

**Upper San Juan Mixed Conifer Working Group  
Meeting 14, January 20, 2012  
Pagosa Community Center  
Meeting Notes**

The fourteenth meeting of the Upper San Juan Mixed Conifer Working Group focused on the future roles of the group.

Attendees: Bev Warburton, J. R. Ford, Marcie Bidwell, John Taylor, Bill Trimarco, John Nelson, Jimbo Buickerood, Thurman Wilson, Marsha Porter-Norton, Kevin Khung, and Steve Hartvigsen.

Bill Trimarco is the new Archuleta County Firewise Coordinator. He will be working on education and motivation to encourage firewise behavior and helping subdivisions develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs).

Marsha stated that the group is close to accomplishing some of its original goals related to increasing understanding and providing recommendations on mixed-conifer management. Sam and Thurman are working on a report summarizing the work so far. They should have a draft ready for the next meeting. She then kicked off a discussion about the future of the group.

John Taylor mentioned that the [San Juan Conservation District](#) would like to work more with the Forest Service on projects in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Jerry Archuleta with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the main federal representative. The Conservation District has done things like work with the Weed District on a USFS grant for weed control. They helped implement it and are working to educate kids.

Steve said that as projects go forward, monitoring and evaluation is needed. The working group could help with this.

John Nelson agreed that the group continuing to be active through projects would be good. The broader community group helps with political aspects – “greasing the skids and running interference.”

Kevin and Steve reported that they have been visiting with Tony Cheng, director of the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), on ways to continue working together. They want to pursue some of the ideas that Ryan Bidwell originally brought up on considering how treatments would look over time across the larger landscape. One aspect of this is how work in the relatively small roaded portion of the forest can affect a larger area. Tony has a new colleague, Chad Hoffman, working on data requirements. A final document would be primarily directed at an audience having content & technical expertise, such as ID teams or highly-informed stakeholders.

Tony also agreed to conducting a small-scale pre- and post-treatment analysis, emphasizing tree and understory vegetation, and fuel loading. A potential product is a picture-rich guide to fuels treatments and their potential affects. The guide would be designed for wide public distribution. (Steve noted that there is a [picture-rich guide](#) on how treatments affected the spread and severity of the Wallow Fire in Arizona.)

Roz Wu and Peter Brown have a lot of geo-referenced data from earlier studies on the Pagosa Ranger District. They are compiling that data now and CFRI will help organize it for future uses.

CFRI funded Julie Korb (Fort Lewis College) through the [Mountain Studies Institute](#) (MSI) to complete the soil compaction study that is out in draft now. Funding of some new projects is being discussed.

Tony will try to come down to our area this summer to meet and do a field trip.

Contractors who were evaluated and deemed to be in the competitive range, for the Long-Term Stewardship Contract on the Pagosa Ranger District, have agreed to extend their bids for another 60 days as of January 6. Negotiations continue with those bidders.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (which was signed by President Obama on December 23) includes a provision to replace the Forest Service's appeals process with a pre-decisional objection process. The Working Group might be able to play some role in this process. More on this later – the Forest Service will need to develop regulations to implement this.

Thurman mentioned that we have learned that it is hard to consider the mixed conifer without also looking at the vegetation types below (ponderosa pine) and above (spruce-fir) it. If some version of the working group continues into the future, maybe it should evolve into a broader forest management group. We are close to accomplishing what we proposed with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) grant so we probably don't need to keep "mixed conifer" in the title.

It was mentioned that there has been some discussion in the San Juan and Piedra River Protection Groups about them evolving into a broader group. They were chartered specifically to engage a diversity of people in collaboratively striking a balance between the protection of natural resources and water development in response to some proposals in the draft land management plan for the San Juan Public Lands. They were created with the intent of producing a set of recommendations (already completed for the San Juan which formed earlier) rather than to be on-going groups. Some of the participants would like to continue to be involved in river and watershed protection efforts.

Watershed health seems to tie a lot of interests together.

J. R. stated that the presence of a broad-based community group had helped keep the long-term stewardship contract, and other funding opportunities, continue to be considered in these tough budget times.

Kevin said that the Leadership Team for the San Juan National Forest has had discussions about the value of advisory groups but no clear agreement on how to structure one. Someone mentioned that because of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) it might be better for the Forest Service to participate in other groups (such as the Mixed Conifer Working Group) rather than try to form a group themselves.

There seemed to be general agreement that it is good to have a forum for people that are interested in forest health and watershed protection. But there should also be care not to dilute specific efforts. Someone expressed a concern about new people coming into groups that were established but we have always had some of that with the Mixed Conifer Working Group. Marsha offered the opinion that if you get the structure right, people can come in and out.

In summary, the participants agreed that future efforts should include education and participation in future projects, including monitoring and evaluation. Marsha said she would initiate some

conversation with the Rivers Protection Group about cross-pollination with our group. Marsha will help an education subgroup get going but it probably needs to become self-supporting.

There was some discussion of a grant opportunity with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that Marcie has been tracking. Most of the funds were directed towards specific metropolitan areas but a smaller portion could be used anywhere. The thinking as of December 27 is that we are not going to have a proposal by the February 15 deadline because we haven't identified a riparian project that fits the requirements and can't get people together in time to work on the education component. But we need to continue looking for opportunities for additional funding.

MSI didn't get funded on their request to the National Forest Health Program on bark beetles. J. R. met someone from the National Wildlife Foundation that has a summer home in Pagosa. He will try to find out more information on that person so that we can follow up on potential grant opportunities she mentioned.

Thurman sent NFF a report of our first-year accomplishments. They released the second half of our funding (\$7,500) to our fiscal agent, the San Juan RC&D. About a third of that is already committed to paying invoices for facilitation work that has been completed and the RC&D's overhead costs.

Marcie gave a brief report on NFF's National Conference in Lyons where she represented our group. Many other groups across the country are also working on forest restoration. Most also have problems with the lack of markets for forest products. Many are exploring how to develop local micro markets.

Capacity building and how to engage volunteers was a common concern. Interest in monitoring and evaluation has helped other groups grow.

There is a focus, including from the First Lady, on exercise and health of young people. "Get on the move" is an initiative to reach out to the younger generation for exercise and health. NFF discussed getting out of the town and into the forest. That might be a way to get some work done outside.

There was discussion on how organizations mature, including remaining as volunteer-based or having funded staff. (Some good related materials are available on the NFF website at: <http://www.nationalforests.org/conserve/resource>).

Part of surviving as a group is being able to show that you make a difference. "You get what you measure."

Similar groups in Santa Fe and on the Uncompahgre expressed interest in working together.

NFF has a ski area program that matches contributions by ski area visitors. DMR is not currently collecting money but has about \$17,000 that was collected earlier. We should work with them both on how that money is spent and encouraging them to participate again. We should also visit with Wolf Creek but that money would need to be spent on the Rio Grande National Forest.

Jimbo mentioned several pieces of State legislation that people might be interested in following, including a biomass bill that involves several related issues including feedstock transportation challenges. Also HB 1032 reauthorizing cost sharing, HB 1024 modifying local building codes to provide an incentive for using dead trees beyond the current incentives for lodgepole pine and

spruce, and HB 1045, a tax bill to support forest products of Colorado origination. These can be found on the [Colorado General Assembly](#) website.

Someone mentioned that the Pagosa Library now has a meeting room available. They also have a display case that could be used for educational materials.

The next meeting will be February 17 with a focus on the report. Marsha coordinated dates for the education group to have a separate meeting that is now set for February 21.

As always, more info can be found on the Mixed Conifer Working Group website:  
<http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/mixedconifer/>.