



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Partnership Peaks

San Juan National Forest Partner Stories, Opportunities, and Updates

Spring 2022



*Springtime in the La Plata Mountains*

## TURNING TO THE MOUNTAINS

*By Lorena Williams*

As the rivers swell with spring runoff and the earliest pasqueflowers unfurl their delicate pedals, San Juan National Forest employees and our partner organizations start counting the days to field season. We sharpen our tools and our skills, recruit employees and volunteers, all with our eyes turned to the mountains. Eager to get our hands dirty and our bodies moving, we easily lose sight of winter promises to savor downtime and read more books. Spring is when we must strike a balance between relaxation and longing.

All of the Spring Issue's stories are results of winter planning, dreaming, and reflecting. Now, as we head toward field season, it's time to shed some light on them so they can grow! Whether it's the Dolores District's Wood for Life program pilot, area-wide prescribed fire planning, or the burgeoning shared stewardship ideas for Pagosa's Jackson Mountain, these highlighted projects are rooted in partnerships and in new beginnings.

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# Forest Supervisor's Corner

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It won't be long before field season is upon us—the time of year we all look forward to—and we ease up on planning and start “doing!” It used to be that the winter months provided some down time to reflect on the past year for lessons learned and to celebrate our accomplishments and begin preparing for the next field season. I'm guessing every Forest employee would tell you that is not the case anymore. We seem to have only one speed now, and that is full speed ahead with little time to pat ourselves on the back for all we've accomplished. Before COVID, we would gather employees for a barbecue and employee recognition in the fall. Maybe we can get back to that this year. I am looking forward to field season though, where we get to spend more time doing versus planning. We have hundreds of great projects going on across the Forest, and you get a sneak peek at just a small handful in this newsletter. One thing to look forward to - it's time to get the Forest Leadership Team back out on the districts and get our hands dirty. We'll be looking for a project or two to assist with! I for one am looking forward to seeing employees and partners in the field this year, whether working with us or joining us for more great discussions about potential and completed projects.



*Kara Chadwick  
Forest Supervisor  
March, 2022*



Field day with Congressional Staff on the Dolores Ranger District, 2021



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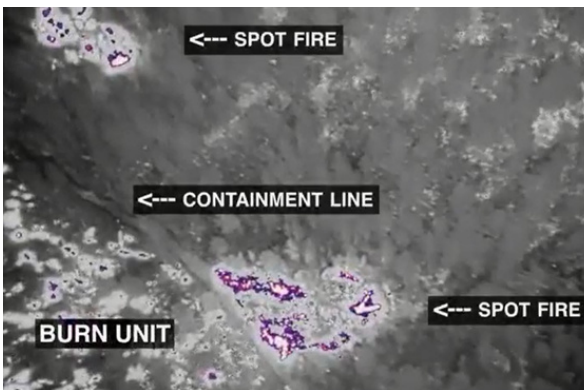
# Landscape-Scale Programs: Prescribed Fire

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by Lorena Williams

Springtime means prep time for the San Juan National Forest Fire and Fuels program, who is gearing up for prescribed fire projects. The timing and execution of prescribed fires depends entirely on weather, fuel moisture, and other variables, but in general the window for prescribed burning on the San Juan NF is April to June. One goal of the prescribed fire program is to improve and restore vegetative conditions. Prescribed fire removes shrubs and low-hanging tree limbs that act as a ladder and carry fire into the canopy. Reducing these fuels decreases competition for ponderosa pine stands, encourages more forage growth, protects mature trees, improves wildlife habitat, and improves our ability to reduce wildfire's impacts to communities. Additionally, prescribed fire operations provide opportunities for firefighter training and refreshers. This year, the San Juan is partnering with [The Nature Conservancy's Prescribed Fire Training Exchange \(Trex\)](#) for prescribed fire implementation.

**Stay updated on 2022 projects** by visiting the [San Juan NF Prescribed Fire Program InciWeb Page](#).



Last spring's prescribed fire windows were limited to a few days, but the San Juan NF and partners took full advantage of them. For the first time in the Rocky Mountain area, an Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) performed aerial ignition on a prescribed fire. Columbine Ranger District Fire and Fuels Management staff utilized UAS for both ignitions and real-time infrared reporting on the Vallecito-Piedra prescribed fire in April ([check out the video](#)).

Firefighters trained as UAS pilots flew a UAS equipped with an aerial ignition device, known as a plastic sphere dispenser (PSD) machine. After firefighters secure the unit perimeter by burning it by hand (blacklining), these devices send out small spheres to ignite vegetation in the interior of the burn. Using UAS for aerial ignition, reconnaissance, and infrared technology keeps our firefighters safe by reducing risk and exposure. The 2021 Vallecito-Piedra prescribed fire was supported by the SW Colorado Project of the [Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative](#) and [Colorado Parks and Wildlife Habitat Partnership Program](#). Thanks too to our partners who dragged a torch with us: [Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control](#), [Los Pinos Fire District](#), and [BLM Southwest District](#).

Prescribed fire is an essential tool for partners in Southwest Colorado to reach their landscape-scale forest management goals. This process is part of the [Shared Stewardship Strategy](#) and includes programs like the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) and [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program](#) (CFLRP). These programs bring financial resources, stakeholder engagement, collaborative support, and a process to identify shared priorities across all lands to leverage treatments and partner investments.

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# Wood for Life

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*Photo Credit: Colin Tsosie*

## *A Pilot Program Delivers Firewood for Navajo Nation Chapter*

*By Abe Proffitt and Lorena Williams*

On a crisp 28-degree morning in an area called "the Glade" just east of Cahone, CO, the only objects not frozen in a carpet of snow are the Prentice 384 Loader and the towering stacks of ponderosa it's about to move. One by one, the loader suspends each log high into the air and gently nestles it into one of two 40-ton logging trucks parked on the frozen dirt road. Running this behemoth with a smile is Jim Broderick, owner and CEO of Triple JR Logging Co., and he's nearly finished loading his truck when we arrive.

The logs are part of a collaborative effort called Wood For Life (WFL) – a pilot program on the San Juan NF aimed at increasing forest resiliency against wildfires and bark beetles while providing firewood to members of the Navajo Nation. Last fall, the Dolores Ranger District entered discussions with the [National Forest Foundation](#) (NFF) and the [Chinle Chapter House](#) about piloting the WFL Program on the San Juan NF. The missing piece of the puzzle was funding. The NFF reached out to [Weston Backcountry](#), a long-standing partner, who immediately kicked in funding to support the initial hauling costs. After months of planning and waiting for the ground to freeze,

the District kicked off the program with its first load of wood in early February to the Chinle Chapter House. "The WFL Program is a great opportunity for both the (FS) agency and the Reservation," said Broderick, "as well as a great chance for local companies, like me, to provide a service people need." When the last log is removed from the road, Jim will have loaded a total of 6 trucks with wood – which roughly comes out to 84 cords of firewood. Upon arrival in Chinle, a tribal Americorps crew processes and distributes the wood to community members across the reservation.



Jim Broderick and David Casey discuss the first load to be delivered in the Wood for Life pilot program

*Photo Credit: Abe Proffitt*



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## Wood for Life (continued)

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The wood is sourced from the Dolores Ranger District's Lake Canyon and Lone Pine Vegetation Management Projects. Small-diameter and low value logs (perfect for firewood) are being removed to increase resistance to bark beetles and wildfires while promoting resilience over time.

Before the WFL program, the San Juan didn't have a reliable outlet of scale for this wood, and in many cases, it was burned in slash piles. Supervisory Forester David Casey, who is managing the WFL Program on the Dolores District, is excited about the program's potential. "What we have are overstocked stands of trees infected with bark beetles causing heavy mortality and increased fuel loads. Younger trees are less susceptible to bark beetles but tend to have little resistance to fire compared to larger diameter trees. Our goal is to have a diverse stand that is resilient to both insects and destructive fires. By doing calculated thinning and prescribed burns, we hope that the seed crop comes in, new regeneration sprouts, and we see the return of a healthier ecosystem." Casey added, "The WFL Program is really a win-win for everyone. These management actions are a step toward a more desirable condition for the national forest, and we're providing a much-needed resource to partners."

The WFL Program began in 2018 as a collaboration between the Kaibab and Coconino National Forests, the Navajo and Hopi Nations, NFF, and other partners to counter the home heating crisis created by the Navajo Generating Station and Kayenta Coal Mine closing in 2019. Many community members on the Hopi and Navajo Nations relied on coal to heat their homes.

During the immediate aftermath of the closures, the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests gave out free firewood cutting permits to tribal members. However, those forests are still several hours' drive away from tribal lands. For many tribal members, especially elders, that solution just wasn't feasible. Shortly after that, the NFF got involved in helping fund and coordinate efforts between local organizations and the national forests.

Since its inception, over 7,000 cords of wood have been delivered to local tribal governments and nonprofits through the WFL Program. "The expansion of the WFL on the San Juan NF will allow the program to benefit more Forest lands and reach more communities," said Sasha Stortz, Arizona Program Manager for NFF. "We're thrilled for this significant moment of growth and really appreciate the partners who have come together to make it happen!"

Long term, Casey knows the WFL Program has plenty of room to expand given the overall need for management of Ponderosa Pine in and around the Dolores District. The Forest also hopes to incorporate this model on other public and private lands throughout Southwest Colorado by collaborating with partner organizations.

So far, the WFL Program has generated substantial interest in northern Arizona and could have unlimited potential in Southwest Colorado. The engagement, commitment, and involvement of San Juan NF partners made the pilot project a success even in the dead of winter, and we look forward to the coming field season's opportunities.

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## Wood for Life (continued)

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Forester David Casey discusses Small-diameter and low value logs being removed.

*Photo Credit: Abe Proffitt*



A Tribal Americorps crew processes the firewood

*Photo Credit: Jim Broderick*



The Chinle Chapter House receives its first wood delivery. Photo Credit: Jim Broderick



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# Jackson Mountain Landscape Project

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*View from Jackson Mountain*

*By Abe Proffitt with special thanks to Dana Guinn and Brandy Richardson*

If you're a partner or volunteer on a National Forest, there's a good chance you have heard one or both mottos: "Caring for the Land and Serving People" and the "Land of Many Uses." Both capture the agency's goal of a healthy, vigorous forest that provides wood products, watershed protection, a variety of wildlife habitats, and recreational opportunities for today as well as for future generations. They also prompt land managers to reflect on a project's value for both the resource and the public. For the Jackson Mountain landscape, which covers a wide range of resources – soil and water quality, vegetation resilience, timber, fuel prep, and trail opportunities – this equilibrium is critically important.

The approximately 11,000-acre Jackson Mountain landscape, located northeast of Pagosa Springs, is popular with residents and visitors alike for activities including hunting, camping, biking, hiking, and wildlife viewing. Jackson Mountain's importance to the local community has led to extensive engagement between the San Juan NF, [San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership](#) (Headwaters) Dust2, and [Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) as they and other groups begin to develop the Jackson Mountain project.

Other key collaborators include [San Juan Citizens Alliance](#), [Mountain Studies Institute](#), the [Town of Pagosa Springs](#), [Archuleta County](#), landowners, and grazing permittees. Headwaters is a Pagosa-based forest collaborative that brings together community members, land managers, scientists, advocacy groups, and local decision-makers to plan, implement, and monitor forest projects. Together, Headwaters stakeholders supported the development of three active [long-term stewardship contracts](#) on Jackson Mountain that aim to manage the mixed-conifer and ponderosa pine forest for desired future conditions while meeting community needs. One of these contracts includes vegetation treatments for an [Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change](#) (ASCC) longitudinal climate study - a unique management strategy developed through a partnership between local land managers and scientists.

Headwaters and other stakeholders are continuing to work with the Forest Service to design treatments to address forest ecosystem needs, support wildlife habitat, offer grazing opportunities, protect adjacent private property and infrastructure, and support dispersed camping and recreation.

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## Jackson Mountain (continued)

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While members of the community and key stakeholders might prioritize different management strategies for the forest, they've ultimately decided to work toward a shared management framework known as shared stewardship. This model emphasizes addressing community and landscape needs based on multiple perspectives across multiple forest resources.

According to Josh Peck, Pagosa's District Ranger, "We want to engage with the stakeholders and public early in the process with the end goal of a project built by the people who are going to use it. This new strategy will put the user in the driver's seat by implementing public-informed strategies and ideas that improve forest health while meeting recreation demands. We are definitely excited to see engagement across a broad spectrum of the local community."

One stakeholder with a long history of shared stewardship work is Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which manages the state parks system and the wildlife for the state of Colorado. Doug Purcell, Division Wildlife Manager for the east side of the Pagosa Ranger District, has been working closely with the San Juan NF and other stakeholders to communicate needs and concerns for wildlife habitat management in the area. The west side of Jackson Mountain offers habitat diversity for multiple wildlife species. One such species is elk, which utilize the area heavily at different times of the year in the Snowball and Jackson Creek area.

"It's really important to consider that many partners at the table have had an open collaborative dialogue about Jackson for over 10 years. Now that we have a significant interest in all types of management we're finally seeing a concerted effort to collaborate with several organizations."

~ Dana Guinn, Headwaters Partnership Coordinator

Wildlife considerations and diversity of habitat will remain high on the list of values as stakeholders look at Jackson Mountain as a whole. Wildlife is one example of a community value, and recreation is another. Over the last two years, additional community interest in creating a sustainable authorized trail system has evolved into a unique and locally driven collaborative project. In the summer of 2021, recreation stakeholders joined Headwaters partners and San Juan NF representatives on a tour of Jackson Mountain that examined ongoing vegetation management activities and offered a forum to discuss opportunities and challenges associated with new and increased management of the landscape. Representatives of DUST2, a Pagosa-based cycling group and non-profit, were in attendance.

DUST2 has partnered with the Pagosa Ranger District and Archuleta County to develop a catalog of options that supports the development of sustainable trails across the landscape. The catalog, funded by Dust2 and Archuleta county, was created by the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) and takes a sustainable recreation approach, replacing user-created trails with a sustainably engineered trail system along with improved trailheads and associated infrastructure.

"What gets us excited about the project is that it represents a culmination of over 10 years of trail advocacy in Pagosa Springs, successful partnerships with the Forest Service, our town, county, and community and it represents DUST2's commitment to its mission," said members of the DUST2 trail crew. "The way that this has come together . . . has been unexpected and therefore incredibly inspiring. To see Jackson Mountain go from a dream to a plan to a [developing] collaborative plan with trail corridors mapped out by IMBA is very exciting."



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# Jackson Mountain (continued)

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## **We Want To Hear From You!**

While the official NEPA process is further down the road, the San Juan NF and its partners want to provide several opportunities for the public to engage in the project development process. Our goal is to gather feedback and ideas and to consider ways to mitigate challenges by working together with partners, stakeholders, and the public to develop a refined proposed action. The San Juan plans to conduct public engagement meetings throughout the year, starting with open houses in April and May. Project components being discussed with the broader group include:

- Vegetation treatments
- Sustainable recreation opportunities
- Fuels treatments
- Wildlife habitat improvement

**[Sign up to be notified of the Jackson Mountain Open House dates and locations here!](#)**



June 2021 Headwaters Collaborative Tour.

*Photo Credit: Dana Guinn*

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# Jackson Mountain (continued)

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Fall, 2020 Headwaters Collaborative Tour.  
*Photo Credit: Dana Guinn*



IMBA representatives collecting info for the conceptual trail plan, Summer 2021.



Jackson Mountain vegetation treatment



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# Partnership Opportunities

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Mesa Verde Backcountry Horsemen during the 2020 National Public Lands Day cleanup  
*Photo Credit: Tif Rodriguez*

An important element we want to highlight in this newsletter is our commitment to our partners.

The San Juan National Forest works to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of this region's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. One way to achieve that is through partner connection. Our partners include land management agencies across all levels of government, nonprofit and for-profit entities, tribes, and community groups. By working with partners with diverse backgrounds and knowledge, we are increasing the resiliency of our natural resources and strengthening the community that enjoys and works in these lands. For information about partnering with the USFS, follow this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/partnerships>

**In our upcoming newsletters, we will highlight the projects our partners are working on across the San Juan NF in a shared calendar that covers the upcoming quarter. If you are a Forest Service partner organization please follow the link below to add your June - August 2022 projects to our calendar.**

## **[Submit Projects for the Quarterly Calendar Here](https://tinyurl.com/mre6bnjw)**

(<https://tinyurl.com/mre6bnjw>).



To become a partner with the San Juan NF or for questions, contact SJNF Partnership Coordinator Lorena Williams by email at [lorena.williams@usda.gov](mailto:lorena.williams@usda.gov) or by phone at (970) 422-2939.

For general questions about the San Juan NF, call (970) 247-4874, visit the **[forest website](#)**, or follow us on social media:



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# Welcome New Employees

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## **Brandy Richardson**

### **Chimney Rock National Monument Project Manager - Forest Headquarters**

Brandy has taken a new position as the Chimney Rock National Monument Project Manager, tasked with planning the CRNM Designation 10-year anniversary event to be held this year. She has been a Pagosa District Wildlife Biologist since 2010, and has taken other assignments in NEPA, Public Affairs, Partnerships, and Collaboration. Before coming to the SJNF Brandy was a wildlife biologist on the Tahoe National Forest. In her free time, Brandy likes to cook, read, run, camp, bike and have outdoor adventures of any kind with her husband and three kiddos.



## **Kyle Personett**

### **Small Products Forester - Dolores Ranger District**

Kyle is now the Small Products Forester on the Dolores District after two years as their Timber Sale Prep Crew Lead. Kyle started his career with the USFS during college as a Pathways Intern on a Timber Sale Prep Crew for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in Northern California. After graduating from Colorado State, Kyle worked on timber sale prep crews in Montrose, CO and Hayfork, CA. As a seasonal, he spent the winters working in Telluride snowboarding 100 days a season during the winter. As a big fan of hiking, biking, trail running, and all things outdoors, Kyle is so thankful to now call the San Juan National Forest home!



Across the San Juan NF, program managers are working hard to complete the hiring and onboarding process for this year's group of temporary seasonal employees. Each year, seasonal employees arrive to the San Juan with fresh energy and enthusiasm to carry out much of our day-to-day project implementation. From trail building to fish surveys, firefighting to weed monitoring, seasonal employees are a critical component of our workforce. Welcome, San Juan NF Seasonals! Photo of Columbine District Trail Crew, 2020.