

**Summit County Wildfire Council
Meeting Minutes
March 21, 2019
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.
Buffalo Mountain Room
County Commons
Frisco, CO**

Attendees: Jeremy Allen, Cary Green, Howard Hallman, Joel Dixon, Eric White, Allison Richards, Christina Burri, Catherine Schloegel, Ken Wiegand, Matt Benedict, Brad Piehl, Eric Howell, Greg Roy, Michael Wurzel, Ken Cremer, Maggie Hillman, Jim Cox, Sawyer D'Argonne, Andrew Held, Jim Curnutte, Dan Schroder, Beth Huron, Dan West, Steve Lipsher, Brian Bovaird (Several other attendees were present, but did not sign in.)

- I. Approval of Agenda:** Jim Curnutte (acting chair) opened the meeting at 1:32 p.m. and all attendees briefly introduced themselves. The council approved the meeting agenda without changes.
- II. Approval of November 15, 2018 Minutes:** Matt Benedict moved to approve the September 20, 2018 minutes. Maggie Hillman seconded the motion; all were in favor and the council approved the minutes without changes.
- III. Chair Nomination:** Dan Gibbs, the former Wildfire Council chair and County Commissioner, has left the county to head the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. Jim Curnutte recommended going with precedent and nominated the new county commissioner, Elisabeth Lawrence, as the new Wildfire Council chair. Jim Curnutte has already spoken to Elisabeth and she is amenable; the council agreed that Elisabeth should be the new chair.
- IV. Guest Presentation: Dr. Dan West, Forest Entomologist, Colorado State Forest Service**
 - Last year at this time, Colorado was at about 60% of the median snowpack; this year the state is at 140% - what does this mean for trees?
 - Fine feeder roots have already dissipated due to lack of water, so there will be lag time before they reestablish. A slow, gradual warmup would be most beneficial for trees.
 - Data collected from an annual Insect & Disease aerial detection survey provides landscape scale data for the entire state, including Summit County. Data collected is available on the CSFS and USFS websites.
 - In 2018, the Buffalo Fire impacted approximately 82 acres of Summit County's 204,210 forested acres (.04%).
 - Western Spruce Budworm causes defoliation of Douglas-fir and spruce and is found in small pockets throughout the state, but is not a concern in Summit County due to a relative lack of Douglas-fir.

- Western Tent Caterpillar affects aspen, which are already highly susceptible to disease.
- Large Aspen Tortrix larvae cause leaf rolling in aspen and eventually consume aspen leaves.
- 2018 aerial surveys showed no defoliation of aspen in Summit County.
- Douglas-fir Beetle prefers large diameter trees, older trees and large stands. In 2018, aerial surveys showed no mortality caused by Douglas-fir beetles. However, bark beetles love partially scorched trees, so we need to watch for Douglas-fir beetle infestation in stands that have experienced fire.
- Mountain Pine Beetle affected 3.4 million acres in Colorado between 1996 and 2018, but Spruce Beetle has already affected 1.84 million acres since 2001.
- Spruce Beetle affected only 1.4 acres in Summit County in 2018; however, the beetles can move through higher elevation trees and thereby move into Summit County. Watersheds in the southern part of the county (i.e., Blue River) are most vulnerable.
- Spruce Beetles prefer the underside of downed trees; therefore, epidemics may occur after wind throw events or avalanches.
- Western Balsam Bark Beetle (WBBB) primarily affects Subalpine fir and is ubiquitous in Colorado, but experts do not expect it to cause a problem in Summit County. The 2018 aerial survey showed fewer than 2,700 acres of spruce-fir forested affected by WBBB in Summit County.
- There is no scientific literature showing a relationship between Spruce Beetle-caused mortality and subsequent fire occurrence; however, bark beetle infestations do change fuel arrangement, which may contribute to greater fire intensity:
 - Lower wind speeds are needed to exhibit tree torching in bark beetle stands.
 - Crown fire wind speeds are more than doubled once the dead needles fall.
 - Fire type transitions from active crown fire to passive crown fire with surface fire restored in infested stands in the short term.
 - Once trees begin to fall, fire intensity becomes intense and surface heating becomes a concern.
- Human activity is a much larger concern in fires than bark beetle.
- Without remediation, we can expect to see approximately 25% of standing live tree mortality over the next 15 years due to the cumulative effects of insects and disease.
- We should focus our attention on the south end of the county.
- Dr. West distributed hard copies of the 2018 Forest Health Report 2018, which can also be found on the Colorado State Forest Service website: <https://csfs.colostate.edu/>.
- The CSFS website has a digital tool, the [Insect & Disease Story Map](#), that allows Colorado residents to type in their address and see data for their area.

A brief discussion followed Dr. West's presentation:

- Spruce beetle is endemic. We do have it in Summit County, but will keep an eye on avalanche areas. Management actions will be limited due to terrain, but the Forest Service

will do what it can.

- Other bark beetles, especially the Four-Eyed, will also attack Englemann spruce. Bark beetles are endemic and have evolved with our ecosystem.
- Aerial surveys will help spot susceptible areas, allowing crews to know where to look more closely from the ground.
- Management could include silvicultural prescriptions in which “beetle bait” is removed. Managers may take small sections of trees before they die so they can drop a seed source.
- The amount of money spent on management will be determined by the value at stake; e.g., management could help reduce fire intensity in critical watersheds.
- Selective forest management may add elasticity back to the forest by reintroducing diversity. We may only be able to affect 15-20% of the forest, but need to look at benefit vs. cost when making management decisions. With 2.9 million people living in the wildland urban interface, we have the responsibility to manage to some extent.

V. 2019 Program Funding: As in previous years, the county has about \$350,000 from previous IA funds to put toward the wildfire grant and chipping program. Funds from the 2018 IA referendum, which the county is calling “strong future funds”, will be used for larger, possibly long-term projects. Funding from 2018 IA will not be available until mid-2019, but senior management has indicated that if a worthwhile project comes along in the interim, they will consider pulling funds as they accrue.

VI. Grant Pre-Application: Staff have received ten pre-applications to date, with a total of about \$400,000 in grant requests. Staff have asked senior management to consider using strong future funds to augment the grant program if requests exceed the available funding.

VII. Chipping Program: Staff have worked on evaluating the chipping program over the last several months and recently met with three local contractors to get input. Based on this evaluation and feedback, the 2019 program will include the following modifications:

- Staff have modified the seven service areas of previous years into eight smaller service areas, but the chipper crews will still run two rounds through each service area.
 - Chipping crews will work from the north end to the south end of the service areas rather than vice versa due to earlier snowmelt in the northern sections of the county.
 - The program will start one week earlier and end one week later than last year, from June 17 to October 4.
 - Rather than accepting competitive bids as in past years, the county will pay the contractor \$130,000 (based on the average cost over the previous five years), plus any overage per cubic yard up to \$150,000.
 - Requirements for equipment mix will be more stringent this year.
- **Education Update Roundtable:** County staff will increase the use of social media, especially Facebook, in 2019. We will need to do a big education push regarding changes to the chipping

program. A full-page Memorial Day ad for the chipping program will kick off the 2019 advertising season, followed by the wildfire awareness campaign.

- Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) plans to collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on mitigation projects utilizing the Good Neighbor program, and will work with the county to get the word out.
- Joel Dixon, Town of Blue River, will share information at town council meetings.
- The Forest Health Task Force (FHTF) is working on wildfire awareness and promoting individual responsibility. Howard Hallman thanked Dan Schroder and Steve Lipsher for presenting at the March 20 FHTF meeting.
- Good Neighbor agreements will allow the U.S Forest Service to increase capacity, with Peak 7 being a priority project. The Forest Service hopes to use IA funds to build staff and get projects going on the ground, and may partner with The Nature Conservancy, Denver Water, Forest Health Task Force, the Town of Blue River and the utility companies.
- Summit County Open Space & Trails is working on a plan to have neighbors of county open space properties work with the county to cut trees. The county will require property owners to contribute financially and do work on their property as well.
- The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) has tasked the Emergency Management (EM) department to work with the towns to develop a common language and policy around fire restrictions. EM is also looking at criteria that the BOCC and sheriff use to go into those restrictions.
- Andy Held, Town of Frisco, suggested that the towns contribute to advertising efforts by disseminating posters and other educational materials.
- Ruby Ranch homeowners have been discussing water sources for their community with Summit Fire and EMS, and may submit a grant request this year. Ruby Ranch is also working with the county to try to figure out how to treat 40 acres of land adjacent to wilderness.
- Friends of the Lower Blue will invite speakers to their annual meeting this summer.
- Summit Fire and EMS continues to provide education programs and free defensible space inspections. The district performs about 40-50 voluntary inspections per year, not including those mandated by building permits.
- Summit Association of Realtors (SAR) is providing three continuing education credits for realtors to teach them about wildfire impact so they can talk to clients and potential homeowners. SAR offers to help homeowners clear slash for the chipping program, but has not had a large response to this program. SAR is looking for fresh content for this year's wildfire mailer, which will go to 12,000 single-family home/lot owners in the county.
- Sawyer D'Argonne from the Summit Daily News invited attendees to contact him if their organization needs help getting information into the paper at sdargonne@summitdaily.com.
- Open Space and Trails will continue to post fire restriction notices at all trailheads.
- The Town of Silverthorne has a new in-house marketing team, and requests that the county send marketing materials to them.

- Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) has formalized an MOU with the U.S. Forest Service on a NEPA project in Lake County. CSU is also renewing an MOU with USFS and CSFS. CSU is looking at watershed restoration and pre-post fire mitigation to determine how to integrate with Summit County's efforts.
- Forest Health Task Force continues to concentrate on pre-fire planning and post-fire mitigation.
- Red, White & Blue Fire District is already very busy. The Town of Blue River has agreed to participate in a wildfire training exercise and the district is looking for another community to participate. Peak 7 residents have gathered over 330 letters of support for a change in the earlier NEPA created for the Peak 7 neighborhood, and to support logging operations in their area. Peak 7 residents hope to begin mitigation work this summer and may submit a grant request to the county.
- Eagles Nest homeowners recently attended FHTF meetings and will share information from the meetings with the homeowners' association.
- Denver Water sends a regular newsletter by email to anyone interested in weekly run-off information. Matt Wittern invited attendees to email him at matt.wittern@denverwater.org if wishing to receive the newsletter.
- The Nature Conservancy is working with CSFS, USFS and the county to consider future forest conditions, with a particular interest in protecting water and natural resources.
- Red, White & Blue Fire District continues its education efforts and is getting a new rig soon.
- Denver Water has expanded its Forest to Faucet program to include private lands and is contributing about \$16.5 million, which by USFS and CSFS will match. Denver Water plans to spend \$4 million on work in Summit County and hopes to work with the county to leverage those funds. Christina Burri invited council members to email her at Christina.burri@denverwater.org if they have anything to share.
- USFS has a new type 6 fire engine that will run out of the Dillon Ranger District, and will have fire response modules on April 28. Allison Richards invited all present to attend upcoming fire restriction meetings, which are being rescheduled due to recent snowstorms.

VIII. Legislative Updates: State legislation on the Fir Worm has been removed from the severance tax.

IX. Adjournment: The chair adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Beth Huron, Summit County Community Development