

# FOUR RIVERS RESILIENT FOREST COLLABORATIVE



## Junction Creek EA Field Tour: July 29th, 2022

### Context

The Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative, in partnership with San Juan National Forest (SJNF), hosted a public field tour of the Junction Creek, Hidden Valley, and Falls Creek landscape and discussed proposed management actions of the Junction Creek Environmental Assessment (EA). This is the third tour in the development of the Junction Creek EA, with the focus on recreation, fisheries and cultural resources instead of vegetation management, which was addressed in previous tours. The EA is still in the pre-scoping phase.



"We can't make it rain, but we can make the rain go twice as far." -Jim Grizzard, talking about mitigation efforts at Falls Creek Ranch

### Tour Site I: Junction Creek and the Colorado Trail

Junction Creek and the Colorado Trail (CT) are very popular recreation areas near Durango, and SJNF expects recreation to continue to increase. SJNF is exploring options to expand the parking lot at the trailhead of the Colorado Trail and make improvements to Junction Creek Road.

SJNF is also considering making improvements to the Colorado Trail to comply with accessibility standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This would include widening and hardening the lower section of the CT, which would increase the trail's durability and reduce sedimentation. There are very few ADA accessible recreation opportunities in San Juan National Forest, so folks are very excited about this possibility.

Another consideration for this area is the stabilization of the stream bank and the reduction of social trails accessing the creek. Strategic placement of boulders and rocks can funnel trail users to designated access points and provide durable surfaces surrounding the water. Construction of an ADA accessible fishing pier is also being considered.

The Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative was formed in 2019 with the mission and vision to advance community action to improve and maintain resilient landscapes.

### Values

- Recreation
- Hydrology
- Fisheries
- Fuels, WUI
- Vegetation management
- Accessibility to outdoor recreation
- Infrastructure protection
- Cultural site protection

### Opportunities

- Trust
- Communication
- ADA accessibility
- Create infrastructure for increasing recreation

### Tools

- Heavy machinery
- Interpretive signage
- Rock formations
- Hand thinning
- Prescribed fire

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### Tour Site II: Hidden Valley

There are up to 80 known archaeological sites within Hidden Valley. About 3/4 of these sites are prehistoric (before written records), and the remainder are historic (cultures with written records). Remnants of the Steineger Homestead, established in the late 1800s, are still visible. Fred Steineger played a significant role in the development of transportation in the area. SJNF would like to place interpretive signage at this site.

Pre-historic sites are not as visible in Hidden Valley, but there is evidence of habitation along the ridgeline that was likely used for hunting. Indigenous people also cultivated crops in the valley, which has a reliable source of water and a longer growing season than the Animas River Valley below, where cold air settles in the cooler months.

SJNF intends to reduce the density of user-created trails in Hidden Valley. They will work with tribes to designate a trail system that is sensitive to cultural resources in the area. Any fuels management done in this area will involve selective fuels reduction, hand thinning and prescribed fire. No heavy machinery will be used.

### Tour Site III: Falls Creek Ranch

Falls Creek Ranch is an excellent example of how private land-owners play an important role in land management. Falls Creek Ranch is a private working ranch community established in 1976, including 940 acres with 100 round, 1-acre round plots. Space between private plots allows for easier landscape-scale work.

The Missionary Ridge Fire started the Valley Fire in 2002 by whipping up embers that landed near the Ranch. There was 300 firefighters on the scene, but 4 homes in Falls Creek were lost. This inspired Falls Creek Ranch to start fire mitigation across their home owners association (HOA). The HOA first hired contractors to do this work, but eventually built its own workforce. They purchased a chipper, dump truck, air curtain burner, hydraulics, track steer, and road equipment.

When the 416 Fire started in 2018, Falls Creek Ranch was directly in its path. Previous evacuation drills and mitigation allowed residents to evacuate safely. The mitigation work that had been done since the Missionary Ridge Fire allowed fire crews to enter the ranch and effectively protect the HOA's homes from fire. Four years later, Falls Creek Ranch is still undergoing post-fire recovery and mitigation to protect themselves from future fires.



"This is post-fire recovery." -Clyde Church, describing the massive culvert being installed

### Next Steps

- Hope to get draft of EA released in November, expect a final decision by Spring of 2023
- Seek additional perspectives from the recreation community

*Interested in participating in the next 4 Rivers field tour? Email Julia Ledford to learn more:*

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