

Living with Fire: Protecting Communities and Restoring Forests



Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable 2006-2007 Annual Report





The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable

The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership (FRFTP) Roundtable was convened by the FRFTP Leadership Team in 2004. The goal was to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a long-term vision and roadmap for achieving comprehensive forest restoration and fire risk mitigation goals within Front Range forests, to engage local communities in the effort, and to build support for forest restoration activities.

The FRFTP was itself created following the record fire season of 2002. Comprised of representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, and National Park Service, the Partnership's goals are to reduce wildland fire risks through sustained fuels treatment;

protect communities from wildland fires; and restore fire-adapted ecosystems. The FRFTP focuses its work on 10 Front Range counties including Larimer, Boulder, Grand, Gilpin, Jefferson, Clear Creek, Douglas, Park, Teller, and El Paso.

The Roundtable is a collaborative effort involving representatives from state and federal agencies, local governments, environmental and conservation organizations, the academic and scientific community, and industry and user groups. Building on the work of the Partnership, the Roundtable assembled leading experts to examine ecological and fire risk mitigation needs, economic constraints, and policy issues that must be addressed in order to reduce fire risk and restore the health of Front Range forests.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable, a precedent-setting coalition of individuals from state and federal agencies, local governments, environmental and conservation organizations, academic and scientific communities, and industry and user groups – all with a commitment to forest health and fire risk mitigation – came together for the first time in spring 2004.

After two years of work, the Roundtable released *Living with Fire: Protecting Communities and Restoring Forests, Findings and Recommendations of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable*. The May 2006 report identified approximately 1.5 million forested acres along the Front Range that require treatment to protect communities or restore forest health. At current treatment costs, achieving these goals could cost approximately \$15 million annually over a 40-year period, which vastly exceeds the approximately \$6 million currently available each year for forest treatments.

Although the challenge is daunting, the Roundtable's combined goals of fire risk reduction and forest treatment are achievable if Front Range communities and local, state, and federal governments provide leadership and take the necessary action.

In its report, the Roundtable identified a specific set of initiatives designed to provide additional resources for forest treatments, reduce treatment costs, drive local leadership and planning, and establish common priorities for forest treatments.

Implementation Progress

Since the release of the report, Roundtable members have worked with federal, state, and local decision-makers to advance these initiatives and help catalyze the changes needed to protect and restore Colorado's Front Range Forests.

Significant progress has been made in the area of legislation at the state level that addresses forest health issues, including a bill that enables counties to form forest improvement districts to achieve forest improvement work. Other state legislation authorizes funding for a

community-based forest health improvement pilot program that establishes a \$1 million grant program to fund forest health projects, and supports federal stewardship contracts to encourage the federal government and stakeholders to identify and obtain the necessary funding to implement three-year stewardship contracts.

Several activities also are underway to increase forest-treatment incentives for private landowners, including the development of community biomass collection programs, development of a centralized grants and foundations database to help landowners and communities more effectively search and compete for funds, and expanding the understanding and use of Good Neighbor Authorities.

Roundtable members also have been advocating for additional federal funding for Front Range forest treatments. Several Roundtable members traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with Colorado's congressional delegation and staff, and the Washington Office of the U.S. Forest Service. The Roundtable also endorsed a national effort to raise the profile of and encourage increased funding for the State Fire Assistance program, one of only a few programs that channels federal monies directly to non-federal stakeholders to reduce fire risk and restore forest health.

Recognizing the need to reduce treatment costs, Roundtable members also have been working to identify opportunities to increase the use of prescribed burning. For example, a major prescribed burning program has been developed and is in the process of being implemented on Colorado State Parks land. Plans also are underway to develop a charter and the necessary process to establish a prescribed fire council at the state level.

Increasing the commercial use of woody biomass also is critical to reducing treatment costs, and Roundtable members are taking steps to foster interest. For example, the Roundtable participated in several educational events to help inform stakeholders about options for utilizing woody biomass at the community level, and is working with Colorado Wood to help establish and market wood-based businesses in Colorado.

To encourage local leadership and planning, Roundtable members have been meeting regularly with county commissioners, insurance industry representatives, and other key stakeholders to explore ways to incorporate specific forest health and fire risk mitigation language into core programs and strategic communications activities. Roundtable members also have been engaged in the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Since the release of the Roundtable report, 11 Front Range communities have completed their plans; an additional 31 are in the process of being developed and many will be completed by 2008.

Adopting a clear and common framework for prioritizing treatments is a shared goal of the Partnership and the Roundtable. To track the percent of acres treated that adhere to Roundtable priorities, Partnership agencies are assembling baseline data, which will allow projects to

be reviewed as they are implemented.

The Roundtable recognizes that protecting communities from the risks of severe wildfires and restoring Front Range forests to good health will require a sustained, long-term effort by all Front Range stakeholders. Since the release of its report in May 2006, a Roundtable Implementation Team has convened to further the work of the Roundtable. This collaborative group includes senior representatives from state and federal agencies, the scientific community, conservation interests, user groups, and local communities.

Looking Ahead

In 2008, the Roundtable will continue to work collaboratively and productively, advancing its recommendations through a variety of channels to help counties succeed in their efforts to more effectively integrate wildfire components in land-use plans, include stakeholder groups in the work of the Roundtable, work with communities to increase the number of completed CWPPs, work with state legislators to include bio-heating language in state legislation, foster broad support for an increase in State & Private Forestry funding in the federal budget, and track new federal and state fuels reduction and ecosystem restoration projects.

Roundtable Member Organizations

Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland, USDA Forest Service

American Planning Association, Colorado Chapter

Bureau of Land Management

Coalition for the Upper South Platte

Center of the American West, University of Colorado

Colorado Air Pollution Control Division, Colorado Department of Health & Environment

Colorado Counties, Inc.

Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Colorado Division of Emergency Management

Colorado Geological Survey

County Sheriffs of Colorado, Inc.

Colorado Springs Utilities

Colorado State Forest Service

Colorado State Parks

Warner College of Natural Resources, Colorado State University

Denver Water Department

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, National Park Service

Grand County Board of Commissioners

Jefferson County Open Space

Jefferson Conservation District

Pike & San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron & Comanche

National Grasslands, USDA Forest Service

Rocky Mountain National Park, National Park Service

Rocky Mountain Research Station, USDA Forest Service

Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance

The Nature Conservancy

The Wilderness Society

University of Colorado – Denver

United States Fish & Wildlife Service, Colorado Field Office

United States Geological Survey

2002 FIRE SEASON

THE 2002 FIRE SEASON

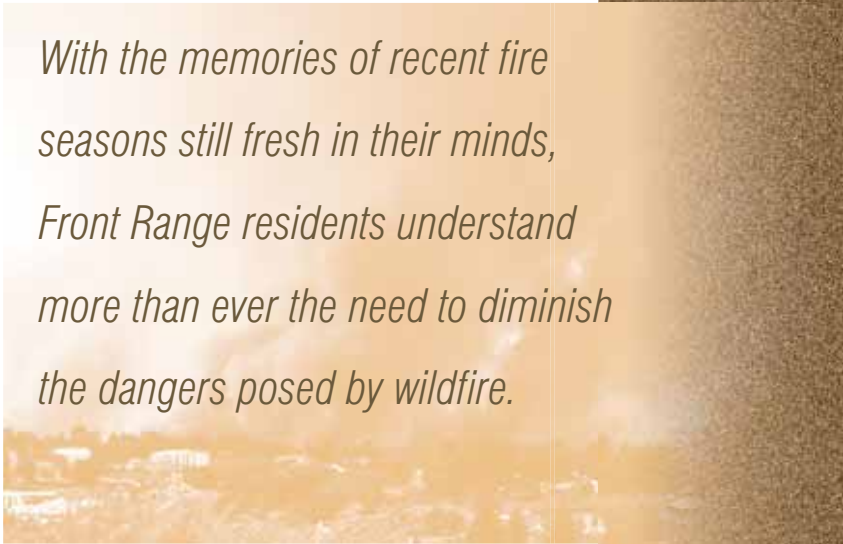
Making the Case to Restore Forest Health and Reduce Wildfire Risks

In the summer of 2002, the Hayman Fire, the largest wildfire in Colorado's recorded history, burned 140,000 acres, destroyed 133 homes and 466 outbuildings, and left parts of four counties vulnerable to flash floods and mudslides. The cost of fighting the fire and rehabilitating the burned area has reached more than \$40 million, which does not include resources required to fund long-term and indirect costs associated with the Hayman Fire. The Hayman Fire was the largest of several major fires that have occurred on Colorado's Front Range over several severe fire seasons.

And yet, losses throughout the state could be much greater. With the memories of recent fire seasons still fresh in their minds, Front Range residents understand more than ever the need to diminish the dangers posed by fire to life and property, to restore forests damaged by fire, to protect the watersheds that sustain the region's inhabitants and its agricultural lands, and to use economic incentives to spur the work of safeguarding lives and restoring forests.

Roundtable Findings

From 2004-2006, the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable studied Front Range forests on public and private land to estimate the number of acres in need of some type of intervention – either mechanical treatment or prescribed burns – to achieve fire risk mitigation and ecological restoration goals. The results are daunting. More than 1.5 million priority acres of forest are in need of treatment, and more than 50 percent of those acres occur on private land. At an average cost of \$400 per acre, annual treatment costs could exceed \$15 million. Treatment needs can be divided into two categories: community protection and ecosystem restoration. For each category, the location, method, scale, and cost of treatments vary.



With the memories of recent fire seasons still fresh in their minds, Front Range residents understand more than ever the need to diminish the dangers posed by wildfire.

Protecting Communities from the Risk of Wildfires

Due to the large number of homes in and near Front Range forests (the wildland-urban interface and intermix), it is clear that fire risk mitigation goals drive the size of any comprehensive treatment program. However, it is difficult to estimate the full scope of this challenge, as there is not yet an agreed upon method for defining universal fire risk mitigation needs. Fire risk mitigation goals are established locally through the community wildfire protection planning (CWPP) process, and many communities have not yet completed their plans. Rough estimates of mitigation needs across the entire

Front Range indicate that more than 1 million acres may need treatment to achieve community protection goals, and a significant portion of those forested acres occur on private land.

Whether intended to protect communities or restore forest health, the Roundtable concluded that every effort should be made to optimize the ecological benefits of forest treatments.

Restoring Forest Health on Colorado's Front Range Forests

Scientists agree that most of the lower montane, ponderosa pine-dominated forests are over-dense and in need of treatment. Lower montane forests encompass approximately 800,000 acres of Front Range forestland, and nearly 50 percent of this forest type occurs on private land.

Linking Forest Restoration and Fire Risk Reduction

Severe fire risk is greatest in the lower montane because that is where a significant portion of the wildland-urban interface occurs. Due to the overlap between fire risk mitigation and ecological restoration, the Roundtable determined that lower montane forests should be the top priority for landscape-scale treatments.

Whether intended to protect communities or restore forest health, the Roundtable concluded that every effort should be made to optimize the ecological benefits of forest treatments. This requires the use of prescribed fire as a management tool wherever possible to restore natural processes and protect soils, and favors extraction, (removing trees and limbs from treated acres) over scattering biomass on the forest floor.

Funding a Comprehensive Treatment Program

The cost of meeting comprehensive Front Range treatment needs (fire risk mitigation and ecological restoration) vastly exceeds available funding. Potential cost savings might be achieved through increased treatment contract sizes, reduced overhead and planning costs, increased use of prescribed burn over mechanical treatments, and increased utilization of woody biomass for institutional bioheating. Even if these potential cost savings are realized, a significant funding gap will remain. Part of the reason for this gap is that the largest portion of acres that need treatment is on private land, but most of the available funds are spent on public land. New tools and incentives are needed to catalyze treatment on private land.

Implementing the Roundtable's Recommendations

Since the release of the Roundtable's report in May 2006, Roundtable members have remained actively engaged in implementation. Organizations identified to lead specific aspects of implementation developed detailed strategy plans describing how they intended to achieve the goals advanced in the report. Following is a summary of stakeholder actions that correspond to each of the Roundtable's recommendations.

PROGRESS SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON THE 10 ROUNDTABLE INITIATIVES

Recommendation – Increase Funding for Forest Treatments

Initiative 1: Identify new non-federal funding sources that can contribute to treatment costs on state and private land.

Federal funding through the USDA Forest Service is currently the primary source of funds for treatments on both federal and non-federal lands. While sustained federal funding is critical, these resources will not likely be sufficient to address long-term forest needs. State and local funding must fill this gap, particularly for treatments on state and private land.

Progress:

- HB07-1168: Forest Improvement District Bill – Codified in the Colorado Revised Statutes as Article 18 of Title 32, this bill authorizes the formation of special taxing districts to achieve forest improvement work and related benefits.
- HB 1130: Funding for a Community Based Forest Health Pilot Program – This bill establishes a \$1 million grant program to fund forest health projects that will be designed through a collaborative process at the community level. The state would cover up to 60 percent of total project costs. Projects that utilize wood removed through treatment on private land would be a priority for these funds.
- The Colorado State Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, Denver Water, and the Pinchot Institute have initiated a project to assess the potential for catastrophic fire on Front Range watersheds. The

assessment will facilitate discussions with Front Range water providers concerning the potential of fire and forest health issues associated with critical Front Range watersheds and effects on watershed values. By potentially leveraging funds and maximizing cooperation across agencies, this effort will streamline watershed protection efforts.

Colorado Counties, Inc. Extending the Roundtable's Resources

Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI) continues to work with the Roundtable to help extend the Roundtable's resources to County Commissioners. With the myriad of issues facing local governments in Colorado, CCI is working with the Roundtable to help develop relationships at the county level that will foster successful implementation of the Roundtable's goals. CCI also assists the Roundtable through its lobbying efforts. This year, a broad group of stakeholders identified three bills that could bring Colorado a few steps closer to addressing the forest health issues Front Range communities are facing. CCI will continue to work with the Roundtable to increase cooperation between local governments and industry, to help educate stakeholders about available resources, and to work on future forestry related legislation.

CCI
Colorado Counties, Inc.

Initiative 2: Increase forest-treatment incentives for private landowners.

The Roundtable's analyses show that more than 50 percent of needed treatments are on private or other non-federal land. Given funding constraints, greater incentives are needed to encourage private landowners to carry out treatments on their own lands.

Progress:

- Efforts are underway to explore how to put Community Biomass Collection Programs into operation. Funding is being sought to leverage resources from The Governor's Energy Office to develop demonstration projects along the Front Range. The sites would help utilize the vast amount of woody material being generated through fuels treatment projects on private lands. Such collection methods also would assist the U.S. Forest Service, counties, Denver Water, and others in utilizing the material generated from fuels reduction and forest restoration activities.
- In March 2007, a briefing on "The State of Your Forests" was held for Boulder County Commissioners. The commissioners heard from Roundtable members and representatives from Boulder County, Colorado State Forest Service, Governor's Energy Office, Colorado Tree Farmers Association, Colorado Forestry Association, and private landowners about forest management activities occurring in Boulder County. They also learned about the lack of opportunity to use woody biomass generated by treatment projects on private land. After the discussion, the commissioners directed county staff to meet again with the other presenters to prepare a list of immediate, mid- and long-term actions that the county should consider in order to expedite fire risk mitigation and forest restoration activities.
- The Colorado State Forest Service, in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and National Park Service, created a grants and foundations database that serves as a centralized information resource for fire departments, private landowners, and local communities to identify incentives and cost-share programs available to implement fuels treatments in Front Range counties.
- The Colorado State Forest Service and U.S. Forest Service are working together to expand the understanding and use of Good Neighbor Authorities and develop an information and training package to help agency field personnel understand how and where to utilize the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA); poll districts to identify barriers and hindrances to the use of Good Neighbor Authorities to implement projects; and incorporate Good Neighbor procedures into Federal Regional and Forest Timber Management Manual supplements. In addition, the Colorado State Forest Service provided input to the Colorado congressional delegation about several proposed legislative bills that would, in part, institutionalize the GNA authorities.
- Related to Good Neighbor activities, the Colorado State Forest Service and the Pike National Forest developed an agreement to use and reimburse U.S. Forest Service crews for burning slash piles on non-federal lands within the Upper South Platte Project Area. This agreement will be implemented in 2007. If all goes well, the concept will likely be expanded in future years. The agreement can serve as a template for similar projects elsewhere along the Front Range.

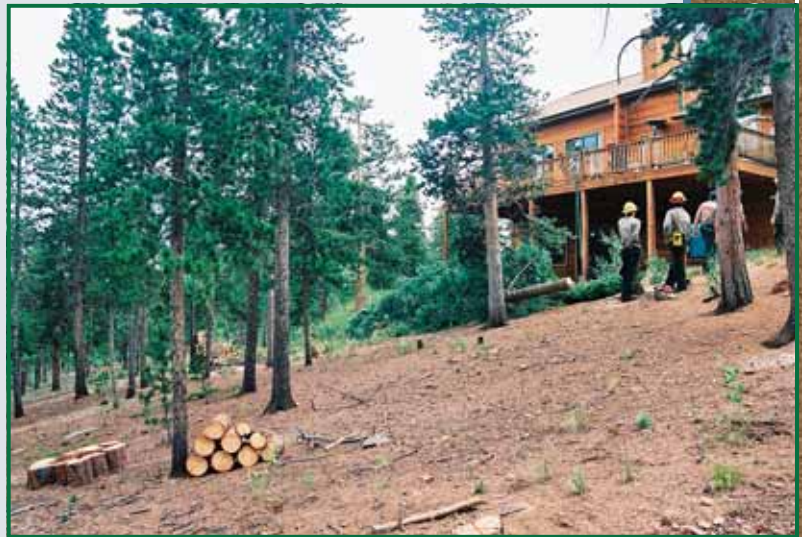
Platte Canyon Fire Protection District Helps Lead the Way in Mitigation Efforts

The highly populated land surrounding the town of Bailey in Park County is located within, and adjacent to, heavily forested lands with a high fire occurrence history, including numerous large devastating wildland fires. The Platte Canyon Fire Protection District (FPD) is working on mitigation efforts identified in the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). This project begins the important work of good-neighbor, cross-boundary fuels reduction by bringing together private landowners, the U.S. Forest Service, the Colorado State Forest Service, and the Platte Canyon Fire Protection District.

With the assistance of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership, the Platte Canyon FPD obtained grant funding to begin mitigation treatment on private property adjacent to the Pike National Forest.

In 2005, the Platte Canyon FPD implemented a fuels reduction pilot project in a subdivision that was identified as being at extreme risk from wildfire. As a result of the project, 150 acres of private property – 90 percent of the Forest Ridge subdivision – was treated and thinned, and hundreds of structures are now better protected. In addition, slash removal was accomplished on 150 properties through the Platte Canyon FPD chipping program.

To date, the district has successfully treated 350 acres with the assistance of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership. Fuels reduction plans also have been completed for an additional 220 acres; treatment will occur in 2007-2008 and beyond. Platte Canyon FPD also is working with the Firewise Communities program to promote the continuation of mitigation efforts and sustained property maintenance within homeowners associations in the district.



Top photo: Platte Canyon Fire Protection District fuels mitigation crew members remove hazardous fuels around a homesite in the Forest Ridge subdivision.

Photo by Katherine Timm

Bottom photo: Slash from a thinning project on private land in Bailey illustrates the need to develop a viable biomass industry in Colorado.

Photo courtesy of Platte Canyon Fire Protection District

Initiative 3: Advocate for additional federal funding for Front Range forest treatments.

Achieving Front Range community protection and forest health goals will require sustained or increased federal funding, particularly in the State Fire Assistance and Hazardous Fuels Reduction categories.

Progress:

- A representative contingent of Roundtable members traveled to Washington, D.C., in March 2007. Meetings with the Colorado delegation and their staff were productive, and there was significant legislative interest in the Roundtable's work. The Washington Office of the U.S. Forest Service also hosted a meeting for Roundtable members, which was well attended by legislative affairs and wildfire management staff.
- The Pike & San Isabel National Forests, in collaboration with the Colorado State Forest Service, has been accepted for carbon credit funding through the National Forest Foundation, a nonprofit partner of the U.S. Forest Service dedicated to engaging Americans in the conservation and stewardship of our National Forests.
- In the spring of 2007, the Roundtable endorsed a national effort to raise the profile of and encourage increased funding for the State Fire Assistance program. This line-item specifically referenced in the Roundtable's recommendations is one of only a few programs that channels federal monies directly to non-federal stakeholders to reduce fire risk and restore forest health. In all, more than 40 diverse organizations sent a joint letter to Congressional Appropriation Committee Chairs affirming the need for these critical resources.
- Through the efforts of the Colorado congressional delegation, Region 2 of the U.S. Forest Service received an additional \$2 million in their 2007 budget to address bark beetles and hazardous fuels on the Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests, White River National Forest, Medicine Bow & Routt National Forests, and the Pike & San Isabel National Forests.



Successful implementation of community-wide fuels mitigation projects often depends on funding provided through the State Fire Assistance program and other grants.

Photo by Katherine Timm

Recommendation – Reducing the Cost of Forest Treatments

Initiative 4: Increase the use of prescribed burns as a management tool.

Careful application of prescribed and wildland fire use fires offers a tremendous opportunity to achieve ecological goals and reduce treatment costs. The use of this forest management tool is currently limited by the high-risk condition of many forests and social barriers such as public acceptance of smoke. Reducing these barriers requires attention to state smoke permit processes, public education, and agency planning protocols.

Progress:

- The Colorado State Forest Service is working with the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, other federal and state fire management agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local community leaders to develop a charter and the necessary process to establish a statewide Prescribed Fire Council.
- In 2006, the Colorado State Forest Service received a FEMA pre-disaster mitigation grant to implement fuels treatment projects on Colorado State Parks land. The two agencies are working together to treat nearly 4,000 acres through pile and broadcast burning over the next three years.



Increasing the use of prescribed burning as a management tool is a priority for the Roundtable.

Photos by Jen Chase and Scott Sticha

Initiative 5: Increase commercial utilization of woody biomass extracted during forest treatments by catalyzing greater use of bioheating as a heating source for institutional buildings.

One of the central issues driving high treatment costs is the lack of commercial uses for the woody biomass extracted during treatments. Institutional bioheating, which uses wood chips or pellets manufactured for use in commercial pellet heating systems, appears to offer the best near-term opportunity to utilize this material. The conversion of public buildings to bioheating could make a significant contribution to reducing fire risk and restoring forest health in the Front Range.

Progress:

- A biomass forum was held in Gilpin County in March 2007 to discuss forest health, wild-fire mitigation, forest insects and diseases, and related issues. The bioheating project planned for the new Gilpin County Road and Bridge Building also was reviewed, and technology, supply, costs, and maintenance were discussed. The project is scheduled to go on-line in the fall of 2007.
- HB 1281, which was signed into law in March 2007, doubles Colorado's Renewable Energy Standard (RES) from 10 percent by 2015 to 20 percent by 2020. In addition, progress has been made to add a thermal component to the Amendment 37 Resolution, which would help jump-start biomass, wind, solar, and geothermal renewable energy technologies. Currently, A-37 applies only to electrical production.
- The Colorado State Forest Service, through Colorado Wood (COWood), is involved in all aspects of bio-based and market development technology transfer and assistance. Ongoing projects include working with new businesses that want to expand into Colorado, and marketing wood to potential users both inside and outside of Colorado for product development; developing uses for

all wood and working with local communities to explore opportunities to use biomass for heat; working with existing businesses to promote and expand value-added products; and providing grant-writing assistance to businesses throughout Colorado.

- The Colorado State Forest Service is working with a large wood products company located in eastern Oklahoma to develop a pilot project to ship small diameter timber by rail from the Front Range for use in a specialized Oriented Strand Board product. If successful, bundled products shipped back to Colorado will bear the Colorado Forest Products logo.



Using Biomass to Reduce Heating Costs

The North-West Fire Protection District in Fairplay was looking for a way to reduce heating costs at the station and help the community dispose of slash removed during fire mitigation projects. They decided an outdoor furnace was the perfect solution. The new furnace, which is hooked into the heating system in the main building, helps decrease dependence on propane to heat the station. Private landowners are encouraged to drop off slash, which provides fuel for the outdoor furnace. When burn bans are issued during the summer and private landowners are unable to burn slash, they can transport their slash to the station. The furnace reduces heating costs for the fire protection district and provides homeowners with a simple way to avoid slash build-up.

The outdoor furnace at the North-West Fire Protection District in Fairplay reduces heating costs and helps the community dispose of slash.

Photo courtesy of the North-West Fire Protection District



Jefferson County Slash Program is a Model for Other Counties

The Jefferson County slash program is celebrating its 13th anniversary. Since the program was inaugurated in 1995, it has grown from a single site to as many as 14 sites that operate throughout the summer months. The program's success relies heavily on support from local volunteer firefighters, local contractors, and a significant contribution from Jefferson County.

Jefferson County's slash program began at the Rooney Road site, and slash was collected on nine Saturdays. Jefferson County Emergency Management and local fire cooperators managed this site until 2000. In 2001, Jefferson County received a U.S. Forest Service grant to subsidize the privatization of the Rooney site. This was accomplished in 2002. Since its inception, the Rooney site has collected nearly 182,000 cubic yards of slash from municipalities, contractors, and private citizens.

With the success of the Rooney site, Jefferson County Emergency Management began sponsoring remote slash sites in cooperation with local volunteer fire departments. Since 1998, the remote sites have collected more than 213,000 cubic yards of slash from fuels reduction. This project has been a collaborative effort between local volunteers, contractors, and county government to reduce wildfire risks to Jefferson County residents.



Slash is dropped off at one of 14 slash sites in Jefferson County. The county's slash program has been in operation for 13 years.

Photo by Rocco Snart

Initiative 6: Increase contract sizes and durations with stewardship contracts on federal lands.

Treating large swaths of land – up to 300 acres – at one time can result in significant per-acre average cost savings. In addition, increasing contract sizes could support the creation of a biomass utilization industry by providing a more reliable biomass supply. Long-term stewardship contracts, rooted in collaboratively developed priorities, foster a public-private partnership to restore forest health by allowing service providers to invest in the equipment and infrastructure needed to productively utilize material generated by management.

Progress:

- State Joint Resolution 006: Federal Stewardship Contracts – This joint resolution encourages the federal government and stakeholders to identify and obtain the necessary funding to implement three-year stewardship contracts. The resolution has been sent to the U.S. Congress. Although it is not legally binding, supporters are hopeful that the federal government, particularly the Colorado delegation, will be able to use the resolution as a tool to fight for increased funding to help address Colorado's forest health issues.
- The Pike & San Isabel and Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests are preparing a Long-term Stewardship Contract (LTSC). The purpose of the contract is to treat forest stands to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve overall forest health. A team is working on the Request for Proposal, which will be issued in the summer of 2007. The proposal will include a minimum of 4,000 treatment-acres per year for 10 years. A sub-group of the Roundtable has been formed to offer input and assistance to the Forests in the area of long-term stewardship contracting.

Recommendation – Ensure Local Leadership and Planning

Initiative 7: Limit the growth of fire risk in the wildland-urban interface.

The large number of homes in forested areas along the Front Range presents a tremendous challenge to both public and firefighter safety. Development in forested areas complicates forest management and results in exponentially higher wildfire suppression costs. Limiting future expansion of fire risk associated with a growing wildland-urban interface through county land-use planning should be a high priority for local communities.

Progress:

- Boulder County is developing a Sustainability Element as part of their comprehensive county plan. Through open meetings with mountain residents, it is clear that forest health poses a significant concern. Because forest health directly relates to sustainability issues such as watershed protection, resource conservation, public health and safety, and preservation of biodiversity, the Boulder County Land Use staff will advocate that the county's Planning Commission explore ways to incorporate more specific forest health and fire risk mitigation policies into the Sustainability Element.
- Roundtable members met with insurance industry representatives to discuss how to effectively communicate with homeowners about forest treatments to reduce the risk of wildfire. Those who participated in the meeting agreed to work together to develop an informational brochure about how to protect homes in the wildland-urban interface, which insurance agents will distribute to their policyholders.

Initiative 8: Promote the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for Front Range Communities at Risk.

Treatment plans are best developed through a collaborative process at the local level with active participation by communities. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 prioritizes federal funding for forest treatments identified in CWPPs. Completing CWPPs for all Front Range communities should be a high priority for local and state leaders.

Progress:

- Since the release of the Roundtable report in May 2006, 11 Community Wildfire Protection Plans have been completed on the Front Range. At the time this report went to press, the following CWPPs were completed: Boulder Mountain, Four Mile, Colorado Sierra, Lefthand Fire Protection District, Gold Hill, Larimer County, Buckskin Heights, East Portal, Little Valley HOA, Poudre Fire Authority, Crystal Lakes, Perry Park, Elk Creek, Harris Park, South Platte, Magic Sky Lower North Fork, Carroll Lakes, Crystal Park HOA, Teller County, Grand County, and Woodmoor. In addition, 31 CWPPs are currently being developed on the Front Range and many are expected to be completed by 2008.
- A coalition of 26 environmental groups has been partnering with local governments and state and federal land managers to promote community level wildfire planning. As of this writing, the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance, a Roundtable member, has contacted all 10 Front Range counties regarding CWPPs; they also have participated in six community wildfire protection planning initiatives and one county fire planning process that involves approximately 100,000 acres.

Recommendation – Set Clear Priorities and Monitor Progress Toward Common Goals

Initiative 9: Adopt a clear and common framework for prioritizing treatments.

Much of the Roundtable’s work is based on the premise that prioritization is essential, given that treatment needs will always exceed available resources. With this in mind, the Roundtable developed a set of consensus priorities that offer the best chance for achieving community protection and forest health goals through collaboration.

Progress:

- Most of the federal agency projects scheduled for treatment in 2007 were NEPA-ready before the Roundtable finalized its priorities. There is broad agreement that most of these projects comply with the criteria specified in the Roundtable report in terms of priority locations, treatment methods, and commercial utilization. To track the percent of acres treated that adhere to Roundtable priorities, the agencies are assembling baseline data, which will allow projects to be reviewed as they are implemented.

Joining Forces to Improve Forest Health and Protect Communities

The Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests joined the White River and Routt National Forests, and numerous other cooperators to form the Northern Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative to address the mountain pine beetle epidemic occurring in north central Colorado.

Treatments on the Sulphur Ranger District of the Arapaho National Forest are being planned in an integrated manner to support the goals and objectives of both the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership and the Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative.



Left: Slash piles from a thinning project in the Wild Acres subdivision in Grand County are ready to be burned.
Right: Slash from beetle-killed trees in Grand County.



Photos by Katherine Timm

Initiative 10: Convene follow-up Roundtable of forest stakeholders to ensure implementation of current recommendations and challenges.

Protecting communities from the risks of severe wildfires and restoring Front Range forests to good health will require a sustained, long-term effort by all Front Range stakeholders. Since the release of its report in May 2006, a Roundtable Implementation Team has convened. This collaborative group includes senior representatives from state and federal agencies, the scientific community, conservation interests, user groups, and local communities.

- Initial steps have been taken toward the development of complementary statewide forest health collaboration efforts. During the February 2007 Forest Collaboratives meeting, participants focused on sharing success stories from projects across the state and common barriers to replicate those successes. As a result of this meeting, actions are being taken to create both a network that engages ongoing collaborative statewide forestry efforts, as well as a policy-oriented advisory body. Structured processes that identify common concerns of ongoing efforts will result in a more focused analysis of problems and lead to unified messages and innovative solutions.

NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

Future Focus of the FRFTP Roundtable

The Roundtable is now one year into its stakeholder-driven implementation phase. The group has continued to work collaboratively and productively, advancing its recommendations through a variety of channels. Looking ahead to 2008, the Roundtable will:

- Work closely with counties to advance their efforts to more effectively integrate wildfire components in land-use plans, offer landowners productive ways to dispose of slash, and consider creating Forest Protection Districts, as outlined in HB07-1168.
- Continue to include stakeholder groups such as small-scale forest industries and insurance companies in the work of the Roundtable.
- Work with communities to increase the number of completed CWPPs.
- Work with state legislators to include bio-heating language in state legislation that addresses Gov. Bill Ritter's renewable energy initiative.
- Foster broad support for an increase in State & Private Forestry funding in the federal budget. This money goes directly to states and communities, and is the best source of additional federal funds to address many of the Roundtable's goals.
- Track new federal and state fuels reduction and ecosystem restoration projects to monitor the extent to which these projects reflect ecological priorities developed by the Roundtable.



Woody biomass is ready for use to heat the Boulder County Open Space facilities in Longmont.

Photo by Dan Bihn

Scattered biomass covers the forest floor in the Upper South Platte project area near Deckers. The Roundtable encourages commercial utilization of this biomass material.

Photo by Kristin Garrison

Acknowledgements

The Roundtable would like to thank the following organizations for their continued support of the Roundtable's implementation activities and funding for this report: Colorado State Forest Service, National Forest Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Information

For additional information about the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable, contact Lisa Dale, Roundtable Implementation Coordinator, at 720.233.7028 or lisa.dale@du.edu, or visit www.frftp.org and click on Roundtable at the bottom of the home page.

THIS REPORT IS ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS:



Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

