

San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership

Mission, Goals, Principles Identified during Strategic Planning Adopted March 2015

Mission

The San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership is committed to pro-active, collaborative approaches to improving the health and long-term resilience of communities by addressing forest and watershed health. The Partnership is focusing on strengthening understanding, sharing knowledge and lessons learned, developing management approaches, initiating high priority projects, and monitoring results using an adaptive framework.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership is to develop science-based, collaborative priorities for the sustainable management of forests, watersheds, and essential community resources.

Goals

1. Strengthen regional communities through a landscape-scale, adaptive approach to addressing forest and watershed health
2. Work with partners to facilitate the development of and adopt a list of principles, values, and priorities
3. Enhance regional economic viability and use of forest health products
4. Implement forest treatments in high risk areas

Objectives

1. Inform and assist community members in understanding and improving forest resilience and diversity;
2. Provide educational opportunities about management goals, vegetation treatment methods, and outcomes;
3. Increase community awareness of the impacts of wildfire, and insect and disease outbreaks, and challenges associated with mitigation;
4. Provide opportunities for the affected communities and all interested citizens to learn about what they can do to get involved;
5. Promote the concept of resiliency;
6. Identify priority project areas; and
7. Form and implement a monitoring plan to guide adaptive management.

Organizational Background

A group of community members, business owners, and land managers formed the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership in 2009 to address concerns with the conditions of forests of the San Juan Headwaters. Growing populations, past management practices have interrupted patterns of periodic fire in the region. In addition, a lack of wood based industry has interrupted logging and tree removal. The result is forests that with more trees and different combinations of tree species. The result is forests more prone to large fires, and die-off associate with disease, and insect infestations. The group recognized that addressing forest health helped to prevent declines in water quality associated with the impacts of wildfire and erosion. By initiating collaborative approaches to treating forests before a wildfire occurs the San Juan Headwaters Group is making communities stronger and more resilient.

The San Juan Headwaters works with community members of Archuleta County, and portions of Hinsdale and Mineral Counties enclosed within the headwaters of the San Juan River to proactively reduce the potential impact of wildfire on forests, water, and vital resources. The group has treated over 400 acres of forest on private, county, state, municipal and federal lands. Much of this work has been done along a primary water supply to the Town of Pagosa. The group has secured over \$100,000 to reduce forest density on a parcel immediately adjacent to primary economic drivers for Pagosa. The work done by the group has helped to secure an additional \$859,000 of Farm Bill funding to treat federal and private acres around essential community water resources.

General principles and values

To the extent possible, the following guidance will be utilized:

- A watershed perspective will be emphasized as a management framework, wherever possible.
- In some vegetation areas, particularly cool-moist mixed conifer and spruce-fir forest cover types, additional field monitoring and evaluation are needed as part of an adaptive management approach.
- Management activities will emphasize forest resilience and diversity.
- Environmental assessments for proposed projects will address water quality, wildlife habitat, insect and disease trends, wildfire mitigation objectives, invasive weeds, and recreation activities, among other ecological and community needs and concerns.
- To the degree possible, management activities that mimic natural disturbances will be utilized.
- In the long term, management actions will seek to create conditions for manageable, planned and unplanned ignitions to meet multiple objectives, such as wildland fire for resource benefit to safely occur in mid to higher elevations.

- Forest management should encourage a sustainable and appropriately-scaled forest product industry, for both community and ecological benefits.
- Sustainable and healthy community life is intrinsically connected to the well-being of diverse, resilient, and naturally functioning forest landscapes.
- Management activities will be designed to meet multiple objectives, coordinate with supportive and/or participative landowners or parties, and foster economic efficiency.

Project selection priorities

Through consistently involving key and well-informed stakeholders, a process will be established to prioritize forest management projects. The priorities will reflect the greatest needs identified by partners that exist within the current ecological/community situation. Those needs are expected to include:

- Protect public water resource quality.
- Mitigate wildfire impacts to life and property.
- Achieve multiple resource benefits and objectives.
- Address landscapes that fall to the greatest degree outside the “historic range of variability” (HRV).
- Increase the opportunities for medium-size wildfires to occur safely in the backcountry.
- Improve wildlife habitat.
- Reduce the potential for epidemic outbreaks of disease and insect damage.
- Use mechanical work in roaded areas.
- Protect recreation opportunities.
- Recover economic benefits to offset the costs of treatment and monitoring.

Group Messaging

The San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership is committed to facilitating conversations around 1) Resilient Communities, 2) Healthy Forests, 3) Healthy Watersheds; and 4) how these components help secure Clean Water.

Program Descriptions

Our efforts are designed to address community resilience through education and outreach, implementation of on-the-ground projects, and informing management practices. We work with partners to identify project areas and education needs.

Facilitate a Landscape Scale Approach:

The work of SJHFHP is built around involving the citizens, agencies, and land managers in Archuleta County in decision-making processes to better address forest health on a

landscape scale. By working across management boundaries vital resources for the community impact potential from catastrophic events will be reduced. SJHFHP offers educational opportunities to the community to help facilitate an understanding of forest health, threats, and the importance of applying a watershed scale to assessing community resilience. We serve the communities of Archuleta County, and portions of Mineral and Hinsdale Counties within the upper San Juan River watershed.

Program Goals: To inform the citizens of the upper San Juan Headwaters on the need to address forest health issues and proactively prepare for the potential for wildfire; and to facilitate a dialogue around forest and watershed management between the many stakeholders within the upper San Juan Headwaters.

Program Objectives/ Activities

- Educate the Community
 - o Provide Tours of project areas and recent burn areas
 - o Make Presentations to community decision makers
 - o Offer 2 discussions of forest health concerns
 - o Offer 2 Citizen Science learning opportunities
 - o Work with communications plan to outreach to community
- Facilitate educational opportunities for local and regional schools
 - o Establish internships
 - o Coordinate monitoring
- Facilitate monthly meetings with regional managers and stakeholders
- Identify ways to expand input from general public
 - o Offer 2 evening meetings per year
- Identify missing partners
 - o Continue to outreach and expand stakeholder network

Implement on-the-ground Projects:

SJHFHP works with partners to address forest health concerns around priority resource areas. Healthier forests are less susceptible to catastrophic changes associated with disease or wildfire. Healthier forests help secure water quality and water distribution systems for the community.

Program Goals: To identify priority project areas and apply on-the-ground forest mitigation measures.

Program objectives/ activities

- Identify/map vital community resources
 - o Work with community to make sure all resources are identified
- Prioritize areas needed for treatment
 - o Work with community and land managers to identify where to work
- Implement on the ground treatments

- Treat 400 acres around vital resources annually
- Identify best treatment for project areas
- Monitor work to measure effectiveness
- Identify and secure funding to support work
- Maintain and build relationships with regional businesses that can do the work
- Secure public support for project work
- Advance work on private lands

Enhance Use of Forest Products:

Making forests healthier involves the removal of excess biomass from the landscape. Challenges exist with how to remove biomass in a manner that is beneficial. The goal is to identify opportunities to utilize biomass in a way that supports the local economy and community. The group plans to maintain the relationships that we currently have and develop new ones in order to facilitate this effort.

Program goals: Expand the markets and outlets for biomass removed from public, private, and municipal lands.

Program Objectives

- Identify current outlets
- Identify opportunities to expand opportunities
- Help secure funding to support new opportunities
- Advance outlets for biomass removed from private lands

Evaluation

Outcomes:

Short Term

In the short term The San Juan Headwaters plans to:

1. Treat acres on the ground in areas around vital community resources
2. Make the community aware of the threats of wildfire
3. Identify priority areas for securing vital community resources
4. Identify issues associated with treatment
5. Establish a collaborative process

Intermediate

1. Reduce the intensity of wildfires in identified priority areas
2. Protect water resources and water quality
3. Transform the community to make it more resilient
4. Demonstrate the need for more advanced treatments (i.e. prescribed burns)

5. Assist with the development of wood harvest economics
6. Have an established collaborative group of land managers and community representatives

Long-Term

1. Resilient communities with vital resources secured
2. Secure better financial standing by reducing chance of expensive recovery costs
3. Establish stronger, more diverse economic base
4. Establish sustainable wood harvest
5. Develop active community involvement
6. Secure communication channels across the community

Outputs

1. A community awareness of the challenges of living with wildfire in the southwest
2. An established process for vetting the needs and concerns of the community
3. An open dialogue of issues with treatment and wildfire and water quality
4. An established process for continued collaboration

Evaluation Technique

Acres Treated

Acres treated is assessed in terms of # acres treated and where. Initial treatments are targeted toward priority resource areas. How many miles of ditch or water line is protected. How many acres around storage is maintained.

Success of treatment

Success is in measuring the densities, health of remaining trees, understory and ladder fuels, and the fuels on the ground both pre and post treatment. Monitoring is conducted pre and post treatment. This allows for a proper prescription to be developed and to determine the success of the treatment. Monitoring locations and monitoring are developed so that they can be repeated periodically.

Success of collaboration

The success of the collaborative group is discussed and evaluated internally. Did we offer enough outreach, meet the goals and objectives of the organization, and financial goals of the organization? We measure attendance at regular meetings, special events, number of citizens that participate in monitoring, and the number of students that are involved in learning about forests, forest health, and water quality.

Regional market

There is a need to develop a tool for assessing the current number of wood utilization companies in the wood product industry, amount of biomass removed from the landscape, amount of biomass from private properties. How much is biomass contributing to local economy? What is the cost of biomass removal?

Community Attitude

San Juan Headwaters is working to develop an assessment tool that will assess community acceptance of smoke, wildfire, sense of preparedness, and concern. The group actively solicits input on events from attendees, however this evaluates the opinions of a group of citizens that have a clear interest in the subject matter. The group is looking to identify mechanisms for assessing the awareness of the broader community. We do track the number of articles written about the partnership and wildfire.

Collaborative Approach

The San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership is designed to facilitate collaboration across a spectrum of community members, business owners, and land managers. Collaboration is essential to achieving the goals of the group on a large scale within the Headwaters of the San Juan River. The group has established relationships with water conservation districts, citizen groups, environmental groups, business interests, land managers, regional tribes, ranchers, county representatives, representatives of municipalities, and fire protection services.

Inclusiveness

The San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership works with representatives from across the community to help involve all perspectives from the community. The group holds monthly meetings that are open to anyone from the community that would like to be involved. Anyone who attends the meeting is welcomed to the conversation. Everyone is invited to be included on the e-mail list so that they can receive information on meetings, agendas, and group priorities and efforts.

Board/ Governance

The San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership does not have a formal board or by-laws. The board includes a broad collection of community needs and perspectives. Those that attend meetings help direct outreach efforts, and organizational goals and objectives. They participate annually in an assessment of effectiveness and program direction with a tri-annual assessment of the groups mission and vision. The board members volunteer time to secure the success of organizational events and financial oversight.

Volunteers

San Juan Headwaters is built around volunteer involvement. Volunteers attend board meetings, help direct special events and tours, and make presentations to the community.

Citizen Scientists – SJHFHP has developed a volunteer citizen science program to help with forest health monitoring. Citizens are trained on how to measure and record different components of forest health, including the forests ability to support wildlife. We have provided the same protocols to students, offering them to learn about forest conditions and needs, as well as provide avenues for students to present their knowledge to community leaders and decision makers.

Planning

The group involves an annual assessment of programs. The discussion is intended to solicit input into the degree of success and opportunities for improvement for the coming year. The group also discusses necessary messages and community needs for the year to come.

Work is assessed by asking the questions:

What have we accomplished?

What holes or things have we missed?

Are we including everyone we need?

Do we have gaps in community perspective?

Are we offering enough opportunity for input?

The group meets monthly. At each meeting the group receives updates on current programs. The updates allow the attendees to provide input and feedback. Lessons learned are presented and corrections can be made mid-stream.

Every 3 years the group has a detailed discussion about the strategic plan, goals, and mission. Changes are made when deemed necessary. This gives the group the opportunity to make sure that the group is relevant and effective.