue of fire and insurance before fire becomes as damaging to insurance premiums as hail.
- These impacts affect people who live in cities, as well as those in the wildland-urban interface and rural areas.

Prescribed fire is an important tool that Colorado needs, and its use needs to be expanded. Prescribed fire is not only the most cost-effective way to achieve large-scale forest treatment, but it also restores some ecosystem functions that have been missing in the absence of fire on the land.

- Increasing the use of prescribed fire should be an early focus for this group. One important step that must be taken immediately is to reintroduce governmental immunity for agencies using fire as a management tool.
- This statement should stress that fire is an important management tool and can be cost-effective.
- This statement should include the use of managed wildlife/natural ignitions/unplanned ignitions under the proper conditions.
- Before the use of prescribed fire can be increased, the permitting and funding challenges must first be addressed.
- Wildfires are never good, but not everyone agrees with this statement.

- The differences between types of fires must be made clear if the FHAC is going to continuously talk about the negative impacts and positive impacts of fire in the same breath.
- There needs to be more flexibility regarding the use of prescribed fire so that when the conditions are right, agencies are able to use it without having to jump through many regulatory hoops.
- The inability to use fire, especially within an entire agency, impacts its ability to recruit and retain the best employees.
- It is important to draw the boundaries of areas that are appropriate for unplanned ignitions outside of the suitable timber base.
- The most important part of this message is that fire is a necessary tool and we need more of it, as long as its use meets the desired future conditions.
- Even prescribed fire still has risks, but there are tradeoffs and risks associated with both prescribed fire and wildfire. The use of fire is all about risk management, as the ecological and social risks associated with prescribed fire are often less than wildfire.
- The opportunity for prescribed fire is to shift funding away from fire suppression to proactive treatment and management.
- The use of managed fire in roadless areas, wilderness areas, and other unmanaged lands is important to consider as well when discussing prescribed fire.
- There are no perfect treatment types, just some tools that work better in certain circumstances than others.
- No management is just as much of a decision as choosing active management. All management decisions have consequences.
- The application of management tools should be based in science, rather than politics.

Recreation management is an important aspect in forest health. Use of our forests must be compatible with maintaining the health of the forest. Changes to types and locations of recreation access may be needed in some areas in Colorado.

- Many people have personal preferences based on their chosen recreation activity, but the importance of the recreation industry to Colorado's economy is clear.
- The FHAC's approach to recreation should be the value of the industry and the importance of proper management on forest health, rather than recommending how recreation opportunities should be applied to the landscape.
- The fact that there are differing opinions regarding recreation should be a messaging consideration, not a fundamental part of the FHAC's work.
- The issue is forest health and how recreation impacts it, rather than recreation management itself.
- A healthy forest provides for all types of recreation opportunities.
- This section should include the specific dollar amounts that represent the recreation industry's impact on Colorado's economy.
- Recreation management regulations should allow managers to make decisions based on scientific evidence, rather than political motivations.
- Recreation is a great opportunity for education, as most residents and visitors understand Colorado's forests and natural resources through their time spent recreating. Capitalizing on this educational opportunity can help to protect resources in a way that feels meaningful to the average person.
- Travel management is an important issue to consider when discussing recreation.
- Recreation management and forest health management may not always align in short-term actions, but the long-term visions for both are interconnected.

Current funding for forest health is woefully insufficient. There is not enough money to treat our forests to help prevent wildfires. While treatments do occur, they are not at a sufficient scale to significantly change the risk of wildfires.

- It is important that the idea of treatment is linked to a more hopeful outcome, otherwise people may feel too discouraged to take any action.
- The issue of treating 14 million acres of private land is a looming issue that needs to be addressed.
- Proactive treatment is one of the most important aspects of forest health.
- While there is a lack of money, it is important to share the message that the current resources can be redirected and used in a more effective manner.
- Financial resources are limited for all.
- Collaboration can be a proactive opportunity to leverage existing resources, and it is an especially effective idea in the current climate since collaborative funding is desirable.
- This should refer to forest health rather than just wildfire.
- A large portion of the financial piece involves insurance agencies.
- The opportunity regarding insufficient funding opportunities is the need to collaborate with partners, private organizations, and the forest products industry.
- While it is a good idea to say that collaboration can be an opportunity to overcome some financial barriers, it will never make up for generally insufficient funding.
- It is important that people read this point and understand that more money is needed.
- The State needs to step up and financially support collaborative efforts, or at least play a larger role through active participation.
- Leveraged resources make collaborative efforts seem more credible.
- There needs to be an active green timber sale program to maintain an active timber industry. A robust industry is important to decrease the cost of active management.
- Money must be shared across boundaries to be leveraged in the most effective manner.
- Term limits are an important issue to consider, as new legislators are often unaware of the huge issues and implications associated with unhealthy forests.
- There would be more US Forest Service (USFS) funding available for forest health issues if treatments were funded proactively, rather than having the USFS spending the majority of the budget on fire suppression.
- There needs to be a culture change within the firefighting community so fire response is more efficient, rather than serving as a jobs program.
- Linking forest health to the newly-approved Colorado Water Plan could be a good opportunity to be able to leverage momentum. Making a link between forest health and water could be most easily made in Colorado House Bill 1255.
- The basin Roundtables that work on water are a great community engagement opportunity while also accomplishing political goals.

The US Forest Service processes and procedures for developing and implementing treatments on our national forests makes their ability to address forest health issues difficult and expensive.

- The USFS permitting process needs an overhaul not because the values of the permitting process are incorrect, but to make the process more efficient and less expensive.
- Land designations should be included along with processes and procedures.
- The permitting process takes so long that the public often becomes disengaged.
- Permitting is particularly important for energy companies, because they need to make sure that no trees fall into power lines.
- The permitting process is particularly onerous, because it is not uniform across districts and agencies.

- The USFS culture does not encourage its employees to take risks to the point that it impacts the goal.
- Land managers need to be empowered to use their full authority rather than just giving into the current culture.
- In order to be proactive, the FHAC can work to support the USFS in streamlining their own processes.
- Supporting a streamlined permitting process could be very important for the current USFS project at La Garita Hills.
- Policy and practice are two different things, and the difference must be clear. Policy challenges are “official,” while practice challenges are cultural.
- Collaborative efforts may help alleviate some permitting challenges in the future as well as encourage more public participation and engagement. The Good Neighbor Agreement can also help in this capacity as well.
- The word “treatment” needs to be defined throughout the document so that it is clear and consistent.

More effort is needed to educate the public and elected officials about forest health. This should include the importance of forest treatments of all kinds, as well as the need for prescribed fire.

- This should include unplanned starts and managed fire, as well as prescribed fire.
- Most of the current outreach efforts are passive and could be more effective if they were easier for people to access.

The lack of a robust and active timber industry in Colorado makes treatments to achieve forest health and wildfire risk mitigation much more difficult. It also significantly increases the cost of these treatments. Colorado needs to find a way to help the timber industry and be sustainable over time, as our need for forest treatments will continue well into the future.

- The problem is not with the industry but with a lacking USFS timber program. Each forest is unique in its priorities, and when leadership chooses to not emphasize timber they will have a lackluster program.
- This should be divided in issues with processing mills and contractors.
- The physical distribution of mill locations is not equal across the state. While areas like Montrose have active and productive mills, other places across the state do not have the capacity to process wood.
- One of the most significant hurdles for the timber industry is transportation costs. High transportation costs are often caused by having to transport material through or around an urban area, to a mill that is far away, or on unsuitable roads.
- Not all timber is financially viable, especially dead and dying trees resulting from insect infestation and other disturbances.
- Another hurdle for the timber industry is that the workforce is aging.
- Fuels and timber are not the same thing. Most fuels are not going to be marketable to consumers due to their appearance.
- Beetle-kill timber is still marketable and just has a cosmetic defect in color.
- The new power plant in Gypsum is taking wood, but it is not a sustainable endeavor since it is heavily subsidized by the US Department of Energy and the USFS.
- Many mills in Colorado have gone out of business since the 1980’s because the lack of reliable process and projects. Since mills require a huge amount of capital investment, it is incredibly challenging to reopen a closed mill.
- Creating a more robust timber program, industry, and market will require a multitude of efforts at different levels and from different angles.

- There are some examples of biomass utilization efforts at the local school in Fairplay and on Boulder County Open Space; however, these programs are likely not sustainable in a free-market environment without any subsidies.
- The timber market must be maintained consistently and not encouraged solely as a response to crises.
- Creating private-industry incentives could be a feasible short-term option for stimulating the timber industry.
- There is a big opportunity to sell more Colorado wood, as most of the timber currently used in Colorado is from Canada.
- There are currently no good options for loan programs for timber companies.
- Carbon markets may play a role in making forest treatments more marketable in the future.
- Some financial institutions will not give out loans unless a long-term stewardship contract is in place. The problem is less about finding banks to give out loans, but creating a sustainable timber program so that contractors have a steady supply of work to pay back their loans.
- Utility forestry is becoming more substantial than it has been in the past.

Collaboration is a critical component to achieving and maintaining the health of Colorado's forests. Collaborative groups can help resolve problems and develop shared solutions not only between different stakeholder groups but also between different land management agencies and elected officials at all levels of government and across Colorado.

- This should be rolled into the discussion point regarding limited resources.
- Collaboration should be mentioned with other issues.

Planning, implementation, and assessment of forest treatments of all types (including prescribed fire) benefit from data and research. While Colorado has a great resource in the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) at Colorado State University (CSU) and the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) through the US Forest Service, CFRI and RMRS lack the capacity to meet all of our research needs. Additional support for research is critical.

- Monitoring is incredibly important due to its role as influencing adaptive management.
- The scientific data does not have to be perfect to inform a management decision; using the best available science is more than enough.
- It is important to continue to pursue the development of science and treatments in parallel.
- Management should be driving research. Science informs research but does not make decisions.
- There will always be disagreements about science, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Having multiple perspectives on how to achieve the same goal can be beneficial.
- The most important research topics for forest health include social, economic, and ecological impacts.

After discussing the entire document, FHAC members agreed that Heather Bergman will revise the document based on this conversation. She will also create a separate table that outlines the obstacles and opportunities related to each topic. No recommendations will be incorporated into the document at this time. When this is completed, Ms. Bergman will send the drafts to Scott Jones, Travis Smith, Tom Spezze, and Carol Ekarius and hold a conference call to discuss and edit the documents.

Topics for Future FHAC Discussions

In order to outline a more defined work plan for the future, FHAC members discussed how they would decide which topics to address in the future. Below are the highlights of this discussion.

- Identifying obstacles will help with identifying low-hanging fruit and time-sensitive issues.

- There should be a dual path that accommodates work on both time-sensitive and big-picture issues to create short-term and long-term outcomes.
- Low-hanging fruit should be addresses on a topic-by-topic basis.
- It is important to come up with some actionable items quickly rather than waiting for everything to be completed.
- It could be a good idea to link forest health issues in with the new Colorado Water Plan, particularly in the upcoming CSFS presentation. *Mike Lester will ensure that the work of the FHAC and the importance of linking water and forest health are addressed in his upcoming presentation.*
- Once the talking points are finalized, it will be easier for members to reach out to members of the Colorado Legislature officially and unofficially.
- There are some bills that CSFS has been considering introducing into the legislature that could be supported by the FHAC.
- Any low-hanging topics should be presented to the interim committees before the legislative session officially starts.
- Bold legislation can take a while to pass so it is important to not be dissuaded.

After considering the above points, the FHAC members agreed to discuss low-hanging fruit to ensure action on some important items.

Low-Hanging Fruit

Members brainstormed some issues that could be addressed in a more immediate manner. Discussion points are listed below.

Idea	Details	Status	Assignment
Expand the use of prescribed fire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the most cost-effective treatment. • Building capacity is incredibly important to sustainably increase the use of fire. • Fire is often not used because some locations are in a permanent fire ban due to the lack of a State Fire Marshal. • Immunity must be established before the use of fire can be expanded. 	Needs further discusion	Discussion topic for next meeting
Reestablish governmental immunity for State and local agencies to facilitate the use of prescribed fire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immunity was rescinded because of the Lower North Fork fire. • This issue can be addressed in tandem with working to establish a State Fire Marshal. • A legislative bill would be required to reestablish immunity. 	Ready for action	
Eliminate fire borrowing by having the Colorado Legislature or the Governor pass a resolution encouraging Congress to take action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money could then be reallocated toward proactive treatments. • Fire crews could complete treatments when they are not fighting fires. This is a good idea, but perhaps now is not the proper time to address it. • The Western Governors' Association has talked about this, but they have not been able to move forward legislation. • Eliminating fire borrowing will require the cooperation of other states. • Action on this item would be encouraging the Legislature and the Governor to take action on a national level. 	Ready for action	

Idea	Details	Status	Assignment
<p>Endorse elements of the Colorado Water Plan that promote proactive forest management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clear connection between the Water Plan and forest health. Solidifying this connection should be simple. • Building a relationship with people who work in the water community is important to ensure that forest health is adequately addressed. • Utilizing the roundtables is a great way to gain community support. • Sending a recommendation for a legislative resolution could be the best course of action, as they could then ask the Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) and the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) for assistance with funding and other efforts. • All FHAC participants should be familiar with the content of the Water Plan before recommending it be linked with forest health. 	<p>Discussion topic for next meeting</p>	<p>Heather Bergman and Mike Preston will send out the Colorado Water Plan to the entire FHAC with directions pointing them to the sections focused on forest health.</p>
<p>Create or support a bill that expedites Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) permits for prescribed burns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main issue regarding permitting is that the process makes it hard to work within suitable burn windows. • Another large issue is the conditions within the burn permits themselves that make their execution challenging. • Asking the legislature to write a bill that requests CDPHE expedite the permitting process would probably be the best course of action. • This is not an issue of employee will or incompetence, but agency policy. It is likely that they are not told to prioritize these permits. 	<p>Discussion topic for future meeting</p>	<p>Jason Lawhon will send Heather Bergman an example of a burn permit and other documents that exemplify the arduous process.</p>
<p>Identify champions within the Wildfire Mattera Committee and build relationships with them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming good relationships with the right people is very important. • This could be part of a larger outreach strategy. • This is an important starting point for any FHAC actions. 	<p>Discussion topic for the next meeting</p>	
<p>Support the Colorado Legislature in passing a resolution stating the importance of the USFS providing a consistent, long-term supply of timber.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not the easiest item on the list, but one of the most important and would set a great example for many western states. • Increasing timber targets must be done at the Regional Office of the USFS. • While a resolution will not solve the problem, it will send a bold message. • Specific numbers are needed if the FHAC is to ask the Legislature to pass a resolution. • This resolution needs to have a clear objective. 	<p>Discussion topic for next meeting</p>	<p>Norm Birtcher will send timber industry data to the FHAC before the next meeting.</p>

Idea	Details	Status	Assignment
Support landscape-scale planning to facilitate long-term permitting for USFS projects that are using the best-available science.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting larger projects is very important to help stimulate the timber industry. Long-term permitting should mean 10 years, not forever. The most important part is not 10-year contracts, but large-scale permitting. Supporting the Legislature in writing a letter to the Regional Forester of the USFS Region Two is the best course of action. This is not the most time sensitive, as the La Garita Hills process is a closed for comment. 	Ready for action	
Establish a statewide fire marshal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sheriffs are not the right people to be dealing with fire management. Substantial data is needed for this effort to be successful. It would be a good idea to hear what fire professionals and those operating a volunteer-based fire department think of this idea. 	Discussion topic for next meeting	Mike Lester will bring back more information for the next meeting regarding cost, authority, and duties for a State fire marshal.
Renew the Wildfire Matters Committee and support a name change that promotes forest health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is imperative to renew this committee right away. This is the most time-sensitive issue on the list. 	Ready for action	
Review Senator Roberts' past bill and restructure/resubmit it to the Legislature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FHAC should spend time reviewing this bill. There maybe be things that need to change based on the previous response. 	Discussion topic for future meeting	Carol Ekarius will send Heather Bergman a copy of Senator Roberts' bill.
Endorse the CFLRP-style approach to forest management and reauthorization of the funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking the Colorado Legislature to pass a resolution encouraging the Colorado delegation to support funding for the CFLRP would be the best course of action at this time. This is not as time sensitive as other issues. 	Discussion topic for future meeting	Heather Bergman will send out the CFLRP legislation.
Ask the Regional Forester to make subsidy decisions for stewardship contracts based on need rather than population or popularity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This issue is complicated because subsidies are often tied to available matching funds. These subsidies are often concentrated in areas with more people by less ecological need, rather than the other way around. 	Discussion topic for future meeting	Mike Lester will continue to work to get representation from the USFS to attend.

Next Steps

The FHAC members agreed to the following next steps:

- Heather Bergman will send a Doodle poll to identify a meeting date for July or Early August.
- Heather Bergman and Katie Waller will draft the agreements document and the meeting summary for distribution.
- The next meeting will be held along the I-70 corridor.