



Partnership Peaks

San Juan National Forest Partner Stories, Opportunities, and Updates

Spring 2024



The 416 bear cub and companion exit the den in 2019 - photo credit CPW

EAGER TO EXIT THE DEN

By Lorena Williams

Nothing says spring like bear cubs leaving their den! Some readers may remember the “416 Bear Cub,” whose paws were burned during the 416 Fire. After receiving medical treatment from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the bear cub was placed in a den with another orphaned cub to live out its life on the San Juan NF ([read about it](#)). All over the forest are signs of spring, from the fresh faces of cubs like those pictured to the sounds of geese and other migratory birds.

Just like animals this time of year, we humans are itching to get outside and frolic in the sun--but don't hang those skis up just yet. Most forest roads and trails remain buried under snow. Wet, muddy areas where snow has begun to melt are easily damaged by hikers, bikers, horses, and vehicles. [Learn about FS road and trail statuses](#).

In the meantime, go to the mountains and enjoy the last ski turns of winter, because summer will be here before we know it. Trails, range, and timber crews are prepping their gear, wildlife and hydrology programs are planning projects, engineers are tired of spreadsheets, and all of us are eagerly checking the forecast.

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Leadership Corner



Hello, neighbor! I feel beyond lucky to share this part of the world and the Dolores District of the San Juan National Forest with you. If I were to imagine a perfect district, it would look a lot like the Dolores Ranger District. Beautiful mountain vistas? Check. A workforce motivated to deliver for our forest visitors? Check. Communities interested in the management and recreational opportunities on the forest? Definitely a check.

In my six years with the Forest Service, I have become a believer in the agency's motto - "Caring for the land and serving people." I have a strong desire to engage with communities and partners on how best to fit together the jigsaw pieces of our multiple use mission. National Forest management is at its best when it's locally informed and we all have a sense of commitment to these lands, and one of the defining characteristic of the San Juan National Forest is our commitment to local partnerships. Every day, I am in awe of the commitment to place and sense of service that radiates from this Forest, and it is a joy of a lifetime to be part of a community that values these lands.

As the new Dolores District Ranger, I hope to encourage community engagement, lift up indigenous perspectives in the management of these lands, and build resilience in our landscapes for future generations. I am also looking to return fire to the landscape as a means of long-term risk reduction for our municipal water supply. It is important to me that we have a clean drinking water supply and that residents in this area have healthy ponderosa pine forests for recreation and as a sustainable resource. I look forward to supporting the Wood for Life program in getting small diameter wood out to reservation communities in need and in making sure the beautiful fall color of the aspen remains for years to come.

There's really no place I would rather be than the Dolores district and no work I would rather be doing than engaging with my community. My wife Megan and I have already fallen in love with the plethora of local music, the world class archaeological resources, and the kindness of so many people that call this area home. So neighbor, whether you see me in uniform talking about public lands management or with my family walking our dog Paintbrush in Dolores, please stop by and say hello. I would love to chat a while and get to know your thoughts on what the future holds for this corner of the San Juan National Forest.

Nick Mustoe
Dolores District Ranger

Landscape-Scale Programs: Prescribed Fire

INCREASING THE PACE AND SCALE OF ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

by Lorena Williams

Prescribed Fire: What’s in store for 2024?

The San Juan National Forest and partner agencies are wrapping up winter pile burning and announcing their broadcast prescribed fire plans for the 2024 season. The San Juan NF may begin broadcast burning on the Columbine and Dolores Ranger Districts as early as March, while Pagosa likely won’t dry out enough until at least April. The Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Tres Rios Field Office has also begun to announce its broadcast plans.

Spring 2024 Planned Prescribed Fires

District/Unit	Prescribed Fire	*Acres Planned
Dolores	Haycamp Mesa	4,583
Dolores	Salter	2,943
Dolores	Boggy Draw	7,615
Columbine	Vallecito Piedra	1,135
Columbine	Sauls Creek	1,640
Pagosa	Brockover-Devil	2,100
Tres Rios BLM	West Dolores Rim	2,591

*NOTE: Total acres may be achieved through multiple burning days and not all at once

Details of this spring’s prescribed fire plans will be released on the [San Juan’s Prescribed Fire Program InciWeb page](#) and [BLM Southwest District InciWeb page](#) as details become available. InciWeb is updated regularly with prescribed fire projects and large wildfire incidents. It is the best source for fire information on the San Juan NF and Southwest District BLM.



2023 Fire Year Roundup

2023 was a fire year with unanticipated outcomes, from prescribed fires executed across private and federal lands to lightning-cause wildfires managed for long-term risk reduction. On the San Juan NF, fire and fuels managers accomplished 9,528 prescribed fire acres in fiscal year '23, as well as 200 acres on private land adjacent to the Vallecito-Piedra Prescribed Fire unit using the Wyden Authority.

Additionally, several lightning-caused wildfires accomplished 4,551 additional benefit acres in 2023 (highlighted in orange below), allowing wildfire to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in the future. A low-to-moderate-intensity burn will reduce available fuels and therefore the intensity of a possible future fire in the area. Another intended result of this suppression strategy is to allow a naturally caused wildfire to encourage the growth of native plants, increase species diversity in the understory, restore ecological balance. [Read more on this strategy, implemented on the Dry Lake Fire, in our Winter Newsletter.](#)

2023 Notable Wildfires

Fire Name	Size	Date	Cause	District
Chris Mountain	511	6/28/23	Lightning	Pagosa
Bear Creek	1,093	7/28/23	Lightning	Pagosa
Quartz Ridge	2,850	8/5/23	Lightning	Pagosa
Trail Springs	1,378	10/19/23	Lightning	Pagosa
Mill Creek 2	121	10/19/23	Lightning	Pagosa
Dry Lake	1,372	8/1/2023	Lightning	Columbine
Hope	1,290	9/21/23	Lightning	Dolores

For the second year in a row, the Pagosa Ranger District saw the bulk of the Forest's wildfire activity. Beginning with the Chris Mountain Fire in June, followed by Quartz Ridge and Bear Creek, and finally Trail Springs and Mill Creek 2 in October. The Columbine Ranger District saw only the Dry Lake Fire burning for a couple of weeks in July and early August. The Hope Fire on the Dolores District ignited in September, and was also short-lived. Firefighter and public safety, as well as community and infrastructure protection, are our top priority and always will be. We are proud to call 2023 a successful year protecting lives and property.

Wood for Life

Project Updates

by Abe Proffitt

In 2022, the San Juan National Forest partnered with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) and the Chinle Chapter House of the Navajo Nation to embark on an innovative program for utilizing low value and small diameter logs, called the Wood for Life (WFL) program. Since that time, the wood has come mostly from the Dolores Ranger District's Lone Pine Project, among others. The WFL program has been an effective tool for the agency, providing outlets for the byproducts (logs) from treatments designed to increase resiliency to detrimental disturbances such as wildfire or insect outbreak. In 2023, an estimated 3,600 cords of firewood were delivered to tribal partners and distributed through wood bank networks (up from 1,200 cords the prior year).



Ancestral Lands Corps crew members cut and stack logs for transport

Part of the increased productivity in 2023 was thanks to conservation saw crews from both Southwest Conservation Corps and Ancestral Lands Conservations Corps, new additions to the WFL program. The crews were funded by an influx in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funds. “These training programs not only help educate youth, but also treat hazardous fuels in preparation for the final step in ponderosa pine restoration—the re-introduction of fire,” said Dolores District Supervisory Forester David Casey.

Wood for Life (cont'd)



+100 loads of decked timber in Taylor Mesa

The program's unique partnerships and all their hard work are some of the reasons the program has been so successful. This type of forest management moves forests closer to the agency's long-term desired conditions for forest health with an emphasis on multi-aged stands of trees. The partnership also benefits our tribal communities and other local partners by providing wood and economic opportunities.

"The successful on-the-ground operations with our partners will continue in 2024," said Casey, "and wood banks will expand this year too thanks to new relationships developed through the Wood for Life networks." National Forest Foundation is also looking to expand its services for the WFL program by utilizing Ancestral Land Corps crews and private entities to provide processed USFS wood to wood banks instead of just logs. Skill sets and availability of personnel varies by wood bank and delivering processed wood will meet the need more efficiently.



Delivery at firewood banks for processing

Timber program staff visit the Moore Cash Lumber Mill

by Lorena Williams

San Juan National Forest employees visited the Moore Cash Lumber Mill in Espanola, NM, whose lumber supply comes in part from our national forest. The thinning work performed by Moore Cash Lumber and other companies improves forest health and supports our local economy. “The purchasers and contractors who conduct vegetation management on our national forest are vital partners in completing treatments on the ground,” said Pagosa District Timber Management Assistant Adam Tlachac. “A vibrant forest products industry enables land managers to accomplish work while providing local employment and sustainable building products.”

Timber program folks tend to work in the woods at the timber source, so getting to see the end-product at the mill was a treat. Green ponderosa pine trees are milled into lumber, beams, firewood, and peeled round wood products, which are then sold to local builders, wholesalers, and individuals. “As a forester on the Pagosa district, I spend most of my time preparing forest treatments aimed at protecting our watersheds and promoting ecological resiliency across the landscape,” said Forester Rita Daniels. “It was rewarding to see the end-products of forest treatments being utilized in such a creative way to fill multiple needs and niches.”



A ponderosa pine log in line for processing at the Moore Cash Lumber Mill in Espanola, NM



A variety of wood products come out of the Moore Cash Mill, including beams and lumber

Mill Visit (cont'd)

“Forestry, which is referred to as both an art and a science, isn’t a one size fits all discipline,” says Daniels. “I’ve spent time in the woods with mill owners, including Bill Moore of Moore Cash Lumber. We’ve walked through forested stands together as he thinks through how he would implement the silviculture prescriptions we’ve developed to accomplish the forest treatment and desired stand outcomes. But he also is thinking about how he would utilize the products so that, quite frankly, it is economically feasible and worthwhile for him to do the work.”



Forester Rita Daniels at the Moore Cash Lumber Mill Tour

As foresters we are trained to think in standard sawlogs and board feet; however, after looking at all the products coming out of his mill, I feel inspired to think more creatively in my profession. It reminded me to innovate and think outside the box.

- Rita Daniels, Pagosa Ranger District

Partnership Opportunities

An important element we want to highlight in this newsletter is our commitment to our partners. The San Juan National Forest works to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of this region's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations - and we're able to achieve that through partner connections. Our partners include land management agencies across all levels of government, nonprofit and for-profit entities, tribes, and community groups. By working with partners with diverse backgrounds and knowledge, we are increasing the resiliency of our natural resources and strengthening the community that enjoys and works in these lands. For information about partnering with the USFS, follow this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/partnerships>

To become a partner with the San Juan NF or for questions, contact Abe Proffitt (SJNF Partnership Coordinator) by email at abraham.proffitt@usda.gov or by phone at (970) 501-0261.

For general questions about the San Juan NF, call (970) 247-4874, visit the forest website, or follow us on social media.



Greetings New Employees!



Emma Schultz
Timber Sale Administrator
Columbine RD



Lance Martin
Forest Training Officer
Supervisor's Office



Jennifer Haney
Wildlife Program Manager
Supervisor's Office



Rachel Geiger
Fisheries Biologist
Supervisor's Office



Hannah Friedrichson
Recreation Special Uses -
Resource Assistant
Pagosa RD



Morgan Bennett
Special Use Permit Administrator
Dolores RD



Riley Blevins
Recreation Special Uses
Columbine RD