

Doing More Together: Southwest Colorado's proactive approach to advancing healthier forests and resilient watersheds

Panel Organizer and Moderator: Ellen Roberts, independent consultant, currently working with the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) and the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) on improved forest health and watershed protection in Southwest Colorado. Ellen is a former state legislator from Southwest Colorado, having served for 10 years in the Colorado House of Representatives and the Colorado Senate and is a lawyer with extensive experience in Colorado's water and natural resources policies and politics.

Goal of Panel: Inform and stimulate discussion with others about Southwest Colorado's proactive, cross-boundary, (federal, state and local), efforts and progress in improving regional headwaters forest health and watershed resiliency. The panel will present the recent successes and challenges faced in this effort and identify policies that help or hinder the future progress of this and similar efforts statewide.

Background: As a result of focused and sustained efforts by many in the region, Southwest Colorado is seeing significant progress in the revitalization of its wood products industry in a manner that will help address the region's headwaters protection challenges.

From the production of biochar from woody biomass in Pagosa Springs to the entry of a wood products business in the Dolores area specifically utilizing small diameter timber and biomass for veneer that complements the existing aspen and excelsior wood products businesses in the area, Southwest Colorado is experiencing a rebirth of its wood products industry sector. Alongside these private sector efforts, the San Juan National Forest has put forth its proactive plan for a significant harvest of some of the Dolores area's ponderosa pine forests currently being devastated by insects that will allow for responsive and more resilient reforestation in the area, helping Southwest Colorado forge a new path.

That path breaks from the status quo of discouraged acceptance of the current condition of our standing dead and diseased forests in a drier, fire-prone climate; the panel will detail the efforts to proactively implement long-term economically and ecologically responsible ways to avoid or mitigate further degradation and erosion of the regional headwaters' vital watersheds through improved forest health by public and private sector stakeholders.

Having dealt simultaneously with last summer's 416 and Burro catastrophic wildfires while keeping the existing collaborative efforts underway, these panelists will share a message of focused strategy and creating an ethic and mission of shared responsibility for improving our forested headwaters together.