



MEMORANDUM

P.O. Box 4100 ♦ FRISCO, COLORADO 80443

TO: MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL
FROM: SUSAN LEE, PLANNER, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
RE: RESOLUTION 22-10: A RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AGREEMENT WITH SNO-ENGINEERING, INC., DBA SE GROUP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A USFS PROPOSAL FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND NEPA REVIEW IN FRISCO'S BACKYARD
DATE: MARCH 22, 2022

Summary and Background: An important community priority identified in the 2017 Frisco Trails Master Plan is trail and resource management improvements in the area known as Frisco's Backyard. This area consists of approximately 230 acres of land located generally south and east of Frisco, comprising Mount Royal, Miners Creek, Rainbow Lake, Ophir Mountain and Gold Hill. It is a very popular year-round recreation area for locals and visitors alike offering hiking, biking, and back country skiing opportunities. It is managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Dillon Ranger District as part of the White River National Forest (WRNF). Because of its importance to the community, as well as its proximity to residences, wildfire mitigation is an important management component for the Backyard area.

Based on the Town's ongoing priorities for trail and recreation improvements, wildfire management, and increasing pressure on the existing trail network, town staff initiated discussions with the WRNF regarding ways to begin actively improving and managing resources in the Backyard in the near future. Due to WRNF budget and staffing constraints, implementation of USFS initiated improvements could be delayed by years. Their recommendation for expediting the process was to contract with a third party that could develop a proposal for resource management and conduct the required National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) reviews on behalf of the USFS. This would then put the Town in a position where the necessary approvals are in place and the Town can implement the desired management activities and trail improvements in the Backyard.

After discussions with Council regarding trail work and budgeting for 2022, staff developed a scope of work for the Backyard area management plan. At the November 30, 2021 Town Council meeting staff reviewed the scope of work and Request for Proposals (RFP) for the USFS Proposal for Resource Management in Frisco's Backyard and NEPA Review with Council and received consent to proceed.

Analysis: On December 1, 2022, staff released the RFP and received four proposals by the January 14, 2022 deadline. The proposers and the total bid amounts were:

Name of Bidder:	Bid Amount:
Dudek	\$175,500
Logan Simpson	\$144,961
SE Group	\$240,500
JW Associates	\$257,390

All proposals were evaluated per the criteria outlined in the RFP:

The successful firm or team will be motivated to work with staff, community members, and elected officials on a multi-disciplinary planning effort and will have expertise in the following areas:

- *Wildfire and fuels treatments*
- *Multi-use trails planning*
- *Sustainability assessments (e.g., environmental, economic, social)*
- *Public participation and communication*
- *Graphics and illustration*
- *Forest Service Directives*
- *Environmental review documents and the NEPA process*

The following is a list of weighted criteria that will be used to evaluate proposals:

<i>Proposer Qualifications and experience</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Methods and approach</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Knowledge of the Town and Dillon Ranger District</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Proposed fees and costs</i>	<i>20%</i>

After reviewing the proposals against the review criteria, staff decided to further evaluate three of the firms based on their qualifications, experience, and methodology. The three firms short-listed by staff were: JW Associates, Logan Simpson, and SE Group. Staff solicited input from the Dillon Ranger District office on these three firms' proposals, as their staff will be overseeing the NEPA review. A brief summary of the three short-listed firms follows.

JW Associates is a land management planning firm based in Summit County that specializes in assessments of forest fire impacts on watersheds. Project lead for JW Associates is Jessica Wald who would be assisted by Brad Piehl and Abby Eurich. Their work experience includes post-fire watershed protection planning and implementation projects for Colorado Springs Utilities, Hewlett Gulch, High Park, and Spring Creek. They are currently working on the East Troublesome and Cameron Peak Fires. For trails and natural resource planning experience they have teamed up with Brian Lorch, former Summit County Open Space and Trails Director, whose experience includes the Golden Horseshoe Master Plan.

Their proposal is divided into two phases. Phase one includes a Hazardous Fuels Treatment Unit Analysis. They state in the proposal that their management approaches would diverge from past USFS management prescriptions and emphasize forest diversity by identifying and preserving aspen, spruce-fir and other conifer stands, minimizing areas of clear cutting or providing breaks between clear cut areas, prioritize areas for aspen plantings, naturalize fuel treatment areas, thinning of previously treated areas, minimizing slash and pile burning, managing noxious weeds, and focus on long-term maintenance. Phase one of the proposal also includes: a trails analysis that will include mapping and categorization of trails based on their sustainability, need for realignment, or decommissioning; development of a plan for trailhead improvements; and

development of an operations and maintenance plan. The final step of phase one is the creation of the USFS proposal.

Phase two is focused on the NEPA review. They offer an option of pulling the fuels reduction work out of the NEPA as either a modification to the Decision Notice of a fuels Categorical Exclusion. The trails component would move forward with the Environmental Assessment (EA) but since anticipated impacts from this portion of the work is limited; the expectation is that this would result in a smaller scope for the EA. Technical studies will be conducted. The environmental review conducted during this phase will include specialist reports (vegetation, fuels, watershed, recreation/scenery, wildlife, cultural resources) and completion of a draft EA. Public process for the EA is included in this phase and consists of notice an open house and a public meeting.

Staff Analysis: JW Associates project approach of gaining efficiency by splitting the project into two parts, fuel reduction and trails/forest health, is innovative. The detail given on the fuel mitigation measures regarding maintaining diversity and avoiding clear cutting is notable. However, WRNF staff had doubts about their approach meeting the USFS's standards of review. Both Town and WRNF staff agreed that having a local company with local knowledge is an asset.

Logan Simpson is an environmental planning and design firm with experience in NEPA and travel management plans for the USFS. They have offices in Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. They have partnered with Worman Forestry Management for the fuels treatment and vegetation analysis components of this project. Project lead will be Jeremy Call with day-to-day coordination and management by Kristina Kachur, and a host of planning specialists on staff to assist with the NEPA process. Logan Simpson are currently working on an update to the Summit County Open Space and Trails Master Plan and they have worked with Frisco on projects such as the Marina Master Plan in 2018.

Their project approach is in two phases, each focused on wildfire management and trails analysis. Phase one is about scoping and goal setting, collecting data including existing trail planning and fuel load survey work, conducting a trails field inventory in tandem with wildlife, cultural, wetlands, and botanical/hydrology/soil surveys for effects of recreation, and preparing a summary prescription for all proposed treatment areas. No actual field data collection is included in the fuel assessment and the treatment prescription sounds very standardized. Phase one ends with the preparation of the USFS proposal. Phase two consists of the NEPA review process: creating a work plan with TOF and USFS; preparing materials for public scoping; performing the EA on wildfire treatment, trail and other proposed projects; revising the EA per public comments; and preparing the final EA documentation.

Staff Analysis: Logan Simpson's proposal contains a number of assumptions and exclusions that will ultimately affect the overall cost and/or timeline of the project. The proposal assumes that the USFS will be responsible for fieldwork, data collection, and related design activities. This is incongruent with the Town's goal of expediting the NEPA process by contracting with a third party to complete these services on behalf of the USFS.

SE Group is a land and environmental planning firm with offices in Frisco. They have assisted the Town with numerous planning efforts including the 2017 Frisco Trails Master Plan and the USFS review process for the Peninsula Recreation Area Master Development Plan. SE Group's team will be led by Ashley Smith specializing in Forest Health and Fuels; with Scott Prior for Recreation Planning, and Wesley Gunselman assisting. They will be joined by sub-consultants Rocky Mountain Ecology, Peak Ecological, Metcalf Archaeology, and ERIA Consultants. They list the Ruby Ranch Fuels Reduction Project Categorical Exclusion, a 33-

acre fuel reduction project, as related local experience. They also have fuel reduction EA experience with neighboring communities such as Vail and Steamboat.

Their scope of work is broken into seven smaller phases:

- Phase one is project management and goal setting for the project.
- Phase two outlines the pre-NEPA proposal development component of the project. Details include reviewing existing trail data from the 2017 Frisco Trails Master Plan with high-level recommendations on sustainability and improvements, recommendations on complementary forest health/winter recreation improvements (thinning for glade skiing). Their sub consultant, ERIA will establish current and desired hazardous fuel conditions and treatments. This phase will have a public meeting and incorporate feedback from the meeting into a draft Study Plan.
- Phase three is mapping for both the proposal and final NEPA as well as online Story Maps for interested parties to learn more about the project.
- Phase four is scoping for public and WRNF comments.
- Phase five is fieldwork, data collection and reporting. They are assuming a study area of 230 acres and the following resource studies: botany and noxious weeds, wetlands, cultural resources, wildlife and fisheries, forest health and fuels (via unmanned aerial vehicles) for a 1229-acre forested area, and recreation and scenery.
- Phase six is preparation of the EA and draft decision document preparation.
- Phase seven is preparation of the final Decision Notice.

Staff Analysis: Both Town and WRNF staff preferred SE Group's multi-phased project approach as it appeared to be the most efficient and adaptable of the project approaches reviewed. Their overall timeline was shorter than the other proposers by about four months. They established the goal-setting phase of the project earlier in the overall process which seemed the most logical. Their proposal included all of the required fieldwork and their sub-contractors are known and trusted by the USFS specialists, creating efficiency in the NEPA review process. SE Group has a proven track record of successful projects with both the WRNF and the Town. Staff is recommending approval of SE Group's proposal.

Financial Impact: The SE Group proposal is for a cost not to exceed \$240,500, which would be spread over the 2022 and 2023 budget years. Town Council allocated \$490,000 in the 2022 budget (2000-5066) for Trails Projects. This included funds for several items: \$100,000 for continued trail work at the Peninsula Recreation Area; \$150,000 to develop a management plan with the USFS for the Backyard area; \$200,000 for wildfire mitigation efforts including fuels reduction/wildfire mitigation plans and revegetation efforts; and \$40,000 to update the 2017 Frisco Trails Master Plan. Since the management plan and NEPA studies are required prior to any type of implementation, a portion of the funds allocated for the wildfire mitigation efforts could be dedicated to the contract for *USFS Proposal for Resource Management in Frisco's Backyard and NEPA Review*. There are sufficient funds in this account (2000-5066) for this work.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Completion of hazardous fuels mitigation and improvement of the trail network in the Frisco Backyard area would support goals in both the Sustainable Environment, and the Vibrant Culture, Arts, and Recreation areas of the Town Council Strategic Plan.

Environmental Sustainability: The overarching focus of this project is to improve the ecosystem health, reduce hazardous fuels and risk of wildfire, and create more sustainable recreation opportunities in the Backyard area. Mitigation of hazardous fuels on USFS lands adjacent to the Town of Frisco will improve forest health while reducing the potential impact of wildfire. Trail

system improvements in this area will be required to follow current USFS management best practices for trail construction, which will reduce erosion and sedimentation. As with any type of construction activity there will be negative environmental impacts associated with energy consumption and soil disturbance but by conducting these activities in accordance with a plan that incorporates sustainable construction practices, the overall impacts will be minimized.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends adoption of Resolution 22-10: A Resolution Approving an Agreement with Sno-Engineering, Inc., for the Development of a USFS Proposal for Resource Management and NEPA Review in Frisco's Backyard.

Reviews and Approvals:

- Leslie Edwards, Finance Director
- Diane McBride, Interim Town Manager

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 Resolution 22-10
- Attachment 2 Contract for Goods and Services for Frisco's Backyard - SE Group