

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)**  
**July 22, 2020, 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM**  
*Virtual Meeting*  
**Meeting Summary - FINAL**

**ATTENDANCE:**

*Participants:* Samantha Albert, Jim Aragon, Eugene Backhaus, Brian Banks, Sylvia Bierman, Angela Boag, Mo Bookwalter, Ethan Bucholz, Christina Burri, Rick Cables, Catherine Cook, Ron Cousineau, Reid DeWalt, Patt Dorsey, Cindy Dozier, Greg Felt, Tom Fry, Jeff Gainey, Dan Gibbs, Vaughn Jones, Aaron Kimple, Tim Kylo, Damon Lange, Ben Lara, Kalem Lenard, Paige Lewis, Matt Lindler, Kim Marquis, Susan Matthews, Frank McCormick, Mike McHugh, Pat Mercer, Adam Moore, Sarah Mudge, Dominique Naccarato, Jamie Nogle, Emily Olsen, Jim Pitts, Molly Pitts, Mike Preston, Time Reader, Kelle Reynolds, Lauren Ris, Ellen Roberts, Marcus Selig, JT Shaver, Travis Smith, Tom Spezze, Chris Sturm, Kelly Sweeney, Wayne Vanderschuere, Nathan Van Schaik, Diana Trujillo, Chris West, Tammy Whittington, Cindy Williams, and Scott Woods

*Facilitation:* Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

**ACTION ITEMS**

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| <b>RMRI-Southwest Colorado Partners</b> | Send out a list of the RMRI-Southwest Colorado (RMRI-SW) Advisory Network participants.  |
| <b>Upper Arkansas Partners</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the data layers and tools used during the prioritization process with RMRI-SW partners.</li> <li>• Share their community survey tool with the other priority landscapes and Social License Subcommittee.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Upper South Platte Partners</b>      | Share information from their prioritization effort with RMRI-SW partners.  |
| <b>Samuel Wallace</b>                   | Send the July 21 Biomass Utilization Subcommittee summary and panelist presentations to RMRI partners once the summary is finalized.   |

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Tammy Whittington, US Forest Service (USFS), and Tom Spezze and Patt Dorsey, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), gave introductory remarks for the meeting. Their comments are summarized below.

- The NWTf has recently had to reorganize its operations due to staffing layoffs as a result of COVID-19 impacts. Tom Spezze was asked to step into the role of National Director of Field Conservation. Tom Spezze is not leaving the RMRI effort, but Patt Dorsey is stepping into the Director of Conservation Operations for the West and as the NWTf lead for RMRI. RMRI continues to be a focus of the NWTf as a way to deliver conservation outcomes.
- A year ago, RMRI partners were first identifying cross-cutting issues that affect forest management across the state. Since then, RMRI partners have worked to increase the pace and scale of treatments. RMRI is based on four shared values: water, communities, forest and wildlife habitat, and recreation. These four values will continue to bring RMRI partners together as RMRI continues to make progress.
- The USFS continues to support the NWTf during these tough times, and the partnership between the USFS and NWTf is important for all parties.
- The USFS has recently selected Mo Bookwalter to serve a 120-day detail as the USFS lead to RMRI to temporarily fill the position that Jason Lawhon vacated. Mo Bookwalter is based

out of Missoula, Montana, in Region 1 of the USFS. She works for both the Montana State Forestry Division and the USFS as the cross-boundary coordinator. Her work includes landscape-scale restoration and Shared Stewardship. Before this position, she worked at the Montana State Forestry Division, and before that, she worked for a small non-profit for 15 years. She will be reaching out to RMRI partners over the phone to talk and learn more about RMRI. RMRI partners should reach out to her as well if they would like to talk.

### **RMRI-SOUTHWEST COLORADO (RMRI-SW) UPDATE**

Mike Preston gave an update on RMRI-SW. His comments are summarized below.

- RMRI-SW partners have set up an eight-member Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is composed of representatives from the USFS, NWTF, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), and the four RMRI values (water, communities, forest and wildlife habitat, and recreation).
- RMRI-SW has also launched its Advisory Network. The Advisory Network is composed of representatives from the local collaboratives, timber industry, conservation, tribal governments, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), among others. The Advisory Network met recently and had 30 attendees.
- RMRI-SW partners are undertaking a prioritization process. They are using potential operational delineations (PODs), to help with their prioritization process. PODs are discrete areas with boundaries that are set up around key holding lines to help prepare and inform fire responses
- RMRI-SW partners have worked to expand the PODs framework into the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and added more detailed information to the PODs. They are also evaluating the PODs through the lens of the four RMRI values. The RMRI-SW Advisory Network and the local collaboratives are helping inform the prioritization process by identifying which PODs are most important to them. The RMRI-SW Steering Committee is also ranking the PODs.
- On July 23, the RMRI-SW Steering Committee is going to make the first attempt at ranking the PODs. They will then engage the Advisory Network, which will identify the associated values with the priority PODs. The Advisory Network will also help identify the opportunities for treating each POD (e.g., where are there National Environmental Policy Act- (NEPA) ready acres).
- The result of the prioritization process should be a selection of PODs in the areas where RMRI-SW partners most want to focus. They will develop a heat map to show where the prioritized PODs are located. RMRI-SW partners will layout a ten-year plan to treat areas based on this prioritization process.

### ***Clarifying Questions***

Meeting participants asked several clarifying questions about the RMRI-SW project update. Questions are indicated in italics with corresponding answers in plain text.

*When do the RMRI-SW Colorado partners expect to complete the prioritization process?*

RMRI-SW partners are trying to complete the prioritization process as quickly as possible so that they can report on their progress. They will continue to work on incorporating more detailed information and action-oriented priorities with each of the PODs over the next couple of months. They should have a clear set of priorities in the next couple of months.

*Who is on the RMRI-SW Advisory Network?*

The RMRI-SW partners will send out a list of the RMRI-SW Advisory Network participants.

*Is the prioritization process going to incorporate a cost-effectiveness analysis during or after the process?*

The opportunity analysis of the PODs prioritization process will integrate cost information. The step-by-step process for the prioritization process includes 1) identifying where treatments are most needed, 2) identifying how those areas align with the four RMRI values, and 3) identifying the opportunities for treatment, which includes an evaluation on the cost and availability of resources. The benefits of treating in Southwest Colorado is the presence of the wood utilization industry. Having commercial capacity is a key component of increasing the pace and scale of treatments, especially in the WUI.

*What, if any, challenges are the RMRI-SW partners facing as they work on the PODs prioritization process?*

The biggest challenge is that there are so many people invested in the landscape. As the Steering Committee tries to set priorities and make decisions, it is challenging to capture the richness of knowledge that is among the RMRI-SW partners. They are working to harness that knowledge and commitment to build a structure with an orderly ten-year plan.

*How does this effort differ or align with previous prioritization efforts in Southwest Colorado?*

RMRI-SW partners can draw from past work. Information from previous modeling efforts and identification of valued assets can be incorporated into the prioritization process. The PODs prioritization adds new elements by ordering the treatments based on need and the ability to execute to increase the pace and scale of treatments. The PODs prioritization process is moving the RMRI-SW partners into an action-oriented stage to make decisions on where to begin treatments. Overall, the current prioritization exercise takes a more granular view of prioritizing treatment efforts.

### **Group Discussion**

Meeting participants discussed the RMRI-SW update. Their comments are summarized below.

- When the Upper Arkansas partners completed their prioritization efforts in Chaffee County, they worked with the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) to build a model that included data on slope and access. The Upper Arkansas partners can share those data layers and tools with the RMRI-SW partners to help inform their prioritization process if it would be helpful to the RMRI-SW partners.
- The USPP can share information from their prioritization effort, which involved both CFRI and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), with the RMRI-SW partners if it would be helpful.

### **UPPER SOUTH PLATTE UPDATES**

Christina Burri updated RMRI partners on the Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP). Her comments are summarized below.

- The Elk Creek Fire Protection District and Evergreen Fire Rescue held their first training to teach their staff how to conduct home assessments for wildfire preparedness. The Elk Creek Fire Protection District has also hired a part-time home assessor to prioritize home assessments. These initiatives are all under the fire-adapted community leg of the cohesive strategy.
- Brian Banks, USFS South Platte District Ranger, is working on building a collaborative landscape restoration analysis on the South Platte Ranger District.
- The USPP Management and Science Team (MST) are working on developing projects.
- Aurora Water has provided funding for Peak Facilitation to continue facilitating MST and Goal, Strategy, and Funding Team (GSFT).

- There is a new mill opening in Golden, Colorado. The USPP partners will be meeting with them on July 23.
- The Jefferson County Wildfire Risk Reduction Task Force is developing recommendations on mitigation funding and education for Jefferson County. There is a lot of momentum behind that task force, and there are several USPP partners on that Task Force.
- Samantha Albert has volunteered to get more involved with the USPP and provide representation from the recreation perspective.

### **BIOMASS UTILIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE**

Molly Pitts gave an update on the Biomass Utilization Subcommittee. Her comments are summarized below.

- The Biomass Utilization Subcommittee is growing because people are interested in the important topic of biomass utilization.
- The Biomass Utilization Subcommittee recently organized panelists to discuss their lessons learned related to bioenergy and biothermal energy. Larry Swan from USFS Region 5, Peter Thompson from the Biomass Thermal Energy Council, Kendric Wait, who was involved with the Gypsum biomass plant, and Zach Knight from Blue Forest Conservation were all panelists.
- Some of the key themes from the panelists included:
  - Biomass energy is dependent on the traditional logging industry.
  - Many diverse stakeholders have to be involved in making a biomass energy initiative successful.
  - Utilities are driven by lower rates for their ratepayers. (Holy Cross Energy received pressure from ratepayers to invest in biomass power.)
  - A secure, 20-year feedstock supply is needed to encourage investment. (There may be opportunities now that the USFS can authorize 20-year stewardship contracts.)
- The Biomass Utilization Subcommittee meeting with the panelists was not recorded. Samuel Wallace will be writing a summary and will send out the presentations and contact information for the presenters to the RMRI partners. The summary, presentations, and contact information will be posted on the RMRI website once they are ready.
- The next step for the Biomass Utilization Subcommittee is to discuss what they learned from these panelists and figure out their next steps. Potential next steps include organizing a discussion with utility providers and exploring options for non-power biomass utilization.

### ***Clarifying Questions***

Meeting participants asked several clarifying questions about the Biomass Utilization Subcommittee update. Questions are indicated in italics with corresponding answers in plain text.

*Are there any barriers to the USFS authorizing a 20-year stewardship contract at this time?*

Twenty-year stewardship contracts are based on Congressional appropriations, and Congressional appropriations are decided on a year-to-year basis. There is a disconnect between the cycle for Congressional appropriations and the timeline of a 20-year stewardship contract. The opportunity for issuing 20-year contracts exists, but it needs to become a priority at the regional and national levels.

*A 20-year supply guarantee may not be tenable for many regions and forests. Is the industry willing to adjust that number and take a risk in the investment?*

- It is not that the industry is not willing to take risks. The industry depends on lenders to fund the construction of infrastructure. If the supply from federal land is uncertain, then the

investment becomes questionable. The desire for national agencies to authorize longer stewardship contracts is there, but agencies are sometimes restricted by appropriations, litigation, and NEPA requirements to issue long-term stewardship contracts.

- The funding required to build a facility has a 20-year amortization period to pay off the facility. A financial institution will look at the supply first to determine whether or not they are making a good investment. Long-term agreements are critical for the industry to develop.

### ***Group Discussion***

Meeting participants discussed the RMRI-SW update. Their comments are summarized below.

- Another takeaway from the panelists is that communities have to be willing to share the risk to help fund and subsidize a biomass facility. In the Gypsum power plant example, the community and ratepayers were willing to increase their electricity rates by a small amount to invest in biomass energy. Communities have to be engaged and understand the importance and need for biomass utilization to help launch a biomass power plant.
- The Gypsum biomass power plant was a \$70 million investment. It now produces 12 megawatts of power. There are smaller plants in California that are operational. These biomass power plants operate at a large scale and scope and require significant investment.
- Congressional legislation authorizes federal agencies to enter into 20-year stewardship contracts. Agencies need to have a contracting officer in place to administer a 20-year contract, and they have to conduct large-scale NEPA upfront to be able to commit to a 20-year contract. RMRI should consider reaching out to Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue or other officials to encourage the use of long-term contracts.
- There need to be subsidies to construct a biomass energy power plant. A long-term stewardship contract helped subsidize the Gypsum biomass power plant. Once a biomass energy power plant is established, the commercial harvesting can then help pay for non-commercial treatments in the forests. There need to be multi-use projects that benefit a variety of companies, including sawmills and post and pole businesses.
- RMRI partners supported the idea that subcommittees are open to anyone who wants to participate.

### **SOCIAL LICENSE SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE**

Tim Kylo gave an update on the Social License Subcommittee. His comments are summarized below.

- Two new members joined the Social License Subcommittee. One is Mo Bookwalter, USFS RMRI lead, and the other is Daniel Beveridge from CSFS. Daniel Beveridge is familiar with the Colorado Forest Action Plan, so there is an opportunity to align the Social license Subcommittee's key messages with the Forest Action Plan.
- The Social License Subcommittee has continued to discuss their key messages. The goal of the key messages is to develop a list of consistent talking points for use to reach out to external and internal stakeholders and the general public. The messages will be used to build out a communication and media plan.
- Because there are a variety of landscapes and communities involved in RMRI, the key messages are meant to act as a menu of options for landscape partners to pick and use in their local context.
- The Social License Subcommittee and Communication Subcommittee are working closely to develop the key messages around three themes: prescribed fire, fire-adapted communities, and active forest management.

- The Communications Subcommittee reviewed the Social License Subcommittee’s key messages. Their feedback was positive, but they did have a couple of recommendations. Some of their recommendations included:
  - Developing a shared definition of “forest restoration.”
  - Expanding the messages on the role of managed wildland fires as a restoration tool to build social license for allowing managed natural fires to burn.
  - Developing messaging around “big smoke versus small smoke” (i.e., the concept that smoke from a large wildfire is different and worse than smoke from prescribed fires).
  - Developing messaging that acknowledges the risk of prescribed fire while also acknowledging the benefits of using prescribed fire.
  - Sharing information on the cost-benefit of forest management (i.e., spending one dollar on forest mitigation now saves three dollars in post-fire recovery).
  - Developing messaging on how climate change will change the way that forests are managed.
  - Using the term “active forest management” instead of “logging.”
- The Social License Subcommittee discussed each of these recommendations but focused their discussion on whether to use the term “logging” in the messaging. Industry and professional foresters use logging as a tool to treat forests. Over time, different words have been used as a substitute for logging, such as “thinning” and “active forest management.”
- The Social License Subcommittee discussed that they should be honest with the public that they are logging as a part of these projects. They also discussed how they should focus the messages on the outcomes to make them more palatable to a potentially skeptical audience. Lastly, they discussed how the messages can be tailored to different audiences and landscapes. The Social License Subcommittee ultimately decided to keep the term “logging” in the key messages.

### ***Clarifying Questions***

Meeting participants asked several clarifying questions about the Social License Subcommittee update. Questions are indicated in italics with corresponding answers in plain text.

*The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) spends resources on promoting Colorado’s agricultural industry. Considering that forests are considered agricultural products, is there value in partnering with the CDA to use some of those resources to promote Colorado forest products?*

- The Colorado wood industry is small, given the population and size of the state. It is difficult for Colorado wood companies to internally fund an advertisement program, especially in the COVID-19 economy, but advertising could help promote the industry and Colorado wood products.
- One challenge with advertising Colorado wood products is that much of the wood in Colorado is sold through brokers. The three biggest sawmills in Colorado sell through a broker. The CSFS has a database under its Colorado Forest Products Program that highlights Colorado companies that are producing wood products.
- Bruce Ward from Choose Outdoors may be a good person to have on the Social License Subcommittee because he has lead several social acceptance initiatives, including a television series, related to active management.

### ***Group Discussion***

Meeting participants discussed the Social License Subcommittee update. Their comments are summarized below.

- It is important to be honest in the messaging. Local community members in Southwest Colorado have expressed that they are not opposed to logging, but they are opposed to logging being described as something else. Creating a full and honest picture of what activities are involved in forest management helps build trust for future projects.
- On the topic of defining “forest restoration,” the goal of forest restoration should not be to restore the forest to pre-colonial conditions. The goal of forest restoration should be to move forests to a more suitable baseline condition and use the land for multiple purposes. The definition of “forest restoration” may also change in different vegetation types. For example, promoting aspen requires management.
- It is important to emphasize how forest management activities (logging, prescribed burning, etc.) are tools to achieve a desired condition, such as ecosystem resilience — the messaging should address the “why” of forest management. For example, healthy forests create a sense of place and promote a high-quality lifestyle. That type of overarching message would help people understand why the forests need to be managed. The RMRI four values can help inform the “why” of the key messages.
- The Upper Arkansas partners conducted a survey and asked people whether they supported prescribed fire. Most people (87%) were supportive of thinning treatments, and most people (80-85%) were supportive of prescribed fires. Among those who were not supportive, their primary concerns were related to communications (they wanted more information on how prescribed fires are planned and implemented). More communications about the prescribed fire planning process may help generate community support. Overall, people see that the forests are not healthy and that the risk of wildfire is increasing. The Upper Arkansas partners can share their survey tool with other RMRI priority landscapes and the Social License Subcommittee.
- The Upper Arkansas partners already have strong social support for their initiative, and they do not need additional messaging at this time. Their messaging has focused on how healthy forests help support and protect the economy, quality of life, and homes in the Upper Arkansas Basin.
- On a statewide basis, consistent messaging would be helpful, considering how often people move around and into Colorado. Messaging, like forests, will need continuous maintenance.
- Southwest Colorado will have similar messaging to that of the Upper Arkansas’ messaging around how healthy forests promote community health, resilience, wildlife, and recreation opportunities. The messaging will emphasize how Southwest Colorado needs different management tools to achieve the desired results and promote shared values.
- The messaging should be adapted and adjusted to fit different communities, cover types, and values. The public also needs to be educated on the limitations of management tools to understand that not every management tool can be used in every situation.
- The messaging is helpful to the Upper South Platte partners, especially the messages around climate change. Denver Water has a climate change adaptation program where they are analyzing different topics under different future climate scenarios.
- The climate change message should be elevated. There is an argument to be made that healthy young forests sequester more carbon than older forests. Wood sequesters carbon for decades, if not more than a hundred years. There could be a messaging frame that a healthy forest promotes a healthy climate.
- There is a carbon message related to the “big smoke versus small smoke” message as larger fires produce larger carbon and air pollutant outputs. There needs to be more information on the different air quality concerns between wildland fires versus prescribed fires.
- The CSFS is in the process of finalizing the Colorado Forest Action Plan. The Forest Action Plan has a section about carbon management and how healthy forests can sequester carbon.

Right now, forests are acting more as carbon sources, but there are opportunities to manage forests to have them act as carbon sinks. The messages in the Forest Action Plan, which the CSFS will release soon, can help inform the messaging around carbon and forest health.

- As the potential for forests to act as carbon sinks is more broadly recognized, there will be opportunities to leverage that momentum to promote new projects. Having consistent and unified statewide messaging around this topic can help provide clarity to partners on complicated themes.
- The Colorado Greenhouse Gas Reduction Roadmap Plan, which will be finished in late September, is going to frame potential strategies to reverse the trend that Colorado forests are acting as carbon sources. The Plan will provide an initial state-level platform for the issue.
- Climate change is shifting the relationship between forests and wildlife. The climate change messaging should convey that the goal is not to get away from fire; the goal is to learn to live with fire. Forest and fire management in a changing climate means trying to manage forests based on the anticipated impacts of climate change.
- Timber availability in Colorado is low due to wilderness and roadless areas. The wilderness areas have an important value, but of the areas that are available for management, there should be a variety of treatments to promote forest health.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE**

Nathan Van Schaik gave an update on the Communications Subcommittee. His comments are summarized below.

- The RMRI website can be found at [www.restoringtherockies.org](http://www.restoringtherockies.org). Under the Resources section on this website, RMRI partners can find the subcommittee summaries and copies of the RMRI newsletter, known as The Source. They also have other documents on the website, such as the Frequently Asked Questions document and an information sheet on the Southwest Colorado project.
- Matt Lindler and Nathan Van Schaik try to update the website with new summaries every couple of weeks. If any RMRI partners have stories to publish, they can send their ideas to [restoringtherockies@gmail.com](mailto:restoringtherockies@gmail.com).
- The Communications Subcommittee would like to build the website out more with information on the local landscapes, maps of the project areas, and gallery where partners can download resources, such as the Social License Subcommittee key messages. The updated website is forthcoming and will be built as they develop the RMRI brand.
- The marketing and branding firm The Truth continues to work on the branding process. Building a brand is a complex process, especially considering the unprecedented nature of RMRI's efforts.
- The Communications Subcommittee continues to look for photographs and videos to add to a depository of usable communication materials. It would be helpful to have pictures of people using Colorado forests, including recreation and timber. Anyone who has photos or videos should send them to Matt Lindler.

#### **RMRI LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE**

Heather Bergman gave an update on the RMRI Leadership Team. Her comments are summarized below.

- Under the RMRI governance charter, the broad task of the RMRI Leadership Team is to set a general direction for RMRI. The Leadership Team is trying to build forward momentum. They do not direct landscape partners.

- The first Leadership Team meeting is being organized in September. The Leadership Team membership is based on the RMRI Evaluation Committee, which evaluated the landscape proposals in November 2019.
- The RMRI Leadership Team participants and their corresponding representation are as follows:
  - Tammy Whittington – USFS (co-chair)
  - Patt Dorsey – NWTF (co-chair)
  - Clint Evans – NRCS
  - Mike Lester – CSFS
  - Tim Mauck – Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
  - Greg Shoop – BLM
  - Vaughn Jones – Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC)
  - Lauren Ris – Water
  - Cindy Dozier – Communities
  - Samantha Albert – Recreation
  - Paige Lewis – Forests
  - Chris West – Wildlife
  - Frank McCormick – Science
  - Molly Pitts - Timber
  - Jason Lawhon – Southwest Colorado
  - Cindy Williams – Upper Arkansas
  - Christina Burri – Upper South Platte
- If this list does not meet anyone’s understanding of who would be on the Leadership Team, they should reach out to Heather Bergman.
- The meeting topics of the RMRI Leadership Team include discussing the RMRI accomplishment of the past year, reaffirming the vision and goals of RMRI, discussing the relationship between Shared Stewardship and RMRI. The Leadership Team will also discuss RMRI commitments to the local landscapes after the Governance Subcommittee discusses this topic at their next meeting.
- The last topic for the RMRI Leadership Team includes the partner survey results. The purpose of the partner survey is for RMRI partners to identify the ways that they can best contribute to RMRI. Some people who have already taken that survey have indicated that they want to talk to someone on the RMRI Support Team, which is composed of USFS and NWTF staff. For anyone who has not filled out the survey yet, they should expect a call from a Support Team member to discuss their potential role in RMRI.

## **UPPER ARKANSAS ORIENTATION**

Upper Arkansas partners gave an orientation on the projects and efforts currently occurring in the Upper Arkansas priority landscape. Their presentation is summarized below.

### *Overview*

- The Upper Arkansas orientation will include information on their projects related to forest health and fire mitigation and their projects related to recreation management.
- The Upper Arkansas partnership is a community story. There are 38 organizations involved with the Upper Arkansas partners. Those organizations are more than their logos; they are dedicated leaders and community members.
- Although they have many partners, their organizational structure is simple. The Envision Forest Health Council formed to develop the Next Generation Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Next Gen CWPP) over a year and a half in Chaffee County. After completing

the Next Gen CWPP, the Envision Forest Health Council decided to organize the group into a long-term organization. The result of the Next Gen CWPP was the determination that they could treat 5% of the landscape to reduce risks to lives, water resources, wildlife, homes, recreational assets, and infrastructure by half. The Envision Forest Health Council has had several early wins before they began engaging with RMRI.

- A similar team to the Envision Forest Health Council in Chaffee County is forming in Lake County. The team is known as the Lake Forest Health Council.
- A Recreation Council has also formed to develop and implement a cross-jurisdictional Community Recreation Protection Plan (CRPP) that parallels the Next Gen CWPP.
- There are over 1,600 highly engaged citizens involved with these projects.
- An estimated 4.6 million visitors visit the Upper Arkansas each year, generating \$128 million in recreation-related revenues per year. The number of visitors and the recreation-related revenue represent about 5% of the state's total visitors and recreation-related revenue.
- The Upper Arkansas represents about 1,400 square miles of critical wildlife habitat and contains 102 miles of Gold Medal Water fishery. The Upper Arkansas is the most popular whitewater river in the world. Both Monarch and Ski Cooper ski areas are located in the area.
- The Upper Arkansas is the source water for over 1 million basin residents and provides water to one-third of Aurora. It also contains delivery points for transmountain diversions that provide water to 400,000 residents in the South Platte.
- There is critical transportation and energy infrastructure in the Upper Arkansas as well. US Highway 50 and 285 run the Upper Arkansas. Transcontinental power lines and some of Xcel's and Tri-State's energy lines run through Chaffee County. Xcel has a gas pipeline that transports gas from the Four Corners region to the I-70 corridor.
- The goals and values between the Envision Chaffee County initiative and RMRI align. RMRI's four values are communities, water, forest and wildlife habitat, and recreation. The goals of Envision Chaffee County are healthy forests, waters, wildlife, and working lands, balanced outdoor recreation, a resilient economy, and engaged and empowered communities. Over 1,500 community members helped create the Envision Chaffee County community goals.
- All the values and community goals in the Upper Arkansas, including forest health and quality of life for residents, are at risk from two threats: severe wildfire and impacts from increasing outdoor recreation use. The spruce beetle epidemic, in combination with drought and warm winters, has increased the severity and frequency of fires.
- In Lake County, many highly used dispersed campgrounds surround the tributaries to the Arkansas River. With the impacts of COVID-19, more people are coming to the Upper Arkansas to recreate, and not all of them are experienced recreators. On the recreation side, the number of visitors is expected to double every six years. The CRPP is meant to balance healthy forests, water, and wildlife with resilient economies with exceptional multi-use experiences. Recreation represents a third of the Upper Arkansas economy.
- Lake County is partnering with Chaffee County to take the tools that Chaffee County has used and apply them to Lake County.
- The Upper Arkansas approach represents a new approach to land management. Their new approach is characterized by collaborative leadership as leaders from 38 organizations have come together to implement solutions. They also have the collaboratively developed Next Gen CWPP, which uses CFRI's modeling tools to identify the areas where treatments will produce the maximum benefit. They have community support, so much so that the community passed a local ballot measure to tax themselves to fund projects that improve forest health and mitigate recreation impacts. The ballot measure established Chaffee

Common Ground, Chaffee County's sales tax-funded conservation program that makes grants to programs addressing forest health, sustaining working lands and agriculture, and addressing the impacts of outdoor recreation. Chaffee Common Ground creates revenue to match federal and state funding. Cindy Williams and Envision Chaffee County are also acting as catalysis for implementation.

#### *Envision Forest Health Council – Early Win Treatment Projects*

- The proposal to treat 5% of the land to reduce risk by 50% includes 30,000 acres of treatment.
- The Envision Forest Health Council continued to meet after the Next Gen CWPP was signed. When the Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and the Environment (RESTORE) grant became available, partners met to identify critical areas for treatment. They identified the Methodist Front Project as an early win project.
- The Methodist Front Project includes a 5-mile break on private land that connects to treatments on BLM and USFS land, creating a ten-mile long fuel break. The treatments will protect water and communication infrastructure as well as 7,000 community members.
- The Envision Forest Health Council applied and received \$366,000 from the RESTORE grant. They are going to match that \$366,000 RESTORE funding with over \$540,000 from community partners, including \$50,000 from Salida and \$25,000 from Poncha Springs. The funding will be used for staff time and administration and on-the-ground work.
- There are two long term wildlife research projects going on in the Upper Arkansas. One is a deer survivability study, and the other is a mountain lion study. In the deer survivability study, GPS collars were placed on mule deer to determine where deer were moving in the Upper Arkansas Valley. The results of the study indicate that mule deer winter in the area of the Methodist Front Project before they disperse to the San Luis Valley and as far as the I-70 corridor in the spring. This data supports the idea that a healthy forest in the Upper Arkansas basin benefits deer populations in the Upper Arkansas Basin and the adjoining areas.
- There are three projects in the vicinity of the Methodist Front Project: the Cleveland Mountain project, Over the Rainbow Habitat project, and the Poncha Loop project.
- The Over the Rainbow project is designed to improve big game winter range by increasing the amount of browse for foraging. The project has been in development for three years, but they had to change the project boundary due to the Decker Fire. They are working through a categorical exclusion to change the boundary.
- Between the Cleveland Mountain project and the Poncha Loop project, the treatments will protect critical utility lines, protect winter range, enhance aspen stands, and remove Douglas fir impacted by insect and disease. The Cleveland Mountain project and the Poncha Loop project treatments are of high concern from the utility infrastructure perspective in particular. The Poncha Pass utility line is the only power source for the San Luis Valley, so any fires in the area would greatly impact the residents of the San Luis Valley.
- The funding from RMRI and USFS has helped fund work on the Cleveland Mountain project. On the Poncha Loop project, the USFS has a stewardship contract in place. With RMRI funding, they are also going to complete the heritage surveys on the Over the Rainbow Project, which will help them move forward to implementing treatments.
- There is another project being planned, known as the Antero project. The goals of this project include the safety of the nearby communities and firefighters and creating habitat for wildlife. The Antero project includes a fuel break along Coyote Valley Road, the main ingress and egress for Mesa Antero community members and firefighters. The fuel break will help protect 250 homes. The project will treat 80 acres on 18 private properties, which

includes all the landowners in the area except one. Collaboration between the USFS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and the Envision Forest Health Council was critical for this project. The project has received \$163,000 from Chaffee Common Ground to begin implementation in 2021.

- Adjacent to the Antero project is 6,000 acres of USFS land that was treated over a decade ago. The USFS treatment went right up to the adjacent private properties. Now that they have more partners involved, they want to re-treat the USFS land with broadcast burns to make the Antero project treatment cross-jurisdictional.
- Upper Arkansas partners are developing a project, known as the Chalk Creek project, to treat a 12.5-mile utility corridor from Mt. Princeton to St. Elmo. Central Colorado Telecom, Xcel Energy, and Sangre de Cristo Energy are partners in this project. The Chalk Creek project includes clearing brush, rock, and debris in a 40-foot buffer area around utility lines as well as treating adjacent public and private lands. The treatment will also treat around a one-way ingress and egress to protect communities.

#### *Lake Forest Health Council – Early Win Projects*

- Lake County is in the process of applying Chaffee County's prioritization process in Lake County.
- There are several projects currently being planned in Lake County. These projects are around the city limits of Leadville and along the corridors to community subdivisions. Local water districts are also eager to join the planning process in Lake County and protect Leadville's water supply. The Lake County partners have applied for an Action, Implementation, and Mitigation (AIM) grant through Coalitions and Collaboratives.
- A focal project in Lake County is the Twin Lakes project. The Twin Lakes project is leveraging interagency relationships between the USFS and BLM and crossing county lines between Chaffee County and Lake County to expand the impact of treatment. The project is located just south of the community of Twin Lakes Reservoir and extends to Clear Creek Reservoir. The treatments will provide habitat for bighorn sheep and mule deer as well as protect water, power, and homes. They are also looking to treat on private lands by partnering with water-related stakeholders.

#### *Envision Forest Health Council – Chaffee Chips Program*

- The Chaffee Chips program is a county-wide program that creates the opportunity for landowners to treat their properties. The Chaffee Chips program provides a free slash removal program. Many landowners are willing to put in the work to treat their properties, but removing slash is a large constraint on them. The goals of the Chaffee Chips program are to help decrease fire danger, educate landowners on the need to treat around their properties, and educate landowners on the need for landscape-scale treatment. The funding for the program (\$48,000 in total) comes from the CSFS Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program and Chaffee Common Ground.
- The Chaffee Chips program is simple. Landowners can request CSFS and Chaffee County employees to come to and assess their homes for treatment. The assessors will identify where they should be treating and where they should pile their materials. When the Chaffee County firefighting crews and Colorado Firecamp students come to load the slash piles that landowners have constructed, the landowners are expected to help them load the slash. The slash is then transported back to a landfill to be put into a tub grinder; the produced chips will then go back to the community. The plan for 2020 is to implement the program in four communities between August and November. The Upper Arkansas partners have begun to advertise the program.

### *Envision Forest Health Council – Outreach and Communications*

- Passing the ballot measure to establish Chaffee Common Ground began by reaching out to the community and asking them about their visions and challenges under the Envision Chaffee County initiative. Envision Chaffee County partners listened to the community, responded to them, and came up with plans in an iterative process. The process resulted in the Envision Community Action Plan, which had four community visions, including a vision for forest health. Once they had the plan in place, community members were willing to pass the ballot measure to establish Chaffee Common Ground because they saw how the funding outcomes would benefit them.
- The success of Chaffee Common Ground and the Envision Chaffee County initiative is because there was a deliberate effort to figure out the collective community perceptions and concerns, respond and make sense of them, and use them to develop solutions. There was also an excellent leadership group that cared about the public and did not have agendas going into the process. The Envision Chaffee County partners also reached out to the community members via social media, newsletters, and newspaper articles.
- The CWPP is 200 pages long, so the Envisions Chaffee County partners distilled the plan down into a more digestible form. The final outreach document included the map with priority treatment areas, the goals of the project (treat 30,000 acres to reduce risk by 50%), and the timeline for the project. This strategy helped people understand how their treatments on their private properties fit into the larger community-wide goals.

### *Envision Forest Health Council – Big Picture*

- In their six-month project report, the Envision Forest Health Council determined they are on track with their treatment goals on BLM, private, and USFS lands.
- Examples of barriers that the Envision Forest Health Council needs to overcome include collaboration, willingness from private landowners to treat their properties, funding to permit, plan, and treat, and the ability to collate and administer funding.
- The Envision Forest Health Council is making significant headway to address the barriers related to collaboration and willingness from private landowners to treat their properties as more landowners are becoming amenable to treatment. The Envision Forest Health Council would like to apply for grants and NRCS funding so that landowners can treat their properties at little to no cost.
- The Envision Forest Health Council is interested in pursuing an NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant. They are also interested in working with RMRI partners to determine how to fund the treatment work.
- The Envision Forest Health Council is working with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) to develop the Upper Ark Forest Fund. To achieve the goal of treating 30,000 acres over ten years, they need a collaborative strategy that aggregates funding for cross-boundary implementation. The Upper Ark Forest Fund will help create this strategy.
- The Upper Ark Forest Fund will function similarly to a watershed investment partnership (WIP). Through this program, the NFF will work with private landowners and the CSFS to implement across boundaries. The Upper Ark Forest Fund will create a single source of funding that partners can collaboratively manage. The goal is to anchor the fund through NRCS RCPP funding, which will provide funding for treating private lands, but also for treating some federal lands. The funding can be used to leverage funding from other entities, like local governments and utility providers.

### *Envision Forest Health Council – Partnership Opportunities*

- There are several opportunities for partners to help support the Envision Forest Health Council. Potential ways to support the efforts of the Council include:
  - Funding support
    - Support the Upper Arkansas Forest Fund through funding contributions.
    - Provide support as the Upper Arkansas partners develop their RCPP proposal.
    - Build additional funding opportunities, similar to opportunities presented from the RESTORE grant.
    - Connect Upper Arkansas partners to agency grants and funding opportunities ((e.g., USFS, BLM, CPW).
    - Provide resources, such as staff time, to help the Upper Arkansas partners develop collaborative grant applications.
  - Wood products support
    - Provide ideas on how to increase the capacity of the wood products industry and regional contractor.
  - Provide support to complete a landscape-scale treatment
    - Prioritize funding for multi-purpose RMRI projects.
    - Provide staff time to help plan projects.
  - Culture Support
    - Incentivize collaborative engagement.
- Related to the regional contractor capacity, Upper Arkansas partners need to increase the capacity and availability of labor and specialized equipment. A contractor from Oregon with machinery that can operate on steep slopes is coming to the Upper Arkansas to conduct treatments. The Envision Forest Health Council is looking to showcase this steep-slope equipment and share expertise to encourage regional contractors to increase their capacity and access to specialized equipment.
- Working with the Upper Arkansas partners is an opportunity to join and contribute to their story.

*RMRI partners were directed to a Google Document, where they were encouraged to answer two questions: 1) What can you do in the next six months to support Upper Arkansas Thrives and help the program be an extraordinary model, and 2) What can the Upper Arkansas team do to help RMRI be successful? The Google Document will remain open for partners to contribute ideas until Friday, July 24, at 5pm.*

### *Recreation Council – Big Picture*

- The Recreation Council is the parallel Council to the Envision Forest Health Council, except with a focus on recreation. The Recreation Council is working on building a cohesive strategy to address recreation impacts, known as the CRPP. The Recreation Council is an inclusive effort composed of local and statewide groups.
- The Recreation Council is working with CFRI to conduct spatial modeling that will identify areas where projects will be the most effective at mitigating recreation impacts. CPW and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) are currently funding the work of the Council.
- Recreation supports 33% of the local economy. As recreation continues to grow, it is impacting water, forest, wildlife, and working lands, decreasing the quality of the exceptional recreation experiences, and impacting the way communities perceive visitors and sustainability.

- The goals of the Recreation Council, based on input from over 1,500 community members, is to develop healthy forests, waters, wildlife, and working lands, maintain a resilient economy, and create exceptional multi-use user experiences. A rapidly growing recreation user population challenges all these goals.
- Recreation is growing by 15% every year and is expected to double every six years. The number of visitors to the Upper Arkansas every represents 5% of the visitors to Colorado. Due to COVID-19, there has been an increase in recreation users, including an uptick in all-terrain vehicle use and an influx of new, inexperienced recreators. This surge in recreation serves as an example of what recreation demand will continue to look like as it grows. The funding to help manage recreation is not increasing at the same rate as demand for recreation.
- There is visual evidence of the recreation use on the landscape, with people leaving their waste and trash at dispersed campsites.
- When community members were asked for their input through community surveys, they identified tourists/visitors/recreators as the second biggest threat to forest health, only behind catastrophic wildfires. Over 220 people wrote specific answers on how recreation threatens forest health.
- From an independent poll that was conducted before the Chaffee Common Ground ballot measure was passed, they asked community members what the most important uses for potential tax funds were. The results indicated people were highly supportive of using tax funds for the conservation, preservation, and protection of natural resources. Only one-third of people wanted to use the funding to increase recreation access.
- Recreation use is impacting user experiences. Community members are afraid of errant campfires, but they are also concerned when they see human impacts in their favorite recreation areas. These impacts are emotional for people.
- Data indicates that recreation use and impact is increasing. In the Fourmile area, the number of dispersed campsites has increased by 230% over ten years. In 2019, the Recreation Council collected data that revealed there are 1,003 campsites, 100 acres of denuded ground, 12 miles of social trails, 37% of campsites with trash or human waste, 40% of campsites located less than 100 feet from water, and 2,300 trees damaged in the Fourmile area.
- Recreation impacts water quality through human waste, erosion, and sedimentation. These impacts affect water quality, storage vessels, and aquatic habitats. The Recreation Council is working with CFRI to model sediment from roads and trails, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) is providing funding to address erosion issues.
- The community input indicated there is a high value for healthy wildlife habitat. Recreators from the Denver and Colorado Springs metro areas come up to the Upper Arkansas to engage in recreational activities. Through cooperative efforts, Upper Arkansas partners are trying to balance recreation use with maintaining and improving wildlife habitat.
- In the community survey, 97% of people said that working lands matter to their quality of life. Working lands improve viewsheds and the ecological value of the land. When the Upper Arkansas partners realized they were not getting input from the agricultural community, they hosted a dinner with ranchers whose families had ranched for generations. The ranchers expressed that they wanted to keep their land in production and within their families.
- Working lands are experiencing pressures from cut fences, dogs chasing cattle, and loss of forage. There are also meta-economic forces that are working against agricultural lands. Drought is another threat to working lands. Addressing impacts from recreation on

agricultural and working lands is important to the Upper Arkansas partners in terms of measuring the success of their recreation initiative.

- The Recreation Council asked community members what they perceive to be barriers to addressing recreation impacts. One of the barriers they identified was the need for coordination between agencies and statewide partners to develop and implement a collaborative cross-jurisdictional strategy.
- The community identified “state marketing without effective user education” as a barrier. This barrier captures the idea that the State of Colorado has conducted a successful marketing campaign to attract visitors to Colorado without educating users on how to be respectful recreators.
- The idea to address all these recreation impacts is to develop the Chaffee County CRPP. The CRPP team includes 21 of the top leaders in the community. A geospatial analysis of the impact of recreation on forests, waters, and wildlife, as well as a cost-benefit model, will inform the CRPP. The development of the CRPP will also engage the community. The CRPP will identify the places to implement projects (e.g., asset hardening, relocation, or recreation closures) that are the most cost-effective.

#### *Recreation Council – Early Wins*

- Chaffee Common Ground has allocated over \$150,000 to fund recreation improvement projects.
- One of the projects that has been implemented is Campsite Collector App. The Campsite Collector App enlists citizen scientist volunteers to provide data on existing and dispersed campsites. The partners who developed the app are currently working on making it more user friendly, increasing transparency and access to the collected data, and creating more tools for data analytics.
- Another project underway in the Upper Arkansas is the Adopt-a-Campsite program. This program encourages individuals and groups to maintain campsites. The Recreation Council partners recently hosted their first training program for cleaning up campsites.
- Chaffe Common Ground provided funding for a youth corps to help contain dispersed campsites in the Antero project treatment area. The youth corps was formed under a partnership between the Salida Ranger District and the Southwest Conservation Corps. The youth corps members constructed buck and rail fencing. One of the youth crews included an all-women chainsaw crew whose members cut lodgepole pines for the buck and rail fencing.
- There have been early wins in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness area. In the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness area, there is an area known as the Horn Fork Basin, which is a popular area as it provides access to three fourteeners and three alpine lakes. The Horn Fork Basin is also a sensitive area because it contains century-old trees and breeding sites for the Endangered Species Act-protected boreal toads. The data collected on the recreation impacts in the Horn Fork Basin indicated that 33 of the 34 campsites had damaged trees in them. There were also numerous campsites in boreal toad breeding sites with trash and human waste present. A partnership among outfitter businesses, community volunteers, agency staff, Chaffee Common Ground, and the Envision Chaffee County communications team formed the Healthy Horn Fork Initiative to develop a long-term plan to maintain recreational opportunities in the area while also protecting the natural resources.

#### *Recreation Council*

- There are several opportunities for partners to help support the Recreation Council. Potential ways to support the Council include:
  - Funding support

- Create a recreation impact management grant database.
  - Provide RESTORE-like opportunities for addressing recreation impacts.
  - Create funding opportunities for sustaining place-based initiatives.
  - Creating funding opportunities for citizen data collection and action planning.
  - Connect Upper Arkansas partners to relevant grant opportunities.
  - Support agency resources for partner coordination and enforcement.
- Build on the Success of the Upper Arkansas
  - Have the USFS/BLM/CPW participate in action planning calls to find ways to use the CRPP as a model for the state.
- Partnership Support
  - Help the Upper Arkansas partners engage the recreation industry and bring them into the process.
- Large Tasks
  - Create a CRPP tool with statutory/funding support.
  - Connect the CRPP to agency management plans with an increased recreation impact management focus.
- There may be opportunities with the passing of the Great America Outdoors Act in Congress. The Act provides funding for deferred maintenance projects. That bill comes at the appropriate time as the Upper Arkansas partners continue to talk about how to leverage funds through other sources.

*RMRI partners were directed to a Google Document, where they were encouraged to answer two questions: 1) What can you do to support the innovative Upper Ark Thrives Recreation Management programs, and 2) What can the Upper Ark Recreation Council do to help RMRI? The Google Document will remain open for partners to contribute ideas until Friday, July 24, at 5pm.*

#### *Closing Remarks*

- In tough times, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by stress. Negative energy can feed into negative energy. However, the opposite is true, and positive energy can feed positive energy. In the Upper Arkansas, they are building positive energy around Chaffee Common Ground, Envision Chaffee County, and all the collaborative initiatives occurring.
- People love the Upper Arkansas area, and for that reason alone, people are coming to provide support to address the current challenges.
- The Upper Arkansas partners thanked the RMRI partners for the opportunity to present and request support in whatever ways RMRI partners can contribute.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

RMRI partners will not be meeting in the month of August. The next RMRI meeting will be the RMRI Leadership Team meeting in September.