



San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership

Meeting Notes for Friday, December 16, 2022

Location: Archuleta County Extension, 334 US HWY 84

Regular meeting: 9:00 am – 11:00 am

Attendance: Josh Peck (SJNF), Anthony Garcia (SJNF), Paul Blackman (SJNF), Adam Tlachac (SJNF), Tim Leishman (SJNF), Kevin Emde (SJNF), Matt Tuten (USFS), Doug Purcell (CPW), Dick Ray (Backcountry Horseman), Christi Bode (Moxiecran Media), Bob Milford (PATC), Kyle O’Neill (NRCS), Ian Hopkins (NWTF/NRCS), Josh Braun (NWTF/NRCS), Tim Haarmann (BPR), Doug Call (Private Citizen), Doug Secrist (SJWCD), Herb Grover (WAS), Bill Trimarco (WAP), Keith Bruno (Audubon Rockies), Adam Hirshberg (Studs Lumber Company), Matt Ford (Pagosa Forest Products), John Rader (SJCA), Annie Sewell (DUST2), Steve Orr (FACO), Estevan Vega (CSFS), Tony Baker (San Juan River Village), Warren Brown (Archuleta County Commissioner), Kathy Weber (Private Citizen), Don Weber (Private Citizen), Dana Guinn (MSI), Julia Ledford (MSI), Alex Handloff (MSI), Anthony Culpepper (MSI), Laura Hanna (MSI), Jake Kurzweil (MSI)

MEETING NOTES

Partner updates

- San Juan National Forest (SJNF)
 - Tim Leishman accepted a position on the Payette National Forest in Idaho
 - Will be starting in January but staying in Colorado until June.
 - New Forest Supervisor, Dave Neely
 - Detailed in the position behind Kara Chadwick over the summer
 - Start date not set
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
 - Working on private lands treatments in the Pagosa Area
 - Also doing work in the Plumtaw area

Project and initiative updates

- Plumtaw Fire film
 - Christi Bode collected lots of media for the film in the fall, now trimming down to 6-8 minutes
 - Awarded a water journalism grant through CU Boulder, which will bring in more money for the film
 - Dana and Christi are planning for the film release
 - Will have a showing at the downtown theatre during Wildfire Awareness Month (May)

- Mountain Studies Institute (MSI) staff update
 - Alex Handloff joins the Forest Team as the Collaborative Communications Coordinator
 - Alex is enthusiastic about creating fun and engaging communications for Headwaters
- Check out the new and improved [Headwaters website](#)
 - Big thanks to Alex for the facelift!
- Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) and other regional initiatives
 - Southwest Colorado CFLRP
 - Small working groups (SWGs) of the Projects and Places and Science and Multiparty Monitoring Committees are developing desired conditions for the landscape.
 - After the SWGs have completed their desired conditions, the committees will meet jointly to consolidate the list and present a draft of the desired conditions to the Coordinating Council.
 - Matt Ford, who represents the Pagosa area on the Projects and Places Committee, no longer has capacity to continue participating.
 - Someone else from Headwaters needs to step up to the plate.
 - [Contact Bob Milford](#), Chair of the Projects and Places Committee to get involved.
 - Meet approximately once/month
 - The first years of implementation through the CFLRP will be focused on projects generated by SJNF that are NEPA-ready.
 - Collaborative project development will begin soon, with the place-based collaboratives (Headwaters is one of three) generating projects and bringing them to the Projects and Places Committee, who will evaluate and prioritize the project, and then recommend it to SJNF.
 - \$3 million/year for 10 years appropriated by Congress every year, funnels through SJNF.
 - Keep in mind that the CFLRP is one of many funding sources for forest restoration in this landscape.
 - Not all projects that we come up with will be appropriate for CFLRP funding.
 - Our region attracted funding from the CFLRP because of our history of successful collaboration.
 - Want to continue attracting and leveraging funds on all lands.
 - CFLRP dollars can only be used on Forest Service lands.
 - Rio Chama CFLRP
 - Part of the Pagosa Ranger District and parts of the Rio Grande, Carson and Santa Fe National Forests.
 - Focused on watershed health and connectivity from the headwaters to downstream water users in northern New Mexico.
 - Also awarded \$3 million/year for 10 years
 - Very different governance structure than the Southwest Colorado CFLRP.
 - The non-Forest Service governing body is the 2-3-2 Cohesive Strategy Partnership, which contains the entire Rio Chama landscape.

- Dana co-coordinates the 2-3-2 with partners at the Forest Stewards Guild in New Mexico.
 - Inflation Reduction Act
 - Funding will become available for use on state and private lands
 - Will fund practices that improve forest resilience
 - Program coming online in the next year or two
 - NRCS got billions of dollars for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - Huge opportunity to get funding for private lands to compliment the CFLRP
 - [ACT NOW](#) funding through NRCS
 - Funding for private lands work in Pagosa
 - Headwaters secured FRWRM (Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation) grant through the Colorado State Forest Service
 - Funds need to be used by 2024
 - Implementation to begin in the Spring on private lands near Cloman Park
 - This project came out of discussions in this group
 - The shared vision for managing the landscape is settling in this group
 - Makes this group successful and unique
 - Receiving support and enthusiasm from SJNF
- Snowtography proposal
 - Snowtography is a low-tech monitoring technique that allows us to understand how different forest structures and canopy cover impact snow accumulation, retention and ablation.
 - This will complement the existing network of [SNOTEL](#) sites across the western US.
 - SNOTEL sites are placed in open meadow at high elevations, which don't reflect the impact of canopy cover.
 - Forested mountain systems represent 75-98% of water supply, so understanding how snow is accumulated and retained in different stand structures is critical for estimating the amount of water stored in the mountains.
 - Funding
 - Dr. Jake Kurzweil, Hydrologist with MSI, and Dana submitted a grant to establish a snowtography network across the San Juans.
 - Joel Biederman, USDA, is the PI
 - Large network of collaborators, including TNC, USDA, Western Water Associates, Fort Lewis College, MSI, Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest Collaborative, [Airborne Snow Observatories](#)
 - Pursuing additional funding through Mancos Water Conservation District and the Southwest Basin Roundtable to establish a site in Pagosa and at Swamp Angel (near Silverton, where the Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies has research sites)
 - Have received funding through the Town of Silverton and in-kind match through CSAS
 - Also pursuing funding through the USDA to hire a masters student to do a regional assessment of all sites
 - The ultimate goal is to build a network of snowtography sites across the region

- Three sites so far:
 - Mancos
 - Dolores
 - Lizard Head
 - Ponderosa pine is represented in these sites, as well as an area treated with prescribed fire
 - Ultimately, these snowtopography sites can inform hydrologic monitoring and make estimates of water supply more reliable.
 - Site setup
 - Each site has three transects with wildlife cameras on each end
 - \$15,000-\$18,000 to install a single site
 - Relatively inexpensive
 - For reference, a SNOTEL site costs about \$1 million to set up
 - Establishing a snowtopography site in Pagosa
 - Offers potential mixed-conifer sites and an area that was recently burned by wildfire (Plumtaw)
 - The Headwaters Partnership will have discussions about what we are interested in learning, and where we could place a snowtopography site
 - Monitoring
 - Masters student would be doing the monitoring
 - Can start making inferences after about 2 years of monitoring
 - Will also be looking at infiltration depending on canopy cover
 - Soil moisture profile
 - Snowmelt
 - Learn more about snowtopography:
 - Check out this recent [article in the Durango Telegraph](#) about local snowtopography efforts
 - [Contact Jake Kurzweil](#), hydrologist with Mountain Studies Institute and a leader in local snowtopography efforts.
 - Read the “[Proposal](#) for San Juan Snowtopography Network Expansion and Regional Analysis” submitted by MSI and the Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies.
 - Read the [snowtopography handbook](#), developed by The Nature Conservancy
 - Check out this [article](#): “*Snowtopography quantities effects of forest cover on net water input to soil at sites with ephemeral or stable seasonal snowpack in Arizona, USA*”
 - National Wild Turkey Federation/NRCS Foresters have started!
 - Josh Braun and Ian Hopkins
 - Key component of knitting together the all-lands idea
 - NRCS excited to have more capacity in the southwest Colorado area

Jackson Mountain

- Status of Jackson Mountain EA
 - Background
 - SJNF wanted to do things a little differently with this EA.

- Usually, the proposal is brought forward first, and then the public responds.
 - For this EA, SJNF started by engaging stakeholders early on to develop the proposal together.
 - This is not part of the formal process.
 - Stakeholders have been happy with this model. SJNF wants to continue using it.
 - SJNF has hosted two public open houses and several meetings with stakeholders to craft a proposed action.
- The EA has three components: vegetation manipulation (timber sale work, fuels treatments), recreation opportunities (mountain bike trail system) and the gravel pit.
 - All three components will be analyzed together, but the gravel pit will be a separate decision.
- Scoping
 - SJNF was planning to enter the scoping period this fall but have struggled to meet deadlines.
 - Now waiting on the Regional Office to give the go ahead on publication of a story map to provide public information.
 - There will be a 45-day scoping period for public comments, hopefully starting January 10th.
 - Headwaters will be directly invited to submit comments, and will distribute information on how to do so.
 - There will also be a public open house during this scoping period where you can contribute comments.
 - The story map that SJNF is publishing and the virtual tour that MSI is creating will both have links to submit comments.
 - If you were involved in the pre-scoping process, you will automatically be invited to submit a comment.
- Final decision expected in July or August
- Jackson Mountain project discussion
 - Wildlife values and grazing
 - The Weber family have had grazing permits on Jackson Mountain for decades.
 - The family also has property adjacent to Jackson Mountain.
 - Very concerned about property rights and trespassing from trail users
 - Questions about how this will be enforced
 - Concerned about keeping gates closed for cattle
 - Want to be sure that recreation on Jackson Mountain can effectively be controlled
 - SJNF has been very helpful throughout this process but doesn't seem to have the capacity to police the area.
 - SJNF is working on getting more personnel out on the ground to enforce rules.
 - Concerns about the adoption of illegal trails in this EA and the message that sends to other recreation groups that want to build illegal trails.
 - Prefers that there are no mountain bike trails on Jackson Mountain

- Migration corridor
 - Elk and deer migrate from the high country down to lower country in the winter and are naturally funneled around Jackson Mountain. They mostly travel around the west side of the Mountain since there is already a lot of activity on the east side.
 - This west side is critical winter range.
 - We saw animal use decrease in Turkey Springs after recreation development in the area. The same thing will happen at Jackson Mountain if a mountain bike trail system is established.
 - Colorado Parks and Wildlife would like the mountain bike trails to stay on the east side of Jackson Mountain so elk and deer can still move uninterrupted across the west side.
 - SJNF should also consider what winter recreation will look like, since elk will be in the area at that time.
- Gravel pit
 - San Juan River Village
 - Nearest home 2,000 feet away
 - Health concern about crystalline silica generated from crushing rock
 - 50 trucks/day will also generate dust, create dangerous traffic conditions on Jackson Mountain Road and entering HWY 160
 - There isn't an entrance ramp for trucks to gain speed before merging with traffic.
 - Noise
 - Wildlife interference with wildlife (elk, turkeys, deer)
 - Economic impacts, reducing home values as much as 25%
 - Archuleta County
 - This is the third proposed location for a gravel pit in Archuleta County. It will be interesting to see what the study reveals.
 - Everyone in Archuleta County uses gravel
 - Will improve recreation and travel experiences
 - Not an easy decision
 - Recreation will continue to increase in the Pagosa area and we have the opportunity to guide the development
 - "Pagosa Springs is a poorly kept secret around the world."
- Recreation
 - Any recreation will have impacts on water quality, sanitation, and wildlife
 - Imperative that we think about water quality and how increasing recreation will impact that water quality.
 - This is a challenging situation
 - Public comments will shape the EA
 - Big undertaking from DUST2's point of view, trying to work collaboratively with all perspectives
 - Provide recreation without huge impacts
 - Working with landowners to create a buffer between recreation and private property
 - Want to mitigate impacts as much as possible

- DUST2 is here to engage with everyone, regardless of what happens
 - Will implement safeguards during construction
 - DUST2 does not endorse illegal trail building
 - Building capacity for educating trail users and members of DUST2
- Introduction to Jackson Mountain virtual tour
 - In lieu of the cancelled Headwaters tour of Jackson Mountain in November, the MSI team is developing a virtual tour that is even more exciting.
 - The virtual tour will be in the form of a story map where users can click on different points on a map to learn about proposed actions, historic management and various stakeholder perspectives on Jackson Mountain.
 - The goal is to create an educational resource for the community to be learn and make informed comments on the proposed actions.
 - This is the starting point for discussions about the Jackson Mountain EA.
 - Including photos, audio and videos from a variety of perspectives.
 - This will be a living resource that will be updated as the EA process moves along.
 - Call for participation
 - The best way to contribute your thoughts about proposed actions on Jackson Mountain is to hear it directly from you.
 - MSI team collecting audio recordings from interviews to include your voice in the virtual tour.
 - [Contact Alex Handloff](#) if you are interested in sharing your thoughts.

Closing and next steps

- What to expect at the January 20 meeting:
 - Finances and 2023 planning
 - Monitoring, adaptive management and communicating priorities