

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
March 31, 2022, 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM
Leadership Team Meeting
Meeting Summary - FINAL

ATTENDANCE:

Leadership Team Members: Samantha Albert, Jacque Buchanan, Patt Dorsey, Cindy Dozier, Clint Evans, Aaron Green (alternate), Jason Lawhon, Tim Mauck, Frank McCormick, Molly Pitts, and Chris West

Additional Attendees: John Brennan, Christina Burri, Stephanie Connolly, Ryan Cox, Liz Dowling, Greg Felt, Jen Heitler, Damon Lange, Alison Lerch, John Mandl, Audrey Miles-Cherney, Dave Neely, Matt Nykiel, Nick Olson, Tim Reader, Kelle Reynolds, Rob Schmidt, Mercedes Siegle-Gaither, Kellie Solis, Jeremy Taylor, Gordon Toevs, Tara Umphries, Nathan Van Schaik, Scott Woods, and Ben Yellin

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBER UPDATES

Leadership Team members provided updates. Their updates are organized by agency/partner and summarized below.

National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf)

- Through a national agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the NWTf has added two private land foresters on the Southwest Colorado landscape.
- The NWTf and other organizations like the National Forest Foundation (NFF) have entered into keystone agreements with the US Forest Service (USFS) to implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategy and increase the pace and scale of forest work.

USFS

- The Wildfire Crisis Strategy aligns with RMRI in intent and aspiration. The Wildfire Crisis Strategy allows the USFS to obtain additional funding and tools. With the establishment of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, the USFS is considering how to take the RMRI framework and apply it to other places.
- The combination of funding from the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has positioned the USFS and its partners to use this funding to make a landscape-scale impact.

Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

The Colorado State Legislature has made the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP) permanent. DNR received an additional \$5 million on top of the \$5 million already allocated to the program, making the budget \$10 million for 2022 to 2023.

Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)

- The CSFS has substantially expanded its internship program. They increased the program to hire 17 interns in their career pathway program, and they can direct two to five interns into entry-level positions every year.
- The CSFS also expanded its transition program with Front Range Community College (FRCC), allowing them to transition graduates from the FRCC program into the Colorado State University (CSU) forestry program.

- The CSFS is internally hiring and increasing staff capacity, including hiring 19 more foresters in important landscapes.
- Susan Matthews, Deputy State Forester, is retiring from the CSFS.

NRCS

- The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has appropriated a large amount of funding to the NRCS over the next four years. The NRCS will increase funding across many of its programs.
- There will be a notice of funding opportunity for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in two to three months. The USDA has heard feedback that the RCPP administration is cumbersome, so with additional funding being allocated through the IRA, the USDA wants to streamline delivery. The RCPP funding represents a once-in-a-career opportunity to bring funds to Colorado to accomplish work on the ground. Anyone interested in learning more about the RCPP should contact Clint Evans.

Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS)

- RMRS has discussed building portable kiln units to transform slash piles and lop-and-scatter material into biochar. These kilns may help alleviate air pollution concerns because it captures particulate matter. They would be portable and scalable.
- The RMRS held a biochar workshop in Durango in October 2022, focusing on using biochar to assist with the remediation of abandoned land mines.
- The RMRS has a new funding program to apply biochar to abandoned mine reclamation.

Colorado Timber Industry Association (CTIA)

A couple of bills in the Colorado State Legislature would help with workforce challenges. Senate Bill 005 would establish an internship program for industry, provide additional funding to stand up another forestry program in the state, and provide funding to develop educational materials for high school students to learn about careers in forestry. This bill is a culmination of the work of the RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee.

UPPER SOUTH PLATE LANDSCAPE 2022 ACCOMPLISHMENT PRESENTATION

Audrey Miles-Cherney, Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP) Watershed Coordinator, presented the 2022 update and accomplishment roll-up. Her presentation is summarized below.

Upper South Platte Watershed Overview

- The Upper South Platte Watershed supplies 80 to 90% of the drinking water to the Denver and Aurora metro areas, a population of three million people. The Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (COWRAP) identifies the Upper South Platte Watershed as having a high drinking water risk.
- The Upper South Platte Watershed is a HUC 8 watershed. Its elevation ranges from 5,000 to 14,000 feet. It is 2,600 square miles, which is equal to 1.1 million acres. Approximately 65% of the land is in public ownership, while 35% is in private ownership.
- The watershed overlays eight counties. It has 12 fish/wildlife “species of concern,” according to the NRCS 2010 Upper South Platte Watershed Rapid Assessment. Over a period of 25 years (1996-2021), there were six significant fires, four of which were catastrophic fires and 5 of which were caused by humans.
- Challenges to the watershed include the following:
 - The presence of vital water resource infrastructure risks
 - Steep terrain, which requires hand tool work or helicopter access

- The low value of timber, in combination with few local markets or mills to take biomass, which makes it difficult to attract contractors
- Inadequate and aging facilities and equipment
- High cost of living and low wages, which makes hiring and retention an issue
- The density of high-value wildland-urban interface (WUI) communities
- Limited safety egress routes or safety zones
- Local public misperceptions and resistance to active forest management

USPP Structure

- The Upper South Platte Partnership is composed of several teams: the Goals, Strategies, and Funding Team (GSFT); the Management and Science Team (MST); the Education, Communication, and Outreach (ECO) Team; and the General Partnership (GP). A full-time watershed coordinator and a facilitation team support all these teams.
- In 2022, 14 active agencies were involved in the USPP MST. Six active agencies were involved within the GSFT: CSFS, Denver Water, Elk Creek Fire Protection District (on behalf of the fire districts), Jefferson Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and USFS.
- The MST is open to entities that are actively implementing projects on the landscape. The MST focuses on tasks like incorporating science into treatment designs, project prioritization, monitoring, and implementation. MST partners are expected to participate regularly in monthly meetings, share accomplishments and lessons learned, and support each other.
- The GSFT is a selective subset of the MST serving as steering committee. The GSFT is responsible for developing a strategic approach on a large scale.
- The USPP is supported financially and with matching contributions from the USFS, CSFS, Denver Water, Jefferson County Open Space, Aurora Water, TNC, and Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI).

USPP 2022 Accomplishments

- In 2022, the USPP had several high-level accomplishments, including the following:
 - Established a new water coordinator position,
 - Updated their structures and protocols to ensure partners are aligned in their mission,
 - Established a new intake and orientation process,
 - Returned to in-person and General Partnership meetings,
 - Initiated a collaborative ArcGIS Online mapping project.
- In 2022, 27 active individuals from 14 organizations participated in MST and GSFT meetings. In total, 73 individual partners joined the USPP General Partnership contact list. Twenty-seven unique entities were represented at all levels of the USPP. Lastly, 30 new individuals not previously engaged with the USPP participated in the USPP GP, ECO Team, and MST meetings.
- In 2022, over \$3 million was awarded to partners for new projects in the watershed. The USPP partners reported treating 2,274 acres in 2022.
- The USFS conducted pile burns on 305 acres. The four fire protection districts completed 292 home inspections, and over 900 properties participated in the chipping programs with the four fire protection districts.
- The USFS and Stewardship West (a non-profit organization contracted with the USFS through a Stewardship Agreement) treated 419 of 1,521 acres on the Jerome Miller & Miller

Gulch Projects on the South Platte Ranger District. They are currently treating an additional 554 acres, with a plan to complete the remaining units in the next couple of years.

- Jefferson Conservation District served as the fiscal agent for the new COSWAP Landscape Restoration Grant among four USPP entities. They also completed 561 acres across seven projects.
- Denver Mountain Parks completed 420 acres across five projects, acquired new parks, developed trails, and implemented revegetation projects.
- The Genesee Foundation is a homeowner association (HOA) that oversees open space management, fire protection, and water and waste treatment facilities for the community of Genesee. They completed 3,000 feet of evacuation route treatments on the one access road in and out of the Genesee community. They completed 20 acres of forest restoration. Additionally, 301 landowners participated in their annual chipping program, which removed 371 piles. They were awarded COSWAP Workforce and Landscape Restoration Grants. They also received an Action, Implementation, and Mitigation (AIM) Grant.
- Jefferson County Open Space completed its Forest Health Plan in partnership with CFRI. CFRI provided a risk analysis that is helping them with prioritization and planning. They also completed 37 acres on Meyer Ranch Park and 240 on two additional projects. They have also been involved with land acquisitions, trail development, and weed treatment. They conducted mountain pine beetle surveys and created a sub-award to fund the USPP watershed coordinator position from 2023 to 2024.
- Elk Creek, Inter-Canyon, and North Fork Fire Protection Districts formally agreed to combine the districts into the Conifer Wildland Division. This partnership enables them to share equipment and resources and allows for greater collective capacity. Approximately 480 properties and two HOAs participated in their chipping program, chipping 3,575 piles. The Conifer Wildland Division conducted 152 home assessments for its Wildfire Prepared Program. Additional activities included pile burning, forestry treatment planning, mastication, and wildfire response. They also partnered with Jefferson County to receive funding through the COSWAP Grant. Lastly, they maintain a successful ambassador program, which helps connect the fire protection districts and other partners to the community.
- Evergreen Fire Rescue conducted 450 defensible space inspections. Approximately 140 homes participated in their chipping program. They also doubled their number of active Plan Units from 13 to 26. They received two COSWAP Landscape Restoration Grants and three Workforce Grants. They were awarded a Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant to create a new mitigation specialist position. They also completed a Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) event in June 2022. Lastly, they also maintained a successful ambassador program.
- The USFS burned 350 piles. They are also undergoing a new condition-based NEPA assessment on the South Platte Ranger District. The Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands (PSICC) provided funding for additional capacity building, including the seed funding to establish the watershed coordinator position.
- The CSFS serves on the MST, GSFT, and ECO Teams. They also serve as one of the USPP's fiscal agents and house the USPP watershed coordinator. They completed 473 acres across four projects from the Golden Field Office.
- TNC provides technical advisory assistance on scientific information and strategies, including the South Platte Ranger District NEPA review process, grants, project development and prioritization, and development of the watershed coordinator position. They also provided non-federal match commitments of in-kind contributions.

- CFRI provides technical advisory assistance on scientific information and strategies. They helped partners with mapping and developing a centralized database of projects to help track accomplishments and identify opportunities to connect treatments. They also helped plan the USPP science jam session to bring science and other relevant information to project planners. Lastly, they are supporting the USPP by hosting an interim webpage for the partnership.
- Denver Water and Aurora Water provide financial support to partners to implement projects. Aurora Water has committed funding to support USPP facilitation and website development. Denver Water provides non-federal match commitments for in-kind contributions.

2023 Plans

- In 2023, the USPP will continue to explore capacity-building opportunities, including renewing meeting facilitation funding, extending watershed coordination funding, enhancing project planning support, and expanding GIS/mapping and data support. They will also establish new student internship opportunities.
- The USPP will also continue to develop collaborative messaging and communications. The USPP is reconvening the ECO Team to develop a new USPP website and create new opportunities to increase awareness of the Upper South Platte landscape story, ongoing challenges and successes, and collaborative and innovative solutions.

RMRI Leadership Team Comments

RMRI Leadership Team members commented on ways their agencies can support the Upper South Platte landscape and information that the Upper South Platte landscape can bring to their agencies to help them provide resources and support. Their comments are summarized below.

Ways RMRI Leadership Team Members Can Support the Upper South Platte

- The NRCS will have additional program funding available for private forest lands. The NRCS can discuss the potential to develop an RCPP project for the Upper South Platte Watershed and evaluate opportunities to build capacity through partnership agreements.
- Last week, the CSFS established a new quarter-time employee to support the USPP watershed coordinator position.
- The CSFS is adding two new foresters in Franktown and three new foresters in Golden as part of a Shared Stewardship surge within the USFS. These positions will create more capacity in the RMRI area.
- COSWAP will continue to provide funding. As contracting costs increase, the DNR COSWAP administrators can talk to partners about their grant deliverables. DNR will reach out in the future.
- The NWTf can provide policy support.

Information that the Upper South Platte Landscape Can Provide to Help Leadership Provide Resources/Tools

- It would be helpful to have a combined fact sheet on existing programs being utilized in the watershed. It would also be helpful to better understand the capacity needed to continue to grow projects.
- A one or two-page document showing the 2022 accomplishment highlights in the landscape with photos and partners listed would be very useful.
- It would help leadership if partners in the Upper South Platte Watershed identified their major gaps or needs.

Other Comments

All the landscapes could benefit from more thought and analysis regarding how to direct public funding on private lands equitably, especially when working in landscapes where the adjusted gross income for private forest landowners is very high.

UPPER ARKANSAS LANDSCAPE 2022 ACCOMPLISHMENT PRESENTATION

Cindy Williams (Envision Chaffee County), Greg Felt (Chaffee County Commissioner), Damon Lange (CSFS), and Matt Nykiel (National Forest Foundation) presented the 2022 update and accomplishment roll-up. Their presentation is summarized below.

Next General Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2022 Accomplishments

- The RMRI designation as a priority landscape has positioned the Upper Arkansas to receive funds from the RCPP, Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and Environment (RESTORE), and COSWAP grant programs.
- Chaffee County continues to address landscape-scale challenges related to forests, outdoor recreation, and agriculture/working lands. These components create the fabric of the Chaffee County community. They also connect to the four RMRI values: water, communities, forest health and wildlife, and recreation.
- The Envision Chaffee County Forest Health Council is composed of 54 members. The Council represents a multi-jurisdictional commitment to one map prioritizing forest health treatments on the landscape. This commitment and shared vision across agencies create relationships that connect partners across the community.
- The Envision Chaffee County developed its 2022 accomplishment metrics to reflect its collective impact on the landscape. Since the Upper Arkansas became an RMRI landscape, partners have treated 5,158 acres, and 16,590 more are in the pipeline. They have also treated 877 acres of private land. Their goal is to treat 30,000 of the highest priority acres (i.e., the acres that will have the biggest impact on reducing wildfire risk) by 2030. They also have the goal of treating 10,000 acres of private land.
- Partners have raised \$23 million for the forestry program, and seven communities have achieved Firewise USA status.
- In 2022, Upper Arkansas partners completed thinning treatments on 2,000 high-priority acres. The USFS also conducted a prescribed fire on federal land. Local utilities also managed the forest around their power lines.
- On the regulatory side, elected officials have begun exploring land use code updates for new land use applicants that would require structuring new communities and homes with wildfire risk under consideration (e.g., defensible space requirements, laying out roads in fire-safe ways, etc.).
- Chaffee Fire and CSFS have increased their staffing. New Chaffee Fire staff is working with agriculture producers to help better burn their ditches. The CSFS is hiring a forestry technician to work on COSWAP projects in Lake and Chaffee County. They are also hiring interns to help with wildfire mitigation home assessments.
- Partners have restored acres on state land, USFS land, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, including the Methodist Front project. Many of these projects connect across boundaries to create a landscape-scale impact.
- In 2022, 417 landowners participated in the Chaffee Chips program. Overall, landowners contributed over 1,500 hours of labor to create piles. In 2022, the Chaffee Chips program expanded from four to three events and was active in the Salida area.

- Colorado Firecamp, a wildland firefighter school, has implemented treatments in Chaffee County. They have also used state funds to partner with youth crews to conduct thinning and chipping treatments on small acreage lots connected to larger fuel breaks.
- The Chaffee County CWPP funding comes from federal agencies (19%), local (18%), utility companies (19%), state (11%), and federal grant (33%) sources.
- Partners are working on establishing a forest health council in Lake County. The Chaffee and Lake County Forest Health Councils have served as a venue for partners to share their ongoing projects and work on single grant applications. Lake and Chaffee County partners have successfully applied for FRWRM, COSWAP, and RCPP grants through the councils. They have also received monetary contributions from Colorado Springs Utilities, Aurora Water, Xcel Energy, and Sangre de Cristo Electric Association.
- Partners have been impacted by inflation. Grant funding secured two or three years ago can no longer pay for the number of acres treated as in the past due to cost increases.
- The Envision Chaffee County Forest Health Council currently has 16,590 acres in the pipeline, which puts them on pace to reach their goal of 30,000 acres by 2030. They have raised \$23 million, a little over half of their 10-year goal of \$45 million. They have treated 5,128 acres on public lands and 877 on private lands. The Envision Chaffee County Forest Health Council continues to ramp up its efforts, focusing on private land treatments and prescribed burns. They need more staff capacity and resources, particularly for the Colorado State Forest Service, to accelerate efforts on private lands.
- The Lake County Forest Health Council developed its own CWPP. They have 13,000 acres in the pipeline and have attracted \$4 million in funds. Like the Envision Chaffee County Forest Health Council, the Lake County Forest Health Council needs staff and funds to build momentum and put fire on the ground.

Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan 2022 Accomplishments

- Community members identified their concerns about human-caused fires in the community wildfire survey. In response, partners in Chaffee County created the Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan to address growing concerns about the impact of recreation on the landscape, including trash, human waste, expanding campsites, and the risk of human-caused fire.
- The goals of the Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan are to “keep it fun,” “keep it clean,” “keep it wild,” and “keep it going.”
- As part of the plan, partners are working on engineering and enforcement solutions to promote better recreation behavior. Chaffee County funds eight rangers to help with education and enforcement.
- Partners have raised \$1.4 million, hired 14 new staff members, and improved four trails to reduce erosion.
- Partners have also cleaned up overused areas to ensure quality outdoor opportunities. Additionally, if residents take the Adventure by Nature pledge to behave appropriately while recreating, they will receive coupons from local businesses.
- The BLM decided to only allow camping at designated campsites. Chaffee County launched its All Lands Camping plan to manage dispersed camping impacts across city, county, private, and public lands.
- Partners raised \$2 million to improve infrastructure, including adding 12 new restrooms on public lands to take the human waste off the landscape. Together, they have removed 15,000 pounds of ash and trash from the landscape.
- The Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan provides tools to protect and enhance wildlife habitat. Partners have installed 15 seasonal gates, advanced four

multipurpose projects, and expanded the Planning for Wildlife tools, identifying the most important habitat areas for wildlife.

- The Colorado Outdoor Partnership is promoting regional recreation and wildlife partnerships across the state. The Envision Chaffee County Recreation in Balance Regional Partnership is one of the featured collaborations. Many of the tools Envision Chaffee County used to assess wildlife habitat and recreation are being adopted statewide.

Regional Needs

- As Chaffee and Lake County continue to accelerate efforts, there is a need for funding, staffing, and more prescribed burns.
- A high amount of funding is coming for fuels and capacity, so partners would like to see that amount of funding continue. There is a need for more funding focused particularly on recreation impact management.
- Many rules and processes make it difficult to implement a prescribed burning program at scale, particularly when burning on private lands. Some potential policy changes would be the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) providing more flexibility on smoke and air quality dispersion rules. There is also a need to engage the public on the utility of using fire for land management. Promoting messaging that communicates that fire can be a good management tool will help obtain social acceptance for prescribed fires.

Clarifying Questions

RMRI Leadership Team members asked clarifying questions about the Upper Arkansas accomplishments update. Their questions are in italics below, with the corresponding responses in plain text.

Is the funding provided by utilities a mix of water and electric utilities?

Yes, both water and electric utilities have brought funding for projects.

Have partners talked about limiting recreation through the use of permits?

Partners have discussed this option but are not in a place to use this management tool. The policy change to allowing camping only on designated sites has limited recreation impacts.

RMRI Leadership Team Comments

RMRI Leadership Team members commented on ways that their agencies can support the Upper Arkansas landscape and information that the Upper Arkansas landscape can bring to their agencies to help them provide resources and support. Their comments are summarized below.

Ways RMRI Leadership Team Members Can Support the Upper Arkansas Landscape

- It may be worth exploring a prescribed fire association or cooperative model. In states across the Midwest, local prescribed fire associations formed to obtain grant funding to purchase equipment. These entities also carry liability insurance, which makes it easier for partners to conduct prescribed fires.
- NWTf can provide policy support.
- DNR can help facilitate a conversation with CDPHE about prescribed burning. DNR will also continue to provide funding through DNR. Additionally, as contracting costs increase, the DNR COSWAP administrators can talk to partners about their grant deliverables.

- The NRCS will have additional program funding available for private forest lands. The NRCS can discuss the potential to develop a Phase II RCPP project for the Upper Arkansas and evaluate opportunities to build capacity through partnership agreements.
- Club 20 can continue to push out the message of RMRI at regional meetings and conferences.
- CSFS will continue to provide staffing support.

Information that the Upper Arkansas Landscape Can Provide to Help Leadership Provide Resources/Tools

- A one or two-page document showing the 2022 accomplishment highlights in the landscape with photos and partners listed would be very useful.
- It would be helpful to have Matt Nykiel, NFF, attend a Social License and Communications Subcommittee meeting to discuss the social license challenges related to prescribed fire. Some challenges related to implementing prescribed fire are related to social license, but most of the challenge is increasing capacity and addressing a tight regulatory environment.

Other Comments

- The White River National Forest will be going into Forest Plan Revision soon. One of their biggest challenges is recreation. Partners in the Upper Arkansas landscape may be interested in seeing how recreation is incorporated into the White River National Forest Plan Revision.
- Communities across Colorado are discussing how to manage recreation, and the Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnership can serve as the venue to address these challenges across the state. The Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnership is working on putting together a framework for the Conservation Statewide Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Climate Resilience Plan. DNR has recently hired a consultant to conduct an organizational assessment of the program.
- All the landscapes could benefit from more thought and analysis regarding how to direct public funding on private lands equitably, especially when working in landscapes where the adjusted gross income for private forest landowners is very high.

SOUTHWEST COLORADO LANDSCAPE 2022 ACCOMPLISHMENT PRESENTATION

Dave Neely (San Juan National Forest (SJNF)), Jason Lawhon (SJNF), Ryan Cox (CSFS), Patt Dorsey (NWTF), Nick Olson (NFF), and Stephanie Weber (San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA)) presented the 2022 update and accomplishment roll-up. Their presentation is summarized below.

Overview

- From 2020 to 2022, partners in Southwest Colorado restored over 56,000 acres, 61% of their goal to restore 93,000 acres over three years.
- Between 2021 and 2022, there was a reduction in the number of private land acres treated. Southwest Colorado partners continue to look for funding to accelerate private land treatment.
- In 2022, partners treated 13,000 acres of their 29,000-acre goal on SJNF and BLM lands. One challenge with increasing the number of acres treated on federal lands is the USFS's self-imposed pause on prescribed fire.
- Over 100 projects and supporting activities occurred on public, private, state, and tribal lands. Colorado Parks & Wildlife and Montrose Forest Products provided support and expertise to implement treatments. Below is a list of partners and the number of projects they are managing:

- Wildfire Adapted Partnership – 15 projects
- NRCS – 15 projects
- CSFS – 11 projects
- City of Durango – 10 treatment units
- SJNF – 23+ projects and activities
- BLM – multiple projects

Water Value

- Southwest Colorado partners aim to have secure, clean water and delivery systems for local communities, agricultural users, water-based recreation, aquatic ecosystems, and downstream beneficiaries.
- In 2022, La Plata County received an \$875,000 Watershed Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) grant. They used this funding to conduct 14 wildfire risk assessments.
- The USFS created and implemented the Chicken Creek Watershed Restoration Action Plan (WRAP) on the Dolores Ranger District to improve the watershed by one condition class.
- The USFS also implemented a new snowtopography monitoring program.

Forests and Wildlife Value

- Southwest Colorado partners aim to have healthy, functional forests that support diverse, suitable wildlife habitats and populations. In 2022, partners treated 13,734 acres to benefit forests and wildlife.
- The SJNF completed 23 projects totaling over 11,000 acres of federal land. These projects included fuels reduction, invasive weeds management, timber sales, roadside thinning, and Wood for Life.
- The SJNF's projects and agreements utilized all available tools and authorities, including Stewardship Contracts, Stewardship Agreements, and Good Neighbor Authority. Some project examples included the Grass Mountain Shared Stewardship project near the Vallecito Reservoir and the Zwicker Good Neighbor Authority project in Dolores County.
- The CSFS implemented seven projects across 209.6 acres on private, state, city, county, and tribal lands. They also completed six Stewardship Plans for private lands, which resulted in 640 acres ready for implementation.
- The wood products industry supported and completed projects. Montrose Forest Products completed projects on federal lands and 120 acres on non-federal lands. They have since completed an additional 500 acres in 2023. Aspen Wall Wood has started to produce pellets to use for small-diameter biomass. Timber Age Systems received a Wood Innovations Grant in 2022 to pursue cross-laminated timber opportunities. Phoenix Recycling is establishing a wood compost market that will be able to receive slash and small-diameter materials from treatments. Farm-to-Table is working on establishing a wood compost market as well.
- The SJNF and Southwest Conservation Corps completed 10 acres of oak thinning for habitat restoration. Additionally, the SJNF and CPW partnered to place six guzzlers on federal lands to provide water for wildlife. Each guzzler holds 35,000 gallons of water and includes a camera to capture wildlife photos.
- CPW invested \$105,000 in planning for a mechanical treatment of 300 acres on Perins Peak State Wildlife Area (SWA). This area has an extensive fire history, including four fires since 2010. Local firefighters said previous treatments changed fire behavior at Perins Peak SWA. This area is among the highest priority potential operational delineations (PODS) for WUI, recreation, and wildlife.

- NRCS implemented 15 projects totaling 265 acres. They have plans for an additional 170 acres. When working with private landowners, NRCS has noticed landowners asking more questions about improving forest health on their property.
- BLM treated 2,339 acres on the Dolores Rim and completed 44 acres of pile burns near the community of Summit Lake.

Communities Value

- The goal for Southwest Colorado partners is that RMRI Southwest communities in priority areas for management are prepared for the threat and post-fire impacts of wildfire. Their goal is also that communities understand the threat of wildfire, its natural role in our human and natural environment, and the tools used to mitigate the impacts, such as forestry work and prescribed fire.
- In 2022, Southwest Colorado partners managed 9,717 acres to benefit communities.
- In 2022, Wildfire Adapted Partnerships and the SJMA engaged volunteers in almost 20,000 volunteer hours. Volunteers helped provide visitor education on trail stewardship.
- Over 16,000 volunteer hours came from the Wildfire Adapted Partnership's ambassadors. Wildfire Adapted Partnership also conducted 102 site assessments, organized 137 wildfire education and outreach meetings/events, recruited 30 new volunteers, treated 82 acres in high-risk WUI communities in the RMRI landscape, and cleaned up 5,135 cubic meters yards of slash.
- The Wood for Life Program connects tribal partners to restoration byproducts for heating, fuel, and building purposes. In 2022, the Wood for Life Program delivered 552 cords of fuel wood (19 acres) to three indigenous communities. The program also received the 2022 USFS Chief's Honor Award.
- The City of Durango treated 52.2 acres of city-owned land adjacent to 176 homes. They also received a \$140,065 Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Resilient Community grant for future activities.
- The NFF implemented the Grass Mountain Shared Stewardship Project, a 450-acre cross-boundary project targeting the largest subdivision in Southwest Colorado. The project will also protect key water infrastructure. It is the first of five projects that Southwest Colorado partners hope to implement over the next three to five years.

Recreation Value

- Southwest Colorado partners aim to have accessible, inclusive, and sustainable recreation opportunities available for local communities and visitors. Recreation aligns with local values and culture, and users value the landscape and invest in its future.
- The recreation strategy is led by the NFF, with support from the SJNF and Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. They plan to develop the Southwest Colorado All Lands Outdoor Recreation Strategy to pursue sustainable recreation across BLM, CPW, Bureau of Reclamation, Southern Ute, City of Durango, and USFS lands around the Columbine Ranger District.
- The SJMA has 151 volunteers who completed 3,889 contact points with the public to educate them about trail stewardship. They also hosted field trips for students and completed trail maintenance work to mitigate visitation impacts, including clearing downed trees and picking up hundreds of pounds of trash.
- The City of Durango established new trails and signs. They also built new trails using the GOCO Resilient Communities grant funding.
- The BLM established the Aqueduct Trail System. Partners purchased wayfinding maps and kiosks at the trail intersections. They also used recreation funds for habitat restoration and

wildlife protection efforts related to recreation. The BLM also manages special use permits for local businesses, which aligns with the partner goals of supporting community service providers while balancing all users.

- The Southwest Conservation Corps helped implement many recreation projects, including maintaining trails and constructing fences to protect archaeological sites. They will also reroute several trails in the East Animas climbing area and install interpretational signs on the Aqueduct Trail.

Conclusion and Needs

- The funding for all these projects and activities comes from diverse sources. COSWAP was instrumental in ramping up private land work in La Plata County. COSWAP funding is also helping support the work of the Mancos Conservation District in Montezuma County. The USFS has invested \$6 million to support projects, from planning to implementation. The BLM Community Assistance program provided \$340 thousand for projects. The CSFS has provided funding through seven different internal funding sources. The City of Durango, CPW, GOCO, NFF, SJMA, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe have also contributed funds.
- Southwest Colorado partners have attempted to build social license by changing the language around what it means for logs to leave the forest (i.e., forest treatments are tied back to shared values). They have discussed putting banners on log trucks to communicate the connection between values and forest treatments.
- The SJMA completed a second year of the RMRI ambassadors program to connect with stakeholders and members of the public about why forest treatments are occurring.
- Partners have built capacity over the past year, including hiring Nick Olson as the new NFF Southwest Colorado Project Coordinator. The NWTF has hired new forester positions and is providing funding to hire a project coordinator for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). The CSFS is also increasing its capacity to make an impact at the landscape scale.
- Southwest Colorado partners continue to need capacity at all different levels. They also need more NEPA-ready acres; the SJNF is currently engaging in large-scale NEPA planning. Partners need support to manage prescribed fires and funding for recreation-specific projects.

Clarifying Questions

RMRI Leadership Team members asked clarifying questions about the Southwest Colorado accomplishments update. Their questions are in italics below, with the corresponding responses in plain text.

Will the large amount of snow that Southwest Colorado received this year impact when they will begin forestry operations?

- There have not been specific discussions on how the snowmelt will impact forestry operations, but it may cause more challenges than in past years.
- The heavy snow has delayed the prescribed fire on Animas City Mountain. The wildlife in the area has had enough stress due to the harsh winter, so CPW is extending seasonal recreation closures and avoiding prescribed burns for the time being.

RMRI Leadership Team Comments

RMRI Leadership Team members commented on ways their agencies can support the Southwest Colorado landscape and information that the Southwest Colorado landscape can bring to their agencies to help them provide resources and support. Their comments are summarized below.

Ways RMRI Leadership Team Members Can Support Southwest Colorado

- The NRCS will have additional program funding available for private forest lands. The NRCS can discuss the potential to develop an RCPP project for the Upper South Platte Watershed and evaluate opportunities to build capacity through partnership agreements.
- Club 20 can continue to push out the message of RMRI at regional meetings and conferences.
- COSWAP will continue to provide funding. DNR will reach out in the future

NEXT STEPS

RMRI is planning a summer field tour to celebrate the accomplishments in the Upper South Platte.