

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
May 11, 2021, 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM
Virtual Meeting
Meeting Summary - FINAL

ATTENDANCE:

Participants: Rob Addington, Samantha Albert, Brian Banks, Frank Beum, Alan Bittner, Angela Boag, Jacque Buchanan, Jamie Connell, Patt Dorsey, Cindy Dozier, James Eklund, Clint Evans, Allen Gallamore, Dan Gibbs, Aaron Green, Vaughn Jones, Aaron Kimple, Tim Kylo, Damon Lange, Jason Lawhon, Paige Lewis, Matt Lindler, Bunni Maceo, Susan Matthews, Tim Mauck, Frank McCormick, Patt Mercer, Jim Neiman, Emily Olsen, Paul Orbuch, Teddy Parker-Renga, Molly Pitts, Mike Preston, Kelle Reynolds, Lauren Ris, Ellen Roberts, Jared Romero, Rebecca Samulski, Catherine Schloedgel, Scott Segerstrom, Mark Shea, Donna Shorrock, Travis Smith, Tom Spezze, John Swartout, Jake Todd, Diana Trujillo, Tara Umphries, Nathan Van Schaik, Chris West, Amanda West-Fordham, Cindy Williams, and Scott Woods

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

ACTION ITEMS

Heather Bergman	Share the Ideaflip notes and well wishes with Mike Lester.
RMRI Support Team	Take the notes from the breakout room session and put them into a usable format.

LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATES

Members of the RMRI Leadership Team provided updates. Their comments are summarized below.

US Forest Service (USFS)

- Jacque Buchanan, Region 2 Deputy Regional Forester, introduced Frank Beum, the new Region 2 Regional Forester.
- Frank Beum is coming from the USFS Region 8 Office, where he served as the Deputy Regional Forester. Frank has previous experience in Region 2, starting his career on the Rio Grande National Forest and working on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest.
- Frank Beum was with NWTF Chief Executive Officer Becky Humphries and USFS Chief Vicki Christiansen when they kicked off RMRI as a pilot project for Shared Stewardship. The USFS remains committed to Shared Stewardship and RMRI, and he is looking forward to working with all RMRI partners.
- Frank Beum and other RMRI partners spent time with Secretary Vilsack, Senator Bennet, Governor Polis, and Representative Neguse. They took a tour of the burn scars from the 2020 fires on the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests.
- The USFS has selected who will fill the USFS RMRI coordinator position, and they will be making an announcement soon.

National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF)

The NWTF remains heavily invested in RMRI. The NWTF will be hiring someone to fill a full-time coordinator position for RMRI. They are currently developing a position description, and they will be announcing the open position soon.

Southwest Colorado

- The Southwest Colorado Steering Committee has been working with local stakeholders and collaboratives to prioritize treatment areas in the RMRI landscape.
- The prioritization effort began by creating a system to weigh the different RMRI values and opportunity criteria (e.g., available funding, shovel-ready status, etc.). This system allowed Southwest Colorado partners to evaluate a set of 22 potential operational delineations (PODs) on their ability to achieve RMRI values and readiness for treatments.
- The Southwest Colorado partners sent out a survey to over 300 different stakeholders, and 135 individuals responded, representing 46 organizations. The stakeholders provided over 1,700 comments. The Southwest Colorado partners also received feedback from Steering Committee members, local collaboratives, and subject matter experts. The comments have served as a valuable database with information on priorities and values on the landscape.
- Through the prioritization effort, they categorized three sets of PODs. The first set focuses on projects that are a high priority for achieving RMRI values and have a high opportunity score; these projects are the ones the Southwest Colorado Steering Committee will focus on first. The next set of PODs includes projects that are a high priority for achieving RMRI values but have a lower opportunity score. With this set of PODs, Southwest Colorado partners will evaluate the opportunity barriers and work to increase the opportunity for treatment. The last set includes PODs with a high opportunity score but are a lower priority for achieving RMRI values.
- The Southwest Colorado partners can evaluate each POD based on the different RMRI values and opportunity criteria.
- The results of the prioritization effort have allowed the Southwest Colorado Steering Committee to track and plan treatments in PODs. The prioritization effort is already informing current project identification for 2022, 2023, and out-years.
- The next step for the Southwest Colorado partners is to cross-reference the prioritization analysis with the Watershed Condition Framework to identify metrics to measure treatment effectiveness.
- Over the past month, Southwest Colorado partners have conducted over 2,600 acres of prescribed fire.
- The San Juan Mountain Association launched a Forest Ambassadors program. Forest Ambassadors will meet with people to talk about fuel treatments and values in the places where Southwest Colorado partners are planning treatments.

Upper Arkansas

- The Envision Forest Health Council is on target to reach the goals in their Community Wildfire Protection Plan. They have treated 1,600 acres so far, identified 14,000 acres for treatment planning, raised over \$3 million in funding, engaged 346 landowners, and created four Firewise communities. They are also working to establish the Lake Forest Health Council in Lake County.
- The Upper Arkansas Partners launched the Chaffee Chips program to empower individual landowners to treat their properties. The program has led to 185 homes treated, 485 piles collected, and the creation of two Firewise communities.
- Through the Chaffee Treats program, partners are looking to treat 10,000 acres of private lands. They have identified nine priority zones for private land treatment. Around 160 landowners have signed up, representing 3,000 treatable acres. They are looking at funding for the program, including applying for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program Alternative Funding Arrangement (RCPA-AFA).

- On the north side of Chaffee County, the Envision Forest Health Council have several projects planned: Twin Lakes, Riverside, Railroad Bridge, and North Cottonwood. These treatments are around Buena Vista and are being implemented by various partners and funded through various sources, including Chaffee Chips and Chaffee Treats.
- On the recreation side, the Chaffee Recreation Council has been developing the Chaffee County Recreation Plan. They will release the draft Recreation Plan on May 24. The Chaffee Recreation Plan will deliver a five-year plan to maintain the health of public lands, sustain the economic benefits of recreation and tourism, and maintain the quality of user experiences in Chaffee County. The Chaffee Recreation Council and Chaffee Recreation Task Force, which together include over 30 community groups and government agencies, provided input on the plan.

Upper South Platte

- The Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are working on a Joint Chiefs' proposal.
- The South Platte Ranger District is starting a collaborative pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for a landscape-scale NEPA assessment. They have partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), and other partners to analyze the effectiveness of treatments and identify places to treat in the future using a PODs framework. The collaborative group will be working through this year with the expectation that the NEPA process will formally begin in 2022.
- The USFS is working with the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) to transition fireshed funds to the Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP), which would allow the USPP to hire a watershed coordinator position. A watershed coordinator would help establish direction for the USPP and connect the USPP with other ongoing efforts, such as the Jefferson County Wildfire Risk Reduction Task Force.
- The USPP is currently evaluating the best way to move forward, given the National Cohesive Strategy funding is about to run out. The USPP sent out a survey to partners to reorganize meetings to be more effective. One result of the survey was an emphasis on the need for a coordinator. A coordinator will enhance the ability of the USPP to report on activities in the partner area and feed into RMRI efforts.
- The prescribed fire program in the Upper South Platte has been reenergized. The Division of Fire Prevention and Control is actively working with partners to identify areas for treatments and increase the scope and scale of prescribed fire use.
- The Mile High Youth Corps treated several areas to prepare them for future prescribed fires. The USFS is looking to initiate 160 acres of prescribed burns soon, depending on weather conditions.
- The Upper South Platte fire protection districts are engaging with landowners and communities for private land treatments. They are developing and seeking funding for fuel treatment modules.
- USPP partners are applying for Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM), Steven Hazardous Fuels Grant (CAFA), and State Fire Assistance (SFA) grants for on-the-ground projects.
- CFRI recently gave an update on the effectiveness of treatments in the Upper South Platte and is continuing to monitor and analyze treatments for effectiveness.
- The USFS and CSFS are preparing to launch the first Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) project on the Upper South Platte.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

- DNR is working with Colorado legislators to request support from a Type 1 National Incident Management Team to increase capacity for high-priority issues following the 2020 fire season. The request has gained traction and will complement RMRI and Shared Stewardship efforts.
- The state legislature approved a \$6 million allocation to the FRWRM grant program. The program is currently accepting applications but will close soon. The state legislature is also looking to include an \$8 million allocation to FRWRM in the long state budget bill. Under this bill, the legislature would allocate \$8 million annually to FRWRM until they decide otherwise.
- The Colorado legislature is also looking to pass a stimulus bill. The stimulus bill contains a \$25 million allocation for wildfire recovery and risk mitigation grants.

Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB)

- A bill is moving through the Colorado general assembly that would provide \$15 million for the watershed restoration grant program. The \$15 million allocation is meant to target post-fire recovery needs. In that \$15 million, the legislature plans to allocate \$500,000 to conduct a statewide watershed analysis to investigate the susceptibility of life, safety, infrastructure, and water supplies to wildfire impacts.
- The Colorado stimulus bill will allocate \$20 million to fund Colorado Water Plan projects. Of the \$20 million, \$15 million will go to the Colorado Water Plan grant program, and \$5 million will go to the basin roundtable's Water Supply Reserve Funds.

Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office expects stimulus funding from the state and federal levels to support outdoor businesses as they recover from COVID.

Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC)

- DFPC has five ten-person modules in operation. They are working with partners on planning and implementing prescribed fires, including in the Upper South Platte.
- The Colorado stimulus package will provide funding for DFPC to bring in new resources for fire suppression.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

- The NRCS is expecting more support for future projects for proactive forest stewardship and recovery efforts.
- The NRCS recently hired a new forester in Durango.
- The NRCS has committed \$39 million in Emergency Watershed Protection funds for restoration and rehabilitation in the East Troublesome, Pine Gulch, and Cameron Peak Fire scars. The \$39 million is \$19 million short of the original funding request, so NRCS is working with the national office to bring in additional funding.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management has been working with the Upper Arkansas and Southwest Colorado partners.

Club 20

Club 20 organized a forest/watershed health panel, where they talked about proactive forest management.

The Nature Conservancy

TNC recently completed a five-year strategic plan. In their five-year plan, they plan to focus on ramping up work on the Front Range, including the Upper South Platte and the northern Front Range, and implementing projects at the nexus of ecology, communities, and watersheds. They are also focusing on post-fire recovery and restoration and incorporating climate change adaptation into prioritization processes and treatment design.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)

- The NFWF and partners are ready to announce the next round of Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and the Environment (RESTORE) grant awards. The grant awards went primarily to projects focused on watershed and riparian restoration in the central mountains. They will likely request a third round of proposals for RESTORE grants in the late summer or early fall.
- The NFWF continues to look at opportunities at the state and federal level to secure funding for NFWF, RMRI, and Colorado to manage forests at scale.

Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS)

- RMRS staff presented information on wildland fire risk assessments, wildland fire behavior and safety, and water quality impacts during the tour with Secretary Vilsack.
- RMRS staff also met with Northern Colorado water utilities to discuss post-fire effects of the 2020 fire season on Front Range water utilities. They are also working with the City of Fort Collins to conduct post-fire risk erosion modeling to look at the risk ash flows pose to water quality and water intakes.

Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)

- The consistent funding for FRWRM is the big news from the CSFS. The increase in FRWRM funding will allow groups to match state funding with federal sources to increase cross-boundary efforts.
- Mike Lester, Colorado State Forester, is retiring in July. Susan Matthews will serve as the interim Colorado State Forester until a new one is hired.

MIKE LESTER CELEBRATION OF SERVICE

Meeting participants celebrated Mike Lester's years of service as the state forester. Meeting participants used the program Ideaflyp to leave virtual notes and well wishes for Mike Lester in his retirement. Heather Bergman will share the Ideaflyp notes with Mike Lester.

FEDERAL PRIORITY DISCUSSION

The Biden Administration released priorities for the USFS. Among those priorities were tackling climate change, providing economic relief, and improving the workforce. In all of these priorities, the Administration mentions Shared Stewardship. The purpose of this discussion is to have RMRI members discuss the intersections between climate resiliency, economic relief, RMRI, and Shared Stewardship and how to communicate these priorities to a broader audience. The most recent Joint Chiefs' application has a question on climate resiliency as well, which further emphasizes that RMRI partners should consider discussing RMRI projects with these priorities in mind. Meeting participants went into breakout rooms to discuss how to align RMRI with federal priorities. The comments from their meeting are summarized in Appendix A of this document.

RMRI LOGO ANNOUNCEMENT

Tara Umphries, USFS, and Travis Smith, NWTF, announced the new RMRI logo. Their comments are summarized below.

- Over the past several months, RMRI partners and subcommittees have been engaged with the branding company The Truth to develop a brand for RMRI. The Truth produced three logos.
- The logo is meant to be a visual symbol that represents RMRI's vision. RMRI partners will know the logo is effective when people recognize it, when it inspires inquiry, and when it shapes the conversation around the RMRI core values.
- RMRI partners received a survey asking for them to select the logo that they think best represents RMRI. Twenty-eight partners filled out the survey. They selected the logo, which can be found in Appendix B of this summary.
- The Truth is working on the branding package based on the selected logo. Once they have completed the branding package, partners will be able to use the logo on RMRI supported projects and products.

NAME CHANGE OVERVIEW

Patt Dorsey, NWTF, and Nathan Van Schaik, USFS, gave an overview of the conversation to change the RMRI name. Their comments are summarized below.

- The purpose of this conversation is to decide whether RMRI partners are interested in pursuing a name change, not deciding on a new name for RMRI.
- In December, The Truth interviewed the RMRI Leadership Team to build a strategy to shape the RMRI brand. The Truth recommended that RMRI change its name for several reasons. The Truth thought RMRI sounded too obscure for a general audience. They also thought the word "initiative" sounds like a singular project rather than a networked community. Lastly, they thought the name RMRI was too long for communications and design.
- The Truth thought a new name could describe the RMRI cause directly and be more understandable to the average person. They also thought a new name could help orient a reader to action, be flexible in anticipated branding uses, and be easier to navigate in the online environment.
- The Communications Subcommittee discussed the suggestion of a name change. RMRI partners shared that they thought RMRI was a "placeholder" for a new name eventually. Some partners also communicated that their highest priority is getting work done on the ground, and focusing on a name change would take extra capacity that they would rather dedicate to other efforts. Lastly, partners said that RMRI is two years old, and people already recognize "RMRI" as the name of the partnership.

Group Discussion

Meeting participants discussed whether they wanted to pursue a name change. Their comments are summarized below.

- RMRI has been building name recognition for two years at the state, regional, and national levels. RMRI should not change its name at this point at risk of losing that name recognition.
- Even if RMRI partners spend time on generating a new name, there is not a perfect name. Every name will have its benefits and drawbacks.
- Changing the RMRI name would require significant resources in both funding and time. If they change RMRI's name, RMRI partners would have to change websites and URLs, which will make it harder for people to find it using online search engines.

Name Change Poll Results

Meeting participants were polled on several questions related to changing the RMRI name. The polling results are below.

Does the name "Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative" reflect our mission and goals?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>	<i>Percentage of Responses</i>
Yes	30	88%
No	3	9%
Unsure	1	3%

Are you interested in pursuing a name change?

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>	<i>Percentage of Responses</i>
Yes	3	9%
No	27	84%
Unsure	2	6%

Which of the following would you be willing to contribute to a name change? (select all that apply)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of Responses</i>	<i>Percentage of Responses</i>
Time	7	21%
Funding	0	0%
Other	3	9%
I'm not able to make any contributions to a name change.	24	71%

Name Change Decision

Meeting participants decided not to pursue a name change.

NEXT STEPS

- The RMRI Governance Subcommittee met to conduct their annual review of the RMRI charter, and they did not propose any changes to the charter. The Subcommittee also discussed whether RMRI should advocate for policies and provide letters of support for legislation and grant applications. The Subcommittee said that RMRI should advocate and provide letters of support but need a process to evaluate projects and legislation on a case-by-case basis. The Governance Subcommittee will be meeting over the next couple of months to develop a process for partners to request letters of support. Any RMRI partner that is interested in being part of this discussion should join the Governance Subcommittee.
- The RMRI Leadership Team and Stakeholder Group expressed that they wanted more transparency. To improve situational awareness, Nathan Van Schaik, USFS, will be sending out a monthly email update on the first Friday of each month. They will also be distributing The Source newsletter more consistently.

APPENDIX A – FEDERAL PRIORITIES BREAKOUT ROOM SUMMARY

How are RMRI efforts (e.g., landscape partners, subcommittees, the stakeholder group) making the landscape more resilient to climate change?

Key Theme – Landscape-Scale Treatments

- Increasing the pace and scale of treatments makes the forest more resilient to climate change. Increasing the pace and scale of treatments in high-priority areas also helps prepare the landscape for uncharacteristic fires, protecting watersheds and communities.
- Jurisdictions will not bind the effects of climate change. Cross-boundary efforts are only possible when multiple jurisdictions are involved. No one entity can tackle the scale and magnitude of forest issues alone; partnerships like RMRI help tackle forest issues more effectively by pooling money, resources, and talent.
- RMRI cannot control elements of climate change, but they can change forest conditions to prepare the forest for climate change futures.
- Through fuels reduction projects, fire mitigation activities, wildlife habitat improvement, and projects that help conserve source water and improve water quality, many RMRI projects have implicit value for landscape resiliency.

Key Theme – Networking and Outreach

- RMRI helps landowners see how they are a part of the bigger landscape and introduces the idea of "living with wildfire."
- RMRI has been able to build into local efforts and take a community-centered approach. When treatments happen at a local level, people can see how the treatments affect them.
- RMRI helps elevate the discussion of forest health, especially regarding risks to water supplies. RMRI helps break down silos surrounding the dialogue.

Key Theme – Carbon Management

- The contrast between the carbon produced from wildfires and the carbon produced by prescribed fires is significant. Prescribed fire allows for carbon outputs to be released in a controlled manner.
- Treating the forest and locking up carbon in wood products, like biochar, helps minimize carbon outputs.
- Strengthening the timber industry in Colorado helps keep the wood products industry local, which ultimately reduces carbon emissions.
- A restored forest captures carbon faster than an unhealthy forest.

Key Theme – Climate Adaptation and Management

- The Colorado Forest Action Plan has a focused section on climate change, which could help incorporate climate change concepts into monitoring, adaptation, and prioritization processes.
- Southwest Colorado has a science team, which will track biomass utilization and carbon outputs and incorporate that information into the adaptive management cycle.
- Changing the forest structure and reducing evapotranspiration will be important for climate adaptation in drier climates.
- Zoning codes in the wildland-urban interface could help with climate resiliency.

What can we do to better tell our story about how RMRI projects are creating resiliency to climate change?

Key Theme – Communication Channel and Tools

- RMRI should share more information about RMRI through existing communication channels (e.g., existing newsletters, Channel 9 News, Denver Post)
- RMRI could work with reporters to go RMRI project areas and tell the story about how the time is now to make Colorado's forests more resilient.
- RMRI should produce visuals with contrasting pictures to show what RMRI is doing to bring desired results (e.g., treatment scenarios versus no treatment scenarios, high-severity wildfires versus low-intensity surface fires). There should be a visual of what a future well-adapted forest might look like.

Key Theme- Audience

- RMRI should tell its story to groups that are not aware of forest management. For example, the RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee has met with the Colorado Department of Labor, and the RMRI Biomass Utilization Subcommittee has met with the Colorado Department of Energy.
- RMRI messages should contain language that is understandable by the average person and not contain jargon that only professionals will understand. They also need to tell the stories in a way that is truthful and honest and incorporates nuances. This means explaining what the word "resiliency" means so everyone has a shared understanding.

Key Theme – Messages

- RMRI should emphasize the social side of its story about how groups are coming together to create resiliency around the four RMRI values. The story should describe how people are working together to create different outcomes, even in the face of difficult conditions.
- RMRI should tell stories about how the work of RMRI relates to environmental justice.
- RMRI should have messages to reach a broader audience on how landscape-scale forest treatments protect watersheds.
- RMRI should emphasize how forest treatments affect the carbon cycle (i.e., reducing the number of uncharacteristic wildfires reduces the potential conversion of forested areas to non-forested areas). They should show how much carbon a catastrophic wildfire releases versus a prescribed fire. They should also emphasize how a healthy forest takes in carbon and releases oxygen and how unhealthy forests release more carbon than they sequester.
- RMRI needs to improve its messaging on fire mitigation and tell the story on why it is important, why it is critical for communities, and the importance of maintaining sustainable timber resources. They need to tell this story to legislators from urban areas who do not understand the relationship between healthy forests and healthy water.
- RMRI should be more deliberate in communicating its mission as it relates to climate change. The messages also need to be rooted in science and inform the public about all the possible tools in the forest management toolbox.
- RMRI should share success stories from the 2020 fire season with the public.
- RMRI should highlight the opportunities and costs related to mitigating wildfire risk compared to the costs of post-fire recovery.
- RMRI should communicate that fire is the "new" normal.
- RMRI should develop prescribed fire messaging to communicate that managers only ignite a prescribed fire under the right conditions.

APPENDIX B - RMRI LOGO

