



**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT**

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**Agenda Item No. 18**

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**TO: Town Council**

**FROM:** Rodney Walters, Town Forester / GIS Assistant

**FOR:** Town Council Regular Meeting

**DATE:** September 19, 2024

**RE: Community Forestry Program, Season Update**

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**Attachments:**

**Mountain Village Community Forestry Program Update**

**Mountain Village Forestry Program 2024 Seasonal Activities:**

➤ **Assessments:**

- Voxel Maps LiDAR and Orthoimagery: The 2023 high resolution (4-inch pixel) aerial imagery provides the most updated overhead imagery for TMV that is available (compared to the 2021 aerial imagery that is available for San Miguel County). The infrared spectrum provides a baseline indicating the areas of the forest that were under stress at the time of the flight (fall 2023). The LiDAR data indicates that TMV had over 200,000 trees at the time of the flight (fall 2023) and shows the location and height of each of these trees. This data also indicates features of TMV in 3-D, including topography, buildings, and trees.
- During March 2024, the Town Forester generated a report for the Town of Mountain Village (TMV) on the Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (COWAP). This website utilizes satellite data and analyses to generate assessments and information about wildfire risks. The most notable change from previously generated reports is the change in the annual likelihood of wildfire for the Mountain Village area. The annual likelihood of wildfire for the Mountain Village area has shifted from low to moderate.

- In June 2024, the Town Forester hired Jeff Rainey, Colorado State Forest Service forester to perform a cruise by collecting and analyzing plot data within the open space parcels along the northern Town boundary in the 100-acre area where the Town forester is working with partners to plan and create a community scale shaded fuel break (along Jurassic and Meadows trail and below See Forever Resort) (image 1). Jeff Rainey utilized this data to produce a wildfire mitigation prescription of the 100-acre area. The 100-acre area is subdivided into 3 sections (east, west, and aspen stands) with a separate prescription for each of the sections. The wildfire management objectives for each stand are listed below:
  - Aspen stand prescription objectives - reduce the dead and down fuels and reduce shading and competition from conifer species.
  - East stand prescription objectives - reduce the dead and down fuels and promote recruitment of aspen regeneration by reducing shading and competition from conifers. Improve stand health and vigor by removing trees effected by spruce-budworm.
  - West stand prescription objectives – reduce fire intensity and severity by removing fuels and increasing the size of canopy gaps. Promote recruitment of aspen regeneration by reducing shading and competition from conifers. Improve stand health and vigor by reducing residual tree density.



**Image 1: Photo of GIS mapping imagery showing the planned North TMV Community Shaded Fuel Break (orange).**

➤ **2024 Forestry Activities and Projects:**

- Earlier this spring, tools, equipment, and supplies were purchased, and the Seasonal Forestry Crew was hired and trained: The function of the seasonal forestry crew is to conduct field operations for the purpose of protecting our community by mitigating risks, improving forest health, and increasing resilience to insects and wildfire. This season, the Town Forester and seasonal forestry crew has been engaged in the following projects:
  - MCH Packet Distribution - The forestry crew distributed 3058 MCH packets on lots OSP 513-14, OSP 21 R, OS22R1, 650, OSFF5, OS 3Z, and OS3M as a Douglas fir beetle deterrent.
  - Aspen sapling protection – Blue-tubes and wire cage baskets are being tested to see which approach best protects aspen saplings from elk browse.
  - TMV Demonstration Forest Maintenance - The TMV forest located on Adams Ranch Rd., between Double Eagle Drive and Lupine Ln. was touched up by the forestry crew, who thinned trees and remove ladder fuels to maintain wildfire resilience on the site. This area has been thinned for forest health and wildfire mitigation and it provides an excellent demonstration of how forests may be maintained to be healthy, visually pleasing, and resistant to crown fire.
  - Woodlot Cleanup – over 45 cubic yards of bark mulch was removed from the woodlot where it was taken to be processed and utilized for garden mulch. Some of this much was made available for public use.
  - Tree Hazard Mitigation along TMV Roadways – The forestry crew has been working to remove over 70 dead and hazardous trees on TMV roadways and properties to mitigate tree hazards.
  - Fuels Reduction for Wildfire Resiliency - The forestry crew has been working diligently on the community scale shaded fuel break to remove standing dead and down fuels to help protect our community from wildfire. They are making our trails safer and the forest healthier as they have been preparing hundreds of trees to be flown off site by helicopter. This initial phase of developing a community scale shaded fuel break is occurring on lots OS FF5 and OS3Z (adjacent to Jurassic Trail and below See Forever Development).
  - 2024 Helicopter Fuel Reduction Operations Project -The Town Forester has been working with community partners, including Telluride Ski and Golf, The Town of Telluride, San Miguel County, Trout Unlimited, and the US Forest Service to plan helicopter lifting operations in the fall of 2024

to reduce fuel loads and wildfire risks in TMV by flying standing dead and down fuels from off steep slopes to be utilized for habitat restoration on the Valley Floor and also to be hauled from the Town where it will find an end use as firewood.

➤ **Challenges:**

Although much has been achieved this year with the allocation of a seasonal forestry crew, as noted above, these accomplishments have not been met without opportunity costs and challenges. The demand for tree consultations, permitting, and work is exceptional this year. Training and management of the seasonal forestry crew and the project planning and management of the large projects has placed significant time constraints on the forester position, which has resulted in a more generalized approach in the tree permitting process and less defensive space assessments that are able to be delivered, which is occurring at a time when the demand and need for these assessments is as great as it has ever been. Staffing for the seasonal forestry crew has been challenging and the forestry crew is currently staffed by 2 of its available 4 positions. Planning challenges include slow responses with property owners to buy into and/or provide permissions for access. One example of this is how the Town's desire to perform defensive space work at Village Court Apartments was stopped because access was not granted due to noise concerns. Addressing the noise concerns will require that defensive space work be performed during the shoulder season which, in part, falls outside of the seasonal work schedule of the forestry crew. These challenges may be met with ongoing persistence in the development of the new Forestry crew, with more full-time forestry staffing, and by hiring outside contractors to perform work when the forestry crew is unable to do so.

➤ **Ongoing TMV Forestry Programmatic:**

1. Mountain Village tree removal permitting and woodlot: Due to high demand for wildfire protection of homes and an 8-year long outbreak of spruce budworm, large numbers of subalpine fire trees have been dying. With these tree mortalities, demand for tree permits are high and more generalized permits are being issued so these dead and dying trees may be removed.

2. Wildfire Mitigation Defensive Space Incentive Program

Demand for the Defensive Space Incentive Program remains high. These assessments continue but have been occurring at a slower rate. Currently there is a wait list for assessments.

The above 2024 forestry projects and activities are in alignment with a strategic approach to establish and achieve the Town's forestry goals over time. An effective strategic process will:

1. Gather fact-based data to generate high-quality forest assessments.
2. Engage the community and its partners to formulate a vision and strategic objectives.
3. Apply resources to complete objectives through the completion of ongoing field work projects.
4. Engage in an ongoing program assessment process to facilitate the ability to adapt to inevitable changes.

The primary goal for the TMV's forestry program outlined in the Community Development Code provides the directive to "...preserve and maintain a healthy forest ecosystem and landscape while also protecting buildings from wildfire" (TMV 2020). To meet this goal, active management of TMV's forest is required to successfully maintain forest health, prevent wildfire, and help work with the inevitable transformation that always occurs within forest ecosystems. The Colorado State Forest Service affirms this on its Forest Health and Management webpage, "Forest management can fulfill an important role in how we help shape Colorado's future forests. Where lands allow for active management to occur, we can enhance forest resilience to fire, insects, and diseases. This approach will provide diverse forests for tomorrow and ensure that we continue to receive the wide range of benefits our forests provide" (Colorado State Forest Service 2023).