Our Mission

Increasing the resilience of our forests, wildlife habitats, communities, recreation opportunities, and water resources across all lands in the Rockies.

Quick Facts

Problem

Our Nation faces increasing challenges to our forests and watersheds. In Colorado, these challenges pose threats to our everyday lives like we’ve never seen, ranging from changing climates and wildfires to water shortages, invasive species and growing population—all rewriting the playbook for land managers.

Solution

We need to work to scale across entire landscapes to create healthy and resilient forests. Wildfires, infestations and drought don’t care about boundaries or property lines. We need solutions that cross boundaries. The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) serves as the common entry point for restoration efforts in the Rockies. A Problem for All Takes All to Solve.

Started in 2019

Co-convened by the National Wild Turkey Federation and the USDA Forest Service, RMRI was developed when Colorado was selected as the pilot location to showcase the Forest Service’s Shared Stewardship strategy in action. Collaborative work, however, started years before.

Partners

RMRI mobilizes 40+ Partners across federal, state, Tribal and local jurisdictions to increase pace and scale of forest restoration. Partners direct investments at improving a few larger landscapes rather than make slow progress in multiple small places. RMRI Partners plan together, prioritize together and act together.

RMRI Landscapes

Partners are restoring landscapes in the RMRI-Southwest, RMRI-Upper Arkansas and RMRI-Upper South Platte landscapes. By 2030, RMRI-SW aims to restore 310,000 acres of public and private lands, RMRI-Upper Arkansas 30,000 acres of public and private lands, and RMRI-Upper South Platte 75,000 acres of public and private lands.

Subcommittees

RMRI organizers identified cross-boundary barriers and assigned subcommittees to address each: Biomass Utilization, Workforce Capacity, Funding, Social License, Governance and Communications. Members are from Partner organizations and come with experience, technical savvy and scientific background.
Southwest Colorado
2021 Review

RMRI’s Marquee Landscape

On Dec. 9, 2019, RMRI Partners unanimously selected Southwest Colorado as the first place to focus its collective efforts. The RMRI-Southwest project area encompasses nearly 750,000 acres, stretching 120 miles along Colo. Highway 160, including the towns of Cortez, Dolores, Mancos, Bayfield, Durango and the San Juan National Forest. RMRI-Sw Partners are committed to treating 20,000 acres of private lands and 290,000 acres of federal lands over ten years. 40+ cross-jurisdictional Partners are united in their shared values to restore one of America’s highest priority landscapes.

Outcomes at a Glance

$4.2 million Funding toward federal lands
$3 million Funding invested by Partners toward state, private, and tribal lands

53 Projects completed on federal lands (12,685 acres)
37 Projects completed on state, private and tribal lands (2,317 acres)

Sustainable Recreation
The National Forest Foundation, Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, and the San Juan National Forest are working with Partners to develop a cross-boundary recreation strategy in the highest use area of the RMRI-SW landscape. The City of Durango is working with Partners through the Durango Area Trails Alliance to facilitate cross-boundary trail stewardship. The San Juan Mountains Association and San Juan NF continue to complete work through the RMRI Ambassadors Program making over 3,600 public contacts and maintaining over 200 miles of trails.

Biomass Solutions
Aspen Wall Wood, Timber Age Systems, and Table to Farm Compost are developing new ways to utilize biomass from forest treatments. And the Wood For Life pilot program on the San Juan NF will increase forest resiliency against wildfires and bark beetles while providing firewood to members of the Navajo Nation.

Building the Project Pipeline
Partners including the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) and Wildfire Adapted Partnership are all playing key roles building a project pipeline to clear nearly 100,000 acres on federal lands and 1,100 acres on private lands.

Conservation Finance
La Plata County and Partners launched the Wildfire Watershed Protection Fund (WWPG) and secured $500,000 in funding from the Southwest Wildfire Impact Fund. The WWPG will be an integral part of the funding strategy on state and private lands in the eastern half of the RMRI-SW landscape.

Progress to Date (Year 2)

67%

$4.1 million

Goal to restore 62,000 acres of private and public lands in first 2 years

Annual Goals (2021)

Mitigate 2,000 acres of private lands and infrastructure to wildfire risk

Create resilient landscapes across 29,000 acres of SJNF & BLM

Investing Accomplishments

Biomass Solutions

2021 Accomplished Projects

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative - Accomplished Projects 2021
Upper Arkansas
2021 Review

Expanded Bang for Buck Priorities

The Upper Arkansas landscape comprises Chaffee and Lake Counties, which include Colorado’s largest river basin, 15 of the state’s 14-ers and the most rafted river in the world. With its 80+ Partners, the Upper Arkansas landscape is a national leader in community-driven restoration. To protect one of America’s highest priority landscapes, Partners are doing the right work in the right places at the right scale.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

In its 2021 annual report, the Envision Forest Health Council reports $19 million raised to-date, as well as more than 1,600 community members taking action to implement Chaffee County’s Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The plan sets a course for improving wildfire resiliency through strategic forest treatments and additional actions; it was updated in 2020 using computer modeling technology to identify the right acres to treat, to reduce wildfire threat and protect assets like water supply and infrastructure.

Chaffee Treats

The Chaffee Treats program organizes and supports treatments on 10,000 acres of private property. The goal is to achieve cross-boundary thinning. The American Forest Foundation continued to support Chaffee Treats in 2021. Three professional foresters were hired in 2021 to provide private property owners consultations and forest management plans. Program partners include CSFS and Colorado Firecamp, whose professional staff have engaged the owners of 4,000 acres in the program to-date.

Methodist Front

Dozens of landowners in the foothills of Methodist Mountain agreed in 2021 to forest treatments that are necessary to create the Methodist Front community fuel break, designed to protect Salida and Poncha Springs. Work started in February 2021 and includes multiple jurisdictions pulling in support from the town of Poncha Springs, City of Salida, Colorado State Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

Recreation

The Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan was adopted in 2021 by the Chaffee County Planning Commission on June 29. The Chaffee Recreation Council worked with public land managers and the community to deliver this 5-year recreation management plan that is designed to maintain healthy public lands, the quality of outdoor experiences, and the economic benefits of recreation tourism. Nine objectives and more than two dozen programs and projects are outlined as $20 million will be raised in the next five years.

Funding

The Upper Arkansas Forest Fund was created in 2021 by the National Forest Foundation to accelerate forest treatments. The Fund was seeded with a 5-year, $1.64 million commitment from the county sales tax measure (Chaffee Common Ground), and leveraged by 350% to secure $5.7 million from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) — a federal grant awarded in September 2021.

Chaffee Common Ground

Forest health and wildfire resiliency is supported in Chaffee County by a quarter-percent sales tax approved by voters in 2018, generating nearly $4 million to-date for the Chaffee Common Ground Fund. The grant program in 2021 invested $2,015,600 in forest health programs and projects. A major investment was a five-year commitment of $1.64 million to seed the Upper Arkansas Forest Fund, which was matched by a $5.7 million federal grant in September of 2021.

RESTORE Colorado

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-led RESTORE Colorado program has invested $820,000 in Chaffee County in two years for projects that improve wildlife habitat, forest health and community wildfire resiliency. The partnership includes Great Outdoors Colorado, the Gates Family Foundation, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Railroad Bridge

The Railroad Bridge forest treatment project improves critical wildlife habitat and protects area residents and infrastructure from wildfire. Forest treatments in the steep, rugged terrain help protect the town and surrounding community. Hand and machine thinning began in the fall of 2021, under the supervision of the National Forest Foundation. The NFF, a member of the Forest Health Council, won $464,000 in funding in a competitive RESTORE Colorado grant process to treat 380 acres in the project area by 2022. The Town of Buena Vista contributed $10,000 in matching funds.
Work in this landscape is led by the Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP), a collaboration between government agencies, water providers, nonprofit organizations and academic institutions. Partners share a vision of sustainable and resilient landscapes, healthy forests, fire-adapted communities, and efficient fire response and management in the Upper South Platte watershed—which supplies 80% of the water for Denver’s 1.3 million residents. The USPP’s goal is to restore 75,000 acres of public lands and 75,000 acres of private lands.

2021 Highlights

- 501 USFS RX Program total acres (321 Piles, 180 Broadcast)
- 12 Projects completed on state & private focus areas
  - Secured funding for full-time USPP watershed coordinator
  - Coordinated GNA Project (Deer Creek)
  - Conducted USPP Assessment / Survey

2021 Outcomes

1. **Harris Park/Bighorn Unit**
   - **Intent**: Reduce overall fuel loading, improve Bighorn Sheep habitat.
   - **Outcomes**: Broadcast burn near Harris Park (40 acres).
   - Multi-agency operation was 1st time a prescribed broadcast burn has been completed in the area since 2012.

2. **GNA – Deer Creek**
   - **Intent**: Erect a defensive shield around water resources and wildfire-prone communities (299 acres) under a congressional authorization known as the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). Work slotted for June 2022 – 2025
   - **Outcomes**: Finalized GNA for action.

3. **Jefferson Conservation District**
   - Project X (USPP funded)
   - Blue Jay Gulch (36 acres)
   - North Turkey (SFA funded)
   - Sunburst (20 acres)

4. **Private/Public Focus Areas**
   - Kuehster (47 acres)
   - Project X phase II (68 acres)
   - Blue Jay Gulch (36 acres)
   - Gooseberry Lane (40 acres)
   - Sunburst (20 acres)
   - North Turkey Creek (20 acres)
   - Echo Valley Ranch (50 acres)
   - Ridge Road pile burn project
   - Jefferson Middle School (60 acres)
   - Hobbs Peak (14 acres)
   - Bell Park (166 acres)
   - Roberts Tunnel (10 acres)

National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy

Guided by The Nature Conservancy, the USPP completed funded projects outlined in the USDA Forest Service’s National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy over the 6-year timeframe:

- 1,850 acres treated through 10 cross-jurisdictional projects
- 445 piles burned on 190 acres across 4 projects
- 360 home assessments completed
- 75 defensible space projects implemented
- 50 agency staff trained
- 208 monitoring plots established and monitored across 9 projects by CFRI