



Ruckelshaus  
INSTITUTE

A DIVISION OF THE  
HAUB SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

## REPORT

# Sublette County Forest Collaborative 2017

## Process and Recommendations



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Cover: The Upper Hoback at sunset. The Collaborative recommends restoration projects for this important wildlife habitat. Photo by Mark Gocke.

## 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. The Forest Collaborative is representative of persons with interests in the conditions of the forests in Sublette County. During the Collaboration Cadre’s workshops, 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. Not all invited participants chose to work through the entire process, usually due to time constraints and/or beliefs that the Collaborative would not address their particular interests. 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 (primary members listed):

- United States Forest Service (3): Rob Hoelscher, Don Kranendonk, Tricia O’Connor
- Bureau of Land Management (1): Ben Wiese
- Elected Official: Joel Bousman (County Commissioner)
- Wyoming State agencies (2): Jill Randall (WGFD) and Brook Lee (Wyoming State Forestry Div.)
- Conservation NGOs (1): Jennifer Lamb (The Nature Conservancy)
- Conservation Districts (1): Michael Henn
- County Weed and Pest (1): Julie Kraft
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (1): Jennifer Hayward
- Outfitters and guides (1): Terry Pollard
- Back Country Horsemen (1): Dennis Dailey
- Grazing Permittees (1): Kim Bright
- Sublette County Unified Fire: Shad Cooper

## The Process

Completed Process for the Sublette County Forest Collaborative				
Meeting #	1	2	3	4
<b>Main Subject</b>	<b>Process, Interests, Issue Identification and Completion of Charter.</b>	<b>Data and Information Sharing re. Forest Health, Travel and Hydrology</b>	<b>Data and Information Sharing re. Forest Health, Travel and Hydrology</b>	<b>Options, Agreed Recommendations and Adaptive Management</b>
<b>Process</b>	<p><b>Dec. 12:</b> Identify interests and issues. Initiate Charter (including process and decision-making method).</p> <p><b>Feb. 17:</b> Define objectives. Completed Charter. Identify Information needs for Forest Health.</p>	<p><b>March 15:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete Charter.</li> <li>2. Learning and information sharing.</li> <li>3. Presentations based on collaborative input.</li> </ol> <p><b>April 19:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue Learning.</li> <li>2. Options for Recommendations.</li> </ol>	<p><b>May 17:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue Learning</li> <li>2. Draft Recommendations</li> </ol>	<p><b>June 21:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review Draft Recommendations re. Forest Health, Travel and Hydrology.</li> <li>2. Decide on next steps and adaptive management process.</li> </ol>

### Procedural Tools:

1. The three themes around which to create a process and provide recommendations to the County, to public land agencies and others: Forest Health, Travel Management and Hydrology.
2. A clear understanding by the Collaborative of the decision context (scope of recommendations) and implementation mechanisms.
3. A decision making process that takes the Collaborative from problem identification to recommended actions for all three themes.
4. A consensus-based decision protocol that uses ‘gradations of consensus’.
5. 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.

Jessica Western (collaborative lead and facilitator, Ruckelshaus Institute) provided the Collaborative with a short training in the principles of collaboration and the process that would be used. Above is the process matrix that was used. It shows the meetings that were held and their objectives.

The process followed the following PRI OCT (Problems, Interests, Options, Criteria, Trade-Offs). The results of each step are listed:

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

#### Group 1

1. Public education related to forest health to explain what it is, its importance, management actions to get public buy-in for programs
2. Allowing natural fire regimes to occur and get the forest where the fire can be beneficial rather than damaging
3. Creating conditions that allow for safe fire fighting
4. Maintain trail access affected by insects and fire
5. Understand the limitations and maximize potential within them (e.g., regulations, institutional mindsets)
6. Generate some forest products: provide local businesses with wood, figure out what's possible
7. Funding for planning, specialists: time and pre-planning are bottlenecks
8. How to find non-government funds and resources
9. How to find funding for private fuel reduction treatments
10. Fuel reduction: prescribed burns challenging to implement – therefore mechanical?
11. Bear watershed health in mind when making recommendations
12. Maintain healthy grazing regimes in the context of forest treatments
13. Need to create diverse seral classes and restore key vegetation types
14. Maintain a diverse spectrum of recreational experiences and opportunities
15. Landscape scale fuel reduction treatments regardless of jurisdiction are needed
16. Manage invasive plant species: limit or avoid spread of invasives in forest treatment
17. Take into consideration the next disease or insect infestation into treatments
18. Aspen is your friend
19. Take migration corridors into consideration when designing treatments

#### Group 2

1. Meadow Lake trail (user conflict between ATVs and horses, human-wildlife conflict between ATVs and elk, safety and strain on Search and Rescue, ATVers need a place to go)
2. Travel management – where is USFS at with their plans? Are they in need of revision?

3. Access – some areas have better access than others (across private, BLM, closed roads)
4. Enforcement of existing travel management through interagency cooperation
5. Addressing year-round elk movements, including feed grounds
6. Physical infrastructure – deteriorating bridges, roads, culverts
7. Improving forest resiliency
8. Removal of dead wood behind gates
9. Improve mule deer habitat conditions
10. Trail maintenance and management of dead fall in burn areas and wilderness
11. How to address hazard trees
12. Creation of designated motorized routes
13. Creation of looped routes and trails
14. Wildland-urban interface (designated roadless areas, migration corridors, etc.)
15. Invasive plants and insects (weeds, pine beetle, cheatgrass)
16. Roads in designated roadless and wilderness areas (what are the available tools for managing these areas?)
17. Wilderness Study Areas – three in Sublette County (inform WPLI on issues)
18. Water quality, particularly in areas of beetle kill and erosion
19. Water quantity, i.e., watershed capacity
20. Forage amount and quality for livestock and wildlife
21. Public and agency education and information sharing
22. Bureaucratic process (red tape)
23. Industry capacity – ability to fill bid, contract duration, stewardship contracting authority
24. Encroachment along interface of different habitat types
25. Lack of data on current forest conditions and areas that need the group's attention
26. How to make decisions regarding areas that cross jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., Mosquito Lake in Sublette and Teton counties)
27. Impacts of timber harvest and travel on soil condition
28. Threatened, endangered, and sensitive species as they pertain to jurisdictional responsibilities
29. Poor air quality resulting from smoke
30. Public lands transfer
31. Wildfire – WUI, public education, resilience, smoke, etc.
32. Impact of fire suppression cost on agency resources

2. 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:

- 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

3. 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.

#### 1. Upper Hoback

##### a. Monument Ridge: South Fork of Hoback Road to Cliff Creek Road (north to south)

##### i. Objectives

1. Enhance aspen communities
2. Improve transitional habitat for mule deer and other big game; wildlife (ungulate) habitat
3. WUI: break up conifer fuels along Highway 191; break up fuels continuity (fuels reduction); WUI
4. Improve hydrologic resources
5. Improve recreational access; recreation access
6. Improve trailhead access to and stabilize the lookout
7. Weed control

##### ii. Methods

1. Slash and burn; prescribed burns (no good way to remove merchantable timber)
2. Hand mechanical treatments prior to burns
3. Wildlife-friendly fencing
4. Mechanical cut in persistent aspen
5. Assess and engineer road, trailhead, and lookout

6. Relocate trailhead to the construction camp east of guard station
7. Follow up on weeds post-disturbance
8. Improve Clark Draw Road; for recreational access (would need work for treatments anyway)
9. For recreation, reopen the Hoback guard station parking area
- b. Hoback Ranches: including USFS and BLM (Kismet Peak)
  - i. Objectives
    1. Defensible space; WUI
    2. Educate landowners and create social license; education
    3. Decrease risk to firefighters
    4. Improve ingress and egress
    5. Improve herbaceous vegetation and aspen for wildlife; wildlife habitat
    6. Remove forest products; timber
    7. Wildlife-friendly fences
    8. Grazing
    9. Public safety
    10. Recreational access (BLM)
  - ii. Methods
    1. Shaded fuel break
    2. Mechanical
    3. Pile burning; prescribed burn (Rim 2 USFS)
    4. Timber sales; commercial thinning (Rim 2 USFS)
    5. Road work for ingress and egress access
    6. Firewise community/fire-adapted communities and Ready Set Go
    7. Engage landowners in planning
    8. Fence modification and rebuilding
    9. Implement Rim 2 timber sale
    10. Implement Rolling Thunder, Rim Ranch aspen work
    11. Need to establish if there is landowner buy-in prior to discussing treatment
    12. Create an overall plan/map to approach landowners with suggested treatments
    13. Education regarding “living with fire”
    14. Now’s the time: “Strike while the iron is warm”
    15. Potential recommendation for private lands:
      - a. The county and state will jointly create a plan that includes current conditions, desired conditions, and proposed treatments.
      - b. The county and state will assess landowner buy-in.
        - i. If insufficient, continue education.
        - ii. If sufficient, apply for grant funding to conduct treatments.
    16. BLM: Need to secure access first

- a. Timber sales
    - b. Mechanical, prescribed fire
    - c. Adjacent landowner cooperation/coordination for timber access
    - d. Create permanent public access easement for recreation
    - e. Or create permanent management access easement
  - c. East Rim: From Rim Station to Flying A Ranch
    - i. Objectives
      - 1. Defensible space; WUI
      - 2. Produce forest products; timber
      - 3. Transitional habitat improvements; wildlife
      - 4. Recreation
    - ii. Methods
      - 1. Merchantable timber sales; timber sales
      - 2. Mechanical thinning; mechanical treatment
      - 3. Piling; prescribed fire
      - 4. Fix trailhead (expand parking)
- 2. Boulder
  - a. Boulder Lake: Dead Soda to Meadow Lake
    - i. Objectives
      - 1. Reduce cheatgrass prevalence and spread; invasives
      - 2. Wildlife-friendly fencing
      - 3. Enhance trail access to Wilderness and lakes; recreation
      - 4. Reroute the Meadow Lake ATV route and reduce Wilderness trespass; travel management
      - 5. Investigate reroute of Burnt Lake Road
    - ii. Methods
      - 1. Aerial herbicide application
      - 2. Fence modification/rebuild stock
      - 3. Rebuild Boulder Lake Trailhead
      - 4. Reconstruct first quarter mile from stock trailhead to the main trail
      - 5. Close ATV route that lead up to wilderness – require buy-in
      - 6. Road improvement?
      - 7. Cheatgrass EIS
  - b. Boulder Estates: Note – this WUI is well taken care of
    - i. Objectives
      - 1. Recreation
      - 2. Invasives
    - ii. Methods
      - 1. Continual trail maintenance
      - 2. Aerial herbicide application

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

5. 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 June 21, 2017. The language of these recommendations are specific and were crafted and agreed to by all present.

Recommendation 1: Encourage the Bridger-Teton National Forest to initiate the NEPA process to acquire the use of aerial application of herbicides for invasive annual grasses control on National Forest lands.

The following letter has already been sent to the Forest Supervisor of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The language was based on consensus agreement.

“To Whom It May Concern,

The Sublette County Forest Collaborative has set our first priority to encourage the Bridger Teton National Forest (BTNF) to initiate the NEPA process to acquire the use of aerial application of herbicides for invasive annual grasses control on National Forest lands. We strongly encourage the BTNF to prioritize and complete the EIS required to allow the management of cheatgrass with aerial application. It is essential to our sagebrush rangeland ecosystem and to prevent further spread of cheatgrass.

Numerous partners have invested nearly one million dollars, time and effort in treatment and monitoring cheatgrass infestations adjacent to the BTNF lands. The infestations on BTNF lands

are prohibiting local managers from realizing their goals and pose a threat to adjacent areas, through re-infestation of this very aggressive species. The infestations within the BTNF are spreading into areas where control options are severely limited, such as wilderness areas.

The Greater sage grouse, mule deer and other sagebrush obligate species are and will continue to be negatively impacted by this cheatgrass invasion. We will continue to lose grazing capacity for livestock and native plant species diversity. Even though these areas are infested, the native plant community is still intact. We still have an opportunity to positively impact native species and facilitate recovery. We may be one large disturbance away from crossing a threshold to a monoculture of cheatgrass, which would require even more effort to overcome.

The only economically viable and ecologically sound method of treatment is through the aerial application of herbicides. Please partner with us to improve the landscape level management of cheatgrass. This partnership will strengthen management and help us all use and acquire funding.

We are requesting that your agency invest time and effort in securing the ability to aerially treat these infestations on BTNF lands.

Sincerely,

Sublette County Forest Collaborative Members”

### [Recommendation 2: We recommend the following three project areas in the Upper Hoback:](#)

a. **Monument Ridge** - South Fork of Hoback Road to Cliff Creek Road (south to north). Goal: to improve wildlife habitat, reduce fuels in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas and improve hydrological and recreational resources.

#### Objectives:

1. Enhance aspen communities;
2. Improve transitional habitat for mule deer and other big game; wildlife habitat;
3. Conduct fuel reduction to address fuels continuity within the WUI;
4. Mitigate impacts to hydrologic resources by maintaining and improving roads, particularly the Clark Draw Road;
5. Improve and assess all motorized and non-motorized recreational access;
6. Invasive species management;
7. Identify and develop additional emergency water supply access.

Tactics and strategies to consider:

- Slash and burn and prescribed burns;
- Mechanical treatments of forested vegetation;
- Wildlife-friendly fencing;
- Assess and engineer the road and trailhead and stabilize the lookout;
- Relocate the Monument Ridge Trailhead to the parking area east of the guard station;
- Develop an invasive species management plan;
- Improve Clark Draw Road for recreational access.

b. **Hoback Ranches Service Improvement District:** Goal: Reduce fuels and make area more defensible in case of a fire and improve “life safety”, while improving wildlife habitat.

Objectives:

1. Create defensible spaces around structures and conduct fuels reduction within the WUI;
2. Educate landowners and foster partnerships by engaging them in project planning and implementation;
3. Improve ingress and egress for firefighter access and evacuation;
4. Improve herbaceous vegetation and aspen for wildlife habitat;
5. Manage invasive species;
6. Offset the cost of fuel reduction through the removal of marketable forest products;
7. Improve wildlife movement with wildlife-friendly fences;
8. Identify and develop additional emergency water supply access.

Tactics and strategies to consider:

- Reduce hazardous fuels through
  - slash pile burning;
  - shaded fuel breaks;
  - mechanical thinning;
  - timber sales; commercial thinning
- Widen roads and turnouts and conduct hazardous fuels reduction along roads for safe ingress and egress;
- Provide education through programs such as Firewise Community, Fire-adapted Communities, and Ready Set Go;
- Modify fences to wildlife-friendly standards;
- Contact landowners to form partnerships by identifying project areas and creating a strategy with each individual landowner;
- Create an overall plan/map to approach landowners with suggested treatments;
- Apply for grant funding to conduct treatments.

c. **The Rim:** Bounded by Middle Beaver on the south, Upper Hoback on the west, Raspberry Ridge on the north, and Twin Creeks on the east, including the East Rim, Rim 2, Kismet Peak, Rolling Thunder, and Rim Ranch projects. Goal: Create a resilient forest and defensible space within WUI areas, while improving wildlife habitat and migration routes and improving recreational opportunities.

#### Objectives

1. Create defensible spaces around structures and conduct fuels reduction within the WUI;
2. Produce forest products;
3. Improve habitat for wildlife;
4. Improve recreational opportunities;
5. Maintain and improve forage for livestock and wildlife;
6. Mitigate impacts to hydrologic resources by maintaining and improving roads;
7. Manage invasive species.

#### Tactics and Strategies to consider:

- Reduce hazardous fuels through
  - slash pile burning;
  - shaded fuel breaks;
  - mechanical thinning.
- Promote stewardship contracts to allow for forest product extraction while implementing local improvements;
- Explore new ideas for the use of forest products to improve the local economy;
- Implement the Rim 2 timber sale;
- Improve trailhead access and examine other recreational opportunities;
- Implement Rolling Thunder and Rim Ranch vegetation treatments;
- BLM: Need to secure access to Kismet Peak first
  - a. Timber sales
  - b. Mechanical treatment and prescribed fire
  - c. Adjacent landowner cooperation/coordination for timber access
  - d. Explore a public access easement for recreation
  - e. Create a permanent management access easement

Recommendation 3: We recommend the following projects in the Boulder area:

a. **Boulder Lake:** Dead Soda Lake to Meadow Lake. Goal: Reduce cheatgrass, improve wildlife corridors, and improve recreational opportunities.

#### Objectives

1. Reduce the prevalence and spread of invasives, especially cheatgrass;
2. Improve wildlife movement;
3. Enhance trail access to the Bridger Wilderness and lakes for recreation;
4. Maintain the character of the Bridger Wilderness;
5. Ensure user safety and reduce resource damage on trails.

#### Tactics and strategies to consider

- Develop partnerships with interested groups to address safe access in wilderness;
- Engage ATV users to reroute the Meadow Lake ATV route to reduce motorized intrusions on the Wilderness and to mitigate impacts to wildlife;
- Improve access to Burnt Lake campground and boat launch;
- Implement invasive species management, including aerial herbicide application for cheatgrass;
- Complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) for aerial application of herbicide for invasive grasses;
- Modify fences to be wildlife-friendly;
- Explore improvements to the Boulder Canyon trail and associated Wilderness access, including Burnt and Meadow Lake trails;
- Reconstruct the first quarter mile from the stock trailhead to the main trail and fix the stock corrals.

There were no Recommendations that received either Consensus with Major Reservations, or No Consensus.

## NEXT STEPS

- Next collaborative meeting: September 5, 2017

### Current projects

- Agencies will identify funding needs
- Find funding and start NEPA for Monument Ridge (2017)
- Don Kranendonk (USFS) and staff come back to the collaborative with what's feasible and timelines (September 2017)
- Clark Draw Road – USFS will work with county (2017)
- Rob and staff will come back to the collaborative with feasibility and timeline (September 2017)
- Monument Ridge and East Rim: consider WGFD Mule Deer Initiative and PAPO funding
- Rim 2: USFS is working on it
- BLM will come back to the collaborative with feasibility and timeline (September 2017)
- Hoback Ranches sub-group: need report regarding July 15 meeting and fuels grants program manager in September
- Hoback Ranches
  - Create CWPP-ish plan with USFS, BLM, State Forestry, fire department, and private landowners
  - East Rim is part of this
  - Job, perhaps, for a sub-committee
  - Objective 1: Create defensible space and enhance wildlife habitat on private land
  - Objective 2: Wildlife-friendly fencing
    - Potential partners: TNC, HOA, NRCS (EQIP funding deadline November), WGFD
  - Objective 3: Noxious weed mitigation

### Next possible projects

- Union Pass – Fremont, Teton, and Sublette Counties
  - Start with road improvements, then maybe timber harvest
  - Include gravel pit
- Existing recommendations – NEPA and scientific reviews?
  - This collaborative can help with public engagement during NEPA
- Green River Lakes Road – make passable
  - Road repairs post-2017 flooding
  - Will require partner dollars
- Elkhart(sp?) Road repairs for recreational access

- Work with user groups on Cliff Creek Road, Upper Hoback, and N Horse Creek Road and S Cottonwood trailhead
- Work with motorized and non-motorized recreation groups to create looped trails
- Tackle drought management
- Wyoming Range Recreation Trail – improve resources, marketing, etc.