COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

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Cataloging and Assessing Post-fire Restoration Projects in Colorado Watersheds

INTRODUCTION

The project focused on cataloging and assessing post-fire restoration projects across Colorado watersheds, specifically selecting fires greater than 20,000 acres between 2012 and 2023. This selection criterion allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the most significant fire events in Colorado, providing insights into the effectiveness and reach of restoration efforts across diverse landscapes.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

The primary goal of the internship was to engage with a variety of stakeholders, including community members, government officials, and organizational representatives, to gather data and perspectives on post-fire restoration projects. A significant outcome was the creation of a detailed database documenting these projects, which required collaboration, meticulous data collection, and an understanding of the broader socio-political landscape influencing restoration initiatives.

APPLICATION TO MY EDUCATION

As a PhD candidate in Political Science with a focus on Environmental Policy, this internship directly aligned with my academic pursuits. My research centers on watershed sustainability, and this project provided a practical application of my studies, allowing me to explore the complexities of environmental governance, stakeholder engagement, and policy implementation in post-disaster scenarios.

PALS installed in the Cameron Peak Burn area in the Elkhorn Creek watershed. (Photo credit: Ayers Associates)

Log structures increase roughness, reduce flow velocities, and enhance sediment deposition. (Photo credit: Ayers Associates)

Willow wattles help to establish woody riparian vegetation. (Photo credit: Ayers Associates)

FEATURED LOW-TECH PROCESS-BASED RESTORATION PROJECTS

WORK SUMMARY

During the internship, I was responsible for conducting in-depth research to document fires over 20,000 acres and their associated restoration projects. I also led scoping conversations with various stakeholders (such as JW Associates, CFRI, and CPRW) to gain a holistic view of the challenges and successes in post-fire restoration, ultimately culminating in a comprehensive database that serves as a critical resource for ongoing and future restoration efforts.

LESSONS LEARNED

The internship was a profound learning experience, highlighting the importance of stakeholder collaboration and the challenges associated with ensuring equitable resource distribution in post-fire recovery efforts. I gained valuable insights into the intersection of environmental sustainability and social justice, particularly how lower-resource communities struggle to access necessary support for recovery.

NEXT STEPS

Building on the foundation established during the internship, the next steps involve a detailed analysis of the distributional equity of post-fire watershed restoration projects. This will include assessing how resources are allocated and identifying gaps to inform more inclusive and effective environmental policies in the future.

A Glimpse of Database