

RMRI: Why this matters

The time to act is now.

Fires are engulfing much of the West. The Pine Gulch Fire in Colorado is now the state's largest in history. The Cameron Peak Fire is growing, with only 21% containment and a loss of 57 structures to date. Air quality alerts are in place across the state. Widespread smoke from out of state wildfires is increasing in the Rocky Mountains, reminding us that fires and smoke know no boundary lines. It will take an all hands, all lands concerted effort to proactively restore forest health and reduce fire risk across all landownerships.

Wildland fire management and



Firefighters battle the Pine Gulch Fire — Colorado's largest in history — Aug. 16. U.S. Bureau of Land Management photo.

improving landscape level resilience are vitally important to all RMRI partners. One of the goals of RMRI is to improve forest conditions and reduce fire risk across all ownerships. We are working together under the principles of Shared Stewardship to do the right work in the

right places at the right scale. We are shifting the paradigm from working on small projects in many places, to jointly prioritizing our resources to reach a scale comparable to the needs on the ground. Our three RMRI project areas exemplify this business model.

RMRI's showcase project in SW taking shape

SW RMRI Steering Committee hones in on "shovel-ready" projects.

The Southwest RMRI Steering Committee continues to make significant progress toward its shared vision.

Using virtual meetings, the steering committee is identifying opportunities and barriers to restoration work across the nearly 800,000-acre Southwest project area. Using an innovative decision support tool, the steering committee has weighted values and opportunity criteria and is now prioritizing those values across the landscape. The support tool helps identify and affirm areas of overlap in stakeholder values.

Moving forward, the committee will draw heavily on the expertise and values from the local communities through a newly established Advisory Network, a group of dozens of local stakeholders, to help guide the steering committee toward local priorities and issues. This group will also be using the decision tool, which is set up to collect valuable input from a large number of

stakeholders, to inform the prioritization and decision-making. This collaborative input will build a strong foundation for the 10-year implementation of RMRI in the Southwest.

Southwest Colorado is starting to see Shared Stewardship benefits. The San Juan National Forest, for example, used input from the steering committee to inform its 2021 priorities. In turn, the Steering Committee is also looking at "shovel-ready" projects in shared priority areas that would benefit the four RMRI values: resilient communities, water, forests and wildlife habitat, and recreation. Based on the projects and priorities, the group has pulled together a funding strategy to implement projects on non-Federal lands that will be complemented by upcoming planning and implementation work with the San Juan National Forest.

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Restructured website

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Significant forest work funded in Upper Ark Basin

By Kim Marquis, Envision Chaffee County



The Methodist Front project protects municipal water supplies as well as the Gold Medal Trout Waters of the Arkansas River, by reducing the likely intensity of a wildfire in the forests above the “Little Ark” near Salida. Photo provided by Envision Chaffee County.

With an innovative Community Wildfire Protection Plan in-hand, forest leaders in the Upper Arkansas River Basin are striding toward implementation with two new projects that protect lives, homes and important infrastructure while improving wildlife habitat.

The projects are designed and led by the [Envision Forest Health Council](#), a group of more than 20 community leaders working to implement the Chaffee County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The plan was approved in February 2020 to increase the past rate of treatments and reduce overall community risk of the effects of a wildfire.

The two projects are among top treatment priority areas identified in the plan, which uses computer modeling by the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute at Colorado State University to map wildfire risk and identify the right 5% to 10% of lands where treatment will cut in half the risk severe wildfire poses to the community.

A 5-mile-long area of fuel breaks in the foothills of Methodist Mountain will protect the Salida and Poncha Springs

communities of 7,000 people while also enhancing critical habitat. The Methodist Front project connects to the 2019 Decker Fire burn area and extends across the mountain to the west.

The second, 2-mile-long fuel break is located in the center of the county, designed to provide safer firefighter access in the event of a wildfire in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness. It also will improve egress for residents and visitors, protect structures in the surrounding area, and tie into public lands mitigation work by the U.S. Forest Service on more than 6,000 acres of forest to the west.

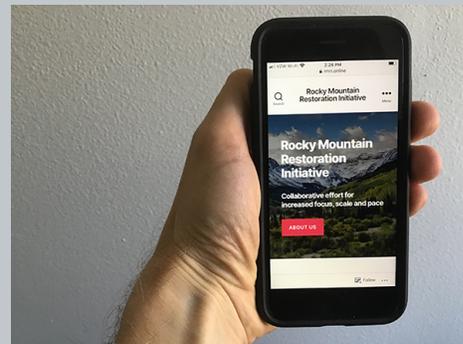
Funding is provided by local, state and federal sources, including grants from RESTORE Colorado and Chaffee Common Ground, a local program funded by a 0.25% sales tax.

Landowners in both project areas are advancing the number of acres treated by participating in Chaffee Chips, a new program that coordinates neighborhood slash removal and chipping services.

Last year, the Arkansas River Headwaters communities partnered with the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, advancing their long track record of local innovation to deliver nationally recognized results.

RMRI restructures website

Maps, calendar added improving transparency and user experience.



The RMRI official website has been updated increasing information-sharing and transparency while improving user experience.

The Communications Subcommittee met Aug. 27 to address necessary updates and offer feedback to improve both internal and external communication.

Each of RMRI’s six subcommittees now has a designated page to hang meeting summaries, webinars and other resources. Maps were added in response to feedback at the July 22 all-hands RMRI meeting. Additionally, a calendar was added so stakeholders can track and request to join subcommittee meetings.

More work is needed — including a brand and logo — based on a forthcoming communication strategy.

Visit restoringtherockies.org.

Request for Proposals: RESTORE Colorado 2021

Deadline: October 29, 2020

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is soliciting proposals for the annual Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and Environment (RESTORE) Colorado Program. To date, RMRI efforts have aligned over \$1.5 million of Restore Grant funding for the Upper Arkansas and SW Colorado projects. [Apply...](#)



Upper South Platte narrows in on Elk Creek Focus Area

Connect at uppersouthplattepartnership.org.

The Upper South Platte Partnership has a history of working at scale to meet the needs of the landscape and increase community resilience—all contributing factors to why RMRI stakeholders in December decided to support the Upper South Platte project.

The Upper South Platte

Partnership, or USPP, is made of landowners and communities, as well as local, state and federal agencies now working to strategically align resources and capacities to achieve science-based treatments and



activities at a large scale on federal and non-federal lands.

The Elk Creek Focus Area, or ECFA, is one example of the Upper South Platte Partnership's effort to work at larger, cross-boundary scales to achieve a more focused and

leveraged impact. The ECFA brings together the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Jefferson Conservation District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the local fire protection district to treat large private parcels and critical at-risk communities, as well as state park land and federal land.

The economics of outdoor recreation in Colorado

How outdoor recreation boosts jobs, revenues

Colorado's outdoor recreation industry is a boon to rural and local economies, and a significant contributor to the state and U.S. economies. But it comes with tremendous responsibility, cautions Samantha Albert, deputy director of Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Industry Office.

"There are consequences for not doing the work of supporting healthy forests and waters," she said Sept. 1 at the [Colorado Water Congress virtual summer conference](#).

America's outdoor recreation economy is [outpacing the growth](#) of the overall U.S. economy. But the state of Colorado has a comparative advantage: It's [ranked first](#) among western states for access to public lands, responsible energy development and outdoor recreation.

What's more, outdoor recreation expenditures account for 18.7% of all jobs in Colorado. That's more than the construction and manufacturing labor force—combined.

And communities across Colorado are benefitting.

For example, in the period from

2013 to 2017, local, state and federal tax revenues increased by a whopping 83%. In that same period, the number of jobs in the outdoor recreation sector increased by nearly 200,000. And total wages and salaries earned grew from \$12.4 billion to \$21 billion.

Through RMRI we've been able to establish partnerships ... all for the benefit of the state.

With unique public-private partnerships, such as the [Front Range Trail Stewardship Strike Team](#) funded by [VF Foundation](#) and [National Forest Foundation](#), the industry has also positioned itself to support quality recreation and youth employment opportunities.

"While there are many communities that benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism," Albert said, "we have to realize that these communities benefit because of the healthy forests, clean water and community advocates/stewards that recognize the impact of outdoor recreation."

Which is why Albert — repre-

senting the state of Colorado and its outdoor recreation industry — has teamed up with the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative.

"Thoughtful, community-driven forest health solutions, as well as collaborative partnerships, are absolutely imperative to the success of sustainable outdoor recreation, tourism and economic development," noted Albert.

The more than 40 RMRI partners from across the state, each with varying interests, have nonetheless committed to four shared values, one of which is rooted in recreation. Outlined in their RMRI governance charter, RRMI partners have agreed to work collaboratively across the state to create

accessible, inclusive, and sustainable recreation opportunities for local communities and visitors.

"Through RMRI we've been able to establish partnerships and we've learned how to better connect and share the messages about the importance of healthy forests, wildlife, clean water, outdoor recreation and community awareness — all for the benefit of the state," Albert said.

Colorado's outdoor recreation industry is gaining steam, altering the trajectory of the state's economy. Yet Colorado is getting warmer, populations are rising and disturbances like wildfires, insects and disease are worsening. For Samantha Albert and her

RMRI partners, they are intimately aware. And they know the work they have a head of them.

"Our outdoor economy is growing," she said. "It impacts us all and we need to make sure we're fostering it in a sustainable way."

Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Economy



511,000 jobs
Supported by
ORec Expenditures



10%
Colorado GDP



18.7%
Colorado Labor Forces



\$62
Total Economic Impact

SOURCES:

Colorado Parks & Wildlife: The Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado, 2017

Bureau of Economic Analysis
Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and Prototype for States, 2017



Montrose Forest Products performing forest management with private landowners

Project to improve forest health on 1,600 acres.



Montrose Forests Products photo.

DOLORIS, Colo. — A timber company located in Montrose, Colorado, has taken on a project aiming to improve forest health and resilience on 1,600 acres of private lands while adding fuel to the local economy.

Montrose Forest Products contracted with a private landowner northwest of Dolores

amid growing concerns the lands are subject to wildfire and beetle infestation.

“We are helping manage the Ponderosa pine on this family-owned ranch,” said Tim Kylo, who oversees the project with Montrose. “The family members are great stewards of their lands, which they use for cattle-grazing, recreation and hunting.”

About two-thirds of the ranch is covered with mature Ponderosa pine. The Montrose-based company specializes in Ponderosa pine, according to the [company’s website](#).

Fires in recent years have encroached on the family’s land from adjacent federal lands, prompting action to restore the forests’ resistance and resilience to future wildfires.

Montrose forest managers will first target

unhealthy trees through sanitation and salvage harvesting, followed by any necessary logging to thin dense overgrown areas, Kylo said.

Montrose Forest Products partners with the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative to foster healthy, functioning forests to support suitable wildlife habitat and populations.

“We partnered with RMRI to tackle problems that might otherwise be impossible handled singly. Together we share the same values, resources and responsibility,” Kylo said.

The project — which begins in late September of this year and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2021 — is staffed by local loggers and truckers, adding a shot in the arm to the local economy.

RMRI Subcommittee Updates

RMRI Sub-committees were brought together to help remove key barriers and develop solutions identified in RMRI project areas. Sub-committee workplans identify key actions and deliverables that support and advance the four RMRI values. Visit restoringtherockies.org/subcommittees.



Governance

- ✓ Developed [RMRI Governance Charter](#).



Biomass Utilization

- ✓ Hosted a joint meeting with the Colorado Energy Office to learn the laws and programs to support biomass use across the state.
- ✓ Hosted a [biomass webinar](#). Speakers included biomass users and producers in California and Colorado.
- ✓ Discussed legislation and the different biomass energy markets.



Workforce Capacity

- ✓ Hosted a webinar with Southwest Colorado workforce center to better understand the services they offer.
- ✓ Secured funding in partnership with Northern Arizona University to complete a statewide forestry products industry survey.



Funding

- ✓ Led discussions on a funding strategy to address funding needs across all three landscapes.
- ✓ Hosted [Conservation Finance webinar](#).



Communications

- ✓ Identified top priorities: Continue highlighting the work done across the three landscapes; develop a brand and long-range communication plan; and build out an internal communication channel.
- ✓ Restructured website: restoringtherockies.org.



Social License

- ✓ Developed key messaging to address barriers across all three landscapes. Developed a definition of *forest restoration* and crafted messaging on prescribed fire risk, big smoke v. little smoke, and active forest management.

