

Forest Health Advisory Council ~ Listening Session  
March 3, 2021  
Panel Questions and Answers

Note:

*USFS* – Indicates answers provided by the US Forest Service

*DNR/CSFS* – Indicates joint answers provided by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and Colorado State Forest Service

1. Dan Gibbs - What do you see the role of prescribed fire in addressing these statewide issues moving forward?

***DNR/CSFS*** - Prescribed fire is an important tool in our toolbox for returning fire to ecosystems and reducing fuel loads. It is cost-effective, but can be challenging to implement due to weather constraints, Colorado's extensive wildland-urban interface, and air quality regulations. The [Division of Fire Prevention and Control](#) in the Department of Public Safety is Colorado's lead agency on prescribed fire. DNR recently completed an interagency agreement with DFPC that clarifies the ability for CSFS staff to assist with broadcast burns, and the ability for DFPC to conduct prescribed burns across all lands. This agreement aims to increase the number of acres and state staff available to perform prescribed fire.

2. In a year we had \$240M+ in suppression costs and likely around \$1B in insured losses, how is it okay that only \$1-5M was invested in proactive mitigation work and the temporary shift is to invest \$10M/ year from the state for the next two years?

***USFS*** - The Rocky Mountain Region covers five different states in which risk mitigation work occurs. For Fiscal Year 2021, the region has approximately \$21 million in hazardous fuels program funding to distribute for risk mitigation work. Colorado Forests have been allocated just over \$4.9 million in base hazardous fuels funding with an additional \$6.4 million in earmarked funding for initiatives such as Joint Chiefs', RMRI and the Strategic Investment Strategy (Firesheds). Hazardous fuels targets assigned to Colorado Forests are 76,500 acres. In total, the National Forests of Colorado are receiving 53% (\$11.3 million) of the Regional Hazardous Fuels allocation while responsible for 51% (76,500 acres) of the Regional target.

***DNR/CSFS*** - While thus far the legislature has passed \$6M to fund the CSFS Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation program this legislative session, there are ongoing conversations about more substantial and ongoing investments in CSFS' mitigation programs. The Polis Administration's [Colorado Recovery Plan](#) proposes investing \$10-25M in wildfire recovery and risk mitigation through stimulus efforts. DNR and CSFS recognize and acknowledge the huge need for investment in mitigation work, but we also recognize that we must scale up investments over time,

along with expanding Colorado's forest workforce and wood products industry to accommodate increased workforce demands and biomass production.

3. Will the climate change message be more prominent with this administration?

**USFS - Addressing climate change is one of the priorities of the Biden Administration so yes the message will be more prominent. We will continue to work to do landscape scale restoration to create more resilient landscapes to combat climate change.**

**DNR/CSFS - Climate change is a central focus of Governor Polis' Administration. One of Governor Polis' four key issues is the environment and renewable energy. The Polis Administration is dedicated to moving Colorado's electric grid to 100% renewable sources by 2040 and protecting the environment for future generations, and the Governor recently released Colorado's first [Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap](#) and the [Colorado Resiliency Framework](#).**

4. Dan Gibbs: How do you envision protecting communities and watersheds while also achieving 30x30?

**DNR is beginning internal and external conversations with stakeholders on 30x30, and what it means in Colorado. No firm decisions have yet been made. Forest health and wildfire risk will be incorporated into these ongoing discussions.**

5. How have timber sales suffered under the use of stewardship or service contracts? Seems costs are going up and acres treated are going down.

**USFS - Long-term stewardship contracts can have a negative impact on small operators and even some larger purchasers. However, in some cases stewardship contracts are the only way we can get much needed WUI treatments completed. The cost of service work has been going up and this can be significant for certain treatment types. Lack of competition has been a driver in this trend, but that is improving with more contractors working in the region (Markit!, Sweat, etc.). Lack of markets for small diameter material is also a driver in increasing treatment costs. Contractors are required to remove material to meet resource objectives but may need to transport it long distances to find a market, which greatly increases costs.**

6. Are there ways to get Conservation Corps more involved?

**USFS – Yes, Conservation Corps are a great way to involve youth in this shared stewardship work as this collaboration also creates pathways to natural and cultural resources careers. The new administration recently passed an executive order that directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop a strategy to mobilize the next generation of conservation workers (Climate Corps) to restore public lands and waters, increase access to outdoor recreation, improve community resilience, and more broadly address climate change. For more information on how to engage**

conservation corps in your service area: Colorado <https://www.cyca.org/> & <https://corpsnetwork.org/>.

**DNR/CSFS - Applicants to CSFS' Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grants are encouraged to hire Conservation Corps in project work. State agencies are also in ongoing conversations with the Conservation Corps with respect to opportunities through state and federal stimulus funding.**

7. Did you notice a significant increase in GNA use in CO after it got national authorization?

**USFS - Yes, there was a dramatic increase in the use of GNA in Colorado under the new authority. The main reason is the deliberate flexibility that the agency built into the new authorization to rely on State processes as much as possible. The original program was too rigid with federal requirements and made it difficult and expensive to implement.**

**DNR/CSFS - When Colorado and Utah were the only two states authorized to use GNA, there was an increase with the number of projects that utilized the Authority. Its use dropped considerably in GNA's last couple of years of initial authorization. With the national re-authorization, GNA received a lot of attention and we think it was the right program at the right time. There was much work to be done and GNA allowed a broader use of available technical resources.**

**The USFS and the CSFS entered into a ten-year Master Good Neighbor Agreement in early November 2015 and it was updated in July 2019. Under the agreement, the CSFS has the authority to conduct forest treatments on the 11 National Forests in Colorado, complementing work on state and private lands, and leveraging state resources to accomplish work across land ownership boundaries. The BLM and the CSFS also have two Cooperative Agreements to conduct treatments on BLM lands in Colorado.**

**Since 2016 CSFS has completed 20 Supplemental Project Agreements (SPAs) on 6 National Forests and 3 BLM districts, with completed and planned treatments totaling over 16,000 acres.**

8. We continually hear the comment random acts of mitigation. I feel that this is a poor generalization. Could you please further describe what you mean? When working with communities (often the best use of limited \$) work occurs over broad area.

**DNR/CSFS - The phrase "random acts of mitigation" generally refers to seemingly random forest treatments. Wildfire risk reduction activities are often done at the scale of an individual parcel, rather than strategically linked across communities and landscapes. We need to coordinate fuels treatments at a scale, and strategic value, that will significantly reduce wildfire risk. Collaborating with local, state and federal land management agencies, communities and private landowners to link fuel treatments to increase effectiveness on a landscape scale is critical.**

9. Dan Gibbs: what responsibility do ascribe to local governments for wildfires? Will the State provide adequate financial assistance to poor local governments for that work?

***DNR/CSFS - Colorado's Fire Commission and the [Division of Fire Prevention and Control \(DFPC\)](#) have authority over wildfire response in Colorado, and legislation is proposed this session to address some of the issues surrounding the costs of wildfire response. Please contact the Fire Commission or DFPC for more information. For post-fire watershed recovery, the [Colorado Water Conservation Board](#) provides grant funding to support communities and utilities in restoring watersheds.***

10. How can we see what projects have been moved forward with the new FS funds?

***USFS - The Forest units in Colorado are responsible for reporting their accomplishments (risk mitigation acres) in our system of record on a regular basis and tracked as an overall metric toward progress to meeting our assigned target. Reports of these accomplishments are reported to Regional Leadership on a monthly basis. In addition, for earmarked funds such as Joint Chiefs', additional reporting is required on an annual basis which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative accomplishments. These reports are made available through the NRCS Joint Chiefs' initiative website and available to the public. Additional reporting of hazardous fuels project progress for other earmarked funds such as RMRI and Strategic Investment Strategy (Fireshed) funding may be produced and reported based on Regional and National Leadership direction.***

11. Funding opportunities must expand beyond grants. Those areas that are in proactive forest treatment and fuelbreak modes have passed local taxation measures. This demonstrates personal awareness and responsibility. How to increase this across the WUI?

***USFS - The Forest Service has been making targeted hazardous fuels/risk mitigation investments for many years that expand beyond the Stevens Funding (CAFA program), State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grants. Programs such as Joint Chiefs', Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) and the Strategic Investment Strategy (Firesheds) look for opportunities where partnerships exist for a multi-jurisdictional approach to mitigating wildfire risk in high risk areas or those places where partnership investments can be capitalized. For 2021 in the state of Colorado, this includes an additional investment of over \$8 million in funding focused on areas where a shared stewardship approach is being taken.***

***DNR/CSFS - The state applauds all local communities who develop local funding solutions for forest management and wildfire risk mitigation. The match requirements for state grant programs can be leveraged more effectively by communities with local funding measures. Networks of counties and municipalities can share lessons learned about how to successfully pass such measures.***

12. Does your forest committee or council include economic development representation?

**DNR/CSFS - Yes, the Forest Health Advisory Council currently includes one member who is employed by or associated with an economic development organization.**

13. How are you working to reach underserved communities that don't have access to resources or the capacity to compete for grant funds?

**USFS - We have recently created a position in the Regional Office focused on inclusivity, including underserved communities. We are committed to fostering stronger relationships with the communities we serve. We are investing in new communication strategies, developing new and stronger relationships with non-traditional and community partners, and exploring new avenues for community engagement and public involvement. We work with communities, serving the public in the interest of shared stewardship.**

**DNR/CSFS - The lower match requirement for communities with fewer economic resources in the FRWRM program will provide a new opportunity for these communities.**

**Legislative changes to the FRWRM program in the 2020-2021 grant cycle allow for grant funds of an individual project to cover up to 75% of the total project cost for projects located in areas having fewer economic resources. For all other project locations, grant funds will continue to cover up to 50% of the total project. All applicants must contribute matching funds in an amount of at least 25% (if in an area of fewer economic resources) or 50% (if not in an area of fewer economic resources) of the total project cost, including through in-kind sources.**

**The CSFS collaborated with researchers at Colorado State University in the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics and the Rocky Mountain Research Station for assistance in defining and developing a social vulnerability index to wildland fire (SVI) in Colorado to address areas of fewer economic resources in the state. The researchers constructed the SVI using data from the 2016 American Community Survey (5-year average) with weighted categories for socioeconomic status, household composition/disability, minority status/language, housing/transportation and new equity variables. Applicants can determine if proposed projects are located in an area of fewer economic resources from the Colorado Forest Atlas Wildfire Risk Viewer. Additional background and information on the SVI can be found at <https://coloradoforestatlas.org/> . Individuals should launch the Wildfire Risk Viewer application and select the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) layer for results and description.**

14. There is a strong representation of NGOs on this listening session. Is there more opportunity for NGOs to play a more active role in the FHAC?

**USFS** - Yes, there are opportunities to collaborate, share resources, expertise, and assist in implementation of projects. The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative <https://restoringtherockies.org/> is an example of an opportunity.

**DNR/CSFS** - The current FHAC includes members employed by or associated with an environmental organization, a wildlife organization, a conservation organization, a sportsman organization, and recreation advocacy organization. Therefore, there is currently participation by several NGOs. With the FHAC sunseting this year and a new council being formed, there may be opportunities for currently unrepresented NGOs to participate. The FHAC is also open to including discussions and presentations by NGOs in their meetings.

15. Understanding the constraints of the NICRA agreement where USFS dollars are hit at 26% indirect regardless of funding sources, a break down of those costs would be good to know. Any excess going to science or implementation would be highly desired.

**USFS** - The state can better speak to the breakdown of NICRA costs. The Rocky Mountain Region recognizes the excellent work the state does with funds in these agreements and sees tremendous value in what we get with the overhead rate.

**DNR/CSFS** - The Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) is an agreed upon rate between Colorado State University and the Department of Health and Human Services. CSFS indirect rate is 26% and is used for grants, contracts, and other agreements with the Federal Government. We were not clear on what costs they were wanting a breakdown on.

16. What post fire recovery activities are planned in the Rocky Mountain Region and where are areas of emphasis?

**USFS** - Post fire recovery actions on NFS lands include post-fire treatments/response actions to lower risk to BAER critical values, minor infrastructure replacement projects approved under a new pilot program, and long-term fire recovery treatments.

**BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) treatments on NFS lands after the Rocky Mountain Region 2020 fires generally included:**

- **Protection/Safety treatments to lower risk for potential impacts on human life and safety in the post wildfire environment**
- **Treatments to lower risk for post fire impacts on roads, trails, recreation facilities and other USFS property**
- **Treatments to limit establishment and/or spread of noxious weeds**
- **BAER teams also prioritized coordination and information sharing about burned area conditions with agency partners**
  
- **The BAER files for each fire contain reports and maps that describe the treatment prescriptions and locations for each burned area. Public versions of BAER reports are shared with interagency partners and are made available at <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/>.**

- For the 2020 fires in the Rocky Mountain Region, BAER reports indicated natural recovery of the burned areas to approximate pre-fire rates of runoff, erosion and sedimentation would occur within 3-5 years following the fires

Post fire recovery projects proposed under Minor Facilities and Infrastructure Rehabilitation Pilot include infrastructure or facilities that were damaged or destroyed by the wildfire:

- Recreation infrastructure: Kiosks, campgrounds, signs, burned trail bridges, etc.
- Range fences and water developments
- Property boundary markers and signs
- Engineering infrastructure: Gates. Signs, road drainage features, etc.

BAER primary areas of emphasis for all of the fires were roads and trails treatments, except for the Mullen fire for which a large-scale cheat grass treatment plan was approved and funded.

17. Has Colorado considered it's own super tanker? It could be more cost effective than paying someone else.

***DNR/CSFS*** - Please contact the Department of Public Safety's Division of Fire Prevention and Control for the latest information of fire suppression equipment.

18. Speaking of cost, the Flooding After the Fire, which is a secondary disaster cost.

***DNR/CSFS*** - Agreed. Flooding after fire can be very costly, which is why the Colorado Water Conservation Board makes funding available to communities to mitigate flood risk post-fire.

19. With the proposed increase in Wilderness how do we mitigate our water watersheds areas with limitations on access

***USFS*** - There are benefits of Wilderness with regard to water quality, surface and subsurface flow, and ability to collect water outside of Wilderness which originates in Wilderness. Wilderness is managed to preserve natural conditions, including watershed health among other values. Natural processes dominate and natural recovery following a disturbance is preferred, particularly if the disturbance is natural. However, when life, property, or the wilderness resource are seriously threatened, watershed treatments may be used to stabilize or restore damaged areas. Motorized equipment, mechanical transport, aircraft, and installations are generally prohibited in Wilderness but may be authorized when determined to be the "minimum necessary."

20. Any perspectives on grants being managed by local conservation districts?

**DNR/CSFS -Local conservation districts have been successful grant recipients in the past and use programs like FRWRM to match federal programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Like all successful grantees, they are responsible for meeting grant criteria.**

21. Are fuels reduction or post-fire project prioritizations weighted with regard to areas of increased values versus areas with less numbers of combined values? Further, what percentage of available funding within the RMR is awarded to the areas exhibiting less values (population, structure, infrastructure, municipal water users...)

**USFS - The USFS Hazardous Fuels program utilizes a Regional Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment analysis to help inform our allocation of hazardous fuels funding. Those Forests exhibiting the greatest risk from wildfire receive a larger percentage of the hazardous fuels funding to mitigate risk. In addition, Forests are instructed to focus the majority of their hazardous fuels funding on treatments to protect the WUI and other high value resources and assets (watersheds, infrastructure, etc) and to look for opportunities where cross jurisdictional work (Shared Stewardship) can be accomplished.**

**DNR/CSFS - FRWRM does not fund post-fire projects. There are a number of criteria that is used to score FRWRM grants. One consideration is where the project is located on the 2020 Forest Action Plan Subwatershed Priority Composite map. The Subwatershed Priority Composite Map prioritizes areas that address combined themes of Forest Conditions, Living with Wildfire and Watershed Protection. The Forest Conditions Theme Priority Map evaluates threats such as insect and disease disturbance, canopy fire, and land use conversion. The Living with Wildfire Theme Priority Map evaluates wildfire risk including the wildland urban interface, drinking water assets, forest and riparian assets combined with burn probabilities. The Watershed Protection Theme Priority Map evaluates improving and maintaining quality of water and infrastructure by looking at infrastructure and predicted post-fire erosion rates. More information on the Colorado Forest Action Plan and Themes can be found on the Forest Atlas at <https://coloradoforestatlas.org/>**

**Other grant programs administered by the CSFS have specific criteria for each program. Criteria includes wildfire risk, communities at risk, alignment with the Forest Action Plan, proximity to USFS lands, etc.**

22. Are there any additional advances in developing Biomass Utilization options across the RMR?

**USFS - BioChar Now outside of Loveland, CO, has greatly expanded its capacity, JR Ford has the Pagosa Area Long Term Stewardship Contract and has stated he will be producing biochar, there has been interest in biomass for energy utilizing the old sugar beet plant in Longmont, CO.**

**DNR/CSFS - There is a bill currently being considered that would authorize a study regarding biomass/biochar opportunities. Interest and investment in biomass-based**



**transportation fuels can be expected to increase in response to increased volatility in fuel prices. Biomass is well-suited to substitute for traditional transportation fuels in Colorado's state climate.**