

# Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative

## Junction Creek EA Discussion Notes

**When:** Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Where:** Virtual meeting

**Purpose:** To offer the USFS a chance to articulate a vision for the overall analysis and present thoughts on decision tools for certain proposed actions. To offer the stakeholders a chance to present questions and offer input. To present next steps and time frames.

**Proposed agenda:**

- 5:00-5:15 PM: welcome and intros
- 5:15-5:20 PM: USFS presents status update (Time Leishman)
- 5:20-5:50 PM: Agency leaders' intent on decision tools and analysis for JFIRM (James Simino, District Ranger)
- 5:50-6:15 PM: questions and answers, discussions and concerns
- 6:15-6:30 PM: next steps

**Attendance:** Aaron Kimple (MSI), Julia Ledford (MSI), Paulette Church (Falls Creek HOA, resident), Clyde Church (La Plata County, resident), Tim Leishman (SJNF), James Simino (SJNF), Andrew Hawk (Timber Age Systems), Jimbo Buickerood (SJCA), Mary Ann and Barry Bryant (Falls Creek Ranch residents), Steve Monroe (Resident), Marke Loveall (CSFS), Steve McClung (CPW)

**Notes:**

- Welcome and intros
  - Aaron Kimple is filling in for Anthony Culpepper, who will be back on May 9<sup>th</sup>.
  - This is the first evening rendition of this discussion. The intent was to include more people that are not able to attend meetings during business hours.
  - We are looking forward to hosting in-person meetings in the future, but we want to be cautious and graceful with balancing public health concerns.
- USFS status update (Tim Leishman)
  - [Map](#)
  - This is the 4<sup>th</sup> pre-scoping meeting with the Four Rivers group to discuss the Junction Creek EA.
    - Previous meetings:
      - Field trip last fall
      - Discussion of vegetation and fuels management proposed actions early last winter
      - Discussion of recreation and travel management concerns in March of this year

- This meeting is meant to discuss the planning process of the EA and the leader's intent.
  - Stand exam contract begins this week in the Falls Creek portion of the EA
    - This process will take about 2 months to complete
    - Private contractor
    - 1,400 plots, covering almost entire area with slopes <50%
    - This will yield information about:
      - Potential conditions for prescribed fire
      - Where mechanical treatments will be feasible
      - Where hand thinning will be more practical than mechanical
  - Cooperating agreement with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
    - Steve McClung, wildlife biologist with CPW, will be a formal member of the planning process with San Juan National Forest (SJNF).
    - SJNF is excited about collaboration with CPW.
  - Looking at utilizing a story map to tell the story of proposed actions of this EA
    - This story map will be released along with a draft EA in a few months.
    - A story map is a great visual tool that adequately represents the diversity of interests in the project and will clearly show where projects are being proposed in the three areas of analysis.
  - Scoping
    - SJNF is currently in the pre-scoping stage for the Junction Creek EA.
    - Was waiting for James Simino (District Ranger, Columbine District, SJNF) to come back before starting to roll out the scoping process. Now that he is back, scoping is set to begin in about 1 month (late May or early June).
      - This will probably be a 30-day scoping process.
    - The NEPA coordinator is now on detail, so a NEPA specialist from the Pagosa Ranger District will be helping to get the project into the scoping phase.
    - Recreation is one of the most complex components of this analysis.
      - Need to be very specific with recreation details.
      - Use general language that is easily understood by residents
        - For example, use the term "user-created trails" instead of "system/non-system trails".
      - Overall, SJNF and everyone involved in the planning process should be very intentional about communication with the public about recreation.
- Agency leaders' intent on analysis and decision tools for JFIRM (James Simino, District Ranger)
  - Changes within the proposed EA based on input from the last meeting with Four Rivers:
    - Falls Creek Ranch and neighboring HOA has requested that fuels mitigation work be expanded to the north and east, around private land ownership.
      - [Updated map](#)
    - The BLM was not willing to help build a connection trail between BLM and USFS land near Hidden Valley.
    - Need to confirm written approval from the Church Camp property to include the egress road from USFS land to Church Camp.

- SJNF is considering scoping the project as a whole and then separating out the different components (recreation, vegetation and fuels, travel management) for approval.
  - From a NEPA standpoint, it might be possible to divide these components into separate approvals/decisions. Everything will be kept in the same proposal, but this will prevent less complicated/controversial topics from being held up by the more complicated approvals.
  - Vegetation and fuels work is expected to be the least controversial.
    - Might as well get this decision out of the way and start working.
  - Recreation management will likely be more challenging and controversial.
    - Pull it away from the less controversial work, while still meeting the needs of the recreational public.
    - For example, the Log Chutes and Hidden Valley trails are user-created trails that are being proposed to be adopted by USFS. They are not designed to USFS standards, will need to be nearly rebuilt and integrated into the existing trail system.
      - This will likely generate more comments and concerns than doing a prescribed burn in a high priority POD.
  - Travel management
    - Expand the parking lot at Junction Creek
    - Proposal to chip-seal Junction Creek Road up to the campground
      - Reduce dust
      - Reduce maintenance costs down the road
  - Mitigate damage to historical and archaeological resources in the area
- Questions and answers, discussion of concerns
  - SJNF is recognizing connectivity of the landscape and is attempting to do cross-boundary work with this EA.
    - Currently, SJNF is working on a project near Forest Lakes with BLM, USFS and State lands.
      - This is the first cross-boundary project of its kind on the Columbine Ranger District, so they want to work through the first project and learn from the process before starting with the Junction Creek EA.
        - Junction Creek EA cross-boundary work would be larger-scale and more visible than the Forest Lakes project.
      - SJNF would like to do cross-boundary work with Durango Estates I and Durango Estates II in the Junction Creek project.
    - Shared stewardship is still a new tool for SJNF. Right now, they are just talking about contracting tools.
      - By combining acres from different land management agencies into one project they can:
        - work together with one contractor and only one contract
        - reduce cost/acre
        - potentially complete projects faster with one big contractor
      - SJNF wants to learn how to use these tools effectively, and they want to do it right.

- The National Forest Foundation (NFF) will be a conduit of funding and will write the contract for all agencies at once.
- Are shorter duration, higher intensity projects preferable over smaller scale, longer duration timelines?
  - Operationally, it might make sense to get it done fast
  - Getting it done fast would reduce the impact on wildlife
  - Culturally, how does our community feel that impact?
    - The residents on the call agreed that they would prefer a shorter duration, higher intensity project implementation – to just get it over with.
- PODs: Potential Operational Delineations
  - Geographies on landscape that have been identified as logical areas of land to control fire.
  - PODs are usually defined by landscape features like rivers, ridges, roads, etc. That the fire community has identified as features they can work with to control fire.
- Other input from residents
  - Big proponents of fuels mitigation.
    - They love the solitude of living in this area, but also understand the risk.
  - Residents prefer predictable work schedules.
    - Large work vehicles (like logging trucks) could be scheduled to travel up Junction Creek Road only on certain days of the week so as to avoid conflict with recreationalists using the road.
  - Support work to restore springs as a resource for wildlife
- SJNF should constantly seek to increase the level of detail that is included in the proposal.
  - For example, the fish population in Junction Creek should be addressed.
  - Proactively think about post-fire flooding
    - Consider doing geofluvial risk analysis
  - Address the substantial birding group using the area for recreation, especially in wetland areas that have been restored recently
    - [Weminuche Audubon Society](#) is a great resource
    - Steve Monroe also does lots of bird-related projects and is connected to local groups
    - Community bird monitoring could be a great way to supplement/add to monitoring plans for CFLRP
- Current status of agreements with NFF
  - Wood for Life is a new project that utilizes wood from fuels management projects from SJNF and trucks it to Tribal Nations in need.
    - The pilot project was done in the Dolores Ranger District.
    - The program should be completed and active by the end of next week.
    - Original pledge: \$60,000 from SJNF, NFF required to fundraise 20% match
    - Finding new solutions, utilizing biomass, helping neighbors in need

- Shared Stewardship
      - Specialized partnership agreement with NFF for contracting cross-boundary work
      - Will encourage more cross-boundary work
      - With CFLRP funding, the pot of money will grow
- Next steps
  - Thoughts and feedback on evening meeting?
    - Four Rivers needs to do more advertising for these meetings so we can bring more voices that we haven't heard before.
    - In general, attendees seemed to appreciate the intention of the evening meeting and think we should try again with sooner notice of the meeting and a greater effort to include more voices.
    - There was also a lot of support for an outdoor meeting with a potluck or barbecue. If a meeting like this was held at the Junction Creek campground or at Falls Creek, we would likely have better attendance among residents.
  - Notes for Four Rivers in general:
    - Set a more structured meeting schedule
    - Get announcements about meetings out earlier (probably more than 2 weeks before the meeting)
    - Discuss things other than strictly USFS activities
    - Agenda items to add:
      - Website
      - Review documentation
      - Understand who the partners are
  - SJNF should utilize action-oriented communications throughout this process.
    - Publicize when documents are released and decisions are made
  - Field analysis and surveys starting next week
    - Scoping will be completed by the end of May or beginning of June.
    - The archaeology survey contract is set to start in the next 4-6 weeks and will hopefully be completed by September.
      - Hidden valley
      - Areas of proposed fire line building for prescribed fire
      - Areas of proposed mechanized work
  - Four Rivers has discussed offering a tour with release of the scoping document
  - Hauling of wood from Log Chutes project will start May 2<sup>nd</sup>
    - 8-10 trucks/week
    - USFS pilot project with Timber Age
  - Paulette and Clyde are tracking beetle flight at Falls Creek.
    - This could be expanded and added into monitoring efforts!