

Watershed Wildfire Protection Group Meeting Minutes

26 July 2013; 0900-1500; Colorado Parks & Wildlife Administrative Office; Bighorn Room;
Denver

1). Introductions

Meeting Attendance List

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Brad Piehl	JW Associates
Chris Sturm	Colorado Water Conservation Board
Eric Howell	Colorado Springs Utilities
George Bigger	Construks
Greg Dewey	City of Loveland
Jane Lopez	Colorado DPS - Division of Fire Prevention & Control
Jerry Gibbens	Northern Water Conservancy District
Jill Ozarski	Senator Mark Udall's Office
John Duggan	Colorado Dept. Public Health & Environment
Jonathan Bruno	Coalition for the Upper South Platte
Karl Kumli	Senator Michael Bennet's Office
Kristy Muskopf	Colorado State Forest Service
Kyle Hamilton	CH2M Hill & South Platte Enhancement Board
Lisa Corbin	US Forest Service, PSI NF-Leadville RD
Lucia Machado	Colorado Dept. Public Health & Environment
Marcus Selig	National Forest Foundation
Matt Schulz	Colorado Parks & Wildlife
Mike Frary	Colorado DPS - Division of Fire Prevention & Control
Mike McHugh	Aurora Water
Naomi Marcus	Colorado State Forest Service
Polly Hays	US Forest Service Regional Office
Rhio Sugawara	USFS Rocky Mtn. Research Station
Rich Edwards	Colorado State Forest Service
Rocco Snart	Colorado DPS - Division of Fire Prevention & Control
Sally Edwards	Xcel Energy
Travis Warziniack	USFS Rocky Mtn. Research Station
Trent Hyatt	Clear Creek County

Total Number of Participants = 27; 21 organizations

2). **General Update** – Rich Edwards

- Mission - Promoting healthy watersheds by facilitating education and awareness and prioritization and limitation monitoring for people and wildlife.
- Vision – Protect Colorado water supplies and the critical infrastructure from catastrophic wildfire and other threats by maintaining healthy resilient watersheds through collaboration, implementation, leveraging and education.
- Goals – connecting implementers with funders and outreach.

We have set up meeting with San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership out of Pagosa Springs as outreach. West Fork fire has burned a fair amount of the Pagosa Springs' main watershed (San Juan River).

We are talking with Northwest Colorado Council of Governments out of Dillon looking at doing a Northwest meeting and a Southwest Colorado meeting. Skeleton crew from our group to meet with these folks in September; will do a similar meeting with the Dillon group.

3). **Watershed Wildfire Assessments Update** – Brad Piehl; see power point

Note: All meeting power points may be accessed from the following link:

<http://www.jw-associates.org/wwwpgmeetings.html>

(Our thanks go to Brad Piehl for temporarily hosting this information on his website!)

4). **Legislative Updates** – Jill Ozarski & Karl Kumli

Fire suppression budget is now taking up half of the US Forest Services budget. Fire mitigation (hazardous fuels) budget went down to about a one third of what it was last year. A lot of that is being driven out of the office of management and budget, it's not a political decision it's actually a policy call. Energy and natural resources committee is trying to address this issue.

Farm Bill:

- Has been package for a bunch of important forestry legislation.
- Permanent authorization for contracts, it's an ongoing agreement with the forest service as far as hazardous fuels reduction goes. It also provides the timber industry with a reliable product source.
- Expansion and extension of the good neighbor policy, a policy that allows state and local agencies to work on forest service land abutting private or local government land.
- Authorization for forest health mitigation, Healthy Forest Recreation Act (HFRA) focused on community fire mitigation around homes and WUI. Forest health division would expand the same expedited legal process that WUI areas get to areas impacted by forest health issues such as pine beetle.
- Effort to double the forest health mitigation funding focused on beetle outbreak areas.

Sequestration on fire fighters – 500 less firefighters the feds were able to hire this year (nationally), less trucks also but it is the understanding that none of those cuts have happened in Colorado. There are the same number of federal firefighters on the ground in Colorado this year as in previous years.

Mitigation:

- Need more money. Looking for solution off budget, through FEMA, to fund more wildfire mitigation.
- New bill to help fund mitigation in the state. When FEMA helps after disaster, whatever they spend there is an additional 15% (from the national disaster fund) that goes to the state to help with future mitigation. FEMA's enabling act is called the Stafford Act. Wildfires don't get Stafford Act designations very often because they don't reach the national disaster level. Instead FEMA gives Fire Mitigation Assistant Grants, those grants come in at the beginning of a fire that help cover 75% of the cost of firefighting. New bill will change the Fire Managements Assistance Grant Program so there is also a mitigation component of 15%.

Q & A:

Q - Park Service said their budget is getting cut for any kind of fuels mitigation projects, would it be helpful to communicate to OMB directly to express our concern, or should we just let you guys handle that?

A – Communicate with elected officials instead of OMB.

Q – Time frame, what kind of time frame for that kind of funding to be in place so fire mitigation could happen?

A – Two parts, getting the bill passed and implementation. Will try to attach to other bills to get it to move quickly but it is Congress. Once it's in place there has to be a big fire then designation.

Q- What kind of funding would the state get, for instance, for South Fork?

A – Fire Management Assistant Grants apply to state and local fire fighting. West Fork was a federal fire because it was on Forest Service land so mostly federal dollars went in to that.

Q – Is the 15% back restricted to the burn site or can it be used on mitigation elsewhere in the state?

A – Yes, anyone can apply to the state for that if there is a CWPP in place. The funds can also be used on post-fire flood mitigation.

Statements:

There is a program called the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, for non-federal lands that are burned, that helps fund post-fire recovery issues. The Senate worked to get it into the Sandy recovery bill in December and the House chose to not pass that.

Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program is funded nationally, if there is a BAER need on the ground identified we should not have any problem getting money for that. Please let Jill know if this is not happening.

This group needs to educate the public, that people living in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) need to mitigate.

Fires have a long-term impact on the landscape and there will be significant flooding so managing expectations is a big deal.

5). **Division of Fire Prevention and Control** – Jane Lopez, Rocco Snart – see power point

Prescribed Fire Burn – Mike Frary - see power point

6). **Funding Opportunities Panel** –

a). Naomi Marcus, Colorado State Forest Service – see power point

Q & A:

Q – Is there any flexibility in the CWPP?

A – Projects do have to be under a CWPP.

Q – Does restoration fit?

A – It is highly debatable, there could be components to make restoration fit.

b). Chris Sturm, Colorado Water Conservation Board – see power point

Q & A:

Q – Is there a restriction to the 50% match?

A – We can use other state money to match it.

Q – You said you don't allow for fire mitigation, could you clarify?

A – We can't fund fuel mitigation.

Q – Mastication and thinning on a high voltage line, could we use our money along with someone else's money to do this?

A – Whoever's water supply it is would be the one to help with the money.

c). Lucia Machado, Colo. Dept. Public Health and Environment- see power point

Q & A:

Q – I need to update my BMP manual, would that apply?

A – Yes, that would be considered outreach.

Q – Could you talk about the partnership between non-point source and the watershed restoration programs and the grant cycle. How much money do you think is going to be available for post fire watershed restoration activities?

A – For 2013 grant application, I have to apply for my grant ahead of time, so for 2013 there is no money there. The only money currently available is \$400,000 that was committed last year (\$200,000 for High Park and \$200,000 for Waldo) depending if they are ready.

Q – Do you think with the number of wildfires this year, do you anticipate for 2014 you may have some funding for wildfire?

A – If there is a local group that puts together a proposal addressing water quality, meeting our requirements then that proposal can be in the competition for funds.

7). Group Update -

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) – recently lost director, there will be a nationwide search. CPW recently opened a new state park by Conifer; Staunton SP.

National Forest Foundation (NFF) – partnering with Vail Resorts, still working on Hayman fire restoration. NFF is looking at new funds for Trail Creek and Horse Creek watershed. We are also trying to pool and leverage funds for Waldo Canyon.

Clear Creek County – County Commissioners funding free slash program last few years, hoping new commissioners will allocate funds and help folks in the county with mitigation projects.

Rocky Mountain Research Station – working with American Water Works Association and their watershed protection group.

US Forest Service – Working on the MOU and wrapping up the BAER report on West Fork fire complex on the San Juan NF.

Excel Energy – Executing MOU and working with the Forest Service to protect our high voltage transmission lines. We will be doing a field trip with water providers in the Buffalo Creek area. Currently have 45 people on crews out there cutting dead trees down.

High Park Fire Restoration – Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) funding, part of that went to Waldo Canyon fire, mostly wood shred, mulching and tree felling to start in August.

San Juan Headwaters Partnership – Had a tour of the Little Sand fire and a couple of educational presentations on bark beetle infestations.

Colorado State Forest Service – We have new state forester, Mike Lester, from Pennsylvania. Just got Stevens funds grants (for work on private land), Colorado got 57% of regionally available funds for that. Woodland Park, Franktown, Durango and Fort Collins districts all got funded one grant. 2012 Best Management Practices Audit coming out. We are taking concept papers for State Fire Assistance (SFA) grants now from districts.

8). Q & A for DPS – Jane Lopez:

Q – Is the rule making process for prescribed burning with the state group still in the works?

A – We have hired an individual now, Mike Frary.

Q – One slide had something about collection of fees, what are those for?

A – For the certified burner program.

Q – I’m wondering about using prescribed fire more than we have in the past in RMNP?

A – RMNP, they are doing a lot of neat things. Prescribed fire is sensitive in that there are smoke concerns and a buildup of hazardous fuels. They are trying to look at alternatives and be creative but I can't comment specifically about what they are doing.

Q – One of the updates from RMNP is that they are going to have their budget slashed to 1/3 of what it is now starting next year so they are going to lose a bunch of people.

A – I think that is happening across the board, I thought Jill's comment was extremely interesting that fire fighters in Colorado are not being affected by sequestration. My husband works for Indian Affairs and he knows that they are not hiring seasonal fire fighters because of sequestration. To me it's kind of crazy what we are doing now, putting more and more into suppression and less and less into mitigation. I think that's what Jill's big point was there.

Q – If it's their fire management folks that are doing mitigation, they are the folks that do the suppression too right?

A – You are correct (not Jane Lopez).

Q- So that is an impact to suppression resource?

A – It is (not Jane Lopez).

Q – If we have a big fire, doesn't it mean that suppression crews are being cut in other parts of the country and we are drawing from other parts of the country, thus it is going to affect the resources available overall. Does anyone volunteer to write something to Jill?

A – I think it would be worth making her aware that this discussion took place.

A – I think there was not a lack of resources on any of the fires that took place this year, resources were available. There was concern because of this kind of rumor (not Jane Lopez).

Q – Does Division of Fire Prevention and Control interface with air quality as far as stepping up the amount of burn permits being allowed?

A – I interface on a regular basis but after LNF we had multiple discussions and it's a very fragile issue. We are going to reengage with those folks, there are ongoing discussions about the permit numbers.

Q – Is the EPA involved also?

A – Yes, we are continuing to dialogue.

9). Pueblo Water MOU Panel Discussion -

a). Alan Ward, Pueblo Board of Water Works – We are working to mitigate fire risk in collection systems. Working with forest service, budgeted \$50,000 for first year. Management wanted money to go directly to treatment not EIS studies etc. Mt. Elbert area had most direct connection to water collection system. Project is ongoing and is progressing well. Attorney concerned about liability and language in MOU but this project didn't require prescribe burn. In the future prescribe fire will need additional discussion to go forward on a project. This was a one year agreement with forest service but would like to move forward and work on Clear Creek area.

b). Mike McHugh, Aurora Water – 2 projects with the forest service, one through the National Forest Foundation. This project was concentrated in the Leadville district around Mt. Elbert and Twin Lakes. Concern is to protect area around water storage areas to prevent sedimentation. We also have

contributed toward getting these areas ready for additional work. The goal is to try to figure out a way to keep the green trees green to the extent that we can and then do some rehabilitation where we need to. Aurora water doesn't own any land around their reservoirs except for around Spinney Mountain Reservoir, which is managed by State Parks. Worked on a project with the National Forest Foundation at Trail Creek and contributed \$500,000 over two years, NFF matched amount.

c). Lisa Corbin, USFS San Isabel NF – Currently in the process of putting together an environmental analysis for the Tennessee Project. Project is 16,000 acres with 11,000 acres of that anticipated as being treatable. The area surrounds Turquoise Lake and partners are looking to protect this area. Challenges are lodgepole pine, not easily thinned. Scheduled to be done September with signatures by end of calendar year. Aurora helped with seasonal staff and Colorado Springs helped with cultural surveys. Most of our forests are green and didn't get hit bad by mountain pine beetle so implementing green treatments, dead tree and hazard tree treatments are taking place. Estimating \$1,000 per acre to treat so combining funds would need to happen.

d). Eric Howell, Colorado Springs Utilities – Partnership with forest service dates back to 1913. Watershed agreement provided protections for water reserve lands on Pikes Peak. Agreement also called for joint management of those lands. In 2009 new position created to deal with fuels reduction project. Provided \$250,000 for property surveys and a lot of that is on forest service lands. Aurora and Denver Water partnership formalized this past spring. MOU is a 5-year plan for fuels management, forest restoration, fire suppression, special uses permits and much more. We are looking to spend 6 million over the next 5-10 years and are trying to get something on the ballot to get state funding.

Q & A:

Q – What kind of prescriptions are you trying to implement? What are you trying to do to protect your watershed?

A – Prescription calls for putting 25% of the area into clear cuts, so looking for age class diversity. Clear cuts can go up to 40 acres, also looking at aspen enhancement and also spruce enhancement. Will do thinning prescription which is a combination of thinning small patch cuts (1/4 acre) and then reserve relief areas, this resembles a more natural eco system. Didn't map this out on paper, went out to see what makes sense on the ground. Both broadcast and pile burning will be involved with the project and some people are not comfortable with that so Pueblo is different than Colorado Springs and things are different in each project.

Q – Who will do the work, will you stewardship contract it?

A – Right now that work is being done by the Department of Corrections State Wildland Inmate Crew and they are a great crew. They are \$1600 a day for 20 guys and they are very skilled. They burn the piles in the winter for us also.

Q – Do these type of agreements change forest management priorities or just enable you to do things you would want to do anyway?

A – It switches the priorities a bit because the partners each have certain areas that they want to work that may not have been our first priority. At the same time we have been coming to the table and saying this is what we have available; are you interested in it?; and trying to come up with a win-win situation.

Q – So I assume the folks in Leadville are relatively happy to be managing forests for people in Aurora?

A – (Lisa); It's been an education, having the folks in Leadville realize the partners are paying for it but telling them this is a benefit. We are not going out there for strictly protecting the water source, it's about forest health also.

A – (Mike); That was one of the questions when we first started and I belong to a group called the Carpe Diem West and it's a group of different utilities across the west that have agreements with the forest service. We have a healthy headwaters work group and we talk about these issues. We talked about if municipalities are putting in funding and then they are changing the direction and policy of the local forest district to do work because they have the money and then you are forcing out somebody who is smaller and that's not a good situation so we have been very keen on that.

Q – After you complete the treatments what do you expect the maintenance to be like years later? Do you expect to have to go back in a re-treat every X number of years or do you think it's self-sustaining at that point?

A – There is a maintenance there that typically is going to pop up around the 15-20 year mark and that is part of this project. There is a little bit and that is anticipated that it will occur.

A – I think that's going to be the biggest change overall in the west trying to look at revitalization in the forest industry in order to have a market for timber and maybe it's more of a biomass industry.

Q - \$1,000 an acre, why is that?

A – What we anticipate in the Leadville area is hundreds of stems per acre and a lot is small diameter pole size material, less than 5 inch diameter, and the market for that is limited. We are looking at using the long term stewardship contract that we have in place on the Pike to come in and do some of the work. For the contractor, a lot of this work they get paid for and that is what we are anticipating when we look at all the requirements for the long term stewardship based off their rates. What we anticipate right now is about \$1,000 per acre. Overall that is an average, areas are different; some are steeper some are flatter and easier to access.

Q – Have you looked at some creative things for treating your lodgepole pine and have you looked at created openings because in Grand County they are being filled in by the conifer.

A – Are you talking about doing clear cuts greater than 40 acres?

Q – No, you can do 40 acres or under but just designate them as being openings so you cut them and burn them every 20 years.

A – That was one thing we didn't do with this project. We talked about taking those openings and maintaining them as openings but at this point and time my silviculturist didn't want to go down that route.

A – It's more of an adaptive management process, you want to create openings and maintain them.

A – There is some good scientific back up to doing more created openings in those high elevation forests too. We just haven't gone there yet, it's yet to be explored.

Q – In beetle-kill mountain pine beetle country where I live there has been a lot of mitigation done and they look great now but those are all young stands and they will come back and there was a question about maintenance but the other question is do we want all those to be lodge pole pine stands in the future or do we want increased diversity?

A – One of the factors is a lot of the area we are looking at right now is designated as lynx habitat and so there are some restrictions that apply.

Q – I wonder in those areas if you could transplant some Aspen trees or try to get something else to take hold. It might be a nice experiment.

A – We did a project last year and walked through it yesterday and in the six months since we finished it we have Aspen regeneration coming across most of the area.

Q – How do you pass this on in your water rates and what do your customers think about it, do you get feedback?

A – Fairly universally if you raise the water bill you are going to hear about it and most people feel their water bills are too high, we don't separate it out; it's just part of our operations and maintenance budget. We put money under a line item called forest health but it's not a line item on a water bill.

A – For us after Waldo everybody knew we should have spent more to do more and it takes an emergency to get that money rolling.

Next WWPG meeting – tentatively set for October 4 or 18.

10). General questions for the group –

How do you think this meeting went?

How do you want to improve it?

What do you want to look at for the next meeting?

- It was good information
- The funding pieces were really good
- Wildfire Protection Group will post slides from this meeting on their website
- With this group you have representation of a lot of different entities. Would an organizational chart/ map of who you are and what you do be helpful?
- We should have our own website or at least a page on someone else's website.
- There are parallels with prescribed fire council (Mike Babler), there might be some tie-ins there. They are thinking about hosting an information conference that would be appropriate for you to be there.
- Get someone from air quality at a meeting (Sarah Gallup?)
- Maybe something else on funding (NFF?)
- Update/presentation on USFS web application (watershed condition classes)
- Updates from Jill & Karl on Farm Bill
- Hopefully Lisa Dale can update us with DNR (?)
- Talks back east are saying it's easier to deal with fire than to do mitigation, could we have someone talk about that
- State Fire Assistance Group
- AWWA watershed protection group; cost for post-treatment after wildfire?
- Water Research Foundation
- Cost-benefit analysis for watershed restoration and what does it look like?
- Denny Lynch, retired CSU forestry professor, has research on cost of fire. Is there anyone that has picked up on his studies and continued?
- Keep it more focused on water; be careful to include the discussion on the role and cost of fire
- Park Service in RMNP; maybe they could present about Big Thompson and Poudre what are their plans for that watershed. Mike Lewelling, FMO at RMNP, cost of fires, etc.
- Have a brainstorm session
- Be an advocate for prescribed fire; get Nature Conservancy more involved