

**Summit County Wildfire Council
Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2019
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.
Buffalo Mountain Room
County Commons
Frisco, CO**

Attendees: Maggie Hillman, Joel Dixon, Eric White, Matt Benedict, Sawyer D’Argonne, Bill Jackson, Elisabeth Lawrence, Adam Bianchi, Jim Curnutte, Christina Burri, Kate Zander, Steve Lipsher, Ron Cousineau, Ryan McNertney, Catherine Schloegel, Howard Hallman, Lisa Lewis, Ned West, Tyler Campbell, Brad Piehl, Jen Barchers, Sarah Thorsteinson, Dan Schroder, Beth Huron

- I. **Approval of Agenda:** The Chair opened the meeting at 1:36 p.m. The council approved the meeting agenda without changes.
- II. **Approval of June 20, 2019 Minutes:** Steve Lipsher moved to approve the June 20, 2019 minutes. Matt Benedict seconded the motion; all were in favor and the council approved the minutes without changes.
- III. **Guest Speaker - Christina Burri, Watershed Scientist, Denver Water:** Denver Water’s watershed management and protection plan has identified Summit County as high priority for watershed protection. The plan’s top three priorities are drinking water, infrastructure, and community and environmental stewardship. Two main programs:
 - 1) From Forests to Faucets began in 2010 as a partnership between Denver Water and the U.S. Forest Service to address the high cost of the Buffalo Creek (1996) and Hayman (2002) wildfires. Each partner committed to a \$16.5 million contribution. In 2017, a second agreement expanded the partnership to include the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). CSFS and NRCS each committed another \$16.5 million, bringing the total funding commitment to \$66 million by all partners. The program focuses on forest and watershed health in areas critical for delivering water to Denver Water customers.
 - 2) Forest and Land Management Services Agreement: CSFS has provided forestry services to Denver Water for over 30 years and manages 60,000 acres of Denver Water land. Denver Water serves about 1.4 million people. The Buffalo Creek and Hayman fires affected many people, with post-fire sedimentation causing the largest impact immediately after the fire as well as down the road. Strontia Springs Reservoir has been hugely impacted by sediment, and will require intervention for many years. Just before the Hayman fire, CSFS did a fuels treatment around Cheesman reservoir, which saved the caretaker’s home as well as other structures. A prescribed burn also helped prevent the spread of fire into southwest Denver.

Key successes of From Forests to Faucets are: prioritization of Zones of Concern; the program has benefitted many people; and shared cost for focused treatments. Through Forest to Faucet partnerships, about 30% of the zone of concern around Strontia Springs has been treated, and the wood has been utilized by the Gypsum biomass facility.

Questions:

- What do you do with the woody debris? A) It is difficult to deal with, but some has been burned.
- Can we expect more Forests to Faucets projects in Summit County? A) CSFS is working on a project near the Wellington neighborhood through a Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) with USFS, and has applied for Forests to Faucets money to match IA money for next year. Miner's Creek, also a GNA project, will be completed this fall. USFS is using Forests to Faucets funding in Keystone Gulch, Tenderfoot, Ophir and the Golden Horseshoe.
- Is it hard to get funding? A) Yes – we have to make a strong case for the projects, but need to think of the risk if we don't make the investment.

- IV. Grants & Chipping Program Updates:** The chipping program is going well. With three weeks to go, participation is tracking around the same as the first year of the program (2014). In spite of extensive marketing efforts, the biggest challenge is to educate the public regarding acceptable materials and schedule. Dan and Kate are helping the contractor by picking up piles. The county may need to look at a state grant for equipment. Contractor fatigue has proven to be a factor, both in the reduced number of bids, and in the crews missing piles later in the season. Jim asked the council and partners to help spread the word regarding accepted materials. We may need to form a small task force to address the chipping program.

2019 Wildfire Grants: The town of Blue River cistern project is complete, as well as Bill's Ranch signage. No applicants have submitted for reimbursement, but work is getting done.

- V. 2018 Strong Future Fund Project Updates:** Last year, the Board asked staff to form a task force to help determine how to spend the \$1 million coming from the 2018 Referred Measure IA funds (Strong Future Fund or SFF). The task force has met a couple of times and will pass its recommendations on to the Board. Currently, the SFF is supporting USFS in three categories: 1) Four person fuels crew plus fuels planner, 2) working with CSFS on GNA projects (Barton Rd. and Miner's Creek) and 3) six person dispersed recreation crew. The fund is also supporting administration by CSFS of the Good Neighbor USFS/CSFS project at Barton Rd. CSFS has awarded a bid and selected a contractor, and work will start at the end of this month. The contractor will use winches to remove materials due to the steep slope of the project area, and hopes to have no piles remaining to burn. CSFS will use this as a pilot project for steep slope management, and will issue a press release to inform the public. CSFS now has a forester in Summit County thanks to SFF. Ashley Garrison will help promote and manage new projects, and will provide technical expertise for the county grant program. CSFS also managed the Mesa Cortina project, which is now complete. CSFS hopes to burn piles from the project in 2020 using SFF.

VI. Round Table Discussion – Activities of Wildfire Council Members and Partners:

- Ron Cousineau, CSFS: Recently attended a meeting of the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI), which is focused around large-scale forest management projects along the I-70 corridor. Hope to submit two proposals centered around Summit County.
- Matt Benedict, Red, White & Blue: Have had a few small, low intensity fires this season. Firefighters have done about 200 free defensible space evaluations this year. There are two

new Firewise communities in the district.

- Jim Curnutte, Summit County Community Development: The BOCC just approved new fire codes, including a 5-foot non-combustible zone around the home.
- Eric White, acting USFS fuels planner: Working on laying out future units, writing prescriptions for them, and working on tailoring a NEPA for Peak 7 units. USFS hopes to fill this position full time by end of year.
- Joel Dixon/Town of Blue River: Thank you for the grant to help with cisterns. The town has adopted Firewise code for new construction. Asked about Indiana Gulch – preparatory work is being done, but treatments won't begin until next year at the earliest.
- Jen Barchers, Town of Dillon: The town will most likely pass new fire code soon.
- Sarah Thorsteinson, Summit Association of Realtors: With assistance from Dan Schroder and Steve Lipsher, SAR has developed a continuing education course approved for three credits by the Colorado Realtors Association. The first class was very well received.
- Howard Hallman, Forest Health Task Force: FHTF has completed forest monitoring with USFS, and is working on ecological enhancement on fuel breaks, as well as the Summit County climate action plan.
- Brad Piehl, Forest Health Task Force: RMRI proposals are due in October for competitive grants. Brad is trying to organize one in the mountains, which may include several counties. Invited members to contact him with interest or questions.
- Ryan McNertney, CSFS: Ashley will be working with the Peak 7 community to do other SFF projects, including Slalom Dr., Protector Circle, and possibly Whispering Pines. Ashley is also looking at other projects with county open space. Last week, CSFS hosted two state representatives on a tour including Mesa Cortina and Denver Water property, demonstrating partnerships in Summit County.
- Maggie Hillman, Lower Blue: The Lower Blue is finally getting a cell tower.
- Catherine Schloegel, Nature Conservancy: Looking at the future of clearcuts and aspen.
- Lisa Lewis, Ruby Ranch: Lisa thanked the group for support working with Ruby Ranch, especially on the new water infrastructure project. She has met with Ashley on Firewise, and states that the community is excited to do more work.
- Christina Burri, Denver Water: Denver Water is supportive of any projects, such as RMRI, that will benefit our watersheds. NWCOG worked on a letter to legislators asking to protect fire fix funding for forest and watershed health.
- Bill Jackson, USFS: Supports RMRI, especially with inclusion of Summit County and the I-70 corridor.
- Elisabeth Lawrence, BOCC: Attended a tour last week with USFS called Safe Passages, which will focus on creating wildlife crossings.

VII. Legislative Updates: U.S. Representative Joe Neguse has been on three different tours in Summit County, as well as Grand County.

VIII. Adjournment: The chair adjourned the meeting at 3:24 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Beth Huron, Summit County Community Development