



# Bringing Our Community Together via Communication

## June, 2022 Newsletter



Please welcome Jim Nielsen as our new Ruby Ranch manager. Jim, his wife and two fur babies live in Mesa Cortina and are longtime residents of Summit County. Back in the early 1980s, Jim was on the work crew that set up the two ranches that now comprise Ruby Ranch to be developed into what we now call home. That crew dug and improved ditches, did basic fire mitigation work and just generally got the place ready for sale, so you could say that Jim's background for the Ranch Manager job goes "back to the beginning."

Jim has been employed by the Town of Silverthorne for many years, primarily as an equipment operator, working on Town roads in both the summer and winter. For 16 years, Jim has managed the Town's weekend road crews and he is just the person we need to get our roads in shape and keep them in shape in all seasons. Jim's longtime personal contacts with key local businesses and governments will be invaluable as we move forward.

Jim took over as our Ranch Manager in the middle of June and is already busy absorbing the basics of the job, working

from the gate upward on Ruby Ranch. Jim's cell phone number is (970)485-4342 and he can be reached on email at [ranchmanager@wbmetro.org](mailto:ranchmanager@wbmetro.org). Jim is already working hard to get our irrigation system in good shape. Please say hello, when you see Jim out and about and make him welcome!

### Eagle’s Nest Wilderness Fuel Break (ENWFB)— Becoming Reality

Ruby Ranch voters recently authorized a three-year increase in property taxes, raising \$400,000 to pay the cost of clearing a 200-foot-wide fuel break in the Eagle’s Nest Wilderness. As promised, we have been seeking funds to offset as much of this cost to our property owners as possible. The US Forest Service, on whose land the fuel break will be cleared, has budgeted \$125,000 toward the cost of the project, which is very good news indeed. And Summit County has awarded us up to a \$200,000 matching grant, as we requested so it looks like this will be a true partnership of the Federal Government, Summit County and Ruby Ranch (via our Willow Brook Metro District), with each partner paying about a third of the final cost.

Looking back over time, this whole project is something of a miracle, given the prohibitions on altering a designated wilderness area. “They said it couldn’t be done” but we are on the verge of doing it! This project will become a model for “public-private partnership” to be emulated across the United States.



Currently a tinderbox

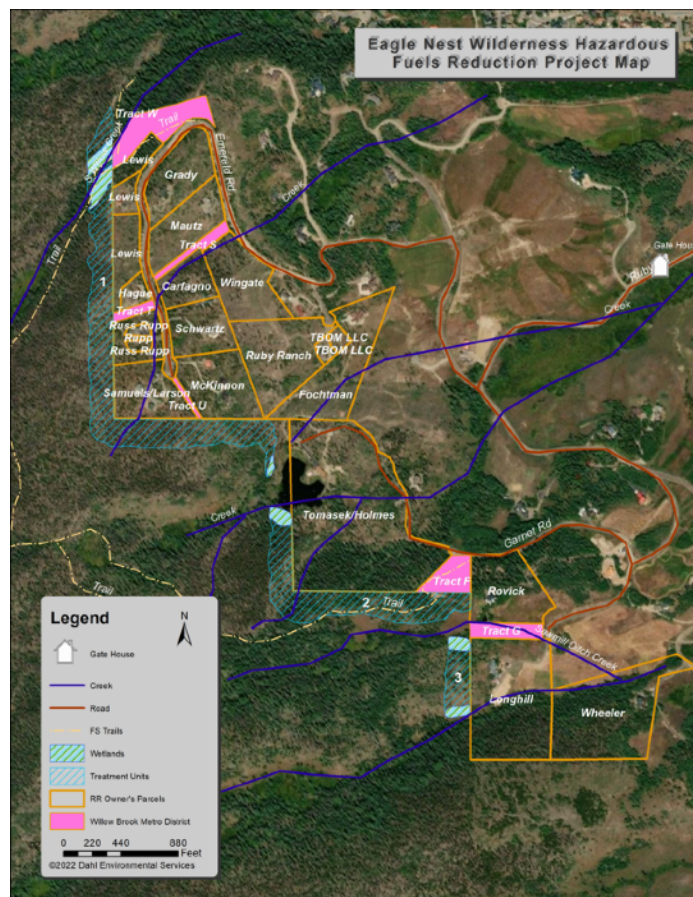
### ENWFB—The Project Map

The adjacent map shows the Fuel Break area from which the hazardous fuel will be removed. It is the blue, cross-hatched area on the map running down the western and southwestern borders of Ruby Ranch and in the Eagle’s Nest Wilderness itself.

Community property, controlled by our Willow Brook Metro District, is shown in pink and the names of private lot owners involved are included. The total area to be cleared encompasses 28 acres to create a 200-foot wide break along the perimeter of the Ranch.

The “phases” of the project are numbered 1 to 3, with the heaviest concentration of dead wood being in Phase 1 and that is where the work will start, near the Lewis lot. Other areas, such as the wetlands (shown in green on the map) will require less attention.

The wood cleared will be piled in teepee’s, primarily in the blue, cross-hatched areas but some of the teepee’s will likely be in the 50 feet of private land adjacent to the Wilderness, with the consent of the private lot owners.



### **ENWFB—The Logger and Logistics**

The USFS has flagged the area for fuel reduction and work is scheduled to begin on July 18, aiming to be complete by the end of September. 17 loggers were solicited for bids, including both national and local loggers. In the end, one Oregon-based bidder (G.E. Forestry in Medford, OR) got the job and for a price within our budget. This logger does 90%+ of its work with the USFS and brings that valuable experience to our project. 15 workers will stay in local hotels and travel to the worksite in a van, so traffic disruption on the Ranch should be minimal.

This same logger and crew are then willing to stay on the Ranch to clear deadfall off our Sawmill irrigation ditch, where hand tools are required, just as hand tools are required for the Fuel Break project itself. This same logging crew is then available to remove the remaining significant stands of dead trees on private lots on Ruby Ranch for the relatively low price of \$3,000 per acre, which is about half the cost local loggers charge. The owners of those lots would be free to sell the trees removed for firewood, somewhat offsetting their \$3,000 cost per acre and we are currently investigating the market to determine what, if any, value these trees may have. It is possible we might see the virtual end of pine beetle fire hazard on Ruby Ranch by the end of 2022 if all goes as planned!

### **ENWFB—Fire Danger**

The loggers will pile the dead wood into about 1000 “teepees,” mainly in the Eagle’s Nest Wilderness with some on several private lots adjacent to the project (with lot owner supervision and approval). These “teepees” are carefully constructed to allow 80% consumption of their wood with a goal of having all wood in the teepee consumed by the fire. The teepee’s will be allowed to “season” for a year and then burned when snow and weather conditions allow in the winter of 2023-24. The loggers who will cut the wood and construct the teepees are also experienced fire fighters. The USFS Forest Rangers who will burn the piles have burned many thousands of piles without mishap. Equipment will be on the burn sites to extinguish any fires that crop up. The USFS is confident it can burn the teepees with little or no fire danger to Ruby Ranch.

### **Updates elsewhere on the Ranch**

Rampant inflation and a shortage of labor are playing havoc with the other Ranch projects scheduled for completion this year. For example, as previously reported, Well 1 at the southern end of South Ruby Road needs to be replaced but elicited only one bidder who asked for 300% of the previous year’s price to complete a new well. The WBMD Board is seeking other bids.

The new electronic water meters we need to accurately record, and report water usage (to your cell phones) may shortly double in price and the WBMD Board is seeking State grants to offset their cost.

The only local firm competent to service our dirt roads is tied up working on roads in Grand County and we are “next on their list.” The Board has funding for the annual maintenance of our roads in the established budget including replacing culverts as needed, “pulling” the roadside ditches and grading all the dirt roads in the Ranch. But a completion date for the work is unknown. The Board is exploring several options for acquiring the heavy equipment needed to service our dirt roads, especially in view of our new Ranch Manager’s extensive background with this type of equipment.

Work remains to be done to complete the interconnect linking our north and south water storage tank to double the amount of water available to fight a fire. The current contractor is unresponsive and the Board is seeking a replacement contractor.

As the airlines like to say, “Thank you for your patience.” We will keep you advised as progress is made on these projects and on the Fuel Break project.