

Notes

St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership

1:00-3:00 pm, January 27th

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6688242485>

Attendees

Jessie Olson – Watershed Center

Yana Sorokin – Watershed Center

Chiara Forrester – Watershed Center

Sean Cronin - St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District

Scott Hansen - City of Longmont

Ch'aska Huayhuaca, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute and Northern Colorado Fireshed
Chief Zick-Lyons Fire

Angela Gee, USFS Boulder Ranger District

Pryce Hadley, City of Longmont Natural Resources/Water Resources

Jonas Feinstein - USDA NRCS

Gerry Kelly, BCNA

Kimberly Mihelich, Northern Water

Bill Ellis, Raymond resident and property owner

Frank Falzone, NRCS

Vern Koehler, Acting District Ranger, Clear Creek Ranger District (Idaho Springs), US Forest
Service

Scott Heffernan, Forester with the Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts

Ben Pfohl, Colorado State Forest Service - Boulder Field Office

Ken Huson, City of Longmont

Dan Wolford, City of Longmont

Maya MacHamer, Boulder Watershed Collective

Erin Fried, Communication and Community Engagement PM, Boulder Watershed Collective

Tom Veblen, retired CU

Ben Markle, Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts

Chris Wanner, City of Boulder OSMP

Barbara Luneau St Vrain Anglers Trout Unlimited Chapter

Susan Spaulding-Boulder County Parks & Open Space

Rob Walker - Forester with the Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts

Stefan Reinold-Boulder County Parks and Open Space

Matt Jones, County Commissioner

David Batts, EMPSi, Lyons Ecology Board

Danna Muise USFS GIS
 Angie Busby, Cal-Wood Education Center
 Scott Golden - Boulder County Parks and Open Space
 Pam Sherman, Intermountain Alliance
 Andrew Slack, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute
 Kevin Zimlinghaus USDA Forest Service ARP/Boulder RD
 Tammy Williams, ARP Public Affairs listening in for Reid Armstrong
 Chad Buser USFS, ARP
 Paul Orbuch, USFS Contractor coordinating the Boulder County Fireshed
 Katie Fialko USFS Boulder Ranger District
 Ken Lenarcic, Town of Jamestown
 Chris O'Brien Lefthand FPD
 Monica Bortolini, City of Longmont, LWC Board Member
 Mary Stern, Resident and Property Owner, Meeker Park

Welcome and Brief Partnership Overview

Jessie Olson

1:00 PM

- Reviewed agenda
- Reviewed partnership history and boundary
 - Described partnership vision and process to ID vision
 - Working via science and communications team to develop tools for working towards vision

Partner/Project Updates

1:05 PM

- USFS (Angie Gee)
 - Angie is moving on to regional office USFS position at the end of March. Ranger position is currently being advertised.
- City of Longmont Button Rock projects (Pryce Hadley)
 - Two forest health and fuels projects in 2022.
 - 40 acres in Antelope Park area, along Sleepy Lion trail. Shared access routes with Boulder County. Funded by FRWRM. Goes till 2024.
 - 12-18 acres through partnership with Laramie County Conservation Corps. Includes education and outreach campaign. Working in partnership with the Watershed Center on educational campaign in summer. Occurring in part of the area where SVFHP hosted field trip.
- St. Vrain & Left Hand Water Conservancy District Projects (Sean Cronin)
 - Introduced SVLHWCD's voter-funded 5-Point Plan. \$3.4 million in 2021. Entering in Partnership agreements to fund projects. Noted two agreements related to SVFHP with Left Hand Watershed Center and Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts. Explained return on investment to taxpayers. Noted additional projects related to SVFHP are currently underway/being considered.

- Boulder County Hall Ranch Prescribed Fire (Stefan Reinold)
 - Hall Ranch project is underway (prescribed burn took place this past fall) and they are applying for more funding to support the project. Currently hiring new senior forester, plus another position Jim Webster noted.

Communications & Science Team Updates

Chiara Forrester

1:30 PM

- Overview of existing outreach/engagement materials
 - Showed images for lower elevation forest restoration projects.
 - Introduced outreach tool and provided summary.
https://watershed.center/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/OutreachTool_V12_HighRes.pdf
 - Sean asked about use of watershed vs. basin language. This will be further discussed at Communications meeting.
 - Introduced and reviewed story map tool.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/59ba8a8f97ce45a5a2028161fcd8b87c>
 - Shared social media tools Chiara can send to others who want to share.
 - Ch'aska asked about community feedback from story map. Chiara noted we have seen increased engagement but have not tracked website stats/clicks.
 - Mary asked about pre-prescribed burn notifications and added that post-fire conditions in the conceptual images reflect many years in time, noting concern about post-fire cleanup. Chiara responded that we are considering creating a landing page for prescribed burn project notification and agreed that the images reflect years into the future. Chiara added that Northern Colorado Fireshed is working on creating images that show more precise stages of post-treatment conditions over time. Koren added that the burn Mary mentioned was done by the RMNP and noted the firefighters followed up with one concerned individual to clarify information and address concerns. Koren added that RNMP notifies people in many ways and makes house calls as needed, and agreed that the landing page Chiara mentioned would be helpful. Mary added that the Allenspark Wind is a good way to reach that community.
 - Vern asked if the Partnership has started talking about communication of air quality impacts. Chiara noted that we have not had these discussions yet, but it will be added to the list this year.
- Overview of Adaptive Management Process & Desired Future Conditions
 - Reviewed AM process, providing summary of each step.
- Upcoming strategic planning meetings process & draft focus area maps
 - Reviewed Boulder County Fireshed Focus Map and noted that our next step is to have strategic planning meetings to refine treatment areas through additional conversations with the public in smaller, sub-geography boundaries.

NEPA Update

Jonathan Markovich

2:15 PM

- Jonathan introduced himself as the Forest Environmental Coordinator for the Arapaho National Forest and Pawnee Grassland working on environmental analysis for NEPA and developing a proposal for the St. Vrain Forest Health Project. Showed 100,000 acre project boundary. Noted that the process is incorporating the work the Partnership has been doing.
- Proposal for NEPA is using a conditions-based management approach. This means that instead of identifying specific treatment locations within the boundary, the NEPA describes existing conditions, desired conditions, and potential treatments that could get us from existing to desired conditions. Deciding actual treatments and locations will happen collaboratively with the partnership and public.
- Showed Roadless Areas. These are designated by law as areas with restricted management activities. There are two types of areas (Upper Tier and non-Upper Tier). Upper Tier generally prohibits tree cutting except under very limited circumstances such as incidental tree removal along a control feature to facilitate prescribed burning. There are 20,000 acres in the project boundary that are roadless areas (both upper and non-upper tier). Proposed treatments in these areas will be limited by what's legally allowable based on the roadless rule, and additional review by regional USFS offices will be required. Addressing these unique areas is requiring more review time to understand the areas and align with the rules. Prescribed fire will be emphasized as the main tool in these areas because tree cutting will be limited. Though this is one limitation, on the ground treatments will ultimately be decided through the collaborative Partnership approach.
 - Sean asked for clarification about public vs. SVFHP input. Jonathan responded that there will be regular opportunities to involve both SVFHP and the public during and after the environmental analysis process.
 - Angie emphasized that when USFS sends out information for scoping and public feedback, it will not specify the treatment type that will take place and where the treatment will take place. It will specify what's appropriate as determined by on the ground conditions at the time of mitigation. In the scoping package, the public will see descriptions of current and desired future conditions, as well as discussion of various tools (e.g. thinning, prescribed fire, etc.) to achieve desired future conditions, and the types of conditions that would trigger/warrant action on the ground. The package will explain all that, but it's ultimately through the partnership efforts and public engagement at the time of implementation that USFS will determine which treatment is occurring. E.g. in five years a fire or insect infestation will change existing conditions and we want to be able to adapt to that very quickly instead of being stuck to the conditions that are existing today. This is a newer approach for the USFS. This helps increase the pace and scale of restoration/mitigation.
 - Sean asked for clarification of language from general public perspective. How does a member of the public buy off on something if they don't know where it will occur and how it will occur? Jonathan explained that part of the package is the list of criteria that USFS will follow to make decisions about on the ground treatments. E.g. what specific conditions will trigger allowable treatments? In

terms of where, there will be a list of which conditions trigger treatments and what prioritizes specific areas (e.g. partnership priority, POD boundaries, etc.). NEPA process will help address these concerns from the public. Angie added that Implementation Framework will explain how USFS will work with the public and seek public engagement. It will make it clear that USFS will not ID areas independently and decide the treatment. Partnership and public will be part of the decision process and data collected to inform decision will be part of adaptive management process. Jonas emphasized that this is the point of the collaboratively developed desired future conditions.

- Jonathan reviewed next steps for developing proposal (e.g. purpose, need, proposed action, letter, webpage, etc.). Goal is to have this sent out for scoping at the end of February with guidance for public about what comments will be helpful for environmental analysis. Draft decision is expected to come in a year after.
 - Angie added that proposal will not have a ton of specificity and we need public input to refine and shape what the public wants to see happen on the ground. Angie emphasized that there will be more opportunity for input than there has been historically, and continued public input will help the USFS adjust and refine on the ground action over time.
 - Jonathan added that there will be a webinar scheduled for stakeholder groups and the public to go over the proposal.
 - Gerry asked for more info on the integration of the environmental analysis. Also noted that this seems to be a hybrid between a site-specific NEPA and programmatic NEPA. Jonathan responded the environmental analysis is conducted by a forest team of resource specialists with diverse expertise. They look at proposed action and effects on their resources areas. They also take into account public feedback. The process can take months to years. This all disclosed in the NEPA document. Jonathan added the USFS considered conditions based actions to be a site specific NEPA rather than a programmatic NEPA. Angie added that programmatic NEPA is generally used for things related to policy and strategic decisions. Conditions based management authorizes a decision on the ground to respond to conditions that occur within the project area. The conditions and authorized treatments will be described in the NEPA documents. Ground truthing and validation is done before we decided about treatment. Gerry asked how environmental analysis will be incorporated if the documents are coming out soon. Jonathan responded environmental analysis is anticipated to be documented in environmental assessment to determine if there are significant affects and will incorporate public comments. Public input opportunity will occur throughout and comments will help refine proposed action.

Upcoming Events & Tools

Chiara Forrester

2:50 PM

- NEPA webinar

- Video and mailer with SVLHWCD
- Organize and implement sub-geography strategy meetings
- Work with Boulder County Nature Association to develop community forest ecology workshops
- Organize quarterly Ignite Talks in rotating communities – presentations from researchers and managers
- Translate outreach materials into Spanish
- Field tours of existing projects
- Outreach campaign with City of Longmont
- Monitoring through Adaptive Management at Scale (how can forest monitoring inform river monitoring)
- Considerations with Marshall Fire:
 - Increased engagement with urban planning and policy measures
 - Consider how our efforts can be integrated with climate policy
 - Continue practices to mitigate drought in strategic locations
- Asked for any additional needs for the coming year:
 - Ch’aska noted the Northern Colorado Fireshed is thinking about this too and deciding about how to engage at a scale that makes sense and looking forward to keeping the conversation going.
 - Jim added that the County is seeing and will be seeing more engagement from additional communities about fire risk after the Marshall Fire. Discussion will continue.
 - Chief Zick agreed that Marshall Fire is changing landscape about what everyone does. They are being inundated with calls for requests to evaluate properties in Lyons. More people are concerned about safety. This is changing how fire departments view this and what mitigation is needed to avoid this in the future.

Next Steps & Adjourn

Jessie Olson

3:00 PM

- Jessie thanked all for participation on the science and communications teams – we couldn’t do it without you.
- Next step is focus on April strategic planning meetings. We’ll need your help to participate and plan those meetings. Our next step is to reach out directly to plan those.