

Recommendations of The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable for Protecting Communities and Restoring Forests

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Colorado's Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership (FRFTP) was created following the record fire season of 2002. The interagency Partnership's goals are to reduce wildland fire risks through sustained fuels treatment projects that are economically feasible, socially acceptable, and ecologically sustainable; to protect communities from wildland fires; and to restore fire-adapted ecosystems on private, state, and federal land in the 10 counties on Colorado's Front Range (Boulder, Clear Creek, Douglas, El Paso, Gilpin, Grand, Jefferson, Larimer, Park and Teller).

In 2004, the Partnership broadened its capacity and expertise with the creation of a roundtable comprised of representatives from state and federal agencies, local governments, environmental conservation organizations, academic and scientific communities, and industry and user groups.

The FRFTP Roundtable, was charged with the development of a long-term vision and roadmap for protecting communities from the risks of wildfire and restoring forest health within Front Range forests and to engage local communities in the effort. The results of the Roundtable's work show that the challenges posed by Front Range forests are significant.

The Roundtable identified approximately 1.5 million forested acres along the Front Range that require treatment to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfire to area

communities or to restore forests to historic conditions. At current treatment costs, achieving these goals could cost approximately \$15 million annually over a 40-year period, a sum that vastly exceeds the approximately \$6 million currently available each year for forest treatments. This challenge falls on individual landowners as well as governmental land managers because a significant portion of acres that need treatment are on private land.

While the challenge is daunting, the combined goals of reducing fire risk and restoring Front Range forests are achievable. Success depends on leadership and action by federal, state, and local governments, as well as the proactive involvement of Front Range communities. The Roundtable formulated 10 recommended initiatives designed to provide additional resources for forest treatments, reduce treatment costs, drive local leadership and planning, and establish common priorities for forest treatments. Roundtable members will continue to work with federal, state, and local decision makers to advance these initiatives and catalyze the changes needed to protect and restore Colorado's forests.

Roundtable Recommendations

The Roundtable identified 10 initiatives to accelerate progress toward Front Range community protection and forest health goals:

Increase Funding for Forest Treatments

1 Identify new state and local 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 funds likely will not be sufficient to address long-term forest needs. State and local funding must play a key role in filling this gap, particularly for treatments on state and private land.

2 Increase forest treatment incentives for private landowners

The Roundtable's analysis shows that approximately 60 percent of acres in need of treatment are on private land. Because public subsidies catalyze private investment, greater incentives are needed to encourage private landowners to carry out treatments on their own lands.

Advocate for additional federal funding for Front Range forest treatments

Achieving Front Range community protection and forest restoration goals requires sustained or increased federal funding. Given federal budget realities and the competition for limited resources, sustaining long-term funding for Front Range forest treatment objectives requires a concerted effort by all affected stakeholders. Land managers should also seek to maximize efficiency by prioritizing projects that cross ownership boundaries.

Reduce the Cost of Forest Treatments

Increase the appropriate application of prescribed fire and wildland fire use as a management tool

Careful application of prescribed fire and wildland-fire use offers a tremendous opportunity to achieve ecological goals and reduce treatment costs. Colorado's forests evolved with natural cycles of fire, which stimulate forest diversity, regeneration, and other key ecological processes. Prescribed fires also have a significantly lower per-acre treatment cost of approximately \$125 per acre compared to \$400 to \$800 per acre for mechanical treatments. However, the Roundtable also recognizes that the opportunities for the use of prescribed fire and wildland fire use are currently limited along much of the Front Range. This is largely due to dense forest

conditions that require fuel loads be reduced mechanically before a prescribed fire can be safely employed. The use of prescribed fire is also inhibited by public opposition to smoke pollution despite the fact that such small controlled burns prevent much larger air pollution problems produced by wildfires. We must take steps to reduce these barriers so that fire can be a primary tool in long-term forest management.

Increase commercial utilization of woody biomass, especially as bioheating fuel for institutional buildings

One of the primary issues driving high treatment costs is the lack of commercial utilization of woody biomass extracted during treatments. Although most of the higher-value sawlogs, posts, and poles produced during treatments currently are sold, little of the woody biomass — which makes up the bulk of material available after treatment — is utilized. Institutional bioheating, which uses wood chips to fire heating systems, appears to offer the best near-term opportunity to utilize this material. Bioheating has the potential to absorb a significant volume of available biomass and subsidize up to 40 percent of forest treatment costs. Bioheating also is the least expensive fuel available per unit of energy produced. Installing bioheating systems in new public facilities and replacing old boilers with them in existing public buildings would reduce energy costs while supporting fire risk mitigation and improved

forest conditions along the Front Range.

Increase contract sizes and durations through the use of stewardship contracts on federal lands

Treating large areas of land — more than 200 to 300 acres — at one time can result in a per-acre average cost savings at all stages of treatment, including planning, execution and monitoring. This scale of treatment can be accomplished on single ownership properties or by bundling together several smaller treatments on lands covering several ownerships. Stewardship contracts also



At Left: Pikes Peak Watershed – The contrast is striking between treated and untreated areas.

Photo by Andy Schlosberg

At Right, Top: Tree slash, collected by homeowners in the Windcliff Estates subdivision in Larimer County, awaits chipping and scattering.

Photo by Katherine Timm

At Right, Bottom: Firefighters monitor a prescribed burn in Jefferson County. It's a much less dangerous task than fighting a wildfire and creates far less smoke.

Photo by Jen Chase

would provide a long-term, consistent supply of biomass to increase commercial utilization of woody biomass, especially as bioheating fuel for institutional buildings (see Initiative #5).

Ensure Local Leadership and Planning

7 Limit the growth of fire risk in the wildland-urban interface (WUI)

The proliferation of people, homes and related infrastructure in the wildland-urban interface strains public resources and compromises firefighter safety. Growth projections for the Front Range suggest that the WUI could double over the next 20 years. Limiting future expansion of the WUI and/or ensuring that WUI development incorporates Firewise building materials, landscaping, and other practices should be a high priority for local communities.

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 within three years should be a high priority for local community leaders.

Set Clear Priorities and Ensure Progress Toward Common Goals

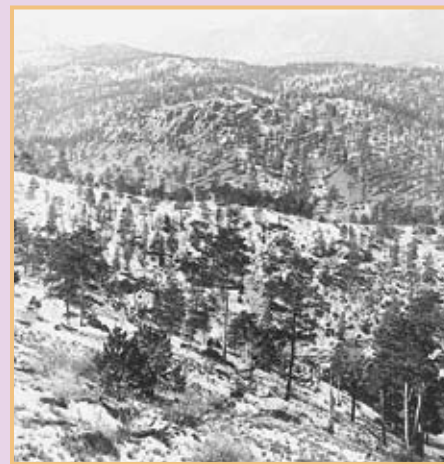
9 Adopt a clear and common framework for prioritizing treatments

Even with implementation of recommended cost-reduction initiatives, the required funding to treat Front Range forests likely will exceed available funding for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the need to set and follow clear priorities is paramount. The Roundtable recom-

mends prioritizing areas that require both fire risk mitigation and ecological restoration.

10 Convene follow-up Roundtable of forest stakeholders to ensure implementation of current recommendations and address future challenges

Protecting communities from the risks of severe wildfires and restoring Front Range forests will require a sustained effort by all Front Range stakeholders over several decades. Formation of a collaborative group including senior representatives from state and federal agencies, the scientific community, conservation/environmental NGOs, industry and user groups, and local communities can help sustain comprehensive fire management.



The lower montane forest at Cheesman Reservoir (below) after recent treatment resembles the forest of 100 years ago (left).
Color photos by Merrill Kaufmann
Historical photo courtesy of Denver Water



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

For more information about the FRFTP Roundtable or for a copy of the complete Roundtable Report, visit www.frftp.org.

Front Cover, Top Photo: Smoke from the 2002 Hayman Fire shrouds the Lost Valley Ranch near Sedalia. Lower Photo: The population of the Pawnee montane skipper butterfly, a federally listed threatened species, has increased 14-fold in a recently treated area near Deckers.

Top photo by Tim Sexton; lower photo by Mike Elson