

Multiparty Monitoring Group (MMG)
March 1, 2021
Virtual Zoom Meeting
Summary – FINAL

ATTENDANCE:

Participants: Paul Alaback, Karen Blakemore, Teagen Blakey, Rebecca Boyce, Chad Buser, Aurelia DeNasha, Jason Duetsch, Mark Foreman, Angie Gee, Alex Markevich, Mark Mendonca, Sam Peterson, Tanner Scheetz, and Kevin Zimlinghaus

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Izzy Sofio

ACTION ITEMS

Kevin Zimlinghaus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to work on the phase and unit spreadsheet.• Send the spreadsheet to MMG members when it is complete.
Angie Gee and Kevin Zimlinghaus	Provide information to MMG members regarding the start of work, when/ if there is a Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) on the ground when work on a unit begins, and when work on a unit is finished.

UPDATE ON FUTURE PLANS FOR FORSYTHE II

Angie Gee of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) provided the group with an update on the future of Forsythe II projects for the next year (fiscal year 2021). Key points from her update are below.

- Due to the devastating 2020 fire season, Forsythe II plans have changed a lot. The USFS's priority has to be on fire restoration at this point in time. Because of this, the USFS has to rebalance resources for recovery programs and action. Ultimately, many of the Forsythe II plans and projects will not get accomplished this year.
- The two egress routes coming out of Big Springs are still a priority. A few proposed modifications to the egress routes got approved. One of the routes is further along in the approval process than the other, but neither route is completely set in stone. Once the route locations are both finalized, the USFS will likely need to conduct an environmental assessment and some other supplemental reports. The USFS is committed to working with the town of Nederland on those projects.
- Right now, there are existing contracts occurring (details on existing contracts discussed below). The contracts that the MMG approved last year are currently in the process of being awarded. Those projects will begin sometime in the summer of 2021. If conditions are right this fall, the USFS will go through with the planned prescribed burns near Gross Reservoir.
- There are not enough resources at this time for all of the plans the MMG made before the 2020 fire season, such as planning in Unit 77 and the East Boy Scout Units. It is hard to say what will be possible beyond FY2021. The USFS is not walking away from the Forsythe II project. The project just needs to slow down as the USFS reorganizes their priorities and addresses fire restoration.
- All of the projects that MMG worked on last year are marked, so those projects will be awarded, and the treatments will occur. The items that did not get finalized are on pause.

STATUS OF CONTRACTS

Kevin Zimlinghaus of the USFS provided an update on the current contracts to the group. Key points from his update are below.

- The Manchester contract began around mid-February. At the time of the meeting, the Manchester contract was still occurring.

- The Blue Dot contract will not begin until late spring or early summer. That contract requires road and trail improvement in order for the contractors to get to the southside of Unit 9.
- The Phase 3 contracts, which were awarded last year in 2020, will start in the spring or summer.
- The Phase 5 and Eureka contracts will be combined into one project and will begin in the summer, depending on who is awarded that contract.

Clarifying Questions

MMG members asked several clarifying questions directed to Angie Gee and Kevin Zimlinghaus of the USFS about the future plans for Forsythe II and the status of current contracts. The questions are in italics and their corresponding answers are in plain text.

Will contract monitoring and feedback loops still occur?

Due to COVID-19, it is not possible to have MMG members out with the contractors to see exactly what the contractors are doing. The real-time monitoring of MMG members will not be able to occur. MMG members can go out after the contractors have implemented the treatments to see what was cut.

If MMG is not going to continue having monthly meetings, what mechanism can MMG members use to make sure they can meet if something comes up with a contract?

The dates set aside every month to meet can be used for any questions that come up. If something pressing comes up, a short notice meeting can be organized as well. The USFS does not get a lot of notice from the contractor before they show up because the contractors are not required to provide advanced notice when they are coming. If a contractor does provide advanced notice, the MMG can plan to have a meeting.

Will MMG members still be notified if the USFS is at a site with the contractor before a contractor starts work?

Yes.

Are there any concerns that the project will lose funding from Denver Water because of this pause? How will funding be impacted by the change in plans?

The current agreement with Denver Water expires in 2021. The USFS Boulder Ranger District and Denver Water are currently working on negotiating a new agreement. Assuming that a new agreement goes into effect, then the work will continue in all of Denver Water's zones of concern. At this point in time, funding specifics are not known. Denver Water is fully committed to all of its areas of interest.

Last year the USFS committed to having a member of the USFS at a site before the contract work begins. Can the USFS still commit to that this year?

At this point in time, the USFS is still in the process of determining who will administer many of the current contracts. It is likely that a USFS administrator from Fort Collins will come down to oversee one, and a USFS member from Granby will come down to oversee another contract. The USFS is stretching resources across districts, and because of that, it might be a little harder to confirm that commitment. The USFS team will continue to work on contract administration planning and then have on what they can and cannot commit to.

Is it possible for the USFS to notify MMG members when a unit has been completed so that MMG members can go check to ensure that the work was done properly?

The USFS is not able to ask a contractor to wait after they have completed one unit before they leave to work on another unit for MMG members to come check on the work. The USFS is able to notify MMG members when the work is completed, at which point MMG members can go check on the work, but the contractor and their work cannot be put on hold so MMG members can go check the work. Additionally, if the USFS knows that work will begin, they will notify MMG members with that information.

Group Discussion

The group discussed the future plans for Forsythe II and the status of current contracts. Concerns, requests, and key points from the discussion are below.

- The spreadsheet that Kevin Zimlinghaus has with all phase and unit data should be shared with the group. It would be helpful for MMG members to have access to that spreadsheet so that there is a place for up-to-date information regarding past and current contracts.
- Legally speaking, there is nothing that requires an individual from the USFS to be on-site with contract workers every day the work is happening. As long as the contractors are doing the work within the legal guidelines of the contracts, the USFS loses some control over what can and cannot happen at a contract site. Therefore, it is challenging for the USFS to have as much oversight over contract administration as some MMG members would like there to be.
- The USFS has committed to providing MMG members with as much information as they can. In the case of contracts, there is currently not very much information to provide to MMG members because contracts have not been administered yet. When contracts are administered, MMG members will receive notification.
- The USFS likes to have an individual from the USFS on the ground for those units to ensure the contractors understand what work needs to be done within orange-mark units. The USFS will have members out at orange-mark unit sites when those contractors begin work due to the complex nature of the orange-mark units.
- There is a level of noncompliance that is acceptable for contractors and the work they do on the units. Meaning, contractors have the ability to make some mistakes as they work. A contractor will get paid 100 percent for work that is 90 percent correct. There is space for error, and that level of noncompliance occurred during some of the work on Phase 1.
- There was emphasis put on the importance of having someone from the USFS at a unit when work begins, specifically at orange-mark units.
- If the USFS cannot supply reassurance that an individual from the USFS will be on-site at the beginning of a contract, then a member of the group is willing to take legal action against the USFS.
- The USFS will share all of the relevant information they have with MMG members in regard to contract work as they acquire that information. The USFS will share information regarding the start of work, when/ if there is a COR on the ground when work begins, and when work on a unit is finished.

UPDATE ON COLORADO PARKS AND WILDLIFE ELK COLLARING PROJECT

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) employees Rebecca Boyce, Jason Duetsch, Sam Peterson, and Tanner Scheetz presented information on the CPW elk collaring study. Key points from the presentation are below.

- Since the beginning of the project in January of 2021, CPW has collared upwards of 30 elk in Game Management Units 38 and 29 (Unit E-38).

- Collar deployments occurred on the west side of Nederland, west of Rawlins, and west of Highway 72. All deployment occurred away from tree cover in open meadows to avoid timber and vegetation hazards.
- The collars will monitor temporal behaviors, migration corridors, seasonal changes, and will help CPW understand the elk's most frequented habitat areas. The collars also help CPW staff with elk surveys and CPW's ability to monitor the elk population, including population size estimation.
- In total, CPW is monitoring around 19 collars. The collars send CPW data twice a day. At this point in the study, there is not enough information to show any significant trends.

Clarifying Questions

MMG members asked several clarifying questions about the study. The questions are in italics and their corresponding answers are in plain text.

When would the first data sweep occur?

CPW sweeps the data for different reasons. The timing of the first data sweep will depend on what the data needs to be used for. For example, the data from this study has to be shared with CPW's partner agencies that use the data for their own projects. Members of the public can make a request for the data on the CPW website. In terms of access, Boyce and Scheetz have to get permission to sweep the data from the Global Positioning Systems (GPS).

When would CPW have the confidence to say that this area (Forsythe II) appears to be an elk migration route (even if it is not the only one)?

- CPW would need at least one to two years of data before they could confidently say that the Forsythe II area is a migration corridor. Experts would likely need to check the data to confirm whether or not there is a migration corridor in this area as well.
- Additionally, collar data trends do not appear until a year into data collection or until seasonal and temporal data are collected.

What is the lifetime of the collars?

The collars have a three-to-five-year life span. CPW purchases Advanced Telemetry Systems (ATS) brand collars. ATS collars have historically functioned very well.

How do fuel treatments impact the elk migration corridor? Are there studies on how elk are influenced by habitat impacted by fuel treatments?

A study that focuses on how elk are influenced by habitat impacted by fuel treatments would be a different study than the CPW elk collaring project. The elk collaring project will produce data that can partially answer that question.

How do the fuel treatments impact elk migration corridors and habitat use? How would the USFS respond to treatments based on habitat use and migration corridors? (Aurelia DeNasha, USFS, responded to this question instead of the CPW presenters.)

The USFS uses the best available science and considers any new information or resources. If CPW comes out with a study that says fuel treatments impact elk migration corridors and habitat, that study would be taken into consideration and would be used to contextualize the implementation of USFS treatments.

Does the USFS anticipate adjusting prescriptions based on the data CPW collects? (Aurelia DeNasha, USFS, responded to this question instead of the CPW presenters.)

The USFS would discuss the data to see how prescriptions impact the elk. The USFS thinks a lot about how the prescriptions impact the elk. They will always consider any new information.

Is this project based only on the collars that are out on the elk now, or is there funding for more collars when they need to be replaced?

If enough information is gathered and the data fulfills the goals of the study, then the study would be complete. In that case, there would not be a need for more collars to go out. There would have to be a good reason to replace the collars if all of the data was collected by the end of the collar life span, and that would likely become another, separate project. The current elk collaring project was designed for the lifespan of the collars. The herd is healthy now, but if animal mortality rates increase, then the collars would be redeployed onto other members of the herd.

Does CPW anticipate being able to answer the questions posed by the research with the lifetime of these collars?

Yes.

How many collars were deployed in GMU 29?

CPW staff deployed about 19 collars in GMU 29.

In past experience with research, mortality is a very important data source. If there is mortality, is it part of the study to look into the cause of mortality?

- Mortality is important. If it happens, CPW makes an effort to figure out the cause. For the most part, collars fall off the animals rather than finding them on dead animals. Adult mortality in the herd is not a concern right now. If issues arise with calf survival in the future, then that could be examined through an additional project.
- Most cases of mortality are obvious. Most of the time, the animals are hit on the road or shot.

If a calving area was discovered, would the USFS change prescriptions? (Aurelia DeNasha, USFS, responded to this question instead of the CPW presenters.)

Absolutely. There are restrictions put into place in that case. If a calving area or a migration route is found, then prescriptions would change. Many of the current designs consider those factors.

Will the CPW study explain why the elk migrate to certain areas or where they like to spend their time and why?

Yes. Part of the goal of the study is to use GPS data to understand that. The study will look at distribution, seasonal changes, corridor movements, and high-density analyses which will determine where the herd tends to congregate during different times throughout the year. There will also be a time frame analysis that will focus on how long the elk stay in one area and when the elk move onto a new area.

Would that information be made public through a publication in two or three years?

Yes.

What kind of habitat do elk need?

- Elk use a range of habitat. Typically, elk are seen moving from different areas. Elk move around because they need different areas for different reasons. For example, elk might move somewhere for cover and somewhere else for foraging. An Aspen stand would be used for foraging, a meadow area would be used for eating, and a really dense area would be used for warmth or cover.

- Elk are more habitat generalists compared to moose, which spend a lot of time in areas with a lot of water. Elk have a wide range of habitat that they need to use. In summer, elk are found at higher elevations. In winter, elk are found at lower elevations. Elk want to stay on north-facing slopes with higher vegetation density during the summer. A lot of forest treatments can actually better accommodate elk habitat needs.

What do elk forage on?

Elk are browsers and grazers. During the winter and summer, they spend time grazing in the high alpine. There are some residential herds near highways 72 and 93. Those elk spend time grazing in the flats. They utilize willows and aspen shoots as they forage.

How will CPW share the study data?

CPW follows the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA). There are some parts of the data that cannot be shared. For example, data collected on private land cannot be shared with the public. That is one reason CPW does not give specific locations on the collars. CPW's main goal is to protect these animals. If their specific, or even general, information is accessible to the public those animals could be put in jeopardy. Although nobody at this meeting would do anything malicious with the data, there are people who probably would. That is not a risk CPW is willing to take.

Is the best way to get the elk collaring data through the USFS?

- The best way to get the data will likely be when CPW reports actionable items. They will release that information when they release the general data reports, observations, and analyses in the form of an agency memo or a change in the plan of the study. Technical documents that come out of the elk collaring study will be the best way to get information. CPW can share updates with the MMG during the MMG meetings. Although, they cannot promise that data will stay the same between the time that CPW shares information with the MMG and when the final findings are published. Ultimately, the best and most accurate information will be from the final technical documents.
- If MMG members are interested in current information on elk migration patterns, there is publicly accessible information. This information was previously shared with the group by Aurelia DeNasha: [Elk Migration Patterns](#).

UPDATE ON PRESCRIBED BURNS

Chad Buser of the USFS provided information on the current status and plans for prescribed burns in the area. Key points from his update are below.

- Burns began during the last week of February 2021. About 864 piles were burned that week. Unit 99 is amongst a few units that were not burned at that time. The USFS has conducted burns on the following units:
 - **Forsythe II Units 5,7,8:** 1,500 piles **General Location:** 2 miles East of Nederland, north of Magnolia Rd, and adjacent to Forest Service trail 606.
 - **Forsythe II Unit 26:** 500 hand piles **General Location:** 2 miles south of Nederland, east of Kelly Dahl Campground.
 - **Forsythe II Units 82 – 100:** 500 hand piles **General Location:** 1 mile southeast of Nederland, south side of Big Springs Subdivision.
 - **Pisgah/Fall River:** 50 hand piles **General Location:** 2.5mi North of Dumont on Fall River Rd., near St Mary's and Alice.
- Due to the dry winter, there have been a lot of challenges with burning. When the weather permits, the USFS can conduct prescribed burns. If the weather is not good, then they have to put burning on pause.

- If there is more snowfall, the USFS will burn the last units near Big Springs. After that, the team will move east and continue working, where pile burning will likely get more challenging.

Clarifying Questions

MMG members asked several clarifying questions about the prescribed burn update. Questions were directed to Chad Buser, Angela Gee, and Kevin Zimlinghaus regarding the prescribed burn update. The questions are indicated in italics and corresponding answers are in plain text.

Are burn piles being left for the wildlife or not?

- No. If there are any piles left, it is because they were not in prescription, or they were not visible because they were underneath the snow. If there is an abundance of piles on the landscapes, MMG members can look for them and can let the USFS know where specific piles are. The Forest Service will then remove them.
- Due to the cold and windy weather, some of the heavy materials do not burn and remain on the landscape.

It seems like there is a backload of piles to be burned. How does the USFS prioritize which piles to burn with the limitations of what can be burned in a given year?

- It is difficult to balance the backload of piles to be burned and the limitations of what can be burned in a given year. This year what can be burned is additionally limited to what is within the prescription. Some piles that need to be burned are relatively old and have aged after sitting out on the landscape for years. On top of that, those piles also require very specific snow conditions for burning.
- Forsythe II is relatively low-hanging fruit because there are new piles that just require the right snow conditions for burning.
- There are over 900 acres of piles to burn throughout the district. The James Creek project will likely be the next area the USFS will burn.
- As the weather improves, the USFS might be able to divide and conquer throughout the district to burn more of the backload of piles. Burning depends heavily on the weather. Because spring is right around the corner, burning is even trickier because the days are longer, and the snow stays for less time. When it snows, there is a very narrow gap to burn that has to be taken advantage of.
- Sometimes all the conditions to burn are right except the smoke disparity forecast. During the spring, storms often come in with poor air quality, and burning cannot happen.
- For prescribed burns, the USFS is looking at windows in the fall. Although over the last few years, the fall burn window has been very challenging.

Were the conditions right to burn in the Winiger Ridge units?

A lot of the necessary preparation for that unit is already done. For example, the USFS conducted some chipping along the road. The fire vehicles need to be able to get down to the unit to burn, so road preparation for fire vehicles still needs to occur. If the spring does not allow for pile burning, then additional preparation on the broadcast units will have to happen, such as moving fuels along the containment line. Burning in the Winiger Ridge unit depends on the resources available.

Has the problem of cheatgrass near units been addressed or considered?

The USFS staff recently heard that there is a relatively new herbicide to treat cheatgrass. The USFS would need to check to see if they can use that herbicide to treat cheatgrass.

Is there a way to mitigate the spreading of cheatgrass after prescribed burns?

Because the land near the units where the USFS needs to burn has not had many disturbances over the last few years, most of the invasive and some native plants have built up their seed sources, including cheatgrass. The wind can carry the cheatgrass seeds further than a lot of other plants. The disturbance stimulates germination in both native and invasive plants. So, the USFS is trying to mitigate the invasive and promote the natives as best as possible.

There were piles at the top of the Winiger Ridge units. Has anyone from the USFS been up there to evaluate those piles?

Some USFS staff confirmed that they saw piles up there. The piles are likely additional fuel loading that will be moved prior to any prescribed burning in that area. It is unlikely that those piles would impact the scheduling of the burns very much. The USFS made sure the burn lines are prepared correctly throughout that area.

There are some lop-and- scatter fuels to the west of where the burn unit is at Winiger Ridge, potentially from Forsythe I. What can the USFS do about the scatter that will not get burned and is still left on the ground?

- If the scatter is to the west of the unit, the USFS can probably hand pile and burn it next winter.
- Those scatters probably fall within the 300-foot buffer zone around private property. The USFS will need permission from the homeowners to go over and manage the scatter.

Is it possible to use non-toxic methods, like the hand-pull method, to control cheatgrass?

Due to the scale of the cheatgrass on the Forest, the hand-pull method is a little difficult. It is possible that other groups the USFS works with might be able to control cheatgrass using that method. The economic cost of labor for the hand-pull method needs to be considered, too.

NEXT STEPS

- In case there is a need for a meeting, MMG members should keep all of the planned meeting dates sent to them by Izzy on their calendars.
- MMG members should keep in contact with one another via email to determine if a meeting is necessary. If there are many questions, comments, or concerns around contracts or treatments, or if the USFS has any important updates for the group, then the group will meet at the scheduled meeting times.
- Angie Gee and Kevin Zimlinghaus will notify the group when a contractor is out on a unit, when there is a COR on the ground, and when a contractor has finished a particular unit.
- Kevin Zimlinghaus will work on updating the spreadsheet with all phase and unit information. He will distribute it to the group when it is complete. Peak Facilitation Group can help him with the spreadsheet if need be.

