



REPORT

Sublette County Forest Collaborative 2021
Process and Recommendations





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Cover: Photo by Troy Smith.





Introduction

In 2016 the Sublette County Conservation District (SCCD) with support from the Sublette Board of County Commissioners applied to the Wyoming State Forestry Division for funds under the Forest Collaboration Assistance Program to convene an inclusive process to tackle forest health issues in the area. The funds were awarded and the Conservation District reached out to the Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming to facilitate the process.

In its original application for funding, the SCCD noted that the county had experienced positive outcomes using collaborative approaches, e.g. in the aftermath of the Fontenelle Fire, but needed to widen participation to include additional stakeholder types to be successful in its stated purpose of addressing forest health, vegetation management, Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) issues and reduction of forest fuels. Addressing these issues would then simultaneously allow a group to consider recreational access and riparian health issues.

In late 2016 the USFS Collaboration Cadre's Gary Severson and Gregg Walker hosted two workshops to allow interested parties to learn about collaborative processes. An important result from these workshops was a Draft Purpose Statement to guide the Sublette County Forest Collaborative.

Draft Purpose Statement:

"Involve diverse interests to learn and listen together in order to create recommendations to federal, state and private landowners and managers regarding fuel reduction and other forest management and restoration activities in Sublette County to protect wildland urban interface areas and watershed health while benefiting recreation, wildlife and livestock."

This purpose statement is reflected in the resulting final recommendations.

The Charter

Following this the Ruckelshaus Institute drafted a Charter, which was reviewed by a subset of participants, and then submitted to the whole Collaborative for approval on December 12. It was agreed to on February 17 after deliberations by the Collaborative and changes agreed to by the Collaborative were made (see the Ruckelshaus Institute's Sublette County Forest Collaborative webpage for the final Charter). The Charter was signed by all participating stakeholders.



The Participants

The SCCD and the BOCC had chosen a bounded process with a fixed set of seats at the table in 2017 and the group remained that way during this 2021 process. The Forest Collaborative is representative of persons with interests in the conditions of the forests in Sublette County. During the Collaboration Cadre’s workshops in 2016, interest groups were identified that they felt should be invited to the Collaborative and members of those interest groups were invited. All invitees were asked to identify a primary and alternate member. Although it is recognized that Forest Collaborative members have multiple interests and may participate in discussions from various perspectives, the Forest Collaborative members broadly represent the following organizations and/or interest groups:

Stakeholder Group	Representative	Alternate
Conservation District	Michael Henn	Shari Meeks.
WGFD	Troy Fieseler	Jill Randall or Brandon Scurlock
BLM	Doug Linn	Joel Klosterman
District Ranger Pinedale and Big Piney	Rob Hoelscher	
Weed and Pest	Julie Kraft	Andy Currah
Outfitter	Terry Pollard	
Agriculture	Kim Bright	
County Commissioners	Joel Bousman	
County Fire	Shad Cooper	
NRCS	Jennifer Hayward	
State Forestry	Barry Tye	Nate Wilson
Conservation	Jennifer Lamb*	
Sublette County Trails Association	Paul Swenson?	
Motorized	Sandy Sletten	
Industry	Larry Dennis	Barb Dennis.
Non-motorized Recreation	Dave Bell Austin Mansell*	
Consultant	Richard Stem	

*Jennifer Lamb is with the Nature Conservancy and represents only that organization.

**Austin Mansell is with the Sublette County Trails Association



The Process

Below is the process matrix outlining the dates, purpose and outcomes for each meeting

Meetings 2020-2021	Purpose	Outcome
Zoom, 3 hours. December 15	Revisit what has been accomplished. Revisit Process and Charter. Share Updates. Discuss issues to address.	Ensure all agree to process and participants. Create list of issues for collaborative to focus on.
Zoom, 3 hours. January 12 and 25	Revisit interests and options. Discuss Information Needs. Discuss options to address issues.	Understand importance of process to participants. Create common knowledge base. Create list of options.
Zoom, 3 hours., February 22	Share Information. Continue discussion regarding options	Information sharing. Continue creating list of options.
Zoom, 3 hours. March 9	Share information. Finish discussion regarding options.	Finalize list of options which become draft recommendations.
Zoom, 3 hours. April 8, 20 and 28	Discuss and evaluate draft recommendations. Finalize recommendations	Build Consensus toward final recommendations. Test for Consensus.
Public Meeting, Pinedale, June 30.	Discuss and evaluation draft recommendations	Build Consensus toward final recommendations.

Procedural Tools:

1. A clear understanding by the Collaborative of the decision context (scope of recommendations) and implementation mechanisms.
2. A decision-making process that takes the Collaborative from problem identification to recommended actions for all three themes.
3. A consensus-based decision protocol that uses 'gradations of consensus.
4. Collaborative deliberations and procedures that are guided by a charter that defines the "rules of the game" and is unanimously approved by the Collaborative at the outset



Problem/Issue identification – Members identified nine categories of issues they wished to address within the contexts of forest health primarily, and associated recreation, wildlife and hydrological issues in Sublette County:

Options by Location	Issue
Upper Green/Union Pass	
Farm Bill CE	Timber harvest
Cow Camp Sale	Timber harvest
Aquatic Habitat Restoration Area	Wildlife Habitat Restoration
Pronghorn and Mule deer Migration Project Area	Wildlife Habitat Restoration
USFS Crucial Terrestrial Project Area	Wildlife Habitat Restoration
USFS Restoration Priority Area	Wildlife Habitat Restoration
Access to Upper Green, boat launches; rivers and high elevation lakes	Recreational Access
East Rim	
WUI/Fuels	WUI
Fire prevention / WUI	WUI
WGFD Aquatic Habitat Restoration Area	Wildlife Habitat
USFS Crucial Terrestrial Project Area	Wildlife Habitat
Trails for recreation and grazers	Access
Blowdown	
Trails Clearing	Access
Roads Clearing	Access
Trail opening - 2021 -	Recreational Access
Chainsaws to reduce impact	Access
Chainsaws in wilderness to maximize efficiency	Access
Chainsaws in wilderness – Regional Forester can assist with this issue.	Access
USFS Concentration on system trails VS non-system trails - balance	Recreational Access
Use trails as fuel breaks	WUI
Fuels reduction - long term	WUI
Possible timber sales associated with blowdown salvage	Timber harvest
Grazer permit trails	Access
Boundary Fence issues	Grazing Fencing
Invasive Species Issues caused by disturbance or equipment	Invasive spp.



Adding weed prevention and monitoring	Invasive spp.
Reserving treatments funds	Invasive spp.
Opportunities in Previously Burned areas.	
Logging treatments- if there is enough timber sales and is profitable in size, timber sale improvement funds can help to fund recreation efforts.	Timber harvest
Pursue industry options like in Evanston; firewood processing plant (or other).	Timber harvest
Salvage projects	Timber harvest
Overlap to address wildlife values	Wildlife Habitat
Define project areas (review maps, overlapping polygons for wildlife values). Wyoming Range Mule Deer Project overlap with Fontenelle Fire	Wildlife Habitat
Aquatic management – may benefit	Wildlife Habitat
Muddy Ridge	
Bridge Replacement	Access
Muddy Ridge Bridge and Roads	Access
Pre-identified sales and potential GNA	Timber harvest
Big Sandy Opening	
Temple Summer Homes	WUI
Big Sandy Lodge	WUI
Potential Salvage	Timber harvest
Bridge	Access
Road	Access
Trailhead and Parking area	Access
Invasive Species	
Wilderness	Invasive Species
WSA EA	Invasive Species
Continued funding for maintenance	Invasive Species
Various	
Elk Feedgrounds - need for enhanced access hunters, anglers and winter range for elk	Recreational Access



Timber Mgmt – roadway corridors, egress corridors, migration corridors, weed mgmt.	Timber Management
CWPP – important lever in the County unified support	CWPP
Collaborative provide seed money to push the CWPP forward?	CWPP
Sublette County Long Term Strategy	
Strategic and tactical plan to deal with the blowdown.	Comprehensive Strategy
Recon Flights with land managers and key collaborative members prior to spring	Comprehensive Strategy
List of designated trails to evaluate access	Comprehensive Strategy
Big Sandy and Elkhart Park – find a strategy to reduce/minimize impact in these areas	Comprehensive Strategy
Trails and recreation being a part of this effort.	Comprehensive Strategy
Create a “task force” to determine priorities within & systematic approach	Comprehensive Strategy
Blowdown areas (Forestwide)	Comprehensive Strategy
Trail maintenance and recreation: Projects/ Coordination Subcommittee of the Collaborative?	Comprehensive Strategy

Interest identification of the stakeholders in the collaborative – Members deliberated the reasons why forest health in Sublette County was important to them and agreed on the following interest statements, which are unchanged from 2017:

- a. To maintain and enhance a resilient and ecologically healthy forested landscape.
- b. To maintain and enhance economic opportunities.
- c. To maintain multiple uses of a forest as an integral part of the custom and culture of the community.
- d. To maintain and enhance wildlife habitat at a landscape scale.
- e. To maintain and enhance a diverse range of recreation opportunities.
- f. To protect private and public property and lives.
- g. To instill confidence in public land management.
- h. To maintain and enhance scientific learning.
- i. To maintain our vibrant community values and way of life



Option generation – participants identified possible options for recommendations to address the above problems/issues. Below is the list of options for recommendations generated based on identified geographical areas. The options outline the area to be addressed, the objectives the Collaborative recommends achieving and methods suggested to achieve the objectives.

Criteria – stakeholder interests were used as criteria against which to measure the strength of the options for recommendations.

Trade-Offs – stakeholders deliberated the final options in order to resolve problems and meet as many interests as possible. These discussions lead to the crafting of final recommendations, and exploration of levels of agreement for each recommendation (see below).

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Consensus Recommendations

The following are recommendations to all land managers that received full consensus agreement from the Sublette Forest Collaborative on April 28, 2021. The language of these recommendations is specific and were crafted and agreed to by all present. The recommendations range across nine categories related either to a place or to a topic. There were 30 recommendations that received full consensus and one where a participant did not support the recommendation.

Levels of Agreement Definitions based on the 2021 Charter

1. Endorsement - Member likes it.
2. Endorsement with Minor Point of Contention - Basically, member likes it.
3. Agreement with Minor Reservations - Member can live with it.
4. Major reservations - Formal disagreement, but will not object to the proposal/provision
5. Member will not support the proposal.



Consensus Recommendations and Levels of Agreement			
Final Recommendations April 28, 2021	Levels of Agreement		Comments
Upper Green/Union Pass	Level	# Participants	
1a. We recommend the USDA Forest Service analyze the use of Categorical Exclusion or other mechanisms under NEPA to implement timber harvest/fuels reductions where appropriate to improve forest health and wildlife habitat at Union Pass and the surrounding area.	1	12	Rob H. - will need to follow applicable laws for NEPA, may not always allow for CE level of assessments.
	2	1	
1b. Implement a timber harvest under the Good Neighbor Authority at Cow Camp to improve forest health.	1	12	
	2	1	
1c. Improve recreational access in the Upper Green watershed by seeking opportunities to improve trail systems.	1	9	Kim B. - 2 - as long as they don't pave the road! Dave B./ Austen M. - Prefer the road not change, including don't pave.
	2	3	
	3	1	
1d. Within pronghorn migration routes seek opportunities to improve animal passage with the use of mechanical treatments to reduce conifer encroachment per the WGFD Statewide Habitat Plan.	1	12	
	2	1	
East Rim	Level	# Participants	
2a. We recommend the appropriate parties collaborate to conduct a fuels reduction treatment on the East Rim from the Rim Station to Kendall Valley to achieve fuels mitigation and forest health in identified WUI areas.	1	12	
	2	1	
2b. Maintain and improve trails for recreational and grazing purposes to reduce erosion and increase longevity of trails.	1	13	





Blowdown Area	Level	# Participants	
3a. Address impacts related to the blowdown on trails and roads.	1	13	
3b. Recommend the USDA Forest Service enable the use of chainsaws where appropriate to clear trails in Wilderness in the Blowdown area.	1 2 3 5	9 2 1 1	Rob H. – important to ensure compliance with the Wilderness act of 1964, and Wyoming Wilderness Act of 1984. Kim B. - Highly in favor – have been promoting this for 20+ years prior to the blowdown. Jen L.- No support.
3c. Conduct a fuels reduction treatment in the Blowdown area where appropriate to achieve fuels mitigation and forest health in areas with heavy fuel loading.	1	13	
3d. Use mechanical timber harvesting to salvage blowdown trees to recover economic and resource benefits and reduce fuels in Blowdown areas.	1	13	
3e. Coordinate with agencies and permittees to repair and replace range improvement projects including fencing where necessary in the Blowdown area.	1	13	
3f. Support funding to monitor, prevent and treat invasive species for post-blowdown operations.	1 2	10 3	Rob H. – Forest Service cannot ensure funding, we have to rely on what we are appropriated.
Opportunities in Previously Burned areas.			
4a. Encourage cooperative timber harvest that may generate funds for other resource benefits using Good Neighbor Authority and other mechanisms.	1	13	
4b. When planning projects in previously burned areas, seek opportunities to improve terrestrial and aquatic habitat by reducing invasive species.	1	13	



Muddy Ridge	Level	# Participants	
5a. Recommend agencies and user groups coordinate to replace Big Sandy bridge on state trust land and improve roads on Muddy Ridge.	1	12	Rob H. - worthwhile and important goal that will be challenging to coordinate. Difficult for agencies to acquire or assign funding at the same time.
	2	1	
5b. Conduct cross boundary forest treatments through timber harvest fuels mitigation using Good Neighbor Authority.	1	13	
Big Sandy Opening	Level	# Participants	
6a. Conduct a vegetation treatment around Temple Summer Homes and Big Sandy Lodge to reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat.	1	13	
6b. Use mechanical treatments to improve forest health using existing NEPA authorities.	1	12	
	2	1	
6c. Widen and improve the Big Sandy Opening Road, include fuel breaks along the road and improve bridges to allow large trucks and visitors.	1	10	Rob H. - - the use of the word widen here, does that mean a wider road, or does it mean to widen the fuel break along the road. Road widths are determined by the class of the road and changing the class of road can be challenging as it requires Travel management decisions that can be difficult. (Group discussed: widen road and fuel breaks).
	2	3	
6d. Improve conditions at the Big Sandy Trailhead and Parking Area to reduce congestion and accommodate visitors.	1	10	Rob H. - with the caveat that the FS does not necessarily wish to create increased access therefore more visitors into the Wilderness, but simply to provide an acceptable experience at the trailhead.
	2	3	



Invasive Species	Level	#Participants	
7a. Develop an Environmental Assessment for the Bridger Wilderness for annual grass treatments (cheatgrass) to reduce the spread and minimize the impact to forest health.	1	13	Rob H. - agree with this one, it is just difficult ensure that a 10-year plan is completely reliable as issues and challenges emerge in that amount of time.
7b. Develop sustainable annual funding for invasive species treatments in addition to special project funds.	1	10	
	2	3	
Sublette County Long Term Strategy	Level	# Participants	
8a. Encourage land management agencies to identify realistic opportunities to implement fuel breaks to reduce fire intensity, improve egress and ingress when working on existing projects along trails and roads outside Wilderness.	1	13	
8b. Recommend the Collaborative support creation of a 10-year forest management strategy for the benefit of private enterprise related to the Bridger Teton National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming State Forestry Division and State Lands and other landowners to create economic, recreational, forest resilience and wildlife habitat benefits.	1	7	
	2	5	
	3	1	
8c. Given recent recreation trends, we recommend the USFS secure funds with a letter of support from this Collaborative to explore options that address impacts of too many people in certain areas in Wilderness.	1	10	Rob H. - - this is something that the FS will need assistance with, to accomplish. Barry T. - WSFD would support research into recreation trends but the recommendation needs to clarify who is seeking the funding and contracting the experts.
	2	3	



8d. Encourage maintenance and improvement of a motorized travel network as part of the long-term strategy for recreation and to address natural resource concerns and projects.	1 2	10 3	Rob H. - - this is something that the FS will need assistance with, to accomplish. Terry P. - Depends on the specific motorized proposals
8e. Recommend the County pursue sources of funding as means to revise the CWPP.	1	12	Missing – Rob H.
8f. Recommend land management agencies and other partners contribute to revisions to the current Sublette County CWPP.	1 2	12 1	Rob H. - - actual money would be dependent on Congressional allocation rules. In kind assistance is a given. The group discussed this and agreed that contributions can be in kind, in the form of recreation, or other.
Wildlife Habitat Improvement	Level	# Participants	
9a. Seek opportunities to improve native winter range habitat for elk, particularly in areas that are associated with feed grounds to increase herd sustainability.	1 2	12 1	Terry Pollard: I have mentioned several times how important and necessary our elk feed grounds are to the maintenance of our elk herds in our areas, but somehow, it hasn't really been addressed in the write up? I would like to see something like, "Seek opportunities to improve native winter range habitat for elk, particularly in areas that are associate with feed grounds to increase herd sustainability by maintaining those existing elk feed grounds in addition to potential habitat improvements."
9b. Encourage land management agencies to consider wildlife values when implementing	1 – 12	12	1 Missing – Kim B.



forest management projects in conjunction with additional projects types when possible (fuels reduction, timber harvests, etc.) to improve terrestrial and aquatic habitat in crucial and restoration areas in consultation with the WGFD Statewide Habitat Plan.			
gc. Within the projects identified in these recommendations, seek opportunities to improve habitat and permeability within identified migration routes to ensure wildlife viability into the future.	1 – 12	12	1 Missing – Kim. B.
<i>Discussed, some participants missing:</i>	Level	#Participants	
Seek opportunities to improve native winter range habitat for elk, particularly in areas that are associate with feed grounds to increase herd sustainability by maintaining an elk feed ground system in Sublette County in addition to potential habitat improvements.	1	9	Troy: 2 - While my intention for this recommendation was for the improvement of habitat, both quality and quantity, for elk away from feedgrounds, I can live with this addition. Doug L.: 1 for BLM. We agree with this language as it matches our current Resource Management Plan goals and objectives and our current MOU for Elk feed ground management on BLM managed lands. We defer to the USFS for any potential differences in Elk feed ground management on USFS and we fully acknowledge the ongoing WGFD reviews which we appreciate and participate in.
	2	1	
			3 Missing



Improve recreation access on in the Upper Green watershed by maintaining road systems more often.	1	8	*
	2	1	4 Missing
Improve recreational access in the Upper Green watershed by seeking opportunities to establish boat launch sites along the Green River to minimize resource damage from unregulated use.	1	7	*
	2	2	4 Missing

Recommendations that were not supported by all

Member did not Support	Level	#Participants	
3b. Recommend the USDA Forest Service enable the use of chainsaws where appropriate to clear trails in Wilderness in the Blowdown area.	1	9	Rob H. - important to ensure compliance with the Wilderness act of 1964, and Wyoming Wilderness Act of 1984. Kim B. - Highly in favor - have been promoting this for 20+ years prior to the blowdown. Jen L.- No support.
	2	2	
	3	1	
	5	1	

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

On June 30th the Collaborative hosted a public workshop in the Sublette County Library in which the process and results were presented and discussed to interested participants. No changes to the recommendations were requested.

