

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Implementation Grant



Perry Park Metropolitan District



Perry Park Metropolitan District comprises the 3,840-acre Perry Park Ranch. Initial development of the ranch began in the late 1960s. The ranch sits at the base of the Rampart Range west of Larkspur, Colo., where the vegetation changes from open meadow with scattered ponderosa pine to a pine forest with clumps of Gambel oak shrub to a Douglas-fir forest. Rocky Mountain juniper and mountain mahogany occupy drier sites. The Pike National Forest is a backdoor neighbor. Approximately half the 1,300 residential lots have homes and other structures. Only one dedicated road provides access to the community.

Approval of emergency preparedness district bonds in 2000 paved the way for wildfire mitigation within the Metro District. In 2002, Perry Park became one of the first communities nationwide to receive Firewise Communities/USA designation. In December 2004, the Metro District Board received approval for a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that shaped the strategy to protect Perry Park Ranch and its residents from the impacts of wildfire.



The Metro District Board has built many partnerships to implement the CWPP. The amount of vegetation along county right-of-ways has been reduced. Steps to create a second emergency egress route are underway. The Sheriff's Department in the Douglas County Office of Emergency Management has been vital in providing residents with pertinent evacuation information. The lake owned by the Perry Park Country Club is a fire suppression water source. Other partners include the Intermountain Rural Electric Association, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Douglas Land Conservancy, Perry Park Water and Sanitation District, Firewise Communities/USA, and Larkspur Fire Protection District.

Fuels mitigation has become a common term and practice in Perry Park, but the mitigation work also serves other purposes. A goal of Perry Park residents is to manage the forest with wildlife in mind. Using photos taken in 1871 as a reference, they hope to restore forest diversity. What makes this project unique is how the work is being accomplished. Private mitigation contractors continue to work on land accessible to equipment that cuts and chips trees. Thanks to ARRA funds, the Metro District also has a seasonal, 11-person fuels mitigation crew that works in tougher terrain. ARRA funds allowed the Larkspur Fire Department to hire the seasonal fuels mitigation crew, which also responds to wildfires that occur within the Larkspur Fire Protection District. The crew will work in Perry Park for the next two years. The fire department and residents of Perry Park hope this is just the first season of many to come for the crew.

Putting America to Work

The Larkspur Fire Department fuels mitigation crew was hired in May 2010 to help restore the forest in Perry Park. Crewmembers are 19 to 35 years old and their fire service experience ranges from one to 13 years. The crew is led by Moises Barrera, a 10-year veteran with the fire department.

With a vast range of experience and backgrounds, crew members learn from and teach each other. Those with emergency medical service experience expose the others to medical terms. Another crew member is sharing American Sign Language vocabulary, a useful skill when operating a chain saw.



The crew is divided into two squads, each with a squad boss. The ARRA grant gave both squad bosses the opportunity to gain leadership experience and to return to their home state. In addition, Justin Moon was able to purchase a home in June, and Aaron Meyers can see his son more often.



Lori Johnson rode in a fire truck with her uncle when she was young. As a crew member, she is laying the foundation for her career. Steve Wagner's father, brother and brother-in-law all are in the fire service. This is Wagner's first year, and for him, the best part of the job is the teamwork and friendship – and looking out for each other. Andy Geipel and Taylor Reifschneider are passionate about the fire service. Both are fire department volunteers, and both are building careers in the fire service.

Some crew members were on a different career path when the need for a change or an unexpected opportunity brought them into the fire service. Bonnie Holladay has a degree in journalism, but joined AmeriCorps after college. After working on several disaster relief and response projects, she realized emergency response was a better career fit for her than journalism. Chris Gentile worked for an independent office supply store, but he has found the different work environment to be more satisfying.

For Ricky Romanin, a volunteer with the fire department in Sedalia, Colo., the job is all about doing his part as a community member. "This job gives me the opportunity to be a part of the leading force in helping my community be prepared in case of a large wildfire." Chad Tamanaha agrees, "The best part of the job is serving the public in an outstanding, recognizable manner."

