

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)**  
**April 17, 2020, 2:00pm - 4:00pm**  
**RMRI Social License Subcommittee**  
**Meeting Summary - FINAL**

*Attendance:* Rob Addington, Paul Amundson, Patt Dorsey, Cindy Dozier, Rachel Franchina, Tim Kylo, Matt Lindler

*Facilitation:* Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

**ACTION ITEMS**

<b>Patt Dorsey, Matt Lindler, Paul Amundson</b>	Create a list of key messaging bullets for review by Rob Addington and Rachel Franchina and then by the larger Social License Subcommittee.
<b>Rob Addington and Rachel Franchina</b>	Review the first set of key messaging bullets.
<b>Rob Addington</b>	Reach out to a representative from the Prescribed Fire Council to see if they have any existing communication resources.
<b>Paul Amundson</b>	Reach out to Kirk Will and Vaughn Jones of the Division of Fire Protection Control (DFPC) to see if there is a representative who would like to join the Social License Subcommittee.
<b>Tim Kylo</b>	Reach out to Molly Pitts of the Colorado Timber Industry Association to vet the idea of having companies hang banners on their logging trucks and forestry equipment.
<b>Rachel Franchina</b>	Review US Forest Service (USFS) research on how to develop effective messages and incrementally increase people’s knowledge about fire issues over time.
<b>Heather Bergman and Matt Lindler</b>	Discuss the Social License Subcommittee strategies with the Communication Subcommittee and update the Social License Subcommittee on their responses.
<b>Samuel Wallace</b>	Develop a strategy table to help the Social License Subcommittee think about the process, sequencing, and the financial and capacity needs to develop messages and communication materials.
<b>ALL Social License Subcommittee Members</b>	Email Heather Bergman with any time preferences for the next meeting, which will occur either on the morning of May 11 or during May 13.

**SOCIAL LICENSE SUBCOMMITTEE APPROACH AND STRATEGY DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed how the Social License Subcommittee should approach social license as a cross-cutting issue and potential strategies to address a lack of social license. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Social License Subcommittee needs to consider the scale at which they will approach developing solutions to build social license, whether it is best to address at a statewide level or to address at the priority landscape level. One approach is to develop a consistent statewide message to show the benefits of broadcast burning and large-scale forestry treatments, encourage homeowners to develop defensible space and harden their homes, and show success stories from different watersheds. Another approach is to develop a multi-pronged strategy with a statewide message for prescribed fire and other statewide issues but regionally focused messages for sensitive issues that are regionally specific (e.g.,

messages about large timber programs in Southwest Colorado). The Subcommittee will take the approach of developing a consistent statewide message that local groups can then use and apply to their specific localities and regions.

- The Social License Subcommittee has the option to develop a message to gain social license for prescribed fire, active forest management, or for both as there can be strong community resistance for both activities. In some areas, it is not possible to conduct a prescribed fire until a mechanical treatment has occurred, so the two activities are connected to each other. The content of a coordinated message could focus on the larger theme of forest restoration, which would include a discussion about both active management and prescribed fire. The content could also focus on increasing awareness on defensible space and home hardening, which has been a successful strategy to capture the attention of homeowners and shift their perspectives on large-scale treatment projects and prescribed fire. Another approach to content is to develop a message that focuses on five common values: wood, water, wildlife, recreation, and community.
- The identity of the messenger is an important part of building social license. The Social License Subcommittee should consider who is the best messenger to deliver any coordinated messages. A representative from the USFS may not be as effective as a local representative (e.g., local fire protection district representative). The general strategy should be for local representatives to deliver the statewide messages in their communities.
- It is important to identify who the audience of the message is. There are many people who are moving into the wildland-urban interface (WUI) in Colorado and are not aware of the fire-related issues; recreators and new homeowners could be a potential audience for a message.
- The timing of when to release a message is another important aspect of a communication strategy. For example, a prescribed fire message may be seasonal and based around the burning schedule.

## **MESSAGING TOOLS AND OPPORTUNITIES DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed opportunities and messaging tools to build social license. Their comments are summarized below.

- There is currently legislation to provide funding for local communities to develop educational programs on prescribed fire going through the Colorado General Assembly. This legislation, if passed, may be an opportunity for future funding.
- The Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland (ARP) has been successful at building social license for prescribed fires. The Social License Subcommittee could engage with ARP representatives as a learning opportunity.
- Meeting participants discussed through what medium they could distributed a message. Using a combination of mediums may be the most successful strategy for reaching different audiences. There could also be a tiered approach to building people's understanding of prescribed fire and forest management in which people are first introduced to forestry concepts through a social media video and then there are local public meetings for them to attend if they are interested in learning more. Potential messaging formats include:
  - 30- to 45-second videos for state, county, and local organizations to distribute on their social media.
  - Television commercials.
  - Handouts and pamphlets.
  - Public events and meetings, including workshops, demonstration burns, public festivals, etc.

- Banners on logging trucks and forestry equipment with messages around forest health and fire mitigation.
- “Wildfire ready” endorsements for towns and homeowner associations (HOAs) to place on their welcome signs.
- Industry partners would likely be interested in hanging banners off their equipment. Trucking companies operate as a separate business, so there would need to be an outreach effort to both forest industry contractors and trucking companies. The banners would need to be made of material so that they are not waving too much when they are on the road, and they could potentially have logos for RMRI. The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) can create several designs to be vetted by the RMRI Social License Subcommittee and RMRI-Colorado (RMRI-CO) for industry partners to select and print themselves onto banners, stickers, magnets, tarps, etc. once a message is developed. Tim Kylo will reach out to Molly Pitts of the Colorado Timber Industry Association to vet the idea of having companies hang banners on their logging trucks and forestry equipment.
- Some Colorado communities use the national recognition program FireWise to highlight communities that have implemented forest treatments, so it may be confusing to use another community endorsement system. There could be an opportunity to explore incentives for communities to conduct treatments around their neighborhood in addition to the FireWise program.
- The role of the Social License Subcommittee is to identify barriers to building social license, develop the messaging to overcome those barriers, and identify who has the skillset and resources to help develop the messaging language. The Communication Subcommittee can then take any developed messages from the Social License Subcommittee and create the communication material.

## **BARRIERS DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed the barriers to build social license in Colorado. Their comments are summarized.

- One barrier to developing and distributing a message is a lack of resources. Local organizations often rely on volunteers to develop their communication material. The cost and resources required to develop communication materials often depend on location. The production of a 30- to 45-second video may cost \$1,000 to \$2,000, and a ten-minute video can cost up to \$10,000 or more. RMRI partners would need to provide resources, staff, or expertise to produce and distribute communication materials. The Social License Subcommittee members can consider using video clips that are in the public domain with a voiceover to reduce costs in the near-term and develop higher-technology messages in the long-term.
- Other identified barriers to building social license include:
  - Fear that a prescribed fire will get out of control.
  - Concerns around the smoke from prescribed fires.
  - Aesthetics of an area right after a burn.
  - Fear of crown fires destroying a mountain vista.
  - Prescribed burning impacts on wildlife (this may not be as large of an issue in Colorado in the near term, but the Australian wildfire may brought this topic to the public’s attention).
  - Lack of understanding of the difference between prescribed fire and wildfire.
  - Lack of awareness from those moving into the WUI about fire-related topics, like prescribed fire, wildfire, landscape resilience, and defensible space.

## MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed the strategy to develop a message to build social license. Their comments are summarized below.

- There are several potential ways to begin to develop the content of a message. The strategy to develop any message could start by asking, “what is needed to acquire community buy-in” and what are the ongoing RMRI activities that could be leveraged in real time to promote forestry treatments and prescribed burns.
- Having a consistent message across the state is an important aspect to developing content. The statewide messages could be tiered in their level of detail with simple messages on banners and signs and a more detailed message and set of talking points for pamphlets and videos. The simpler message could highlight the common values to achieve broad social approval (wood, water, wildlife, recreation, and community).
- The strategy to build social license should include an education component to teach people about the difference between prescribed fire and wildfire, introduce concepts like defensible space and landscape resilience, and educate on the process of ecosystem recovery and the benefits of creating fire-adapted forests for wildlife. Topics around fire issues are complex, so finding a simple, consistent, and repeatable message may be an effective way to inform people. Visual messages (e.g., side-by-side pictures) may be helpful as well. Rachel Franchina will review USFS research on how to develop effective messages and incrementally increase people’s knowledge about fire issues over time.
- Meeting participants discussed how to approach an educational component of the strategy. Science and data can help the story of the historical significance of fires on Colorado forests and set the foundation of a message to explain why prescribed fire is necessary. It is also important that a message appeals to people’s values and emotions. The messaging should be based on science but connect with people in a way that it becomes second nature to them that fire is good. Visual messaging can be an effective tool at connecting to people’s emotions. The message could also focus on how fire or the lack of fire affects a person’s life and lifestyle.
- A potential central message is that Colorado communities need to be “wildfire ready.” Another part of the “wildfire ready” message could focus on “change” to highlight how the past efforts to mitigate wildfires have been unsuccessful, so there must be a change if people want different results. Highlighting burn scars from previous fire events may be a way to promote this message about change.
- Meeting participants discussed whether the Subcommittee should develop messages to build social license for prescribed fire, for active management, or for both. The benefits of focusing on building social license for prescribed fire is that broadcast burning will help scale up treatments, and it has support from the RMRI group. One of the benefits of focusing on building social license for active management is that active management precedes prescribed fire, and active management may be more understandable for the larger public. Rather than choosing whether to build social license for prescribed fire or active management, the key messages can focus on the broader message about supporting actions that create a healthy forest and protect communities, wildlife, water, and recreation, which includes both prescribed fire and active forest management. They can then refine the messaging for different purposes later.
- At this time, the messaging should focus on communicating to a broader audience. Once the centralized messages are developed, the Subcommittee can refine the messages for more specialized communications. This allows for a step-by-step development of communication materials rather than trying to build all the messages at once. One potential goal for the

Social License Subcommittee is to create a depository for different messages and talking points on a variety of topics (e.g., wildlife, forest health, mechanical treatments, etc.).

- The Social License Subcommittee should be prepared to answer any questions about why the Subcommittee has chosen to focus on wildfire mitigation rather than mitigating beetle kill in forests.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- One of the next steps is to create a draft list of key messaging bullets for the Social License Subcommittee to review and discuss. Patt Dorsey will develop the initial set of bullets with assistance from Matt Lindler and Paul Amundson. Rob Addington and Rachel Franchina will review the first set of key messaging bullet points.
- The Colorado Prescribed Fire Council may have existing messaging and communication materials that can serve as a foundation upon which to build. Rob Addington can reach out to a representative from the Prescribed Fire Council to see if they have any existing communication resources.
- A representative from the DFPC would be a helpful addition to the Social License Subcommittee. Paul Amundson will reach out to Kirk Will and Vaughn Jones of DFPC to see if there is a representative who would like to join the Social License Subcommittee.
- Samuel Wallace will develop a strategy table to help the Social License Subcommittee think about the process, sequencing, and the financial and capacity needs to develop messages and communication materials over time.
- Heather Bergman and Matt Lindler will discuss the Social License Subcommittee strategies with the Communication Subcommittee and update the Social License Subcommittee on their responses.
- The next Social License Subcommittee meeting will occur on the morning of May 11 or the morning or afternoon of May 13. RMRI Social License Subcommittee members should email Heather Bergman with any specific time windows that they are available.