

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
April 6, 2021, 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
RMRI Social License/Communications Subcommittee Joint Meeting
Meeting Summary - FINAL

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Rob Addington, Cindy Dozier, Esther Godson, Mike Orrendorf, Jake Todd, Tara Umphries, Nathan Van Schaik, and Crystal Young

Facilitation: Patt Dorsey and Samuel Wallace

4/6 ACTION ITEMS

Nathan Van Schaik	Revise and simplify the social license messaging while respecting the original work of the Social License Subcommittee
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SOCIAL LICENSE MESSAGING TEMPLATE DISCUSSION

Nathan Van Schaik developed a messaging template for social license. He shared information on the messaging template with meeting participants. His comments are summarized below.

- The purpose of the messaging template is to ensure partners are speaking with one voice both internally and externally. The messaging template includes sections for background, communication approach, holding statement (elevator pitch), definitions, facts, talking points, news releases, questions and answers, points of contact, and products.
- Nathan Van Schaik added the themes and messages that the Social License Subcommittee worked on over the past year to the messaging template. Nathan Van Schaik can refine the themes and messages in the document to make them more memorable. The ultimate goal of the messaging plan is for it to fit on one page.

Group Discussion

Meeting participants discussed the social messaging template. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Social License Subcommittee originally developed the key messages to serve as a collection of messages, from which landscapes and subcommittees could take any relevant messages and refine them for their specific needs.
- The holding statement (elevator pitch) section should be simplified. The facts and background sections are very good.
- The Social License Subcommittee should prepare to release messages soon, with fire season coming up quickly. It would be helpful to have a prepared press release.
- The Social License Subcommittee should consider applying the messages to specific projects. For example, the Upper South Platte will likely need messages for prescribed fire. The Upper South Platte does not have identified prescribed fire projects at this time. The Upper South Platte would benefit from having an outline of messages from which they can pull messages for future use.
- In the priority landscapes, it is not clear if stakeholders are measuring what messages are effective for building social license. There is not a good or agreed-upon way to track the effectiveness of messages, but the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands (PSICC) could gather data on which messages the public is engaging with on social media. There may also be an opportunity for US Forest Service (USFS) communications staff to work with on-the-ground rangers to release messages and track success. On the San Juan National Forest, staff monitors social media and collects base

metrics on the post's intent (i.e., is the post meant to notify, solicit feedback, etc.) and the number of engagements. The options the USFS has to measure success are non-scientific, and the Social License Subcommittee should consider ways to flesh out a monitoring plan at a future meeting.

- Nathan Van Schaik will revise and simplify the social license messaging while respecting the Social License Subcommittee's original work.

LANDSCAPE AND SUBCOMMITTEE TRACKING DOCUMENT DISCUSSION

Nathan Van Schaik created a landscape and subcommittee tracking document for the landscapes and shared it with the Subcommittee. His comments are summarized below.

- The project tracking document aims to develop a common operating picture so that partners across the landscapes and state have situational awareness of what is occurring in the landscapes.
- RMRI has tools to communicate internally and externally (e.g., a website, social media plan, governance charter, email distribution list). RMRI partners have indicated they are interested in improving internal and external communications and celebrating RMRI accomplishments.
- The Communications Subcommittee could use the landscape and subcommittee tracker to identify projects to share with RMRI partners. They would meet once a month to share updates on landscape and subcommittee projects.
- By tracking and monitoring projects, some RMRI partners could develop an external, public-facing dashboard that shares progress in each of the landscapes. However, it is unclear who would manage the dashboard. If needed, Nathan Van Schaik could manage it.

Group Discussion

Meeting participants discussed the landscape and subcommittee tracking document. Their comments are summarized below.

- Having partners attend both a monthly Social License and a monthly Communications subcommittee meeting may be difficult. The expectation is not that partners attend every Communications Subcommittee meeting but to attend as many as possible to help build a common operating procedure. The meetings could be one hour as well. Another option is to have Nathan Van Schaik attend landscape partner meetings to increase his situational awareness of the landscapes and share the information with the Subcommittees.
- The landscape and subcommittee tracking document is not on the website. The document will act as a living document with periodic updates.
- A landscape representative will need to approve any updates before they are added to the document. The goal is to distribute landscape updates more regularly to RMRI partners through The Source to improve internal communications. The Communication Subcommittee could also release stories and updates more frequently via social media.

PROJECT MESSAGING DISCUSSION

Meeting participants identified key community concerns, audiences, messages, and communication products needed for specific projects. Their comments are organized by the landscape project and summarized below.

Salter Vegetation Management Project – Southwest Colorado

- The Durango Herald recently published an article that outlined several community concerns around the Slater Vegetation Management Project. Some of the community concerns in the article include:

- Impacts to recreation assets, such as trail networks and dispersed camping
- Impact on the recreation economy, particularly in Dolores
- Increased logging traffic through Dolores
- Impacts to wildlife
- 20-inch diameter cap
- The Durango Herald article outlines the public perception of the Salter Vegetation Management project, but it is unclear how aware the public is of some of the project's components. For example, the USFS will not be logging within 18 feet of the trail corridor. This project design is meant to create a buffer for recreators.
- The Salter Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA) moves the forest towards a diversity of diameters. The project is leaving smaller trees on the landscape to achieve age diversity goals.
- The logging trucks will be gathering logs and traveling through town primarily in the morning. The expectation is there will be about eight to twelve log trucks moving through town a day while the project is active. There are also hauling restrictions, and trucks will also not be operating on weekends and holidays.
- In the Dolores area, there is a beetle infestation. The Salter Vegetation Management Project is meant to reduce the beetle infestation before it reaches epidemic proportions.
- The Social License Subcommittee should develop messages highlighting some of the project facts to address misconceptions, such as treatments will not occur within 18 feet of a trail corridor. The messaging would only be positive and would not be focused on picking apart the Durango Herald article. An example message is that the USFS based the treatments on science and designed them to increase the forest's age diversity, which in turn increases the resiliency of the forest to threats, such as the bark beetle. The treatments are thinning the forest, not clear-cutting them.
- The messages should generally focus on the treatment's purpose and be tailored towards the community concerns related to recreation and wildlife. The audience for the messages could be recreators.
- All messages should be based on plainly stated facts. The goal of the messages is to inform, not persuade.
- One communication product that would help build understanding and clarity around the project is a community field trip. A community field trip could help the public understand what will occur on the ground and why. On a field trip, community members should look at an area post-treatment and pre-treatment. There could also be an online science delivery tool that talks about how these silvicultural practices will help create resiliency in the forest. Another communications product could be tarps for logging trucks that deliver the message that they are helping build a healthy forest.
- One reason to track projects is to get messages out ahead of the project to mitigate concerns as early as possible.

MacArthur Gulch – Upper South Platte

- The MacArthur Gulch Project is 150 acres, compared to the Salter Vegetation Management Project's 20,000 acres. There is a question on whether a social license effort is needed for a project that small.
- The MacArthur Gulch Project is primarily mechanical treatment, but there is the potential for prescribed fire. Building social license for prescribed fire in the Upper South Platte may be a more relevant conversation for the Subcommittee.

Prescribed Fire Projects – Upper South Platte

There are community concerns around the containment of the prescribed fire. The North Fork Fire occurred in the Upper South Platte, which resulted from an escaped prescribed fire. After the North Fork Fire, the state reviewed the prescribed fire operating procedures and made recommendations and improvements. One message to address these concerns would be to acknowledge the fire and outline the improvements made following it. The Upper South Platte has recently discussed developing a prescribed fire strategy.

Smoke Management

- Smoke management is a common concern around prescribed fires. The Social License Subcommittee could build tools, such as smoke management plans for smoke-sensitive communities, to distribute to landscapes.
- The state has requirements on proper burning weather conditions and smoke release. The state requirements could be included in a smoke management messaging plan.
- Smoke management messages are broadly applicable. One message should be that the smoke from a prescribed burn is small in comparison to catastrophic wildfires.

NEXT STEPS

- In the future, the Social License Subcommittee should identify landscape needs, find messages that apply to that need, and create a tool to distribute messages.
- There was no conclusion about whether the Communications Subcommittee and Social License Subcommittee would continue to meet jointly. The discussion about the relationship between the Communications and Social License Subcommittee will need to continue offline or at a future subcommittee meeting.
- The next Social License Subcommittee meeting is on ***Monday, May 3, from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm.***