

PROFILE: A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Colorado Front Range Roundtable

What is the Idea?

The Colorado Front Range Roundtable (FRR) is a regional, multi-stakeholder collaborative partnership established in 2004 to improve forest conditions and reduce wildfire risk in a 10-county area of Northern Colorado. In 2006, the Roundtable released a report, endorsed by the Governor, which advanced ten recommendations for improved forest health. Despite substantial advances in policy, funding, and management recommendations, the FRR has struggled to provide on-the-ground, measurable results. Contiguous treatments across jurisdictional boundaries paired with local utilization and processing facilities offer the best promise for demonstrable success. In Spring 2008, the FRR issued a “Request for Information” across the 10-county area to identify one community in which to invest time and resources to achieve forest health priorities. The project focuses on building local capacity and fostering active participation by local residents. The purpose of the FRR’s *Community Demonstration Project* is to treat acres in need of attention, utilize as much of the harvested material as possible, and establish local capacity for processing.

The community of Woodland Park, Colorado, was selected in May 2008 as the demonstration location.

The Roundtable has now begun to marshal its considerable resources, including technical expertise and financial assistance, to work intensively with that single community to produce a demonstrable success story. State and federal land management agencies have agreed to prioritize the selected community’s treatable acres. The Governor’s Energy Office has committed \$25,000 toward feasibility studies and identification of potential bio-heating installations in the community. The Office of Smart Growth has committed \$15,000 to this project, and the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute has devoted an additional \$15,000 to develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation throughout the project.

What is the Opportunity?

The FRR is a well-functioning partnership among diverse governmental and non-governmental organizations with a high degree of resources and expertise, but has lacked success stories that illustrate on-the-ground, community-based action. By the same token, many communities in Colorado’s Front Range are positioned to take forest stewardship action as a result of completing Community Wildfire Protection Plans, but lack expertise and resources to implement actions across large scales with economic benefit to local communities.

The focus on forest biomass heating presents a key

opportunity. The historical lack of any appreciable forest industry infrastructure in Colorado’s Front Range makes the economics of large-scale treatments cost-prohibitive. Nonetheless, there is plenty of forest work to be accomplished on federal and private lands. The utilization of forest biomass for heating presents a chance to add value to materials removed from forest treatments. High fuel prices make heating of rural, mountain community facilities expensive. When compared to propane and natural gas, forest biomass is cost-competitive per British Thermal Unit (BTU) for facility heating. Should the Community Demonstration Project be successful in producing cost-effective forest treatments and biomass heating, it may open up opportunities for entrepreneurs and operators to establish sustainable forest-based livelihoods.

What is Revolutionary from Current Practice?

In Colorado’s Front Range, the current practice largely involves paying contract operators a fee for forest treatments on federal and private lands. Woody biomass from treatments are typically masticated or lopped and scattered on-site. The Community Demonstration Project is the first cohesive effort to link forest treatments with economic utilization and local community capacity-building for long-term, cost-effective forest stewardship with potential to bolster forest-based livelihoods.

The Community Demonstration Project also marks the first effort by a regional multi-stakeholder partnership to build local capacity in Colorado’s Front Range where there are few self-organizing, stand-alone community-based forestry initiatives compared to other regions of the country. With the lack of a history of industry infrastructure, the FRR’s Community Demonstration Project is attempting to build an economic utilization component to wildfire mitigation and forest restoration that is needed for long-term treatments to be cost-effective. By emphasizing a community-based approach, it is also intentionally targeting local capacity building for forest stewardship, not simply following an industrial recruitment model of building a large, centralized mill requiring high transportation costs and large volumes of material.

What is the Promise for Success?

The Community Demonstration Project is poised to achieve positive results because of the groundwork laid by the FRR as well as the community of Woodland Park. The FRR is comprised of a unique combination of federal, state, and local governments that not only represent forest land management and wildfire mitigation expertise, but economic

development and community interests. Non-governmental organizations include environmental organizations, timber industry, and research institutions. The FRR has achieved a consensus around the scientific rationale for effective treatments to reduce wildfire risk and restore healthy forest conditions, removing a key barrier. Additionally, the FRR can assemble diverse expertise to support the community of Woodland Park in achieving its land management goals and make the economics of forest biomass heating work. The FRR also can leverage and pool financial resources to assist Woodland Park and other communities for similar endeavors.

The community of Woodland Park has committed local leadership demonstrated through the development and implementation of its Community Wildfire Protection Plan. There is also a local organization, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte, which is facilitating implementation across ownership boundaries and at a landscape scale. The City of Woodland Park is committed to local community education and public relations and can provide some direct funding through a community investment line item to support implementation. There is substantial political and public will in the community to make this project happen.