



THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESTORATION INITIATIVE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DECEMBER 12, 2019

WHAT IS THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESTORATION INITIATIVE (RMRI)?

The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative is a new stakeholder-driven collaborative aimed at increasing the resilience of our forests, wildlife habitats, communities, recreation opportunities, and water resources across all lands in the Rocky Mountains. The initiative is taking the groundbreaking approach of tasking a diverse group of partners from Colorado to identify important landscapes, shared interests and potential strategies where a collective effort has the potential to make transformational changes in the health and resiliency of the ecosystem.

WHAT IS THE RMRI TRYING TO DO?

The initiative invited federal, state, local, private and non-profit partners from across Colorado to look across private and public lands at places where comprehensive management could make a significant difference in restoring forests and habitats; protecting communities; supporting recreation and tourism; and securing clean water for downstream users.

- The group identified landscapes of southwestern Colorado, the central Front Range, and the I-70 corridor as the top priorities for a potential pilot project.
- In December, the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative unanimously selected the Southwest Colorado Project to be the focus of its first efforts.
- The Initiative is also exploring ways to engage with several other projects and issues identified in this process.

WHERE AND HOW DID THE RMRI ORIGINATE?

- Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) Chief Executive Officer Becky Humphries met at the 2019 NWTF Convention and Conservation Conference to discuss challenges in forest stewardship that impede fast-paced, large-scale critical landscape restoration.
- Both NWTF and the USDA Forest Service agreed to convene a group of partners to see how, through shared stewardship, we could increase the pace and scale of stewardship work on a focused landscape.
- The Rocky Mountain Region, specifically Colorado, was selected as a pilot due in part to the large number of headwaters in the state and Colorado's record of collaborative work on the landscape.

HOW DOES THE RMRI RELATE TO SHARED STEWARDSHIP?

- The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative was born when Colorado was selected as a pilot location by the National Wild Turkey Federation and the USDA Forest Service to showcase the USDA's Shared Stewardship Strategy — a national effort to plan and implement work across public and private lands.
- The USDA Forest Service subsequently signed [Colorado Shared Stewardship MOU](#) with the State of Colorado.
- The RMRI and the Shared Stewardship MOU complement each other. The RMRI represents an example of Shared Stewardship in action and includes the Department of Natural Resources and representatives from many state agencies.
- Under the Shared Stewardship umbrella, we work across jurisdictional boundaries in an all-inclusive manner.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT AND URGENT?

Population growth, wildfires, and insects challenge our ability to maintain safe communities and to provide quality and reliable sources of water to support citizens, agriculture, and industry.

- These threats also have significant impacts to forests, habitat, recreation, and tourism.
- Our current efforts represent a fraction of the pace and scale needed to mitigate threats and their impacts.

IS THE FOREST SERVICE GOING TO STOP WORKING IN AREAS OUTSIDE OF THE RMRI FOCAL AREAS?

- No, priority work occurring on National Forests across Colorado will continue. RMRI will strive to build upon innovations and success in the Region in addition to ongoing work.

HOW RMRI IS DIFFERENT THAN OTHER COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS?

The initiative is building on the success of many long-standing partnerships in Colorado such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, Forests to Faucets and Joint Chiefs.

- This initiative will bring more hands and greater focus to the beneficial work these programs have been doing.
- The initiative is showcasing an innovative way to implement shared stewardship.
- The stakeholders hope it will serve as an inspiration and catalyst for projects in other parts of Colorado and the west.

WHO IS INVOLVED AND WHAT ARE THE ROLES?

The **National Wild Turkey Federation**: serves as the lead convener, initiating and providing facilitation support for all meetings of the core partner group.

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Partners: The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative includes State natural resource management partners in Shared Stewardship such as: the Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Colorado State Forest Service. It also includes other federal agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Bureau of Land Management plus a diverse set of non-government partners. This group shares in decision making, setting timelines and identifying shared priority location(s). Ultimately, each member of this group will independently determine how they can best support the goals of the selected project/s.

Focal Area Partners: Local partners and collaborative groups in each of the three focus landscapes were asked to work together to identify the highest-priority opportunities to protect shared values in their respective areas. Seven teams presented their project proposals to the Initiative on Nov. 13.

Evaluation Committee: The Evaluation Committee is a subset of Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative Partners selected by the larger group. The evaluation team includes the primary government agencies – Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of Natural Resources and Colorado State Forest Service, plus nominated seats to represent: water, recreation, forests, wildlife, communities, timber industry, and fire protection. It also includes three advisory seats 1) science-advisory seat from the Rocky Mountain Research Station, 2) USDA Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Region, and 3) National Wild Turkey Federation as the lead-convener. The evaluation team met Nov. 14 to discuss the seven project proposals and made its recommendation to the full group on Dec. 9.

The **USDA Forest Service** manages significant forests and grasslands across Colorado. Forest Service staff from the Rocky Mountain Regional Office have co-convenered the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative with the National Wild Turkey Federation and served in an advisory role. Forest Service staff at the local level within the priority areas are participating with other federal and non-federal entities as part of the Focal Area Partners.

WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE RMRI TO DATE?

The RMRI involves all levels of land management agencies: local, state, and federal government, private citizens, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and many more diverse stakeholders.

- **Federal Agencies**: USDA Forest Service (Co-Convener), Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station
- **State Agencies**: Department of Natural Resources, Colorado State Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Interbasin Compact Committee
- **Non-Governmental Organizations**: National Wild Turkey Federation (Co-Convener), The National Forest Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, American Forest Foundation, Great Outdoors Colorado, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Intermountain Timber Association, Club 20, Southwest Basins Roundtable, Gates Family Foundation, 2-3-2 Collaborative
- **Water and Energy Utilities**: Denver Water, Colorado Springs Utilities, Xcel Energy
- **Corporations**: Vail Resorts, Blue Forest Conservation
- **Timber Industry**: Intermountain Forest Products, Montrose Forest Products, Neiman Enterprises

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR?

Since first meeting in May 2019, stakeholders have designed an ambitious project development timeline, project evaluation criteria and iterative decision making process.

- The first milestone was reached **Oct. 11** when eight project teams submitted preproposals indicating they have identified partners and landscapes where collective focus could make a big difference.
- Full project proposals were submitted **Oct. 31**.
- Presentations to the 40 stakeholder members of the initiative took place on **Nov. 13**.
- On **Dec. 9** partners made decisions on the landscapes and issues that will be the focus of the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative

IDENTIFYING PROJECTS

To showcase this innovative, shared stewardship approach, the initiative engaged federal, state, local, private and non-profit partners from across Colorado.

- The Initiative identified landscapes of southwestern Colorado, the central Front Range, and the I-70 corridor as the top priorities for a potential pilot project.
- Partners in these areas were invited to look across land-ownership boundaries at places where comprehensive management could make a significant difference in restoring forests and habitats; protecting communities; supporting recreation and tourism; and securing clean water for downstream users.
- Over 125 partners and organizations have been engaged to date through this process.

WHAT DECISIONS WERE MADE BY RMRI PARTNERS AT THE MEETING ON DECEMBER 9TH?

- 1) The group selected Southwest Colorado as its showcase project.
- 2) The group also agreed to explore ways it could support the Upper South Platte and Upper Arkansas projects.
- 3) The group agreed to investigate how it could play a role in resolving one or more cross-cutting issues identified by all proposals as barriers to achieving success.

WHAT DOES BEING SELECTED MEAN FOR THE SOUTHWEST COLORADO PROJECT (DECISION #1)?

This landscape is a place where the Initiative wants to pool its resources. RMRI will work together with the Southwest project team to develop a strategy (funding, resources, work planning, communications) to remove the identified barriers and complete the critical work identified in the plan. As we begin to develop these strategies, there are still opportunities to become engaged and help us work to make this a success.

- The RMRI will meet in **early January 2020** to discuss potential funding and support strategies for the Southwest Colorado proposal.
- In **late January, early February**, the Initiative will work with local partners to convene a meeting in Southwest Colorado to begin integration of state and local partners and developing a plan to accomplish the identified work.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE UPPER ARKANSAS AND UPPER SOUTH PLATTE PROJECTS (DECISION #2)?

In addition to selecting the Southwest as its first focus area, the group agreed to explore ways to engage with the **Upper South Platte** and **Upper Arkansas Projects**.

- At the RMRI meeting in January, the team will also identify resources and support that could be provided to the Upper South Platte and Upper Arkansas proposals.
- Following this meeting the RMRI will connect with the two project teams and discuss if/how this support may help them advance part/all of their respective proposals.
- If there is alignment between support available, and support needed, a plan will be developed in 2020 to integrate these opportunities into RMRI and develop a plan of work.

WHAT WILL BE DONE ABOUT THE CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES (DECISION #3)?

RMRI recognized some **cross-cutting issues** that were identified as barriers in almost all the projects, and the group believes that addressing these may help many RMRI projects, as well as others across the entire state. In future meetings the group will explore possible strategies for addressing these barriers on a broader scale, including working closely with other entities already committed to working on these issues. The cross-cutting issues include:

- Wood utilization
- Workforce development
- Social license (especially around increasing the use of fire)
- Funding strategies

WHAT FUNDING IS BEING PROVIDED?

While RMRI projects may receive some seed money, one of the primary goals will be to use this initiative to bring more attention, effort and leverage funding to the selected project areas to affect bigger change across land-ownership boundaries.

- The process is meant to identify shared opportunities to focus our collective resources to remove existing barriers and achieve cross-boundary success at a landscape scale.
- The selected landscape will be a shared priority for the Initiative to work together with focal area partners to address barriers to increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration.
- Each organization and partner will determine how and what they contribute towards achieving this goal.

WHAT ABOUT THE PROJECTS THAT DIDN'T GET SELECTED?

- We expect these projects will continue to move forward.
 - Some of the projects were already well underway, with strong partnerships and a history of getting work done. We anticipate they will receive continued funding from the various sources that have funded them thus far and they will be able to continue to move forward at the current pace and scale.
 - Some projects may become engaged and/or benefit from RMRI work towards cross-cutting issues.
 - Several of the proposals were in a more formative stage. We hope these projects will continue building partnerships and planning work across boundaries so they are ready for future opportunities.
 - We plan to remain engaged with all project proponents to share in lessons learned and opportunities that may come from RMRI efforts. One primary goal of RMRI is to create a process that can be replicated in other parts of the state and region. We hope this continued communication will help increase the pace and scale of work across Colorado and beyond.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE AND STAY CONNECTED?

- <https://restoringtherockies.org/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/RestoreTheRockies/>
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