



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Partnership Peaks

San Juan National Forest Partner Stories, Opportunities, and Updates

Winter 2021



A beautiful late fall morning in the La Plata Mountains. Photo by Priscilla Sherman, San Juan Mountain Association

THE MOUNTAINS ARE CALLING

By Abe Proffitt

The winter season in Southwest Colorado is one of beauty, change, quiet, and inspiration. It is difficult to imagine a more picturesque winter mountain setting than what we are blessed with in this landscape. People from across the country travel here to experience the aesthetic beauty of the mighty San Juan Mountains. When the snow has fallen and many trails, peaks, and alpine lakes seem inaccessible, the locals strap on their skis and snowshoes or mount their snowmobiles to reach those special places.

Winter is also a time for reflection. It's that moment of the year when we consider the projects and ideas that have filled our time and energy. While some projects last a season, others are multi-year commitments. In this issue, we take a look at a few projects currently in progress, highlight the partnerships that made them possible, greet new San Juan NF employees, and hear from our project coordinators and partners who are working diligently to keep the San Juan NF thriving, resilient, and accessible.

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Forest Supervisor's Corner

These are exciting times in Southwest Colorado! While we have had strong partnerships and support on the San Juan National Forest for a long time, today we are working more closely with a wider range of partners than we ever have.



Throughout my career, I have observed and understood the value of our local partners and other agencies. One example that will always stick in my mind is the overwhelming support the San Juan saw during the 416 fire. Partners teamed up before, during, and after the fire,

but most memorable for me was the day it started, June 1, 2018. That morning, I arrived on scene around noon to find a whole host of entities working seamlessly in a coordinated response to mitigate the immediate threat to homes and other infrastructure. Forest Service, Southwest District BLM, BIA, Colorado Department of Fire Prevention & Control (DFPC) and local fire department firefighters worked expertly to put out spots near a threatened community. The La Plata County Sheriff's Office and State Police directed traffic on State Highway 550. An interdisciplinary Type 2 Incident Management Team (IMT), headed by the BIA, took command of the fire until we could get a Type 2 IMT on site. Durango Fire & Rescue personnel implemented structure protection and DFPC contributed aviation resources. Without this well-orchestrated and coordinated response and the partnership and collaboration that led up to it, the outcome that day would have been very different.

On a daily basis across our forest, I see strong collaboration in project planning and implementation. Partners are coming together in Southwest Colorado to jointly identify priorities, secure funding, and work across boundaries to reduce the potential for or, at the very least, the effects of, another large fire in the area, as well as to provide safe and diverse recreation, clean water, and healthy economies. These common goals bring us all together and this is what will continue to make us successful. It is highly rewarding to be a part of this effort.

Our partners and the projects we do together are the subject this new quarterly newsletter. The work you do ranges from graffiti removal and tree plantings to fire mitigation and stream restoration. While we can't cover it all in every issue, we hope to highlight and celebrate the variety of your efforts and how they contribute to the success and health of our National Forest.

*Kara Chadwick
Forest Supervisor
December, 2021*

Landscape-Scale Programs

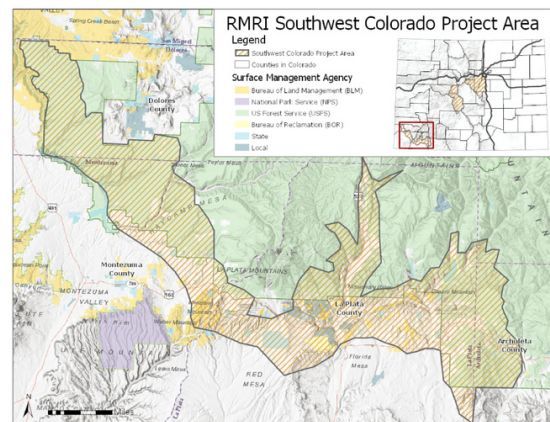


You may have heard the term "RMRI," or Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, thrown around in the past year or two--but what is it and what impact does it have on the San Juan National Forest? In the simplest of terms, RMRI is an all-out effort by many different organizations to restore landscape-size areas like we've never seen before. Here's the [deeper dive](#):

In SW Colorado, we face increasing threats to our forests and watersheds—from wildfires to droughts and beetle kill. RMRI represents a better coordinated and collaborative approach to protecting our values: our water, forests, communities and recreation. To produce meaningful results on the ground, we need to manage Colorado landscapes at a much larger scale. How? Through better coordination and collaboration by all those affected, including people like you! RMRI brings together national, regional, state, tribal and local players to plan, prioritize, and act.

In 2019, the U.S. Forest Service and the [National Wild Turkey Federation](#) co-convened the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative as a pilot program to showcase the USDA's [Shared Stewardship strategy](#) — a national effort to plan and implement work across public and private lands. The San Juan NF and collaborative partners representing the Southwest Colorado landscape applied and were subsequently identified as the marquee landscape. The purpose was to mobilize cross-jurisdiction partners to increase the pace and scale of restoration work. By zooming out and focusing time, money, and effort on an entire landscape, we can accomplish much more than we could as individual organizations working on individual projects.

The RMRI project area encompasses nearly 750,000 acres, stretching 120 miles along CO Highway 160 and includes the towns of Cortez, Dolores, Mancos, Durango, and the San Juan NF. Across Colorado, RMRI has engaged over 70 partner organizations --30 in Southwest Colorado alone. These partners are already working alongside the San Juan NF on projects ranging from prescribed fire implementation to education and outreach programs.

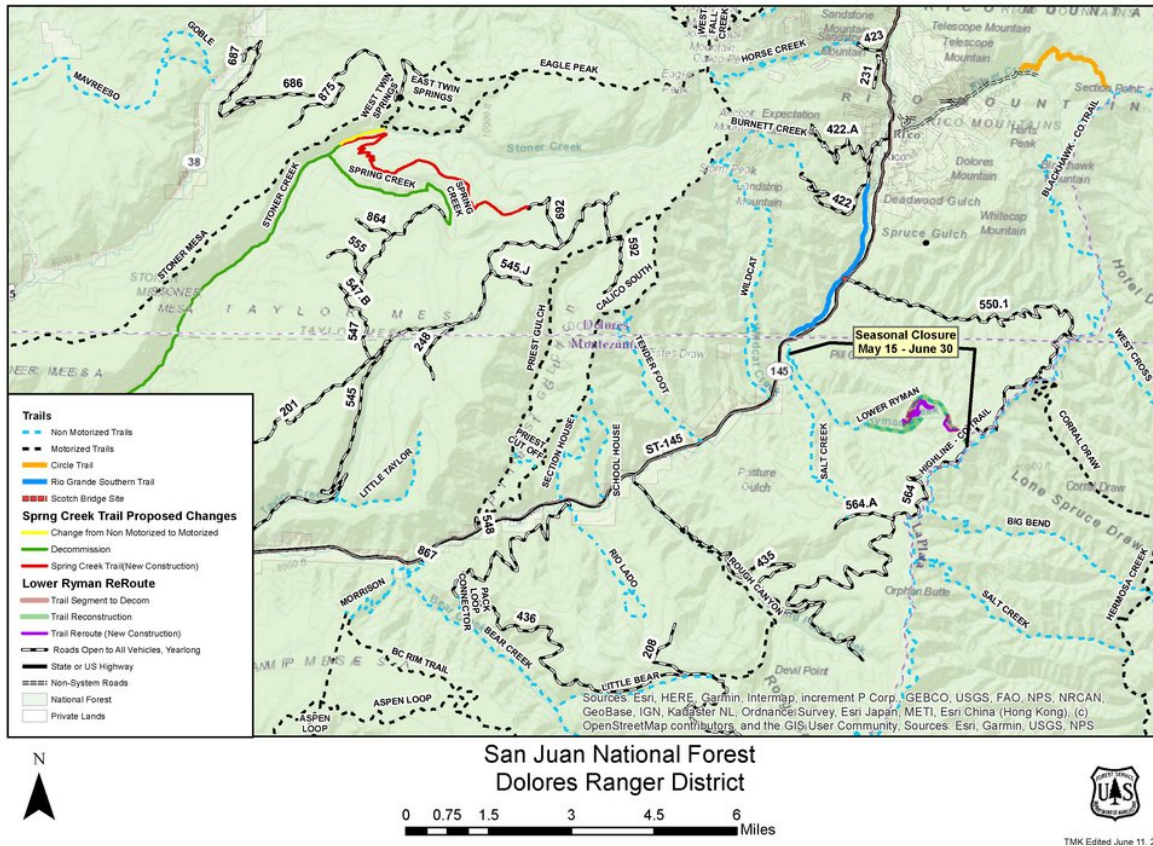


To be clear, this work was already taking place to some extent, but now we have more hands, more funds, and more focus on our aligned outcome.

For more information on the Southwest Colorado Project of the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, visit www.restoringtherockies.org/

To stay updated on current projects, follow RMRI on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

Rico Area Trails Project



Successful Partnerships Lead to Community-Driven Results

By Abe Proffitt

After nearly two years, the trail systems around Rico, Colorado are getting a much-needed facelift, thanks, in part, to partner collaboration on the Dolores Ranger District.

Chris Bouton, the District Trails Manager, and Tom Rice, the District Recreation Staff Officer at the Dolores office, say that the project is a good example of how partnerships can be both effective and resourceful for the District.

The Rico Area Trails Project was launched in late 2019 and will provide new and updated trail access to several popular local and regional trail systems.

Although this project is relatively new, at least two non-profit groups have had their eyes on these trails for some time: the [Rico Trails Alliance](#) and the [San Juan Trail Riders](#).

Formed in 2017, the Rico Trails Alliance (RTA) are stewards of local and regional trail systems and want to develop user education and access to non-motorized trails.

The San Juan Trail Riders, a non-profit group founded in 1998 to preserve motorized single-track trail riding, provided insight into motorized trail use for the District later during the NEPA planning phase.

Rico Trails (continued)

Bouton and Rice met with the RTA to develop an outline for the project. The town had “been looking for non-motorized trails with good access to town that would connect to a larger loop trail system,” said Rice in a statement to *The Journal* in September 2019.

Rather than create new trails, Bouton and Rice focused their energy on improving existing trails that served the residents and visitors to Rico. “We had this existing trail system adjacent to the Rico area that’s relatively underutilized,” said Bouton during that initial meeting with the RTA. “I think they are a community passionate about trails and sustainability and really just wanted better trail experiences.” Thanks to their dedication, both the Circle Trail and Ryman Creek Trail were completed during the 2021 field season.

Funding and Support

Shortly after that initial meeting, Bouton and Rice started drafting their proposed action and partner designations for non-motorized and motorized trails.

An important contribution to the project’s success was the use of a Challenge Cost Share Agreement the District entered into with the RTA (also referred to as a Partnership Agreement). The agreement authorized the RTA to secure grant funding for the project, hire their own trail contractor and volunteer coordinator, and organize volunteer workdays. This approach not only fast-tracked both the Circle Trail and Ryman Creek Reroute components,

it also gave the RTA more leadership and authority to make positive changes that will benefit the surrounding community.

Project Components

The Circle Trail is an existing FS non-system trail that is a popular non-motorized connection between Rico and the Black Hawk section of the Colorado Trail. The 2.6-mile trail is designated for non-motorized use.

The Ryman Creek Trail reroute is a two trail (new trail construction) project that made the existing trail more sustainable and an easier grade in some sections for users. The total length is 2.5 miles and is designated for non-motorized use.

The Spring Creek Trail reroute consists of 3.4 miles of new motorized single track and 2.7 miles of existing motorized single track. The trail will replace the existing Spring Creek Trail (Forest Service Route 627), which was designated as non-motorized in the 2018 Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails Project. Route 627 will be decommissioned and the new trail will be constructed in an adjacent ridge top location to protect sensitive fishery habitat. Due to its complex terrain, the Spring Creek Trail reroute isn’t scheduled to begin until 2022 with hazard tree removal and construction in 2023.

The Rico Trails Project Final Decision Notice, published January 8th, 2021, can be found here:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/112188_FSPLT3_5573643.pdf

Rico Trail (continued)

Photos from National Public Lands Day 2021

Photo Credit: Bill Hatcher



A Fresh Start for Ice Lake Area



Hiking The Ice Lake Trail in September, 2021. Photo by Cassidy Storey, San Juan Mountains Association.

Partnering to Manage Resources in a Changing Landscape

By Lo Williams

Ice Lake Basin, one of Southwest Colorado's most beloved landscapes, is open again to the public following the 2020 Ice Fire. San Juan National Forest partners were essential during the 2021 field season to reopening the area, educating the public, and monitoring post-fire conditions.

Throughout the 2021 field season, Forest Service crews and several project partners worked diligently to restore and monitor the Ice Lake Basin following the Ice Fire that occurred last October. The fire burned roughly 595 acres in the Mineral Creek drainage and damaged the lower portions of the Ice Lake trail as well as the area below Clear Lake. Hikers were evacuated by air during the initial fire response when their egress was cut off by the fire, which grew dramatically in unseasonably hot and dry conditions.

Damage to the popular trail created hazardous conditions that prompted an 11-month area closure. During the closure, Forest Service crews cleared 2.1 miles of trail and 3.1 miles of road, rebuilt trail surfaces, and removed tree snags that could fall across the trail. [San Juan County](#) assisted in clearing Clear Lake Road, and thanks to the combined dedication and hard work, the trail and nearby campground reopened in September 2021.

While the recreation program was hard at work clearing roads and trails, partners helped the SJNF hydrology and fisheries programs perform post-fire water quality and fish population monitoring. The hydrology crew worked with [Mountain Studies Institute](#) (MSI) to collect water quality samples at the outlets of Ice Lake and Clear Lake Basins. This sampling was part of

Ice Lake (continued)

a collaborative citizen science effort led by MSI to collect and process samples at high-use recreation areas on the SJNF within San Juan County. The study is examining E. coli concentrations to see how increased recreational use is impacting water quality. The post-fire closure provided a unique and rare opportunity to collect data that will be used for baseline conditions.

The San Juan NF hydrology crew also worked with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to collect fish population information on Mineral Creek's South Fork. The data will help land and wildlife managers monitor natural recovery following the fire and closure. Using backpack electrofishing units to briefly stun the fish, crew members collected brook trout of varying sizes, including young fish that are typically more sensitive to disturbance.

According to Clay Kampf, a fisheries biologist for the San Juan NF, crews collected fish presence information and measured, counted, and weighed each fish. "This tells us an estimate of the number of fish per mile and general health information such as the length-weight ratio of the fish population. We have not assessed the results yet but the baseline information can be used to monitor fish populations and assess the stability of the population over time."

When the Ice Lake Trail reopened on September 15, 2021, our partners at San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA) were ready for the onslaught of visitors to the Columbine Ranger District's most popular



Reopening the Ice Lakes Trail

trail. SJMA and Forest Service personnel staffed a booth at the Ice Lake trailhead to provide information and Leave No Trace (LNT) guidance to visitors who came flocking back. Although the trail, South Mineral Campground, and road have been cleared of fallen debris and many of the tree snags, a post-fire environment is inherently hazardous, and SJMA prepared hikers for the dangers that lay ahead.

San Juan National Forest partners, like SJMA, MSI, and CO Parks & Wildlife, are critical for helping us restore, maintain, and monitor burned landscapes like the Ice Lake Basin. We look to them for expertise and boots on the ground, as well as their community-driven stewardship that empowers others to be caretakers of our beloved forests.

For more recreation information on the Ice Lake Trail, check out our link below:

[SJNF Ice Lake
Trail Information](#)

Ice Lake (continued)

Project Photos



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. One way to achieve that is through partner connection. 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>

In our upcoming newsletters, we will highlight the projects our partners are working on across the San Juan NF in a shared calendar that covers the upcoming quarter. If you are a Forest Service partner organization please follow the link below to add your March-May 2022 projects to our calendar.

[Submit Projects for the Quarterly Calendar Here](https://tinyurl.com/mre6bnjw)

(<https://tinyurl.com/mre6bnjw>)



To become a partner with the San Juan NF or for questions, contact SJNF Partnership Coordinator Lorena Williams by email at lorena.williams@usda.gov or by phone at (970) 422-2939.

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



A big thanks to Public Affairs and Partnership Intern Abe Proffitt for designing this newsletter and making it a success!

Welcome New Employees



Beth Anderson
Hydrology Program Manager - Forest Headquarters

Beth was the Hydrology Program Manager on the GMUG National Forest since 2015. Before the GMUG, Beth was a Soil Scientist on the Helena – Lewis & Clark National Forest in Montana and worked for ARS, Departmental Management, and NRCS. Beth received her M.S. and B.S. from the University of Minnesota. In her spare time, Beth enjoys all things outdoors, raising meat goats.

Joe Muller
Equipment Operator - Dolores Ranger District

Joe worked in the Fire and Trails Program on the Dolores District before moving to Engineering as a Swamper from 2014-2016. He then went on to get an Equipment Operator position for the Park Service in NY, then back to the Forest Service in Florida, and most recently as an Initial Attack Dozer Operator on the Eastern Divide Ranger District in Virginia. We are happy to get Joe back on the San Juan.



Justin Moore
Occupational Safety and Health Manager - Forest Headquarters

Justin started his career with the Forest Service in 1999 as a seasonal firefighter. Justin moved to the Durango Interagency Dispatch Center in 2008 and moved up to Dispatch Center Manager by 2018. Justin has been an active member of the San Juan Safety Committee for over 12 years and served as a detailed Safety Manger. He has an immense passion for providing employees a safe & healthful work environment and ensuring that everyone goes home safe. He has a BS in Criminal Justice with a Minor in Psychology. Justin and his wife, Kathleen, live in Durango and enjoy spending their time volunteering for rescue groups, rescuing dogs on the Navajo Nation. When they aren't out looking for dogs, they spend their free time with their six dogs and fostering others for rescue groups.

Welcome New Employees

Scott Owen

Public Affairs Officer (PAO) -Forest Headquarters

Scott brings a diverse background to the Public Affairs position, including his previous post in the Forest Service as the Regional Recruitment Program Manager for the Pacific Northwest Region. Scott completed a year-long detail as a PAO and served as the PAO for the 2018 US Capitol Christmas Tree. He has also been a Public Information Officer for wildland fire incidents. Prior to joining the Forest Service, Scott was the Public Affairs Specialist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Scott received his M.S. in Marketing from the University of Oregon and an undergraduate degree and MBA from the University of Missouri. He enjoys hiking, camping, skiing, and being outside with his three children and his wife, Tassia.



Jacob Dahlin

Forester - Columbine Ranger District

Jake grew up on a farm in upstate NY and is a huge Buffalo Bills fan. In 2011, he graduated from Colorado State and has been working in Forestry for the last 15 years. Jake has worked all over the central Western states between Idaho and Arizona, both with the US Forest Service and the private industry, but he has spent the majority of his time in Colorado. Jake is a very active individual and enjoys sports, outdoor activities, skiing, hunting, and live music. He currently lives with his pup Stagger Lee and can't wait to get back on the water and in the Rocky Mountains.



Kevin Emde

Forester - Pagosa Ranger District

Kevin was raised in Stillwater, Oklahoma and attended Oklahoma State University while studying Forest Management. My passion for the outdoors started on my path to Eagle while participating in BSA Scouting and has grown throughout my adult life. I am excited to further my contributions to the San Juan Vegetation Management team!



Welcome New Employees



Kim Bristow

Data Services Specialist, Engineering - Forest Headquarters

Kim is a familiar face in a new place! Since June 2011, Kim Bristow has been the Support Services Specialist for the Pagosa Ranger District. Kim has a passion for creating efficiencies and streamlining processes. She has been focusing on National Priorities involving improvement of the Work Environment as a Special Emphasis Program Manager as well as her efforts toward consolidating hiring processes nationally along with her fellow Regional Temporary Hiring Incident Management Team members. She and her family enjoy spending time in the San Juans, far off the beaten path as well as tackling myriad urban homestead projects on their ½ acre in downtown Pagosa Springs.

We're also welcoming to the Dolores Ranger District:

Emma Reinemann - NEPA Planner

Jon King - Forester



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