



# San Juan Headwaters

## FOREST HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

### August 16th Meeting

**Location:** Archuleta County Administrative Offices, 398 Lewis Street, Pagosa Springs, CO

**Meeting time:** 9:00-11:00 am

### AGENDA

#### **9:00-9:10 am:** Introductions

Attendees: Alex Handloff, Melissa May, Bill Trimarco (WAP), Wayne Hooper (citizen), Matt Ford (Pagosa Forest Products), Bob Milford (PARC), Rob Hagberg (SJWCD), Josh Peck (SJNF), Estevan Vega (CSFS), Robin Young (CSU Extension), Veronica Medina (Archuleta County Commissioner), Adam Tlachac (SJNF), Tim Haarmann (Banded Peak Ranch), Laurel Smerch (Pueblo Community College)

#### **9:10-10:30 am:** [Jackson Mountain Environmental Assessment](#) Update and Discussion

- General overview of project and Environmental Assessment
  - o ASCC: the Jackson Mt site contract for forest management has been awarded for work to start. Potentially starting late fall. Awarded contractor is CRS from Salida, has other contracts on this district. Service contract – USFS pays for work to be done, value of timber is less than the cost of doing the work.
    - ASCC is NOT monitoring management across the landscape. It is separate. But ASCC is within the management boundary, would only do in conjunction not in conflict.
  - o Year and a half ago started as integrated proposal with timber mgmt, fuels mgmt, gravel pit. All those things are interrelated but members of the public disagreed. Got over 100 public comments. Concerns about elk migration corridor with work from CPW and with the location of the gravel pit. Long term sustainability of trails system gave birth to PARC and a long term recreation strategy. San Juan River village also against gravel pit location, though that location is not totally off the table.
  - o Comment period is now closed for Jackson Mountain but there's always time to provide feedback.
  - o Current project goals:
    - One unit open to small “mom and pop” forestry companies. Perfect because road not large enough to support large logging trucks.
    - Meadow enhancements to expand borders of meadow and reduce tree encroachment. Preserve herbs and forbs in open area.

- “Dynamic treatments” - different prescriptions for different stand conditions, including regeneration of decadant/old aspen stands. Need a big enough disturbance to encourage aspen roots to resprout. Without this, it will convert to White Fir which is less of a firebreak and less habitat value, as well as cultural values of aspen viewing.
  - Thin white fir, cut around douglas fir and pine to encourage their regneration (need to open up canopy to get sunlight to next generation). White fir will dominate in shaded canopy system and self perpetuate. From a fuels perspective it is a more flammable species and is prone to being a ladder fuel. Also prone to insects and diseases. It’s the “rabbit” mentality – make more babies fast before it dies young. Not good for long term timber production or habitat. It is much more prevalent now because of reduction in natural fire regimes. Rabbits are overpopulated and need a predator reintroduction (Melissa’s commentary)
  - Mastication is one of best tools to treat fuels in an efficient manner. Too dense with too many ladder fuels for a prescribed burn yet.
  - The external boundary is to clear an area for future work, not saying the work will happen in the whole boundary.
- Specific issues/subjects
  - Environmental Assessment (EA)
    - EA is a planning tool. When its time to implement, there will be more on the ground surveys and specific silvicultural prescription. This just says the general types of treatments, later they will add specific basal areas, unit boundaries, etc.
  - Old growth and large tree retention
    - Definition of old growth – does not mean stands that have not been managed in the past. Basically, means multiple stand characteristics including scattered trees of certain age, so many snags, so many downed trees. Big chunk was cut back in the 1970s as a partial harvest and it has some of those older trees. Some areas have big chunk of aspens in decline so that can check the box of snags and downed trees but old aspens look way different than what the public may be imagining when they think of old growth. Plan isn’t to cut the oldest trees, but manage the stand as a whole for regeneration. Reduce the density, reduce competition between trees, add light and reduce competition for nutrients, reduce spacing for disease/pest spread esp. during drought – all things that would cause more stress to the trees.
    - Does the old growth definition in the executive order change things? In the short term, unlikely, and should not change the maps.
    - Process being developed to work within old growth boundaries to HELP old growth TREES by working within the old growth STAND. If we defer and take the whole old growth stand out of the project boundary, it could set a precedent where they are not able to do forest health treatments in these in the future.

- “Classic” old growth vs. Technically qualifying old growth. It was mapped as old growth, there may be similarly mapped old growth on Wolf Creek Pass that would no longer qualify after beetle kill. No real way to “unmap” old growth once its listed that way
    - Thinking about old growth as pass/fail where you touch it or you don’t is not the truth. Love the idea of being able to ENHANCE old growth. Would be great to work towards outcome of increasing the value of old growth.
    - Saving the what is considered old growth now and also creating conditions for future old growth to occur. It’s hard to do immediate old growth work.
  - Historic conditions vs. Unknown future
    - They weigh multiple things like historic range of variability. Forest plan says that area is suitable for timber management, including fuels mitigation, disease mitigation, provide fiber and timber for local industry, adapt for future climate change. The historic range of variability doesn’t rewind to an exact stand configuration from the past, just a general range. Also need to take into account future climate of what species will thrive in the future – Doug fir and Pondo are more drought resistant. Historic range does not mean exact diameter
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  - Fuels
    - Mastication vs mulching? Matt- Mastication is rotating blade, mulching can cover more acres faster and better for rocky soil. Small scale – oak brush regenerates slower with mulching than mastication but anecdotal only – would be a great thing to study. Masticate may be better prep for prescribed fire but mulching better for protecting a neighborhood
    - Fuels treatment is extended into a large area. Buffer along the neighborhood should be high priority with limited dollars, to increase potential to allow a burn in the future.
  - Fire Severity
    - As SJNF manager, will have to make the call to suppress a fire if it comes through to protect property. Management is a necessary step towards being comfortable enough to allow a fire to burn on this landscape. The idea that fire alone will be the tool we use to get everywhere we want in the forest just isn’t likely – other management is needed to get us to the point we can have the fire.
    - EA comments say that none of the mastication or other treatments have the same effect that fire does on the landscape. Adam agrees, but there are more factors to consider. Dentures aren’t as good as real teeth – you can’t bite an apple but they still let you chew and its way better than nothing!
    - Fire has been removed from this landscape for over 100 years. So the historic effect and positive impacts of fire are not as relevant now. The same tool would not have the same outcome now.
  - Diameter of trees

- Diameter caps are extremely difficult to deal with from a forestry perspective. Old growth vs diameter vs age.
  - Doug fir beetle infestation around Gunnison – prescription is to go get out the biggest doug firs to prevent beetle spread – they are already infested and need to be removed to protect other trees. This would also tie your hands
  - Adam Tlachac does not support the use of diameter caps. Morphology more than diameter. Big misconception that big trees are always older. Flat areas can have young very big trees, rocky areas can have small trees that are very old.
  - “We want to regenerate aspen” a diameter cap can tie your hands because its wet and now you can’t cut the big pines to help the aspens. Unintended consequences!
  - Manage for diversity across the landscape – a diameter cap can homogenize the landscape. Some insects like only big trees and then every tree gets infested.
  - SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS DONT MAKE SENSE
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- Discussion
- Coordinate with WAP and HOAs because homes are nestled in the woods and its very steep. Homeowners want to be in the trees, fuel mitigation needed.
  - Socioeconomic benefits are huge – 160 corridor, water intake for drinking water. These benefits have to be considered in management. There may be differences in what it says in EA versus intentions of the SJH group – how to reconcile these or better communicate?
  - Multi-purpose goals of SJNF: recreation, wildlife, timber, fire mitigation, historic range of variability. One of these does not override others. You can’t say the historic range allows fire if it threatens people’s homes. Anything USFS does has to align with DFCs from the forest plan.
  - Background: Project in Dolores There is a longstanding tension as to whether the project was in service to ecological restoration or forest products only. Though they came to compromise but later a lawsuit was filed. Now entire project is at a standstill. Want to take comments seriously and consider them fully to avoid a future legal challenge if possible.
  - In CA, fire one year took out a ton of homes – a few years later a fire hit that pre-burned area and went out on its own. Using fire routinely would be the goal but with 100 years of fuels... As a homeowner the winds are scary.
  - Go out in the field on a tour to see what the prescription would like like on the landscape with the real trees.

**10:30-10:45 am: SJHFHP updates**

- Forest and Fire learning series will highlight Pagosa Springs. Here are draft examples from [Durango](#) and [Dolores](#).
- [Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network Summit](#) in Durango, September 4 - 6
- [2-3-2 meeting in Del Norte, September 18](#), meet and greet happy hour on September 17
- On KWUF radio monthly

Laurel Smerch Pueblo Community College Natural Resource Officer – Oct 7-11 course. Starting new forest and fire science program at PCC. New to the job.

**10:45-11:00 am:** On the horizon

- Wildfire Ready Watersheds Grant
- Mapping work through Julia combining info from request from SW CO CFLRP
  - o What is the initial reaction to combining all the mapping efforts? Mostly it's the timing that would change and somewhat the format of the data. But still own map with SJHFHP.