Common Ground Workshop - Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition
Meeting Notes
April 3rd, 2019

In attendance (from sign-in):

Anna Hauser (Santa Fe County)
Bryan Bird (Defenders of Wildlife)
Rachel Meier (TNC)
Cathie Sullivan (Tesuque Valley Community Association)
Sam Hitt (Santa Fe Forest Coaltion)
Barbara Fix (Native Plant Society)
Arielle Quintata (Quivera Coalition)
Dylan Oldenburg (WELC)
Alan Barton (NMFWRI)
Carmen Austin (NMSF)
Nancy Gilkyson
April Reese (Journalist)
Gennaro Falco (USFS)
Bill Zenger (Trout Unlimited)
Teresa Seamster (Sierra Club)
Sarah Hyden (Wild Earth Guardians)
Edward Quintana
Sandy Hurlocker (USFS)
Blanca Cespedes (NMHU)
Collin Haffey (TNC)
Marlita Reddy-Hjelmfelt (The Red Elm LLC)
Peter Vigil (Taos SWCD)
Dennis Carol (SFNF)
Dave Isackson (SFNF)
Sarah Schiros
James Miller (USFS)
Jamie Bennett (USFS)
Scott Wilkinson (USFS)
Porfirio Chavarria (Santa Fe Fire Dept.)
Tim Kirkpatrick (NMPFC)
Bill Mansfield
Bob Long
Ann Cook (GEJWUI)
Chris Schaum (Chris' Tree Service)
Bill Loeb (OSFA)
Seva Kalsa
Dan Roper (Trout Unlimited)
Anna Hamilton (SF County Commissioner)
Aaron Kauffman (SW Urban Hydrology)
Tom Jervis (Audubon Society of NM)
Steve Romero (USFS)
Jai Lakshman
Luther Martinez (Picuris Forestry)
Cecilia Shields (Picuris Forestry)
Shiloh Old (Old Wood LLC)
Casey Schandler
Bekah Mathiesen
Judith Polich
Hannah Bergman (USFS)
Lawrence Gallego (WLA)
Craig Allen (USGS)
Andra Nyman
Collin Holloway
Rachel Wood
Carol Licini
Jonathan Glass
Beth Kirby
Ellie Gray
Emily Hohman (CPLA)
Patricia Dominguez (US Senate)
Jim Norton
Mark Bundy
Gabe Kohler (Forest Stewards Guild)
Carlyn Jervis (Audubon)
David Old (Old Wood LLC)
Susanne Dooley
Champe Greene (SF-P SWCD)
Susan Ostlie (GOB for W)
Trudy O'Toole (TNC)
Gianna Settin (Sierra Club)
Steve Basset (TNC)
Lynn Pickard (TVCA)
Dorothy Dean
John Buchser (Sierra Club)
Bob Kirmse
Jonathan Fienjen

Event Description

On April 3rd, 2019 from 3-6pm, the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition convened an interactive workshop in Santa Fe, NM. The event was located at the Santa Fe Convention Center and included over 80 community members from a wide range of organizational backgrounds. The workshop was motivated by the recent publication of a report titled, "A Statement of Common Ground Regarding the Role of Wildfire in Forested Landscapes of the Western United States," published by the Fire Research Consensus Working Group. The working group who produced this report sought to identify, and partly explain, areas of scientific common ground and divergence among fire researchers, focusing specifically on dry conifer forests, in support of informing high-quality public discourse, policy, and management. The common ground workshop addressed similar issues among researchers and land managers specific to the Santa Fe area. Read the full report here.

In the months leading up to the event, The Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project (SMLRP) and other forest management actions in the greater Santa Fe area generated concern by those that did not see the need for forest management actions in the landscape. A key goal of the workshop was to lay the foundation for cooperation and shared understanding in the Santa Fe area.

The workshop was facilitated by community leader Rosemary Romero and Forest Stewards Guild's Southwest Program Coordinator, Kendal Martel. The workshop provided an opportunity for constructive dialogue between those that live and work in the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed and fire scientists Craig Allen, Tom Swetnam, Matt Hurteau, and Ellis Margolis. The event began with the fire scientists introducing themselves and their personal connection to the forested landscapes of Northern New Mexico. Following introductions, the scientists shared a 45 minute presentation of their cumulative fire science expertise in Northern New Mexico. Ellis Margolis began by introducing the relationship between fire regimes and forest structures, and how forest structures have changed with fire suppression. Tom Swetnam introduced the Puebloan history of human-ignited wildfires in the Jemez mountains, and how this has shaped the forests surrounding Santa Fe today. Craig Allen talked about patterns, trends, and process drivers of tree mortality and forest die-off in Northern New Mexico. Matt Hurteau situated changes in forest structure within the context of a changing climate and the effect that these structure changes have on carbon storage. Following the presentation, participants were given the chance to ask questions directly to the fire scientists.

Questions focused on:

1. Clarifying the research findings presented.
2. The effectiveness of fuels treatments at reducing fire severity.
3. Aspen regeneration following high severity fire.
4. Erosion following fire of varying severities.
5. Indigenous role in fire history, and the use of oral history.
6. Preferences and dispute about roadless areas in the Santa Fe National Forest.
7. Best practices for the removal and disposal of slash from forest treatments.
8. Examples of forest treatments reducing fire severity.

After the brief question and answer period, the participants broke into 3 small groups (~8-12 people), and had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss fire science research in a different setting. Notetakers were present at each of the small breakout sessions, and a structured note taking template captured some of the key participant concerns, contentious topics, areas of agreement, areas of change, future desired conditions, and position statements. The following sections summarize the content from these breakout sessions.

Breakout Sessions

Participant Concerns

In all of the groups, participants had concerns about the methods used to understand the role of fire in Northern New Mexico. These concerns focused on; measurements of fuel loading, calculations of percent mortality after a fire, and limitations of forest and fire models. These questions opened up a productive back-and-forth about why certain methods are used and what they can tell us about the role of fire in the forested landscapes of Northern New Mexico.

All groups shared general concerns about the effects of forest management and wildfire on various ecological functions. These concerns focused on; the effect of prescribed fire on wildlife, the effects of prescribed fire on soils, ember transmission from wildfires to human communities, and the effect of post-fire planting on ecosystem recovery. Responses to these concerns varied and scientists were clear about the limitations of current scientific research to dispelling these concerns entirely.

Other concerns focused on the Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project (SMLRP). These concerns focused on: the fire history of the area, claimed stem density reductions of 75-90%, the call by some for an environmental impact statement (EIS), equity of the project and inclusion of tribal representatives, and the mindset of researchers involved in the project. Fire science researchers emphasized the distinction between their scientific research and their personal management preferences. While researchers chose to refrain from making management recommendations on specific topics within the SMLRP, such as the creation of inventoried roadless areas or the need for an EIS, they clearly voiced their preferences on others, such as advocating for the use of thinning and low-severity prescribed fire to protect Santa Fe's watershed and reduce the risk of high severity fire.

Topics of Concern

Some topics of discussion were more contentious than others. Topics that elicited controversy or a more passionate response from participants included:

- The use of accelerants, such as Potassium Permanganate, to ignite prescribed fire from helicopters. Participants were particularly concerned about their effect on water quality.
- The direct effect of prescribed fire on wildlife mortality (i.e. animals dying by fire).
- The perceived subjectivity of management actions in the SMLRP.

- The need for an EIS in the SMLRP.
- Unintended consequences of forest treatments in general.

Areas of Agreement

The identification of areas of agreement, and establishing common ground, was a major objective of the workshop and progress towards this goal was evident. Throughout the small group discussions participants were able to agree in the following areas:

- All models are wrong, but some can be useful.
- The need to view forest management holistically, including the whole network of ecology (e.g. microbial networks).
- Something has to be done in the Santa Fe area to protect forests and water quality.
- There is a lot of misinformation and it is helpful to talk directly with scientists.
- We do not get to choose if there is fire, but we do have some influence over the type of fire we have.

Areas of Change

One participant described how their perspective had shifted through the course of the workshop. Areas of change are helpful to understanding the effect of the workshop on movement towards common understanding and cooperation. These areas included:

- The recognition that prescribed fire may protect wildlife from high severity fire by creating a more mosaic burn pattern than the increasingly large-scale, homogeneous effects of high severity fire.

Future Desired Conditions

Future desired conditions exist outside of a management preference. These statements help understand a common condition that participants valued without placing emphasis or creating controversy on how these conditions are met. To identify the future desired conditions that participants described throughout the breakout sessions, notetakers listened for statements like, "I want a future that looks like x." Some of the conditions that participants described included:

- Healthy forests and trees that thrive
- Ecologically sound forests and not just a "sea of green"
- More surface fire and less crown fire

Position Statements

Position statements are the opposite of desired future conditions and take one side of an arguable viewpoint by citing reasons to support. Position statements made during small group discussion focused on whether an EIS was necessary before implementing forest treatments in the forests surrounding Santa Fe. Some participants cited reasons that an EIS was necessary, while others

stated reasons to let the Santa Fe National Forest to continue to follow their rules and procedures for determining the appropriate analysis level for the SFMLRP.

Regardless of participants' positions on the analysis level, there was general agreement that respectful and thorough public process is needed in the development of the SFMLRP. During the course of the Common Ground workshop, participants created a shared understanding of local fire science that will inform, but not dictate, future discussions about the amount and type of forest management surrounding Santa Fe. Furthermore, the ground rules for communication that Rosemary Romero laid down in the beginning of the meeting were upheld, and with the exception of disagreements, people treated each other with respect. The shared understanding of local fire science and rules of respectful communication from the Common Ground workshop will serve as an important foundation as planning and implementation of the SFMLRP begins.

Conclusion

The Common Ground workshop set out to identify, and partly explain, areas of scientific common ground and divergence among fire researchers, focusing specifically on dry conifer forests surrounding Santa Fe, in support of informing high-quality public discourse, policy, and management. By closely examining the report with the expertise of one of the co-investigators, Craig Allen, as well as scientists Tom Swetnam, Ellis Margolis, Jens Stevens, and Matt Hurteau, workshop participants engaged in thoughtful discussion about the role of wildfire in northern New Mexico landscapes. Facilitated discussion by Santa Fe community leader, Rosemary Romero and Forest Stewards Guild Coordinator Kendal Martel, helped develop a shared understanding of local fire science research and established rules of respectful communication that will lay the foundation for future cooperation in the Santa Fe area. As the Santa Fe National Forest moves ahead with the SFMLRP, this foundation of shared understanding and mutual respect is critical to respectful and thorough public process.