

Chaffee County Forest Treatment Field Trip: June 17, 2026

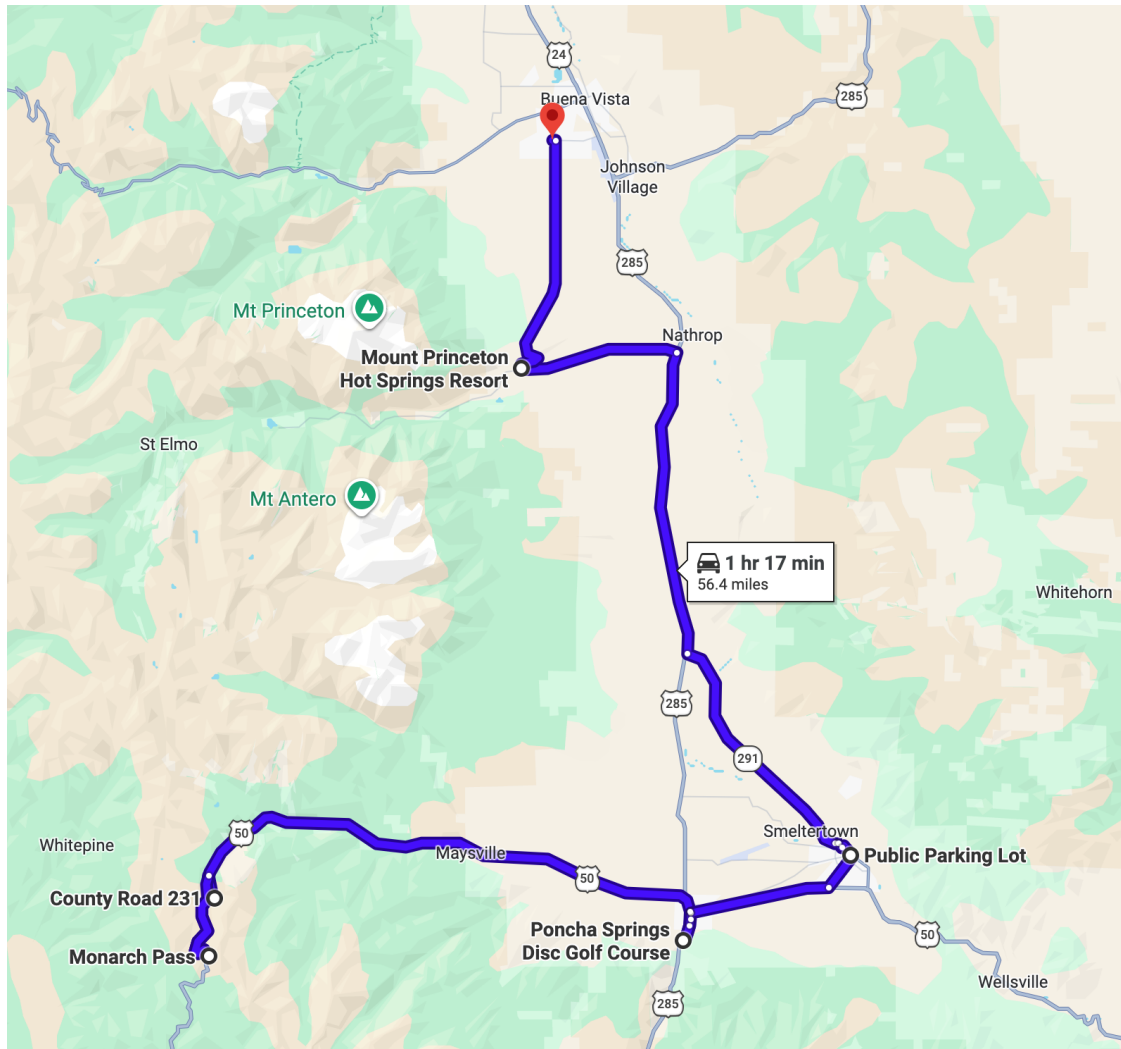
You're invited to join three Colorado wildfire experts, along with Center staff, for a day-long field trip June 17 in Central Colorado's Chaffee County, which has become the state's testing grounds for experimental strategies to reduce wildfire risk and intensity.

Steep-slope logging at Monarch Pass and large-scale mastication projects at Methodist Mountain have been promoted as models for reducing beetle-caused tree mortality, fuel accumulation, watershed vulnerability and threats to nearby communities. But years after implementation, the scientific evidence does not show that these projects effectively or consistently have reduced wildfire risk, particularly in the context of increasingly extreme fire weather. In fact, a vast body of fire ecology research challenges many of the assumptions behind these projects and shows these approaches do little to address the conditions that make wildfires deadly to people and destructive to communities. In fact, logging and mastication may actually make things worse.

But projects like these are now being replicated in forests across Colorado. As the state enters what's expected to be another severe wildfire season, federal and state agencies are expanding forest treatment projects across the high-elevation forests of the Rockies, reshaping entire landscapes in the name of wildfire prevention.

This field trip will examine three high-altitude forest landscapes near Salida through the lens of fire ecology and forest science to address the central question: Do we have enough scientific evidence to justify widespread adoption of these methods, or is more careful study needed before moving forward?

Itinerary



Overview of field trip locations.

1. U.S. Forest Service Monarch Pass Forest and Watershed Health Project (Colorado's first steep-slope, tethered logging project on public lands)

- **Time:** 9:00 AM
- **Location:** Meet at Monarch Pass parking lot, Highway 50, for discussion and short walk into upper portion of the project (45 minutes). Drive to Monarch Campground area at lower portion of project (10-minute drive, 30-minute walk/discussion)
- **Distance to next stop:** 30 minutes



Monarch Pass steep slope logging project. Photo by Brett Henderson.

2. Methodist Front Wildland Urban Interface Forest and Watershed Health Project, Poncha Springs pinyon-juniper mastication site.

- **Location:** Poncha Springs Disc Golf Parking Lot (30 minutes)
- **Distance to next stop:** 10 minutes



Cheatgrass in the Methodist pinyon-juniper mastication site.

3. Lunch Break in Salida.

- **Time:** 11:45 AM
- **Lunch:** Downtown Salida Public Parking Lot, 5-minute walk to multiple restaurants.
- **Departure time:** 1:00 PM
- **Distance to next stop:** 25 minutes

4. Proposed Bald Mountain Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.

U.S. Forest Service logging project across nearly 3,000 acres of public lands along the Colorado Trail, including 898 acres of wilderness-quality lands (Roadless Area).

- **Location:** Mt. Princeton Hot Springs Resort parking lot (10-minute stop at southern end of Bald Mountain project area). 10-minute drive to north end of project area for overall view, discussion. Optional 20–30 minute drive into north end of project area (high-clearance vehicles recommended)
- **Departure time:** 2:15 PM - 3:30 PM

Field Trip Attendees

Professor Emeritus Thomas Veblen's research interests are in forest ecology and vegetation dynamics in relation to natural and anthropogenic disturbances, especially as related to climate variability. He used tree rings to date past disturbance events such as fire and insect outbreaks. For more than 40 years he investigated how disturbances such as fire, blow down, and bark beetle outbreaks interact in the forested landscapes of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Starting in the mid-1970s in the southern Andes of Chile and Argentina he investigated the effects of disturbances such as mass movements, blow down, fires and introduced animals on forest dynamics, and increasingly under the effects of climate warming. Both his Colorado and southern Andean work were mainly supported by the National Science Foundation.

Rebecca Biglow is a hydrologist, geologist and public information specialist who has worked in post-fire response since 2002. She began her work in wildland fire and post-fire response as a hydrologist with the U.S. Forest Service and physical scientist with the National Park Service. She founded Earth Design Analysis and Innovation in 2013 to provide hydrologic and geologic consulting services in support of hazard-mitigation planning, community and land-use planning, and design for construction and landscapes.

Angie Jenson is a forester, ISA-certified arborist and former wildland firefighter who offers forestry and land stewardship consulting focused on nurturing healthy forests through thoughtful guidance. She has been a professional forester for 19 years with most of her work focused on Central Colorado. She has worked for a variety of city and state government agencies as well as private-sector clients. She questions the wisdom of forest treatments involving large-scale tree-thinning, clear-cut checkerboarding and mastication because of the damage they cause to the natural ecosystem, which can increase wildfire risk.