



St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership

Partnership Plan

October 2020

Introduction

Federal, state, and local agencies and organizations (partners) have long recognized the St. Vrain Watershed as a vital landscape that is at risk for catastrophic wildfire. However, the partners tasked with managing this vital landscape have lacked the human and financial resources to address the issue. A new funding source and collaborative agreement is changing these circumstances. The USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) recent grant award from the [Joint Chiefs funding](#) provides a new catalyst and the necessary resources for partners to address this critical issue. Specifically, the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership provides approximately five million dollars of funding to the NRCS and USFS for projects across the Arapahoe and Roosevelt National Forests that mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality, and restore healthy forest ecosystems on public and private lands. Additionally, in August 2020, partners formally agreed to collaborate on forest health projects across Boulder County by signing [an MOU](#). Given the St. Vrain Watershed's importance as a priority geographic area within Boulder County, the St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership was formed to restore landscape-scale forest health and resilience throughout the watershed. Today, the St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership includes participation from diverse federal, state, local, and community representatives throughout the St. Vrain Watershed.

Context

The partnership focuses on the 625,000-acre St. Vrain Watershed, which is at increasing risk for catastrophic wildfires that threaten to have devastating effects on landscape values. The watershed is a vital resource for our ecosystem and community. The headwaters of the watershed originate at the continental divide in Rocky Mountain National Park and Indian Peaks Wilderness. A large portion of the upper watershed is a Research Natural Area (RNA), which is designated for non-manipulative research, education, and the maintenance of biodiversity. The watershed also serves as a critical corridor for big horn sheep migration. Within the RNA, prescribed fire may be used to improve habitat for bighorn sheep and support natural conditions. In the heart of the watershed, Button Rock Preserve is the primary water source for 100,000 domestic water users and provides regional recreation to over 60,000 visitors annually. Further, the watershed is a popular place to live, with rural mountain communities such as Allenspark in the upper watershed, down to Lyons and the City of Longmont in the lower watershed.

The montane forests, on which our community and ecosystem depend, have become dense and overcrowded, increasing their vulnerability to large wildfires, insect epidemics, and disease, particularly in the face of climate change. As catastrophic wildfires become increasingly common in the western US, this threat is acutely evident in our watershed where a major wildfire has not occurred in over 20 years. Experts also note that high incidents of lightning in the area make the watershed particularly susceptible to a future wildfire ([Boulder County CWPP](#) and [St Vrain Wildfire/Watershed Assessment](#)).

Vision

The Partnership's vision is to achieve a healthy and resilient watershed that can sustain wildfire and other natural disturbances while protecting communities, keeping water supplies clean and reliable, and supporting diverse native flora and fauna for current and future generations.

Mission

The mission of the Partnership is to bring together diverse partners and community members to collaboratively plan and implement cross-jurisdictional landscape-scale forest restoration in the St. Vrain Watershed that will prepare the landscape and community to receive wildland fire as a natural part of the ecosystem.

Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Partnership Structure

The Partnership includes over 30 stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and interests, including the USFS, NRCS, State Forest Service, Boulder County, City of Longmont, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, universities, local towns, conservation districts, water districts, fire districts, police departments, schools, environmental groups, and private landowners. The Left Hand Watershed Center, a nonprofit that works to protect and restore watersheds for people and the environment using a collaborative and science based approach, leads the partnership coordination. However, an informal governance structure, that fosters collaborative leadership and ensures participatory engagement from a diversity of partners, overlays the entire process. Although decisions are made by individual entities, the partnership allows collaboration across boundaries to create the greatest impact and landscape-wide benefits. Additional partnership building will entail reaching out to new partners to maximize basin-wide representation and formalize partner roles and responsibilities.

A Steering Committee (Table 1 below) was formed in spring 2020 to develop this project charter. Moving forward, the partnership will endeavor to meet with all partners listed in Table 1 on regular basis (monthly or every other month). The role of the Steering Committee will be periodically re-evaluated throughout the partnership and meetings are expected to take place on an as-needed basis.

Left Hand Watershed Center

- Lead coordinating entity.
- Received funding via Colorado Water Conservation Board and the USFS to lead project coordination and outreach.
- Manage funding, administer grants, and ensure that funding criteria are met and project is complete within scope and budget.
- Main point of contact for all partnership members.
- Keep all partners in the loop on project progress, timeline, and more.
- Strive for open and transparent communication among all partner members.

Agency Representatives

- Government agencies hold title to land in the planning area. Agency representatives:



- Attend meetings and/or participate in surveys to help the partnership develop a watershed-wide vision.
- Assist in or lead workshops and field trips to define desired conditions.
- Assist in or lead workshops to develop project priorities.
- Contribute to writing and reviewing desired conditions statements.
- Lead author on draft restoration plans for their properties (as appropriate).
- Assist in keeping the project on schedule by being responsive.
- Communicate information and obtain feedback from respective agencies as appropriate.
- Communicate questions and concerns to the Watershed Center.

Landowners

- Private landowners hold title to land in the planning area. Landowners:
 - Attend meetings and/or participate in surveys to help the partnership develop a watershed-wide vision.
 - Participate in workshops, meetings, and field trips (as appropriate) to define goals, desired conditions, prioritize projects.
 - Provide input on draft restoration plans for areas that include their properties.
 - Assist in keeping the project on schedule by being responsive.
 - Communicate questions and concerns to the Watershed Center.

Community Representatives

- Community representatives help the partnership understand diverse community perspectives relevant to the project, and ensure a long-lasting solution is developed with broad community support. The partnership strives to include representation across diverse geographies and neighborhoods. Community representatives:
 - Attend meetings and/or participate in surveys to help team develop a watershed-wide vision.
 - Assist in developing overall project goals and desired conditions statements.
 - Participate in reviewing and commenting on draft restoration plans.
 - Assist in keeping the project on schedule by being responsive.
- Communicate information back and obtain feedback from their respective communities.
- Communicate questions and concerns to Watershed Center project manager.

Technical Representatives

- Technical representatives provide technical expertise necessary for the team to understand and use the best available science. These representatives may have specialties from ecology, botany, wildlife biology, forestry, ornithology, hydrology, watershed science, and more. Technical representatives:
 - Attend meetings and/or participate in surveys to help team develop a watershed wide vision.
 - Assist in or lead workshops and field trips to define desired conditions.
 - Assist in or lead workshops to develop project priorities.
 - Contribute to writing and reviewing desired conditions statements.



- Participate in writing, reviewing, and commenting on draft restoration plans (as appropriate and desired).
- Assist in keeping the project on schedule by being responsive.
- Communicate information and obtain feedback from their respective communities and/or relevant technical groups.
- Communicate questions and concerns to Watershed Center project manager.

Communications Representatives

- Communications Representatives are public affairs officers and/or communication specialists for participating agencies. Communications Representatives:
 - Collaborate on and develop communication strategies, key messages, materials, etc.
 - Distribute materials to participating internal representatives.
 - Distribute materials to the public via their public information networks and list serves.
 - Leverage social media platforms.

Partnership Process and Schedule

Approach

- The Partnership goal is to achieve broad support among basin-wide communities by working collaboratively to develop a shared vision and desired conditions statement(s) to ensure the long-term health and resilience of our forests. Throughout the process we strive to include diverse scientific and community perspectives.
- We expect to select priority restoration locations with a range of representative conditions within the watershed (from upper to lower montane, and from developed to undeveloped) to describe the range of desired future conditions within the watershed and/or the expected ecological trajectory.
- Following development of the desired conditions statements and project prioritization, landholding entities will work together to develop implementation (restoration) plans. Partners will also collaborate in developing an adaptive management framework, to assess how well restoration efforts achieve the desired future conditions and/or are on the trajectory toward achieving the desired conditions.
- Meetings are expected to take place via virtual on line platforms or in person as appropriate, and by participating in on-line surveys.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Throughout the project, we will reevaluate and update this project charter as needed.

1. Mission and Vision Statement – August-October 2020

Partners will work collaboratively to confirm the partnership vision, mission, and approach. The draft vision, mission, and approach included in this document were developed by the partnership Steering Committee in the spring/summer of 2020. The Steering Committee used input provided by the entire group during the visioning session in February 2020. Now, the Steering Committee is seeking feedback from the entire group.



Timeline/Actions

- Update www.watershed.center website with current project information. (August/September 2020)
- Email a project update to current participants/stakeholders. (September 2020)
- Develop on-line survey to ask project partners for feedback on mission, vision, goals, structure, and approach. (September/October 2020)
 - Ask who else should be included in these conversations.
 - Ask to distribute to their networks.
- Use social media platforms, neighborhood mailing lists, US Postal Service, etc., as appropriate to contact residents in the planning area announcing the partnership and opportunities for community representatives to participate. (September/October 2020)

2. Desired Conditions Statement – September 2020 - June 2021

In concert with task 3 below, partners will work to define the desired future conditions within a range of representative priority areas. The intent is to select representative areas across lower and upper montane forest types, and from developed to undeveloped lands.

Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) will help the partners utilize the best available science (including information from the Upper South Platte Partnership) and will coordinate with the larger [Front Range Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project](#).

Historical forest stand data will be used as a basis for desired conditions descriptions, while also considering future long-term ecological trajectory of the landscape. Partners will work to find actual reference stand conditions within the watershed using aerial imagery, LiDAR, field recon, and/or local knowledge to describe the range of desired conditions.

Timeline/Actions

- Steering Committee Zoom Meeting to confirm approach and assign tasks to lead prioritization and desired conditions workshops. (October 2020)
- Prioritization & Desired Conditions Workshops. (October 2020-April 2021)
- Socially distanced (or virtual) field trip to sites with “reference” desired conditions. (October-April 2021)
- Develop *DRAFT* Purpose and Need and desired conditions statement(s) in coordination with CFRI and technical experts, incorporating goals from stakeholders and community members. (April 2021)
- Obtain feedback on *DRAFT* Purpose and Need and desired conditions statement(s) from project partners. (May 2021)
- Develop final Purpose and Need and desired conditions statement(s) (and illustrations as funding allows) based on feedback from project partners. (June 2021)

3. Identify Priority Areas – October 2020 - June 2021

In concert with task 2 above, partners will work to define priority restoration areas within a range of representative conditions. The group will aim for representative areas across lower and upper montane

forest types, and from developed to undeveloped lands. Prioritization methods will be defined by agency representatives and technical representatives that agree to lead the prioritization workshops.

- Survey and/or Zoom Workshop as described in task 2 above to define project/geographic priorities within planning area. (October 2020-April 2021)
- Develop prioritization criteria and a priority map for restoration implementation. (February-June 2021)
- Identify funding sources and funding plan (including potential match funding sources) for restoration implementation. (March- June 2021)

4. Project Restoration Planning – April 2021 - August 2022

In concert with tasks 2 and 3 above, project partners will define the proposed restoration actions and adaptive management process that will be used to achieve desired conditions within a priority restoration planning area. Priority areas defined in task 3 will be used as actual on-the-ground examples to describe the range of proposed actions (and adaptive management approach) in the planning area. Planning will be done at appropriate scale and level of detail necessary to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) proposed action and scoping letter.

- Project partners will define restoration actions and adaptive management process within a planning area as appropriate for NEPA. (April 2021-August 2021)
- USFS will initiate public scoping as required by NEPA. (August-October 2021)
- USFS will complete environmental analysis as required by NEPA and other applicable federal laws, informed by collaborative partnership and feedback received via scoping process.
 - Release draft decision for public comment. (Winter/Spring 2022)
 - Release final decision. (Summer 2022)

5. Project Implementation

Landholding entities work collaboratively to further develop site specific project implementation (restoration) plans for priority project locations, relying on input from technical experts and in consideration of the range of desired conditions.

- Develop project implementation (restoration) plan for partner review/feedback. (On-going)
- Monitor treatment outcomes and utilize an Adaptive Management Process as appropriate. (On-going)

6. Future Phases TBD

- Identify targeted neighborhood outreach strategies based on the geographic priorities identified in task 3 above.
- Define on-going collaborative process to implement an annual adaptive management process.



Table 1. St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership- Current Members

Agency	Name	Steering Committee Member?
Left Hand Watershed Center	Jessie Olson, Yana Sorokin	Yes
USFS	Angela Gee, Kevin Zimlinghaus, Chad Buser, Mark Mendonca, Katie Heard, Reid Armstrong	Yes
NRCS	Karen Mandujano, Jonas Feinstein	Yes
Boulder County	Stefan Reinold, Scott Golden, Therese Glowacki, Eric Lane	Yes
Wildfire Partners	Jim Webster	Yes
Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts	Chad Julian, Vanessa McCracken	Yes
Colorado State Forest Service	Ben Pfohl	Yes
City of Longmont	David Bell, Ken Huson, Danielle Levin	Yes
Rocky Mountain National Park	Doug Watry	Yes
Colorado Forest Restoration Institute	Tony Cheng, Mike Caggiano	Yes
Left Hand Fire District	Chris O'Brien	Yes
St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District	Sean Cronin	
Town of Lyons Ecology Board	David Batts	
Allenspark Fire District	Gary Maguire	
Lyons Fire District	Steven J. Pischke	
Boulder County Sherriff's Office	David Buchanan, Seth McKinney	
Left Hand Water District	Jason Whitmore	
The Nature Conservancy	Rob Addington	
Pinewood Springs Resident & SVVSD employee	Sarah Wegert	
Lyons Resident & retired CSFS forester	Ron Gosnell	
Allenspark Resident	Mary Stern	
Raymond Resident & St. Vrain Creek Coalition board member	Bill Ellis	
Part-time Allenspark resident and retired USFS employee	Sally Collins	
Longmont resident & Nature Conservancy employee	Paige Lewis	
Allenspark Resident	Robert Kerr	
Additional Landowner Residents TBD (e.g., Meeker Park, Big Elk Meadows)	TBD	
Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Mark Leslie	
Colorado Native Plant Society	TBD	
American Forest Foundation	Natalie Omundson	
Jamestown	TBD	