

**Summit County Wildfire Council
Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2021
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.
Via Zoom Meeting**

Attendees: Matt Benedict, Jim Cox, Dan Schroder, Jim Curnutte, Beth Huron, Gilly Plog, Ned West, Kat Gray, Justin Conrad, Steve Lipsher, Chapin LaChance, Cary Green, Jim Keating, Madelene McDonald, Catherine Schloegel, Jen Barchers, Sarah Thorsteinson, Terry Startzel, Brett Crary, Lisa Lewis, Drew Hoehn, Ken Wiegand, several others whose full names didn't appear in Zoom sign-on

- I. Welcome and Meeting Protocol:** The Chair was unable to attend due to conflicting meetings. Dan Schroder opened the meeting at 1:34 p.m. and explained Zoom meeting protocol. Jim Curnutte acted as Chair for the remainder of the meeting.
- II. Approval of September 17, 2020 Minutes:** Ken Wiegand moved to approve the September 17, 2020 minutes. Steve Lipsher seconded the motion and the council approved the minutes without changes.
- III. HFR & CWPP Grant Program:** The county has moved the grant application period forward from previous years. In 2021, the grant pre-application is due on March 26, and final grant applications are due on April 30. The Wildfire Council will make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners in May, and grants will be awarded in early June. This will allow applicants to start projects in June, rather than mid-July as in previous years, which is vital as we enter into another potentially intense wildfire season. Jim reminded the Council that the wildfire budget includes \$20,000 for education and outreach, and with the passage of the 2018 tax referendum (aka "Strong Future Funds"), the county added another \$25,000 to the wildfire education budget; therefore we have a potential of \$45,000 to put toward public education. There was a brief discussion on potential education and outreach efforts, and council members made the following suggestions:
 - Work with the Summit Daily News to print stories about wildfire mitigation, as opposed to running ads.
 - Run a Summit Daily News article emphasizing 1) the severity of 2020's wildfires; 2) current extreme drought going into the 2021 wildfire season; 3) 2021 Hazardous Fuel Reduction Grant and Chipping Program.
 - Highlight the work of Summit County neighborhoods to achieve FireWise Community designation in a news article.
- IV. Competitive Grants vs. Strong Future Fund Backfill Discussion:** At the September Wildfire Council meeting, the question arose as to whether the competitive grant program should be separate from the Strong Future Fund (SFF). For the last two years, the county has used SFF to backfill the grant program when requests have exceeded available grant funds, but only for projects considered to be worth funding after review by the Wildfire Council. A brief

discussion followed, in which several members expressed that the strength of the grant process has been the initial grading of the projects, and that the availability of SFF to backfill the grant program adds to the strength of the program. The county's goal is to use all of the funding allocated to wildfire protection, but only for projects supporting the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

V. Chipping Program Discussion: After seven years, participation in the chipping program has remained strong, from 1,664 properties in 2014, to over 2,200 participants in 2020. The volume of wood collected and chipped continues to be around 5-6,000 cubic yards of material. Based on this continued interest from the community, the county will run the program again in 2021. The county has revised the program over time, based on input from previous contractors and the public. The 2020 schedule worked well, and the program will follow the same schedule in 2021. County staff have developed an interactive GIS map showing each year of the program, which will soon be available on the county website. Summit County has received recognition at state and national levels as a success story in wildfire mitigation, and the chipping program has been a big part of that success. The community has come to expect that the county will run the chipping program, and it serves as a great tool for wildfire mitigation messaging.

VI. Get-it-Done Committee Update: Jim and Dan discussed the need to get the Get-it-Done committee back together to brainstorm new ideas to implement the CWPP. Dan pointed out that we have already implemented about 70% of the previous Get-it-Done list. We need volunteers to agree to meet 1-2 times this summer to brainstorm ideas for projects that would meet CWPP goals, which the committee would then present to the SFF task force in August.

The group then discussed the SFF task force. When taxpayers approved SFF in 2018, the county formed task forces to make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners on how to spend funds in each of the SFF program areas. Staff put together a task force to develop wildfire projects, and held the first meeting in fall of 2018, with subsequent meetings in 2019 and 2020. Staff recommends moving the task force funding meeting up to August of 2021, rather than waiting for fall. Projects could address questions such as cistern placement, roadside treatments, emergency egress, etc. Discussion followed on potential project ideas:

- The Colorado State Forest Service suggested that the county consider working with owners of private lands that would connect larger projects on federal land.
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has been studying aspen regeneration and the potential impacts on wildfire hazard. As part of their effort, TNC is working with the U.S. Forest Service to see how silviculture affects aspen suckering, as well as the potential for increasing aspen diversity to make it less susceptible to climate change.
- Michael Wurzel, county sustainability coordinator, has also expressed interest in having the county look at regeneration projects – similar to TNC.
- Consider infrastructure such as town water supplies/tanks.
- Cary Green will help the Forest Service look at areas that have not received fuels mitigation.
- Catherine Schloegel suggested looking into a tool called “PODS” that could help the county plan more cohesively for wildfire.

- Dillon Ranger District has hired a contractor to develop a forest wide plan to help direct fuels management. Kat will share the plan with the group when it is completed.
- Encourage neighborhoods to create plans, such as FireWise.

VII. Legislative Updates: Congressman Joe Neguse launched the Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus, and introduced bipartisan legislation to help Colorado communities recover from the 2020 wildfire season.

VIII. Wildfire Council Members and Partners Updates:

- Ken Wiegand, Red, White & Blue Board of Directors, stated that the “2020 Wildfire Council Wrap-Up” was exceptionally well done, and he would like to see that shared with Summit Daily News. Jim Curnutte is meeting with Nicole Valentine (new county Communications Director) tomorrow, and he will discuss this with her. Ken also brought up the topic of increased premiums for homeowners insurance. It seems that some insurers are raising rates based on where many of the homes they are insuring are located (e.g. California), and Ken asked if the county has worked with insurers to show how well Summit County has done with wildfire mitigation efforts. Dan Schroder keeps a list of the county’s accomplishments (acres treated, dollars spent, etc.) that he could potentially share with insurance companies.
- The White River National Forest (WRNF) is seeking comments on the proposed forest-wide aspen management project. Brett Crary, U.S. Forest Service Silviculturist, explained that the project is designed to improve the health of aspen forests, which can affect wildfire mitigation efforts, as well as to improve wildlife habitat. The project will allow the Forest Service to apply specific management techniques, such as logging or prescribed burns, to promote aspen health and regeneration throughout the WRNF. The WRNF contains nearly 600,000 acres of aspen, approximately 375,000 of which have been identified for potential management under the plan. Within the 375,000 acres, the Forest Service proposes harvesting up to 10,000 acres per decade and applying prescribed burns to an additional 10,000 acres per decade. The management plan would include NEPA approval, which would allow the Forest Service to be responsive as proposals come up. The 60-day comment period starts tomorrow, and the Forest Service hopes to begin implementation next spring or summer. Brett announced that he will be taking another position with the Forest Service, and that it has not yet been determined who will be taking over the aspen management project.
- The Town of Breckenridge has been in discussions with the Highlands at Breckenridge HOA for the first five filings to complete wildfire mitigation work this summer. The Highlands HOA is planning to do mitigation on their private open space, campaigning for thorough work on individual lots, and discussing work in the Town’s right-of-way to enhance egress/evacuation safety. The Town expects more people to be in town during peak wildfire season due to remote work opportunities, thus increasing the importance of messaging about backyard fire permits, fire restrictions, etc.
- Lisa Lewis, Ruby Ranch homeowner, offered to work with Steve Lipsher and Dan Schroder to help build community enthusiasm for obtaining FireWise designation or applying for grants. Ruby Ranch has been working with the Dillon Ranger District to get

federal permission to do fuels mitigation in the portion of wilderness abutting the neighborhood. Kat stated that they have to go through the NEPA process to work in wilderness, and would be looking at restrictions such as hand treatments and removing standing dead only. The potential project footprint is 200 feet along a 1½-mile boundary, but the whole area won't necessarily be treated. The Forest Service hopes to get a decision this year.

- Kat Gray, Fuels Planner for the Dillon Ranger District, reported that the Forest Service has been burning piles from previous fuels treatments, mostly in Keystone Gulch. They are working on several Good Neighbor Agreement projects: 1) Peak 7 phase 2 - comprised of 96 acres around Peak 7; 80% will receive mechanized treatment and material will be removed; the rest of the project will receive hand treatment and piles will remain to be burned later. 2) White Cloud – currently being scoped; project will involve mechanical treatment to avoid leaving piles behind homes. 3) Blue River treatments along west side of town – Forest Service is trying to get the project under contract for treatment next year. 4) Summit County Open Space is considering treatment in the Golden Horseshoe, which requires access on Forest Service land. Denver Water may fund part of the project. 5) Ruby Ranch and Swan fuels analysis. The Forest Service aspen management plan could potentially be applied to the Blue River project if aspen stands exist in treatment area.
- The contractor burning piles on the Mesa Cortina Open Space got about halfway through the project this fall, but was unable to finish due to COVID restrictions. The contractor may need to wait until next winter to finish the project.

IX. Adjournment: Ken Wiegand motioned to adjourn; Matt Benedict seconded. The Acting Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:16 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Beth Huron, Summit County Community Development