Upper San Juan Mixed-Conifer Working Group
Meeting Notes – May 20, 2011

In attendance: Marsha Porter Norton, Sam Burns, Steve Hartvigsen, Kevin Kung, J.R. Ford, John Taylor, Bev Warburton.

Marsha opened the meeting with an overview of our past education and study process, and then asked the group "what else is needed to complete the polygon analysis step." Steve Hartvigsen indicated he would be creating a list of the unique characteristics of each of the polygons.

There was a short discussion about holding a public meeting, to tie in with the press release that had just been made available the day before. It was suggested that what is really needed is a presentation of focused points, that is, the outcomes or conclusions of the mixed conifer study process. Mention was made of going to certain specific interest groups during their meetings, such as the newly reorganized Economic Development Council. Brainstorming of some of the groups occurred. The Rotary Club was also mentioned and a booth at the County Fair or the July Fourth celebration. Kevin Kung said he would follow-up on getting a USFS booth at County Fair. Bev noted that the Back Country Horsemen might be interested in going to the Bio-Mass Demo site. John Taylor offered to coordinate with Kevin about a meeting with the Hinsdale County Commissioners.

Polygon Presentations: Steve began with a presentation of the **Price Lakes** polygon. (See handout and map.) Price Lakes lays southeast of Pagosa Springs. The area, our smallest poly, has a substantial western portion that is in roadless, dominated by warm-dry mixed-conifer, surrounded on three sides by private, and highly suspected to be in great need of treatment. Most of the roaded portion is dominated by cool-moist MC. This polygon is bordered on the north/northeast by Banded Peak, where a public-private partnership could likely occur (given Leslie Allison's management and experience on the ranch). This general area (in the southeast corner of the Pagosa RD) has the highest concentration of BLM lands to the south. Some of the soils in the polygon area are very "slumpy," which has created some wetlands, making timber management a challenge. The area has spectacular views, horse access, lots of bear (due to productive shrublands and water), the district's highest concentration of northern leopard frogs (due to those same numerous ponds), and frequent visitors from New Mexico. Natural fire may be one of the few tools that can be used in much of this polygon.

Comment [sbh1]: The tunnels in question actually are in Rito Blanco and Blanco Basin polys; and the tunnel that then gathers that water lies just southwest of the Price Lakes poly.

There is currently a district level "system roads" review occurring that could affect the Price Lakes area, as well as other areas. This should be completed in about a month, which will address the "minimum required maintenance level" for each road. This review will answer the decommissioning question for all system roads. There was some subsequent discussion about how roadless areas were designated, much of which occurred at such a large scale that errors happened. These errors cannot be corrected at a ranger district level. The recent San Juan forest planning process has generated a better inventory which could enable a more accurate roadless designation outcome in the future.

Piedra Area Polygon: (See handout and map) Some years ago there was a fairly large residential development proposed in the Piedra River Canyon. Some thought this development would stop the wild

and scenic designation on the Piedra River. There was also a proposal for a route across the Piedra and connecting north to the Mosca Road (hence the substantial bridge at the end of the First Fork Road), but it was not wanted by a variety of parties, and therefore did not occur.

The Piedra Area Burn Plan is in place, running from Davis Creek south to Sheep Creek. One of the components to this plan is to create 40-acre openings to meet wildlife management goals. The Piedra Polygon contains one of the 13 Birds-and-Burn national study sites. (See USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station, General Technical Review—GTR 712, July 2007 for a description of this study.)

The Piedra area has one of the largest expanses of pre-settlement ponderosa pine that remains on the SJNF. Because fire has been excluded from this area, that overstory is now at risk for both high-intensity fire and bark beetle – associated mortality. The river is a premier area for rafting, and possesses a peregrine aviary. Group members expressed concern that the Piedra Canyon was being loved to death or destroyed by too much use.

Towards the end of the meeting, discussion returned to "what else is needed." A suggestion was made to present "before and after" pictures in order to make it clearer what results a treatment plan would create. Devil Creek timber sale, the Turkey Springs Demo and Lower Middle Mountain research project were mentioned as examples of before and after situations. Results of prescribed fire treatments should also be included. More public education is needed about the reasons for prescribed fire. Prescribed fire also often needs to occur after mechanical treatments.

Steve indicated he could put all the polygon maps up and the group could go through a rating process for all of them, using criteria the group would agree to. One key question: are there a range of management principles that should be applied to all of the polygons, indicating what types of activities would be acceptable?

It would also be appropriate to list out the areas where there are good opportunities for certain types of treatments. Also we should say where certain areas are not appropriate so that the public understands that "limits" are also being set.

Steve indicated he could have the poly maps modified that would help to better show the roadless areas, would provide a better sense of the Wildland-urban interface (WUI), and would show the progress of bug infestation.

Kevin mentioned Ian McCarg's overlay system which would assist in envisioning all the excluded areas, and also referred to what some have dubbed the Sustainability Triangle which provides a framework for examining the key factors that create sustainability among the ecological, community, and economic sectors. Finally, there were suggestions that we lay out specific actions and outcomes that we are seeking for each polygon.

The next meeting was scheduled for June 17, 2011.