

**Smith Creek Fuel Reduction Project**  
**Public Meeting 6/29/2006**  
**Wilsall Community Center**

**Attendees:** Numerous local landowners; Jim Barrett, Park County Environmental Council; Bob Fry, Park County Fire Department; Mike Waite, Senator Rehberg's office; JT Smith, Rocky Mountain RC&D; numerous FS interdisciplinary team members

**Collaboration:** Ron Archuleta, Livingston District Ranger, opened the meeting by providing an explanation of how the collaborative process works. He invited comments and ideas on how much and what type of participation the public would like to have in developing the project. He explained that there would be public field trips to the project area; the number of trips would be determined by the amount of public interest.

**Park County Fire Department:** Bob Fry from the Park County Fire Department stressed the point that mitigation is key to reducing the risk to homes. Homeowners need to help by treating their private lands in conjunction with treatments on National Forest lands. The draft Park County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) identifies the Smith Creek area as a priority area for fuel reduction treatments. The CWPP will be completed in August, and the draft plan is available for viewing and is posted on the web at <http://parkcounty.rfd.org>. He indicated that there is currently grant money available for private fuels treatments in a 3-county area (Meagher, Park, and Gallatin) with Smith Creek and Cooke City identified as the priority areas.

**JT Smith, the Economic Development Coordinator for the Resource Conservation & Development Center (RC&D):** JT further explained the CWPP Hazardous Fuel Reduction Program and Firewise Standards that must be met to create defensible space. He explained that the grant money is cost-share with a 50/50 split with the landowner, which can be in the form of cash or sweat equity. The grant is primarily for property with capital improvements on it or property that is directly adjacent to such and that the average area the grant covers is 1-5 acres depending on vegetation, topography, and other variables (usually 100-500 ft from the structures). JT also mentioned that treating a 30 foot right-of-way is required along private roads for firefighter and public safety and protection of assets.

A community forester will come out to the private location and address the basic requirements that need to be met for the site to qualify for the grant money. He will conduct a walk through, determining what vegetation would be best to remove and flag the vegetation to be left with the assistance of the landowner. Once the forester and landowner agree, the forester will draft a prescription for the property. Then contractors will come out and bid on the project, placing a value on the work to be completed. This Home Assessment process is free to the landowner and upon consideration of the bids, they can select the bid that they are most comfortable with or make a decision not to thin at that time. The project must be a win/win situation. If a bid is selected, contracts will be signed between the RC&D and the homeowner for reimbursement and the contractor

and the homeowner. The homeowner must provide the initial portion of the funds prior to disbursement of the grant dollars.

JT and Dusty Rixford (FS Prevention Tech) will conduct a workshop on July 19<sup>th</sup> regarding private land fuel treatments. The focus will be on hazardous fuels reduction in the Home Ignition Zone. They will coordinate with Dan Debar as to a time and place for the workshop. It was suggested that a second workshop be set up as well for those not able to attend the initial one. Jack Cohen, a renowned Forest Service fire ecologist will give a presentation at the first workshop and be available for questions.

A question was asked concerning the availability of historic photos of the area. At this time, he did not know of any, however historic Forest Reserve Reports have descriptions of the area and past wildfire information. This would be a good question to present to Jack Cohen at the workshop.

**Potential USFS Vegetation Treatments:** In May 2005, the Forest Service completed a landscape risk assessment on 45,000 acres in the Smith/Shields area. Natural resources (e.g., wildlife, trees, fish, etc) at risk from wildfire and insects were identified. Numerous risks were identified. Two key risks (issues/problems) that Ranger Archuleta extracted from the risk assessment were: (1) firefighter and public safety, (2) and aspen restoration. Addressing these two risk factors is the basis for the Smith Creek Vegetation Treatment project. The Forest Service set up the Smith Creek an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) to develop a proposed action for addressing the risks through vegetation treatments.

A key question for the IDT is what type of and how much treatment should be done on adjacent National Forest lands to address the hazardous fuel conditions in the Smith Creek Wildland Urban Interface Area.

The interdisciplinary team studied photos and previous exam data, as well as visited the project in the field to come up with preliminary potential treatment polygons. These areas were identified on a map that was displayed at the meeting. This map will also be posted on the Gallatin National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin> under projects and plans, Smith Creek Vegetation Treatment Project. These very large areas need to be evaluated, and further refined into potential treatment units. The public has a large role to play in developing the final treatment units.

**A public field trip is scheduled for July 9** to visit the project area to look at the potential treatment polygons, as well as identify any additional areas that should be considered for treatment. The intention of this field trip is to get as much public input as possible to help refine the treatment polygons into potential treatment units. The addition, elimination, or modification of the treatment polygons will help determine the scope of the project and come up with a proposed action. Additional public field trips will be scheduled as determined necessary.

Key topics of concern for the various resource specialists regarding this project include:

- 1) **Wildlife** – Aspen regeneration, old growth, effects to threatened and endangered and/or sensitive wildlife and plant species, and management indicator species. Want to be proactive not just reactive regarding these resources.
- 2) **Aquatic** – Watershed is a stronghold for a pure strain of Yellowstone cutthroat trout so habitat must be maintained or enhanced. Reaches of some streams have been impacted by past logging and roading.
- 3) **Insect & Disease** – Some areas of Douglas-fir beetle and mountain pine beetle attacks. Spruce budworm infestations are currently present in the area.
- 4) **Weeds** – There are some areas of noxious weed infestations.
- 5) **Fire** – Past fire history records for the area indicate that historically there was a 30 year fire frequency (Losensky's Study). There is currently much more fuel than was historically found in the area. There is currently one way in/one way out for evacuation of the area (fuels need to be modified along evacuation routes).
- 6) **Public Concerns**- roads (maintenance, lack of drainage and surfacing), cattle grazing (trespass onto private; resource impacts).

**The first public field trip is scheduled for July 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am. Will meet at the Goat Creek/Smith Creek road jct.**