

**Summit County Wildfire Council
Meeting Minutes
September 16, 2021
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.
Fremont Room, Community & Senior Center**

Attendees: Andy Held, Steve Lipsher, Brian Bovaird, Ben Pleimann, Christian Nelson, Drew Hoehn, Ken Wiegand, Jim Lee, Ryan Cole, Chris Stewart, Eric Nichols, Chapin LaChance, Hilary Sueoka, Kat Gray, Dustin Lyman, Joel Dixon, Lisa Lewis, Ashley Smith, Michael Wurzel, Dan Schroder, Elisabeth Lawrence, Beth Huron, Jim Curnutte

- I. Welcome and Introductions:** The Chair opened the meeting at 1:32 p.m. and asked the newly appointed River Basin representatives to introduce themselves: Dustin Lyman, Ten Mile Basin; Ash Smith, Lower Blue Basin; Brad Piehl, Upper Blue Basin; Eric Nichols, Snake River Basin.

- II. Approval of Agenda and May 20, 2021 Minutes:** Chapin LaChance moved to approve the agenda and May 20, 2021 minutes. Andy Held seconded the motion and the council approved the minutes without changes.

- III. HFR and CWPP Grant Program, Chipping Program Outcomes, Strong Future Funds Allocated Project Updates:**
 - Grants: Seven Hazardous Fuels Reduction (HFR) and four Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) grants were awarded in 2021. Applicants have until July 2022 to complete their projects. The ten grant projects awarded in 2020 are completed. Since 2006, the grant program has funded 193 fuel reduction projects. Applicants have paid 52% of the costs and the county has paid the balance, which demonstrates great leveraging of county funds. Staff will continue to work on messaging to get more HOA's and neighborhoods involved.

 - Chipping: The chipping program is in its 8th year, and public participation has not diminished. The program has been well received, and the Wildfire Council supports keeping it going. Dan outlined some challenges of the chipping program over the past couple of years. The number of interested contractors has dwindled, and only one contractor submitted a bid in 2021. The cost to run the program has increased. Ceres won the contract in 2021 as the only bidder, and they sub-contracted with Alpine Tree Services to cover the same area in less time than in previous years. Timberline was the only bidder for hauling chips to Climax and won the contract. Climax buys the chips from the county, and the county pays the chip haul contractor, so the cost is usually net zero. However, the county is losing about \$30,000 on moving the chips this year due to an increase in chip haul costs. Discussion followed on meeting the challenges of continuing the chipping program:

- The BOCC supports keeping the program going, especially as we have funding.
- The municipalities could participate by providing equipment to bring materials to a central spot.
- Consider changing the structure for hiring sub-contractor, and look at ways to get more contractors involved.
- Municipalities may need to provide housing for chipping employees.
- The landfill takes wood year round for \$12/pound, so the county could take chips to the landfill.
- Finding seasonal chipping staff has become challenging.
- Strong Future Funds (SFF) Allocated Project Updates: Approximately \$1.1 million was to wildfire mitigation efforts in 2021. In 2020, the county spent \$1.1 million on wildfire projects, of which \$475,000 was allocated to multi-year projects (USFS Fuels Reduction and Administration Collection Agreement, USFS fire watch crews, Sheriff's Office fire watch crews, CSFS forestry assistance, education and outreach).
- 2021 projects include:
 - White Cloud (120 acre fuel break between Peak 10 and the White Cloud/Warrior's Mark neighborhoods and Spruce Creek area of Blue River);
 - Settler's Creek (Rocky Mountain Youth Corps cut trees and built piles on 17 acres outside of Keystone; may finish with RMYC or in-house staff in 2022);
 - Peabody Placer and Wellington burn piles;
 - Town of Frisco Ten Mile Water Treatment Plant fuels reduction.

IV. Strong Future Fund Project Discussion:

- The Town of Frisco is working on a multi-dimensional "backyard" project that would encompass private and federal land throughout Frisco. The project will require a lot of collaboration and time, but has great possibilities. In order to succeed, residents will need to propose plans for their neighborhoods. There is also potential for work on land that has already gone through the NEPA process, such as around the hospital. Strong Future funds could be used to analyze and plan future projects.
- Summit County could benefit from the proposed Ski Area Fee Retention Act, which if passed would allow ski areas to retain a portion of the fees that they pay to the Forest Service. There is bi-partisan support for the bill, which could generate \$10 million or more per year to fund beneficial projects in the district.
- When people buy ski passes, they have to opt out of a one-dollar donation. Donation funds have added up to over a million dollars and could potentially be used in conjunction with county funding.
- The Ruby Ranch project to conduct fuels reduction in wilderness abutting the neighborhood is nearly ready for implementation. Ruby Ranch paid for the NEPA, but the Dillon Ranger District has assisted greatly in moving the process forward.
- The resolution that provided the Strong Future Fund includes language that supports projects to protect watersheds.
- Summit Fire & EMS has assigned two personnel to wildfire mitigation, but needs additional funding to develop the wildfire mitigation program. The district is seeking funding via a mill levy to help maintain current staffing and response levels. Assistance from Strong Future funds would allow the district to have a dedicated wildfire specialist,

provide annual red card certification for all firefighters, and provide expanded education and outreach.

- Summit County Open Space and Trails has several potential projects.
- Summit County Open Space and Trails is currently revising the Master Plan, which may provide a nexus with wildfire mitigation efforts.
- Strong Future funds could be used to support revegetation where appropriate, and to plan for future forests that are better adapted to a changing climate.
- The Emergency Manager is drafting a new evacuation plan, and Strong Future funds could potentially support the hiring of a traffic engineer to assist in this effort.
- The county would benefit from having an emergency shelter with advanced filtration when air quality from wildfire smoke is at dangerous levels.
- Ashley Garrison, Colorado State Forest Service forester for Summit County, is available to help neighborhoods develop fuels reduction projects. The forest service is more likely to conduct fuels reduction projects around neighborhoods that have done work.
- It may be time to address the rules that prevent conducting wildfire mitigation projects in wilderness areas.

V. Summit County Wildfire Council By-Laws Update Discussion: The by-laws have not been revised since 2010 and need minor updates such as name changes, meeting schedule, etc. The council agreed that staff should make the changes, and will take a motion on the updated by-laws at the next meeting.

VI. Grant Application Revision Discussion: The grant process has become more cumbersome to administrate over the years as the number of grant properties has increased and available staff time has decreased. Each property requires time from multiple county staff, as well as Colorado State Forest Service (Ashley). The grant model of including large numbers of properties in an individual project has increased awareness in the community and resulted in many satisfied homeowners; however, staff need to evaluate and revise the administrative side of managing the grant projects to ensure the program's sustainability.

VII. Agency/Participant Round Table:

- Town of Blue River – Residents were concerned about logging trucks going between Spruce Creek Trail and Gold King Way; however, Colorado State Forest Service has worked with the contractor to determine an alternate route down Spruce Creek Road and out through Crown neighborhood.
- Red, White & Blue Fire District – The district has two primary focal points for mitigation: fire code and mitigation inspections. They have conducted about 80 inspections this year, and are looking for a funding mechanism to offer on-duty firefighters overtime to do inspections and wildfire mitigation work. The district takes an aggressive approach toward evacuations and focuses on life safety. A RW&B engine has been deployed for almost 2 months, but if the local fire danger becomes worse, the district will pull back resources and keep them in the county. The teams are gaining valuable experience to respond to local events.
- Summit Fire & EMS is focusing on how to replace IA money that expires in 2023.

Combining the fire and ambulance units has improved efficiencies, but with money running out, the district will need to find another plan and has introduced a mill levy increase in this fall's election. The district hopes to develop the wildfire program and have several experts dedicated to wildfire mitigation, but the plan is still evolving. They are currently concentrating on cross-training personnel to improve efficiencies.

- The Town of Breckenridge has been involved in the White Cloud project. The Highlands recently completed a successful mitigation project.
- The Town of Frisco has a fuels reduction project in the works along the North Ten Mile trail, as well as the Backyard project mentioned earlier. The Town is hiring a lobbyist to help advocate for federal funding.
- Copper Mountain went through the mitigation plan to see how quickly they could deploy snowmaking lines if needed. The ski area has cut new trails, removed standing dead, and cleared debris off the mountain.
- Ash Smith is working with Kat on a story map to communicate the importance of mitigation activities to the public.
- The Nature Conservancy (*Sent prior to meeting by Catherine Schloegle*) The Nature Conservancy continues to collaborate on a project to increase resilience to wildfire in the Summit County wildland urban interface. The project is replacing lodgepole in the WUI and instead planting native aspen. It is an experiment whose purpose is to teach us how we can best help our forests adapt to a changing climate that is hotter and drier. We are exploring how aspen affects fire behavior near homes, while also learning how to best plant aspen, and evaluating if it will survive. This June, we confirmed that 83% of seedlings planted in October 2020 survived their first winter. On-going monitoring will teach us more about what is working, and what is not working. There are plans to plant an additional 2,000 trees at the Barney Ford site this fall. The project is a collaboration with land managers – Summit County Open Space and Town of Breck Open Space – and is possible due to support from the fantastic volunteers with the Forest Health Task Force, Friends of Breck Trails, and Friends of the Dillon Ranger District. In addition, for a second year The Nature Conservancy has provided funding to the White River National Forest Dillon District to support work to remove hazardous fuels (and expand aspen groves) in the wildland urban interface. I'll defer to our partners at the US Forest Service (Kat Gray) to share updates on that project.
- Colorado State Forest Service – see attachment A, updates from Ashley Garrison.
- Dillon Ranger District – see attachment B, updates from Kat Gray.

VIII. Adjournment: The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:27 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Beth Huron, Summit County Community Development

Attachment A - CSFS Update Summit County Wildfire Council 9/16/2021

*There may be overlap from our partners on project progress.
Information about all public lands projects is on the Summit County website.

SCOS- Settlers Creek- 17 acres outside of Keystone. Hazardous fuels reduction. Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew spent 3 weeks cutting trees and building piles. SCOS staff are continuing to work on the project. We may get another round of RMYC or finish with in-house staff in 2022. This project was well received by the RMYC who enjoyed working on a project to directly benefit neighbors, reduce fire risk, and promote aspen growth. Pile burning is expected winter 2022/23.

SCOS/USFS/CSFS Good Neighbor Peabody Placer- The Peabody project will go out for bid in 2 weeks with expected time of completion in 2022. This is an 86-acre project above the Highlands, linking previously treated areas and strengthening fuel breaks. This project also protects water quality for Denver Water and Breckenridge.

Peak 7 Community Fuels Reduction- In progress, about half the landowners in the Peak 7 neighborhood participating have completed their defensible space projects. There will be some larger projects on Town of Breck OS linking to previously treated areas and strengthening/expanding fuel breaks.

USFS/CSFS Good Neighbor Peak 7 Phase 2- Hand work/piling units have been completed. Mechanical work is in progress. All wood being removed will be used locally for firewood and timber products.

USFS/CSFS Good Neighbor White Cloud- Project operations are just getting started and will run until snow prohibits. This project will result in a 120-acre fuel break between Peak 10 and the White Cloud/Warriors Mark neighborhoods and Spruce Creek area of Blue River. Wood will be removed and made into sustainable products/lumber by a local company. Cooperation and collaboration with the towns of Blue River and Breckenridge and neighboring landowners were essential to this project.

USFS/CSFS Good Neighbor Blue River West- This project will be next year (2022), working on fuel breaks on the west side of Blue River in the Spruce Creek area.

SCOS Mesa Cortina- Pile burning will continue in winter 2021/22.

SCOS/USFS/CSFS Good Neighbor Wellington- Pile burning may occur this winter (2021/2022) and/or winter 2022/23. Information will be shared with local outlets and stakeholders prior to any ignitions.

Town of Frisco- Water Plan Fuels Reduction project will move forward in 2022. This hazardous fuels reduction project will take place along the North Ten Mile Trail.

HFR Grants- Staff are completing project completion reviews and 2nd-year weed management reviews. Each project must meet approved standards to receive reimbursement.

CSFS Foresters are available to assist neighborhoods, HOAs, and landowners with putting together HFR grant projects and applications, but **we rely on our partners** on the Wildfire Council and in the community to put us in touch with interested groups. With enough lead time we can help seek out additional cost share or other funding opportunities, but we can't do it without willing participants! If you have a project in mind that you need help with, let us know and we can begin the planning process.

Final note- as processes have evolved over the last 18 months, the end-of-the-year wrap-up in 2020 was a successful way to share what the WC members have worked on over the last year. So, we will do it again in 2021! Please start thinking about your end of the year comments and gather those pictures and videos that we can share. We will put out the official call for reports in October/November, but I will take them at any time. We know there is a lot that is not captured in the quarterly meetings, and this is a great opportunity to share your great work with the WC.

Attachment B – Forest Service Updates for 9/16/21

- Peak 7 Phase II (96 acres): hand work is complete, mechanical work has begun but will likely last until next summer
- White Cloud (134 acres): contract awarded, having access issues due to low powerlines, work will begin in next few weeks and finish by next spring
- Blue River West (121 acres): layout complete, contractor “show-me” visit 9/28
- Peabody Placer (34 acres USFS + Sum Co OS): layout complete, contractor “show-me” visit 9/28
- Two Cabins (6 acres): Eagles Nest HOA using HFR grant on National Forest Lands, work has begun and looks good
- Indiana Creek Long Term Stewardship Contract: road work complete, trees will be cut and removed next year
- Scouting for future treatment in Galena Gulch, East-side of Blue River, Frisco Backyard and Boulder Creek
- Ruby Ranch: Decision will be signed in next couple of weeks, work could begin next summer
- Swan Project: NEPA analysis for wildlife habitat improvement, stream restoration and ~1700 acres of fuels treatments. More info can be found here <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60771>
- Maryland Creek: neighborhood is interested in getting a HFR grant next year to treat adjacent National Forest Lands
- Pile burning: We will be burning piles this fall once we get snow in Keystone Gulch, Miners Creek, Tiger Road, Peak 7 and Wellington
- Fuels crew: Working on a unit in Willowbrook
- Dispersed Recreation Crew: Installing designated dispersed camping site signs on Boreas Pass road so it is not a free-for-all of campers