

Winiger Ridge Ecosystem Management Project



Description

The Winiger Ridge Ecosystem Management Project area represents a true urban/wildland interface. It includes approximately 38,000 acres of intermixed land ownerships within the Foothills and Montane Life Zones including land managed by Federal, State Parks, Boulder Mountain Parks, Boulder County Open Space, Boulder County Conservation Easements, Boulder City Open Space and Easements, Denver Water Board, individual private owners and private subdivisions. The Colorado State Forest Service and local Fire departments assisted in coordination and education.

The project area is home to approximately 2,500 permanent residents and 4 million recreationists. The local watersheds provide drinking water to hundreds of thousands of metro- Denver area residents. In addition, these watersheds provide habitat for mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, black bear, mountain lion and various other native animals.

Declining ecosystem conditions combined with increasing human pressures have resulted in challenging & complex land management needs. As a result, in 1996 a collaborative, community-driven, cross-jurisdictional approach to land management was identified as a tool for planning of long-term, sustainable ecosystems within the project area. The purpose of the project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire while improving wildlife

habitats and the general health of the forest in the Winiger Ridge Landscape as identified in the Landscape Management Action Plan which evolved from an interagency Landscape Assessment.

Trigger Issues

- ▶ High fire risk and threatened water shed
- ▶ Bad wildfire seasons 98/99
- ▶ Multiple ownerships
- ▶ Large population

Key Collaboration Principles

- ▶ Teaming with all ownership/management entities
- ▶ Specific planning effort for discrete landscape tied to Forest Plan
- ▶ Open dialogue about the issues and possible solutions before action on the ground: meetings, field trips, workshops, newsletters, articles
- ▶ Trust building through face to face contact and commitment follow through
- ▶ Staff committed to working outside the agency
Patience with interested parties i.e. professional environmentalists, land owners, recreationists
- ▶ Community developed monitoring plan

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What Worked

- ▶ Interagency newsletter distributed by Colorado State Forest Service to about 4,000 recipients.
- ▶ Numerous field experiences before, during and after with responsiveness to concerns and needs. For example, foresters trained interested citizens in basic stand exam and monitoring techniques.
- ▶ Creating meaningful space for engagement. For example, a computer guru from the community developed a sampling system for data evaluation and six volunteers did grow-outs of soil samples.
- ▶ Savvy, engaged contractor with understanding of the land management goals and population.
- ▶ Committed line officers and staff focus

How the Project Leader Engaged in Collaboration

In the case of Winiger, the project leader was a silviculturist. Many of the issues and concerns of her key constituents (environmentalists, adjoining property owners in subdivisions) were very basic, 101 type stuff for a forester. Most people don't understand forest management or the many protective provisions in place for the US Forest Service. For example, sale administrators monitor the

activity of contractors and ensure that contracts are strictly followed or cruise data guides the preparation of timber sales. A great deal of patience and "teaching" time was required of the leader. Much of her trust building for the US Forest Service came in the form of basic field teaching exercises and patience for this slow approach to understanding why and how for the treatments.

The project leader relied a great deal on a primary partner: a forester from the state forest service. Teaming with a professional from a non-federal agency is very beneficial when dealing with large or mixed ownerships. They can share in the outreach burden as well as perform certain task with less "red tape."

The project leader started with small projects (less than 100 acres) to demonstrate treatment objectives therefore educating and building trust.

The project leader ensured that follow through occurred on all projects and that communication with primary interests occurred regularly.

Contact Winiger Ridge:

Amy Krommes
akrommes@fs.fed.us
303-245-6406