



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Partnership Peaks

San Juan National Forest Partner Stories, Opportunities, and Updates

Winter 2022



Winter has arrived in Southwest Colorado

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

By Lorena Williams

Partnership Peaks is one year old, and what a year it has been for the San Juan NF and its partners. A lot of great work was accomplished in 2022, including continued restoration of our unique alpine fens (page 10), deer and elk habitat improvement (page 6), and the introduction of two Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Programs (CFLRP) to the San Juan NF (page 4).

Of course, dozens of other projects were implemented this year alongside our partners. Some notable achievements include construction of a critical fish barrier, removal of over 6,700 trees from San Juan NF trails, and roughly 75 cords of firewood distributed to Tribal partners through the Wood for Life program, with another 300 cords planned this winter.

Also this year, we bade farewell to our longtime Forest Supervisor, Kara Chadwick, and welcomed a new District Ranger to the Columbine District (page 2), not to mention numerous other comings and goings.

This newsletter will reflect on the work that took place in 2022, but we are already planning 2023's great achievements!

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Leadership Corner

There has been movement in the San Juan Leadership personnel!

Jason Lawhon is currently acting as the Forest Supervisor since Kara Chadwick's departure in October. Jason is the SW Colorado Shared Stewardship Program Manager. Thanks Jason for helping steer the SJNF while the permanent Forest Supervisor position is being filled. We would also like to give a hearty thank you to Liz Francisco, Columbine District Archaeologist, who has served as acting Columbine District Ranger.

The SJNF would like to welcome Nick Glidden as the new Columbine District Ranger! Nick was previously the District Ranger on the Pine Valley Ranger District, Dixie National Forest in St. George, UT. Nick began his career with the Forest Service as a volunteer wilderness ranger on the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness before moving to southern Utah as a Student Career Experience Program recreation technician. Nick settled into the Dixie NF as the Recreation Program Manager where he served for almost 18 years before becoming the District Ranger on the Pine Valley Ranger District 4 years ago.



Over the past 20 years, he has completed several temporary assignments at various levels of the agency in wilderness, trails, and other roles. Nick received his bachelor's degree from the University of Montana followed by a master's degree in forestry from Northern Arizona University. Nick's passion lies in fostering partnerships and getting work done on the ground. In their time off Nick and his wife Laurel enjoy recreating with their two daughters, Lily 15 and Emily 12, including mountain biking, camping, hunting, fishing, and Nick coaches his daughter's mountain bike team. Nick is excited for the opportunity to get to know and work with the community, partners, and the San Juan National Forest team.



Laurel Glidden begins early November in her new position here in Region 2 as the Heritage Specialist for R2's NEPA Strike Team. Laurel will be working virtually from the San Juan. Laurel started her career as a seasonal archaeologist on the Dixie National Forest almost 20 years ago. Since then, she worked for the Utah Department of Transportation as a NEPA/NHPA specialist and almost ten years and as a fire and fuels archaeologist for the Utah BLM Color Country District. A few years ago, she came full circle ending up back at the Dixie National Forest as the Heritage Program Manager.

Laurel is passionate about public lands management and finding ways to integrate cultural resource management into the multiple use mission and spends a fair amount of time “geeking” out on public lands management with her husband.

Welcome Nick and Laurel!

A Word on Partnerships

From our new Columbine District Ranger, Nick Glidden

There are so many reasons I am excited to join the San Juan National Forest team, however the partnership aspect of the position is at the top of my list! I am looking forward to the already outstanding partnerships the San Juan has and exploring new ways to partner. Not only do I love working with partners, but I have a deep appreciation for the diversity of perspectives, variety of work, and additional capacity that partners bring to solving the complex issues we face as public land managers. Given the ever-growing demand on public lands and the current needs for large-scale restoration to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, I feel the Forest Service is uniquely positioned to work with partners who share the values and goals of the agency, while increasing the sense of ownership through meaningful work.

My wife, Laurel, and two daughters will be joining me on this adventure and are excited to explore this amazing area. Laurel is an archaeologist also working for the Forest Service and is already blown away with the opportunities this area affords. As a family we enjoy mountain biking, skiing, hunting, fishing and exploring the outdoors. Years ago we came to Durango on vacation and can't believe we now get to live in the same place we vacation!

I am looking forward to settling into this community and building both personal and professional relationships. I am personally dedicated to managing our public lands to the best of my ability and enhancing the opportunities available and I eagerly anticipate getting to the table with our partners to continue this important work!



Landscape-Scale Programs

by Lorena Williams



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
RESTORATION INITIATIVE

2022 has been a big year for landscape-scale restoration across Southwest Colorado! The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) made great strides in its third year, supporting the SJNF and partners getting work done on the ground. Also, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) was awarded to two areas including the entirety of the San Juan NF. Let's back up to review the impetus of these incredible programs:

In SW Colorado, we face increasing threats to our forests and watersheds—from wildfires to climate change and beetle kill. RMRI and CFLRP represent a better coordinated and collaborative approach to protecting our values, including our water, forests, communities and recreation. To produce meaningful results on the ground, we need to manage Colorado landscapes at a much larger scale. How? Through focused funding as well as better coordination and collaboration by all those affected, including people like you! These landscape-scale initiatives bring together national, regional, state, Tribal and local players to plan, prioritize, and act.



Jackson Mountain Project Open House brought together diverse stakeholders to weigh in on project development.

The CFLRP was established by Congress in 2009, and it was reauthorized in 2019. The San Juan NF applied in January, 2020 for the SW Colorado CFLRP (encompassing the SJNF outside the Rio Chama landscape), and the Rio Chama CFLRP, which includes part of the Pagosa Ranger District as well as parts of the Rio Grande, Carson, and Santa Fe National Forests. This April, both CFLRPs were awarded. Each brings approximately \$3 million a year for the next 10 years to restore forest health, reduce the risk of destructive wildfire, and support rural economies across millions of acres.

The critical need for CFLRP, which increases the pace and scale of forest restoration on a landscape scale, was fully realized when fire season heated up with the Ute Pass, Plumtaw, and Perins Peak Fires in May and June. SW Colorado's spring fires also reminded us why we need all the partners and stakeholders involved. From firefighting to evacuations and information dissemination, our communities came together to extinguish the flames and support local residents. From wildfire-mitigating fuels treatments to trailhead ambassadors and ecosystem monitoring, these initiatives are helping to ensure a positive future for SW Colorado forests and communities.

Frequently Asked Questions

How and why should our partners get involved in CFLRP and RMRI?

Q: My organization partners with the San Juan NF already. Why get involved in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program or the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative?

A: Being involved with your Ranger District and building local relationships is critically important to sustaining a healthy partnership. The reasons to *also* get involved in the initiatives is multifaceted. Both RMRI and CFLRP are collaboratively driven, meaning recommendations for priority work are developed by stakeholders and specialists. If you are not part of the collaborative process, you aren't weighing in on what work is priority.

Q: I want to get involved in the landscape-scale initiatives. How do I do it?

A: There are several ways to get involved with the initiatives and thus the prioritization and decision-making process for work being done on the ground. You can get involved at the local level with place-based collaboratives, or you can get involved in the CFLRP governance committees. See below for details.

Q: What is a place-based collaborative and how do I get involved with them?

A: Three place-based collaboratives coincide with San Juan NF Ranger Districts. These stakeholder groups are open to all individuals and organizations interested in working together to improve the health and resilience of our forests, watersheds, and communities, regardless of land designation. Project-level discussions often take place at these venues:

- Pagosa Ranger District: [San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership 2-3-2 Partnership](#)
- Columbine Ranger District: [Four Rivers Forest Health Partnership](#)
- Dolores Ranger District: [Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest Collaborative](#)

Q: What are the CFLRP governance groups and how do I get involved with them?

A: The SW Colorado CFLRP is comprised of the entire San Juan NF. The governance structure was developed in 2022, and is comprised of a Coordinating Council along with six standing committees: Projects and Places, Science and Monitoring, Forest By-Products, Communications, Agreements and Funding, and Entertainment and Fun. All meetings are open to the public, and any individual or organization can get involved simply by attending a meeting. **[Click here](#)** to learn more and to read the CFLRP governance charter.

The Rio Chama CFLRP includes the SE portion of the San Juan NF's Pagosa District and extends south to the Rio Grande, Santa Fe, and Carson NF. [The 2 Watersheds - 3 Rivers - 2 States Partnership \(2-3-2\)](#) is the named collaborative for the Rio Chama CFLRP. Any partner can engage with the 2-3-2 as a whole, elect to participate on a working committee, or both. 2-3-2 committees include: Technology, Research, Assessment and Monitoring, Biomass and Markets, Communication, and Fire Management, Capacity and Efficiency, and the Executive Committee. Connect with the 2-3-2 through the coordinators and sign up for the newsletter to stay in touch.

Partners Unite on Big Game Habitat Improvement



SCC crew member clearing gambel oak

Collaborative project makes headway on the Dolores Ranger District

By Abe Proffitt

Big game species throughout the western United States, such as elk, moose, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn, are important to ecosystems, local economies, and sporting enthusiasts. Many of these animals depend on migration routes that transect hundreds of miles through our wild rural and urban areas where they travel in search of food and breeding grounds.

While there is no shortage of animal encounters this time of year--especially on busy mountain roads--some species and local herds have suffered significant decline in recent decades. According to the [2020 Colorado Parks and Wildlife Big Game Report](#), mule deer and elk population estimates have dropped substantially since 2001. Between 2001 and 2018, deer populations went from 600,000 to 390,000

while elk populations went from 305,000 to 282,000. While disease, predation, and competition contribute to these dwindling numbers, habitat loss and fragmentation accelerated by development and compounded by long-term climate change present significant risks to these species. Fortunately, wildlife biologists and foresters in Colorado and other western states are working together to manage large swaths of forested landscapes for current restoration needs and future range of variability.

One such collaborative effort is the Big Game Winter Habitat Management Project on the San Juan National Forest, where the Dolores Ranger District recently implemented an oak thinning project near Glade Lake with the intent of improving winter range habitat for big game, including elk and mule deer.

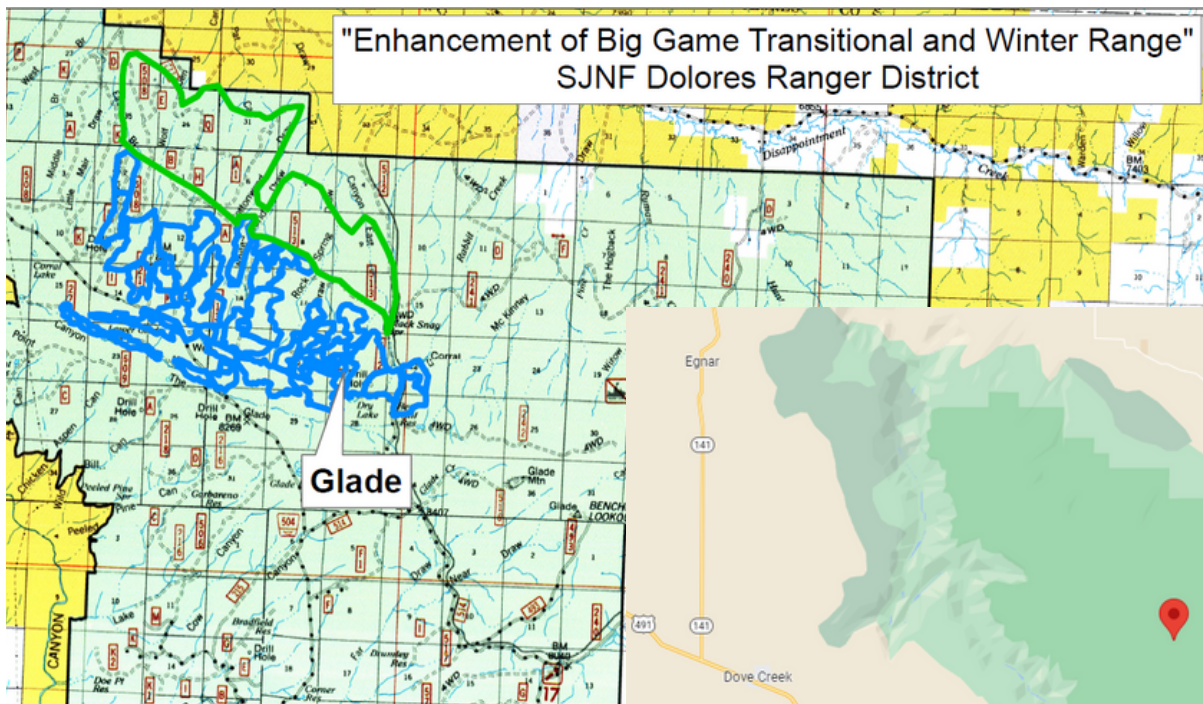
RESTORE (continued)

In 2020, David Casey (Supervisory Forester on the Dolores Ranger District) submitted the Glade Lake project for a Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and Environment (RESTORE) Grant, which supports landscape conservation initiatives such as habitat restoration. RESTORE is a collaborative funding partnership between Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Gates Family Foundation, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (CDNR).

The Glade Lake area is a remote mesa top above the Dolores River Canyon on the far west side of the district. It contains ponderosa pine, scattered stands of aspen, and mountain grasses and shrubs, making it the perfect landscape for big game species. Historical management of this region

included heavy logging and unregulated grazing followed by fire exclusion, all of which led to substandard growth and regeneration of ponderosa pine.

Consequently, ground cover species like gambel oak began to take over, reducing the amount of growing space available to grasses and forbs needed to sustain big game. Casey and District Wildlife Biologist Ivan Messinger saw an opportunity with the signing of the Lone Pine Decision Notice to improve conditions on the ground for big game through a variety of forest management applications and pursued funding for implementing treatments. In the past, funding for this type of brush treatment has come from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Habitat Partnership Program (HPP), which is primarily aimed at agricultural operations for private land managers. The RESTORE Grant was chosen



Map of project area

RESTORE (continued)

because the area lies within the FS boundary. RESTORE is also open to private and federal managers and requires work to be performed by a non-governmental organization (NGO). Luckily, the San Juan NF has a great long-term working relationship with the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC).

For the past two years, an eight-person SCC crew has worked diligently to clear roughly 10 acres of oak brush around aspen stands, ponderosa pine, service berry, and choke cherry. Clearing oak around these species reduces competition and prepares the area for prescribed fire. Reducing canopy coverage by mechanical means and releasing nutrients via fire creates better conditions for grass and forb production, which will provide big game with forage. Treatments such as these help the Dolores District better meet desired conditions as described in the Lone Pine Environmental Assessment--a mixed species forest with heterogeneous clumps of trees and diverse ground cover.

“Before forest encroachment, this area was prime winter range for big game species like elk, which require high-quality forage during colder migratory months. The prescribed burns and tree thinning overseen by the Dolores Public Lands Office are crucial for enhancing forage quality and improving ecosystem health. We’re thrilled to be able to support this critical work in the San Juan National Forest.” - Chris West, director of NFWF’s Rocky Mountain Regional Office



Before treatment



After treatment

Once the SCC work is complete (projected late spring 2023), the district plans to prepare this area and other units for prescribed fire, bringing us closer to our goal of improving large-scale conservation objectives for the entire Forest.

Below are some before and after photos of SCC’s work.

RESTORE (continued)



Before treatment



After treatment



Cleared area



SCC crewmember de-limbing



SCC crewmember de-limbing



Cleared area

Grasshopper Creek Fen Restoration



Grasshopper Creek Fen, 2022

Restoration Efforts are Seeing Results

By Andrew Richards

The San Juan National Forest is home to unique, peat-forming, anaerobic wetland habitats known as fens. They have perennially saturated soils, allowing hundreds of specialized hydrophytic, or water loving, plants to thrive. Fens in the San Juan Mountains can take tens of thousands of years to develop but can degrade quickly. Impacts caused by cattle and sheep grazing, wildlife, recreation, and historic mining have taken their toll at numerous fen locations on the Forest.

The SJNF and partners joined together to discuss opportunities for fen restoration starting in the early 2000s. Several fens around the Chattanooga, Ophir Pass, and Molas Pass areas have benefitted from restoration since then. More recently though, restoration efforts have focused on the Grasshopper Creek Fen, located near Mountain View Crest in the Weminuche Wilderness.

Eroding banks, sedimentation, and dying vegetation. These were clear signs that pointed to a fen in decline. Degradation of Grasshopper Fen had gotten to the point that it was even visible on Google Earth.

Some of this initial planning and design work was funded by a long-existing agreement with Mountain Studies Institute (MSI), emphasizing the importance of our local partnerships. MSI introduced the San Juan to Dr. Rod Chimner, Professor of Wetland Ecology at Michigan Technological University. They also provided a connection to Alpine-Eco Nursery in Buena Vista, which had specialized experience in seed collection methods and propagating vegetative plugs needed for this kind of restoration work.

In 2017, the SJNF Hydrology Program partnered with Dr. Chimner to develop

Grasshopper Creek Fen Restoration (continued)

a plan to restore the Grasshopper Creek Fen. Dr. Chimner has global experience restoring wetlands and was happy to assist the SJNF.

“I’m excited that the Forest Service took the initiative to mitigate the gully that was degrading the Grasshopper Creek Fen. Gullies become worse with time and cannot repair themselves, making their intervention necessary and important for successful restoration.” - Dr. Rod Chimner

Once the restoration plan was developed, it was time for implementation to begin. The first step in restoration was installing a series of wooden check dams with splash pads. This was crucial to slow down flowing water and allow sediment to deposit, which would eventually fill the incised channel and restore groundwater movement within the fen. Specialized blankets made of aspen and coconut shavings were added to the fen to help limit localized frost heave and aid in supporting revegetation efforts.

After fixing leaks in the check dams and collecting local seed needed for propagation in 2018, the 2019 field season was again a busy time at the Grasshopper Creek Fen. A temporary fence was installed to keep wildlife and domestic sheep out of the area so more than 700 *Carex aquatilis* plugs, a native water sedge, could take hold under the coconut blankets that were needed to insulate the vegetation against extreme temperature fluctuations.

This project has been a team effort. The Columbine Range and Wildlife Programs were instrumental in delivering the restoration supplies and materials to the



Overview of Grasshopper Creek Fen prior to restoration efforts in 2017.



2017 Active erosion and sedimentation into Grasshopper Creek prior to restoration efforts



2020 Annual ongoing monitoring and maintenance was important for success

Grasshopper Creek Fen Restoration (continued)



Multiple resource programs were involved to get materials and supplies to the restoration site (2020)



Overview of Grasshopper Creek Fen after restoration efforts (2021)



Check dams are slowly restoring groundwater hydrology and allowing vegetation to reestablish (2021)

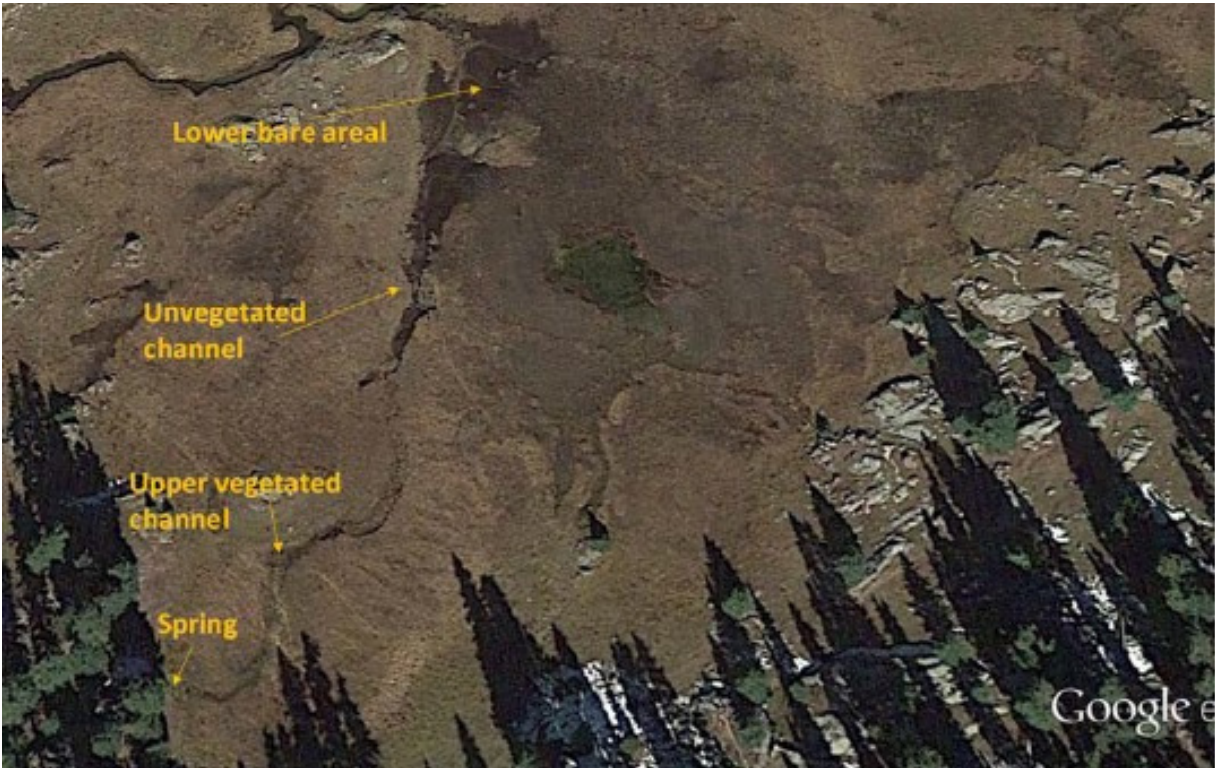
wilderness site by horseback and installing materials for excluding and monitoring impacts from wildlife and grazing.

The hard work is paying off, and ecosystem function is recovering in the Grasshopper Creek Fen. Native vegetation is again taking root and sedimentation into Grasshopper Creek has been significantly reduced, improving water quality for a localized population of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout. (Learn more about the Hermosa Creek Cutthroat Trout Project in our [Autumn 2022 issue](#)).

Eric Herchmer, Hydrologist on the SJNF, oversaw the restoration efforts and is thrilled with the Grasshopper Creek Fen recovery. “Projects like this usually have a trial-and-error component affiliated with them, as this is a relatively new science, and no two sites are the same. We’ve tried to take what we’ve learned at other sites across our forest and implement other successful restoration techniques used both nationally and internationally. The San Juan has one of the highest densities of fens in the Lower 48, so we’re in a unique situation to learn from and inform others on both our successes and failures.”

Special thanks to our partners who have been heavily involved in fen restoration projects including MSI, [Great Old Broads for Wilderness](#), [San Juan Sisters on Leadership Expeditions](#), [Silverton School](#), multiple [Fort Lewis College](#) programs, [Colorado Mountain College](#), [Environment and Climate Institute](#), [Durango Daybreak Rotary](#), [Amigos International](#), and [Wright Ingraham Institute](#).

Grasshopper Creek Fen Restoration (continued)



Google Earth image from 2017



Crew working on restoration efforts in 2019

Partnership Opportunities

The San Juan National Forest works to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of this region's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. One way to achieve that is through partner connection. Our partners include land management agencies across all levels of government, nonprofit and for-profit entities, tribes, and community groups. By working with partners with diverse backgrounds and knowledge, we are increasing the resiliency of our natural resources and strengthening the community that enjoys and works in these lands. For information about partnering with the USFS, follow this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/sanjuan/workingtogether/partnerships>



To become a partner with the San Juan NF or for questions, contact SJNF Partnership Coordinator Lorena Williams by email at lorena.williams@usda.gov or by phone at (970) 422-2939.

For general questions about the San Juan NF, call (970) 247-4874, visit the [forest website](#), or follow us on social media:



In late November, San Juan Mountains Association staff and volunteers cut, net, and loaded white fir trees in support of SJMA's "Christmas Trees For Conservation" program. Harvesting young trees in the Junction Creek watershed improves forest health and reduces hazardous fuels. Projects like this are reducing wildfire risk to our community, water supplies, and critical infrastructure.

Welcome New Employees

The San Juan National Forest is excited to announce the following new employees!

Name	Position	Location
Ryan Tolle	Civil Engineer	Supervisor's Office
Corey Ertl	San Juan NF Range Program Manager	Supervisor's Office
Clay Kampf	San Juan NF Fish & Wildlife Program Manager	Supervisor's Office
Amanda Pray	Range Management Specialist	Columbine District
Isabel Roberts	Trails Crew Lead	Columbine District
Eloisa Leiva	Range Management Specialist	Dolores District
Kevin Conwell	Customer Service Representative	Pagosa District
Adam Tlachac	Timber Management Assistant	Pagosa District
Mike Rung	Forestry Technician-Timber Sale Prep	Pagosa District



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