

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development Grant



Boulder County is topographically diverse. The west boundary follows the Continental Divide. From 13,409-

foot Navajo Peak in the Indian Peaks Wilderness, the terrain drops nearly 8,000 feet and winds through two canyons with many side drainages before settling into the City of Boulder. The county then stretches another 12 miles onto the plains. The Peak to Peak Highway, (State Highways 7 and 72), roughly delineates the uninhabited and populated portions of the county. In addition to the City of Boulder, nine incorporated municipalities and nine unincorporated population centers lie within the county.

Thirteen local Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) have been developed in Boulder County. One purpose of a CWPP is to encourage people to think collectively about wildfire. The owner of a three-acre property who is taking steps to make his portion of the forest more resilient to wildfire benefits from adjacent landowners who are taking similar steps. Benefits continue to multiply as the scope of work widens. It's no longer just one forest steward improving forest conditions and home survival, it's fire protection district personnel, forested subdivisions and government landowners creating a broad-scope wildfire risk analysis based on such factors as topography, road system, prevailing winds, vegetation continuity, available water sources and other factors.

Boulder's countywide plan widens the lens one more notch by piecing together local CWPPs and addressing the areas not already covered. Similar to the picture on a puzzle box that shows what the individual pieces will make when they're all connected, the countywide plan shows communities how their CWPPs relate to one another and which pieces are essential to efficiently complete the puzzle.





In February 2010, Boulder County hired Jim Webster as a CWPP Planner. Most recently, Webster was director of watershed protection for Trees, Water & People, a nonprofit organization based in Fort Collins. Webster has helped develop innovative community-based plans and programs across the United States and in Africa for more than 20 years. His organizational skills are obvious and he has a knack for engaging people.

Webster assembled a CWPP Core Team with representatives from Boulder County fire protection districts, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, City of Boulder, Sheriff's Office, Board of County Commissioners, and the Boulder County Land Use, Parks and Open Space, and Transportation departments. Workgroups were established to assess fire risks and hazards, identify existing and new projects to implement, develop a webpage and reach out to the public.

The fire risks and hazards workgroup sifted through a large amount of information to assess the probability of fire and possible losses. Where is a natural or human-caused fire most likely to ignite? Is the vegetation dense or sparse? Is it ponderosa pine and oak shrub or high-elevation spruce? Is the ground flat or steep? Are communities, houses, historic sites or other important values present? To help answer these questions, the county hired a consultant to create vegetation maps; additional consultants helped identify fuels treatment projects.

Boulder County launched its CWPP webpage in December 2010, initially using it to solicit residents' recommendations on the plan and seek applications from those interested in serving on a public advisory team. The CWPP Advisory Team, comprised of 16 county residents, evaluated the recommendations online, produced 13 priority recommendations, and presented the recommendations at a Boulder County Commissioners study session in May before forwarding them to the core team for further consideration. The advisory team represented 10 of the 23 fire districts in Boulder County.

The webpage also includes links to nine videos produced by five University of Colorado interns. The videos tell personal stories about wildfires and the importance of wildfire mitigation in Boulder County. A tenth video encourages residents to take action to properly insure their homes against wildfires. Most of the homes lost in the 2010 Fourmile Canyon Fire were significantly underinsured.

Meanwhile, the workgroups progressed on their tasks. The fire risk and hazard workgroup revised data within the perimeters of recent wildfires, and the projects workgroup defined and prioritized numerous projects. In August, the CWPP Core Team met to review the draft plan. Webster had compiled all the information from the workgroups and the resident advisory team to create the CWPP draft. The county commissioners held a public hearing to review the draft plan on Sept. 6; the final plan will be completed later in September.

