

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
December 1, 2020, 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM
RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee
Meeting Summary - FINAL**

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Cindy Dozier, Les Own, Ellen Roberts, Tim Reader, Tara Umphries, and Nathan Van Schaik

Facilitation: Molly Pitts and Samuel Wallace

ACTION ITEMS

Molly Pitts and Tim Reader	Organize a webinar for colleges in Colorado to discuss forestry equipment operation certifications with Shasta College and Northern Maine Community College; the potential guest list for the webinar include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shasta College • Northern Maine Community College • Colorado colleges (e.g., Colorado Mountain College, Fort Lewis College, and Front Range Community College) • Kim Poast from the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) • Ray Lucero and Clarke Becker from the workforce development centers • Northern Arizona University (NAU)
Tim Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to NAU representatives to see if they have funding available through their Wood Innovations Grant to help acquire the forestry training simulator. • Forward a draft agenda for the upcoming wood innovations conference to the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee.
Molly Pitts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to reach out to the Southwest Colorado Small Businesses Development Center. • Update the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee work plan.
Les Owen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information from the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) marketing department to identify opportunities for the Colorado Proud program to partner with the Colorado State Forest Service's (CSFS) Colorado Forest Products program. • Connect the CDA's new soil health program director with the RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee once they are hired and onboarded.
Ellen Roberts	Continue to update the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee on the Honnen Equipment proposal so that the Subcommittee can use the proposal to apply for grant funding.

HONNEN EQUIPMENT FORESTRY TRAINING SIMULATOR DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed Honnen Equipment's proposal to loan a simulator for forest industry training. Their comments are summarized below.

- Since the last Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting, Ellen Roberts reached out to Honnen Equipment to gather information on their proposal to loan a forest equipment training simulator. A Honnen Equipment employee is currently working on submitting a

proposal to John Deere to acquire a simulator. The plan is to loan the simulator to Southwest Colorado first and then move it around the state to different locations.

- There are several costs tied to the simulator. The simulator itself is an expensive piece of equipment, and an engineer is usually on-site with the equipment to assist users.
- Honnen Equipment is willing to help Southwest Colorado by playing a role in financing and acquiring the equipment temporarily, but they do not want to overcommit themselves. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee members should help Honnen Equipment by identifying and applying for grant funds. It is not known how much funding is needed for the simulator at this time.
- Forestry capacity grants, like the CSFS's Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program, economic and rural development grants, and education grants are all potential options to acquire funding. The First Southwest Bank in Southwest Colorado has economic development grant money, which could be a potential source for acquiring the forestry equipment training simulator.
- The FRWRM grant application is currently accepting proposals, but the Subcommittee is not ready to apply at this time. There should be another FRWRM grant cycle in 2021 due to the increase in the governor's budget for the FRWRM grant program. The simulator would be an attractive FRWRM grant proposal because it would be unique. Molly Pitts should have more information on the next FRWRM grant cycle at the next Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting.
- Tim Reader will reach out to NAU representatives to see if they have funding available through their Wood Innovations Grant to help acquire the forestry training simulator.
- In a grant application, the Subcommittee should highlight how the simulator would impact forest health, workforce development, and community development. A grant application should emphasize that one goal of the simulator is to build a pipeline between students and careers, particularly in rural areas. This message would grab the attention of education and rural development funders.
- Southwest Colorado partners have been discussing logistical considerations on where to place the forestry training simulator. If the simulator were to be used in the Front Range or Northern Colorado, partners would have to identify a place to host the equipment. The simulator's size is unknown, but a big truck will likely be required to haul it to different areas.
- There are multiple types of simulators for different equipment. The landscape partners and Workforce Capacity Subcommittee should identify the greatest equipment skills need and align the simulator selection with what skills are needed.
- The timeline is to have the simulator in Southwest Colorado at the beginning of the fall semester of 2021.
- The forestry training simulator is a sophisticated piece of equipment, and Honnen Equipment intends to loan it for educational purposes and not for casual demonstration. Honnen Equipment wants to make sure the equipment is treated well and used in an educational environment. The forestry simulator has the secondary benefit of helping recruit young people to the industry. The simulator will show young people that the forestry industry uses 21st-century technology and skills. The simulator can expose students at colleges, like Fort Lewis College and Pueblo Community College, to the forestry industry.
- In the future, the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee should consider how to acquire and transport a forestry training simulator to state fairs and Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H demonstrations to recruit young people to the forestry industry. If the Subcommittee can demonstrate need, the purchase of a simulator would be between \$20,000 to \$25,000, which would give them the option to use it at state fairs and other

settings. The Subcommittee would need to determine who owns it and the transportation logistics if they ever wanted to pursue this option.

- The State of Alaska has a training simulator mounted on a trailer that drives to different communities. Alaska's program could be a model for a similar program in Colorado.
- If needed, Molly Pitts and Tim Reader can provide additional information for or review the Honnen Equipment proposal. They could also help identify the most needed equipment operation skills. At this time, Honnen Equipment has enough information to write the proposal to John Deere. Ellen Roberts will continue to update the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee on the Honnen Equipment proposal so that the Subcommittee can use the proposal to apply for grant funding.

WORKFORCE FORESTRY CURRICULUM DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed a collection of curriculums that Nathan Van Schaik compiled. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee has discussed organizing a webinar with higher education institutions to create a pipeline to recruit talent and expand the forest restoration workforce.
- With the help of others, Nathan Van Schaik compiled a list of universities and community colleges and their forestry-related associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees and certificates. Nathan Van Schaik placed a PDF for each program and a summary document with all the programs in [this Google Drive](#).
- One program that stands out is the Oregon State University (OSU) program. In the OSU program, professors host weekend classes for local community members to learn skills, from managing their properties to selling wood from their private treatments.
- The heavy equipment logging operations and maintenance certificate program at Shasta College, in particular, can serve as a model for community colleges. In Colorado, programs already exist for students who want to go in-depth into forestry training, like Colorado State University and Front Range Community College programs. In the short term, wood businesses need people on the ground operating equipment.
- Fort Lewis College received a grant to work with Pueblo Community College to create a jobs pipeline for local school districts in Southwest Colorado. One of the primary degrees of interest was environmental science.
- The US Forest Service (USFS) has successfully worked with Colorado Mountain College (CMC) in recruiting foresters. CMC has multiple campuses across the West Slope, and it would be helpful to learn what curriculum they are offering currently.
- There are several potential next steps for using this collection of curriculums. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee could:
 - Develop an example curriculum that addresses Colorado's needs to take to different colleges in Colorado
 - Approach schools with the collection of curriculums to discuss what curriculum meets their needs as a community
 - Approach administrators at the state level and ask them the strategy for reaching out to colleges
 - Organize a webinar with state-level administrators, colleges around Colorado, and colleges with forestry equipment operation programs in place (e.g., Shasta College)
- The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee could develop a website that lays out the roadmap for entering into a forestry career. A website could be a value add for colleges because the website would help with recruiting and marketing. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee may not have the information yet to populate a website.

- From the college perspective, there are always good programs to add but not always the funding to add them. Colleges have to know there is a demand for a certain program and a pathway for students to get a job after the program to consider adding it. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee should connect with industry and educational institutions to demonstrate a need for these jobs.
- The Workforce Subcommittee should organize a call to connect colleges and universities in Colorado, such as CMC, Fort Lewis College, and Front Range Community College, with programs training students in the logging industry, like Shasta College and Northern Maine Community College. The purpose of the call would be for Colorado colleges to talk with other colleges offering a forestry equipment operations certificate to learn about their certificate programs and how they were able to establish their programs. Kim Poast from the CDHE, Clarke Becker and Ray Lucero from the workforce development centers, and an NAU representative should also attend this webinar. Molly Pitts and Tim Reader will organize this webinar for mid-January and invite the above people to attend.

CDA-RMRI PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed opportunities for CDA and RMRI to partner with Les Owen, CDA Conservation Services Division Director. Their comments are summarized below.

- CDA has relationships with the conservation districts and could help connect RMRI to conservation districts at the local level.
- One of the challenges with hiring equipment operators in the forestry industry is that people are trained in heavy equipment operations but not specifically forestry equipment. Therefore, businesses lose productivity and take on risk when they first hire someone to operate expensive forestry equipment. CDA has a workforce development and internship program; although the program is primarily oriented towards farming and ranching labor, there is an opportunity for it to expand to include forestry. The CDA workforce internship program is of particular interest as it would allow interns to gain experience without the steep cost to businesses. The CDA workforce internship program seems like a good fit to train forestry equipment operators, but there is only around \$50,000 in funding per year for the program. There could be an opportunity in the future to request more funding for the program.
- The CDA has a marketing program called Colorado Proud. The CSFS's Colorado Forest Products program is under the Colorado Proud program. However, the Colorado Forest Products program database cannot be merged with the Colorado Proud program database due to member ID complications. This barrier makes it so people cannot search for Colorado wood products in the Colorado Proud database. Moving forward, the CSFS Colorado Forest Products program would like to reaffirm its relationship with the Colorado Proud program. Les Owen will gather more information from the CDA marketing department to identify opportunities for the Colorado Proud program to partner with the CSFS Colorado Forest Products program.
- One area of common ground between forest health and agriculture is soil health. Across the state, more businesses are producing biochar. Biochar production creates a use for small-diameter timber, which in turn makes treating forests economically viable. Water has traditionally been what aligns forest and agricultural interests, but if producers can improve soil health with forest products, they can develop a new mutually-beneficial partnership.
- Biochar businesses have identified market development as one of their barriers to scaling up production. The biochar market is primarily small organic agricultural operations. Partners in Southwest Colorado are in preliminary discussions to open a second biochar

product plant in Southwest Colorado. The CDA and RMRI should find opportunities to promote biochar and other forest byproducts to improve soil health on agricultural lands.

- CDA is currently using grant funding to develop a soil health program. They are cost-sharing with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to hire a new soil health program director in the next two to three months. One of their first major tasks will be to identify the investments needed to improve soil health, and biochar is one of the potential opportunities. As the CDA builds up their soil health program, the CDA commissioner's goal is to have a cost-share funding program to help producers afford products, like biochar, to try on their farms. Les Owen will connect the CDA's new soil health program director with the RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee once they are hired and onboarded.

NAU'S WOOD INNOVATIONS PROGRAM GRANT UPDATE

Tim Reader gave an update on the NAU's Wood Innovations Grant. His comments are summarized below.

- Three institutes make up the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI): Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, NAU Ecological Restoration Institute, and the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute. With funding from the NAU Wood Innovations Program grant, they distributed a survey to wood product businesses in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Responses have begun to come in. There should be a survey report by the spring of 2021.
- The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes are planning a wood innovations conference using funding from the Wood Innovations Program grant. Speakers at the conference will talk about innovations in wood products, marketing, and business. The conference will be virtual. They will announce the conference dates soon, but they are tentatively looking to schedule it around March 2. Tim Reader will forward a draft agenda for the conference to the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee.
- NAU has begun developing a timber operations training center. They are hiring a research associate for that center.

NEXT STEPS

- RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee members should be aware of changes and opportunities as there is a transition in the presidential administration. Some proposed changes include promoting wood products. Preliminary information can be found in [the US Department of Agriculture's transition memo](#) and [this Washington Post article](#).
- Molly Pitts will continue to reach out to the Southwest Colorado Small Businesses Development Center.
- Molly Pitts will update the work plan to reflect changes from today's discussion.
- Samuel Wallace will send out a Doodle to schedule the two Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meetings in mid-January. The first meeting will be an hour-long meeting with only Workforce Capacity Subcommittee members. The second meeting will be a two-hour meeting with the local colleges, Shasta College, Northern Maine Community College, and other guests.