



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# San Juan Project



Rocky Mountains, USDA Forest Service photo

Pagosa Springs is a community in southwest Colorado with popular natural hot springs. Ironically, pagosa means “healing waters” in the native Ute language and this area has the potential for devastating wildfire. Recent fires have served as warnings. Historic suppression of natural fire in the San Juan National Forest and surrounding private lands has created a hazardous abundance of fuel. This fuel load, and risk to local communities, has been increased by invasive beetles that recently have killed many trees. That risk endangers residents and their property as well as the local economy. The area is dominated by businesses that depend on second-home visitors and tourists who are drawn here year-round. The snow-capped peaks, wild rivers and high-desert mesas of the Rocky Mountains offer rafting and mountain-biking in the spring and summer, big-game hunting in the fall and skiing in the winter. Wildfires would char the stunning vistas, damage trails and decimate wildlife habitat, which means dollars flowing from visitors could dwindle. Water quality would be compromised from erosion associated with wildfire, and residents would suffer. The Joint Chiefs’ project brought partners and agencies together to work across boundaries to protect homes and secure resources vital to the sustainability of the surrounding communities.

### PROJECT IMPACT

**15** BUSINESS VENTURES SUPPORTED

Total awarded through the Joint Chiefs’ from 2015-17: \$2.4 million

This Joint Chiefs’ project supported 15 new business ventures for equipment operators, mill workers, truck drivers and managers.

USDA’s Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

COLORADO



## San Juan Project RESULTS



Elk crossing the river. Photo by Lance Cheung, USDA



Reduced wildfire threats to residents and improved wildlife habitat: Thousands of trees were removed from prioritized areas to reduce the threat of wildfire for 500 homes, representing about 2,500 residents. Removing dense plant material also provided better forage ground and winter habitat for species, including elk, mule deer and wild turkey, species that are tied to the local culture and tourism economy.



Improved water quality: Funding from the Joint Chiefs’ supported the removal of over-abundant plants and trees around Dutton Ditch, one of two water sources for Pagosa Springs.

The area can now be safely treated with controlled burns, reducing the likelihood of catastrophic fire and protecting water quality for the community—including a large camp that serves hundreds of children each summer.

## SAN JUAN PROJECT



Partners meet to discuss forest restoration. Photo by Aaron Kimple

## Community Efforts Bring Community Gains

"We all understand the forest as we have grown up with it. But that understanding might not be of a healthy forest—it's just what we have always seen," said Aaron Kimple, director of the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership.

Since 2009, the organization has provided a forum to share perspectives and develop top priorities and science-based management strategies in the Pagosa Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest. "People are aware that our forests are changing, and they want to know how to manage them better for the long-term," said Aaron.

For many years, San Juan Headwaters brought together land managers, industry representatives, environmental groups and others to meet shared social, environmental and economic goals. Yet, budget constraints across local and Federal agencies made implementing plans to meet these goals difficult.

"Funding from the Joint Chiefs' provided a necessary boost, giving USDA something to offer to make collective progress," said Fred Ellis, a fire management officer with USDA's Forest Service. High-school interns conducted research on forest health by helping to monitor and evaluate projects in the District, determining that the forests surrounding the town were overcrowded with trees. Resources for projects in densely populated subdivisions got landowners excited to make their neighborhoods more fire resilient.

"Without the Joint Chiefs' project, the pace and scale of restoration would be much more limited today," said Aaron. "The Pagosa Ranger District is positioned to continue this work because they now have public support and a proven track record."



Aaron Kimple

### Key Partners

Archuleta County  
Chama Peak Land Alliance  
Colorado Forest Restoration Institute  
Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Colorado State Forest Service  
Mountain Studies Institute  
Pagosa Fire Protection District  
Pagosa Lakes Property Owners Association  
Rocky Mountain Research Station  
San Juan Conservation District  
San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership  
Southwest Conservation Corps  
The Nature Conservancy  
232 Collaborative