

**ONE-YEAR REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF HB09-1199
THE HEALTHY FORESTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES ACT**

SUBMITTED BY THE COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Colorado State Forest Service would like to acknowledge Rep. Christine Scanlan and Sen. Dan Gibbs, sponsors of HB09-1199, the Colorado General Assembly and Gov. Bill Ritter for recognizing the need to further address wildfire risks, for providing additional resources to the CSFS to augment our technical assistance and outreach capacity, and for providing loans and grants to facilitate forest treatment on important forest landscapes in Colorado. The resources provided to the Colorado State Forest Service through this legislation are essential in helping to shape our future forests so they can continue to meet societal needs.

INTRODUCTION

Insects, diseases and wildfires are occurring at levels unprecedented in our state's recorded history. Colorado's economy is inextricably tied to our forests, which provide world-class recreational opportunities and contribute to healthy watersheds, which supply domestic water to communities and agricultural producers in Colorado and seventeen other states.

In 2009, the Colorado General Assembly passed legislation titled the Colorado Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act (HB09-1199), which increases efforts to address wildfire risk, provides resources to the Colorado State Forest Service to augment its technical outreach capabilities, and provides loans and grants for market-based and forest treatment solutions to reduce wildfire risk. This report, required by the legislation and prepared by the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), describes actions the CSFS has taken to address wildfire risk to life, property and infrastructure in Colorado, while also addressing the most pressing forest health issues. This report highlights accomplishments described in each of the major sections of the legislation, which directed the CSFS to coordinate and evaluate prescribed fire programs; facilitate development and implementation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans by fully engaging partners and County Commissioners; provide technical assistance to determine high fire hazard areas and increase upgrades on FEPP engines; implement forest restoration and fuels mitigation grants; assist wildfire, insect and disease risk assessments; implement a revolving loan fund to assist forest products businesses; and use geographical information and web-based systems to conduct landscape-scale risk assessments and disseminate information.

This report addresses accomplishments to date that correspond with each section of the original legislation, including community and firefighter planning and preparedness; community wildfire risk mitigation; community watershed restoration; wildfire risk mitigation loan program; wildfire risk mitigation revolving fund; and improved outreach and technical assistance.

COMMUNITY AND FIREFIGHTER PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS

Determining High Fire Hazard Areas – The CSFS provided counties west of I-25 with wildfire risk assessment maps to help them determine areas of high wildfire risk in their counties. The CSFS currently is developing a bid to map the Eastern Plains counties for wildfire risk. The maps are an important resource to counties and the CSFS when working with communities to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). CSFS District Foresters work closely with county officials and local, state and federal land-management agencies to develop annual operating plans for fire response. With support from the Wildfire Preparedness Fund, district personnel take proactive steps to reduce wildfire risk by providing technical forestry information and working with local officials and groups to identify areas where forest management and fuels reduction treatments are needed to improve overall forest health.

Increasing Upgrades on Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) – The CSFS Fire Equipment Shop has increased production of upgrades to Type 4 Wildland Engines from eight per year to ten per year; the engines are on loan to Colorado fire departments with equipment needs. The upgraded engines allow these fire departments to respond more effectively to wildland fires. The Type 4 engine upgrades include the conversion of the fire package from high-profile to low-profile tanks, making the engines more stable and safer to use on rugged terrain. In addition, the CSFS hired temporary seasonal mechanics to maintain wildland fire engines so the equipment is ready and available to be dispatched to fires.

Community Wildfire Protection Planning – The CSFS has hired a full-time temporary Community Wildfire Protection Plan Coordinator. The Coordinator will be responsible for working with our districts and local communities to develop CWPPs, map completed CWPPs, identify areas within those CWPPs where implementation is occurring, and analyze funding trends for CWPP development and implementation.

Currently, the Colorado State Forest Service facilitates the development of CWPPs, either through the local CSFS district office or through the Outreach Forester at the State Office. The CSFS is an important stakeholder in the development of CWPPs, and provides technical assistance to communities during the development and implementation of their plans. The CSFS also is responsible for ensuring that all CWPPs follow development guidelines and meet the minimum standards established by the CSFS.

To develop a CWPP, a community is required to follow the basic minimum standards provided by the CSFS. The minimum standards state that the community and all affected stakeholders must have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of the planning process to ensure engagement and collaboration among all groups. To fully qualify as a CWPP, as defined in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the CSFS must review plans to ensure that they meet the recommended guidelines and minimum standards.

The CSFS offers workshops that provide information on how to develop a CWPP, emphasizing collaboration with community and all stakeholders from the beginning. Workshops provide communities the opportunity to ask questions about how to develop a CWPP, who should be involved, how to facilitate the process, grant opportunities, etc. In addition to workshops, CSFS district offices and State Office personnel respond to phone calls and emails about the CWPP process. The number of requests for assistance continues to increase as competitive grants that require communities to have a completed CWPP in place increases. Funding provided through HB09-1199 will allow the CSFS to respond more effectively to these requests, which will help communities compete for limited grant funds to implement their CWPPs.

The CSFS also maintains the only statewide web database of CWPPs approved by the CSFS, as well as a library of printed copies of all plans. The web database is updated as new CWPPs are developed or existing plans are modified. As of December 2010, 159 CWPPs have been developed in Colorado (27 are countywide CWPPs), and 23 of the plans are in various stages of implementation. Funding provided by HB09-1199 for a temporary full-time CWPP Coordinator allows the CSFS to monitor where CWPP implementation is occurring and provide information to communities on available grants to develop and/or implement CWPPs.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RISK MITIGATION

Insect and Disease Assessments – The Colorado State Forest Service now has a cadre of five personnel who participate in the annual aerial survey of Colorado’s forests and receive annual training to maintain their level of expertise. This information is used to develop the annual forest health report that is presented annually to the Colorado legislature. This enhances our ability to provide timely information on insect and disease activity and trends. The information also is useful in planning proactive treatments to improve forest health and remove dead fuel accumulations. To further enhance our aerial survey program, the CSFS contracted with an aerial survey expert who provides training to our personnel in aerial surveying, and has expertise in forest pathology. Access to this level of expertise supports the efforts of the CSFS to identify and address emerging forest health issues. The ability of our personnel to conduct aerial surveys on their local districts provides them firsthand information on local forest conditions, which leads to effective planning with partners to determine where the need for forest management is most critical. In 2009, the CSFS completed the *Colorado Statewide Forest Resource Assessment*, followed by the *Colorado Statewide Resource Strategy* in 2010. Together, these documents identify important forest landscapes and identify strategies to address the most critical issues. The annual aerial survey, combined with the assessment and strategy, provides a powerful tool to identify where forest management will be most beneficial.

The CSFS has hired contractors to provide the GIS expertise and support necessary to assist with wildfire and insect and disease assessments, as well as landscape-scale prioritization and planning. The expertise the contractors provide will increase our ability to produce maps depicting insect and disease aerial survey results, fire hazard data and forest cover. It also will enhance our ability to track Community Wildfire Protection Plan development and implementation, and assist communities that are updating their plans to incorporate new information.

COMMUNITY WATERSHED RESTORATION

Community Watershed Restoration Projects – Seventeen community watershed restoration projects totaling 1,400 acres were awarded a cumulative \$970,000 to demonstrate a community-based approach to forest restoration; these projects will be completed in 2011. Grant recipients will provide an estimated \$1.15 million in matching contributions (cash and in-kind), nearly twice the required match, to ensure that the projects are completed as planned. Several of the projects will involve the use of Colorado Youth Corps crews, who will gain valuable life skills and hands-on experience. Following is a list of funded projects (listed alphabetically):

- Bellyache Ridge Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project, Eagle County, \$30,000
- Buffalo Creek Forest Health Plan, Jackson County, \$61,200
- Dalla Mountain Park Fire Mitigation, La Plata County, \$20,791
- Deer Creek Watershed Restoration, Park County, \$100,000
- Deer Mesa/Mailbox Subdivision Fuels Mitigation and Watershed Protection Project, San Miguel and Montrose counties, \$41,850
- Estes Park Center Fuels Reduction/Fire Mitigation, Larimer County, \$25,000
- Grand County Hazard Tree Removal Along Road ROW, Grand County, \$63,000
- Grand Junction Watershed Protection and Fuel Reduction Program-Phase II, Mesa County, \$35,000

- Greenbelt D Continued Firebreak, Grand County, \$30,000
- Heil PA5 Forest Restoration Project, Boulder County, \$100,000
- Palisade Watershed Fire Mitigation Project, Mesa County, \$20,000
- Ralph Price Reservoir Northwest Forest Thinning, Boulder County, \$60,000
- Shamrock Ranch Phase IV Mitigation, El Paso County, \$40,000
- Town of Breckenridge/Summit County Fuels Reduction and Watershed Protection Project, Summit County, \$148,259
- Watson Island Restoration Project, Mesa County, \$85,000
- White Ranch Open Space Park Forest Restoration and Watershed Protection, Jefferson County, \$39,900
- Upper Fraser Forest Health Project, Grand County, \$70,000

Prescribed Fire – In addition to providing technical assistance and ongoing long-term involvement on prescribed fire projects across the state, the CSFS has been working collaboratively with multiple federal, state and county agencies; private landowners; contractors; non-governmental organizations; Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association (CSFCA); Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD); and other entities to develop and facilitate the Colorado Prescribed Fire Council. The goal of the Colorado Prescribed Fire Council is to “Promote, Educate and Increase the *appropriate* use of prescribed fire in Colorado.”

Among other accomplishments, the Colorado Prescribed Fire Council was instrumental in initiating SB10-102, Certified Burner Legislation. This legislation requires the CSFS to work with the council to develop standards for training and certification of prescribed fire users. The standards must include certified/non-certified designation; processes and procedures for certified burners to follow when conducting a prescribed burn; and recommended organizational structures for prescribed burn operations. The CSFS also must identify preexisting fees, permit requirements, liabilities, liability exemptions, and penalties for burn personnel and landowners. The CSFS is tentatively planning to present a draft of these standards to the Colorado Prescribed Fire Council in February 2011.

The CSFS has worked closely with Colorado State Parks to implement the use of prescribed fire on State Parks lands. Prescribed fire helps reduce hazardous fuels while improving wildlife habitat, aesthetics and recreational opportunities.

ENHANCED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Revolving Fund – Colorado State University has granted the CSFS approval to develop formal contractual agreements with cooperating Business Loan Fund (BLF) organizations. Signed contracts and the scope of work will be in place by January 31, 2011. HB09-1199 BLF concept applications have been prepared and will be distributed during the HB09-1199 BLF workshops to be held in the eligible 15-county area. Agreement has been reached with two cooperating BLF organizations on the qualitative and quantitative HB09-1199 BLF applicant rating and reporting requirements. The objective is to assist existing and new forest products businesses develop capacity to utilize wood generated from forest management activities. Supporting the use of local wood can help offset the cost of forest management, allowing the treatment of additional to improve forest health and reduce fuel loads.

Air-quality and Woody Biomass Technologies – The CSFS has contracted with an energy consultant to work with the Governor’s Energy Office (GEO) to review current and proposed new federal and state air quality policies and regulations to determine their impact on the adoption and operation of current woody biomass energy technologies. The contractor will enhance and facilitate meetings and communication between the CSFS and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. In addition, the GEO awarded the CSFS a contract to develop and conduct not less than five woody biomass-to-energy professional trainings, workshops and conferences across the state to enhance the opportunities for woody biomass in bio-heating and energy applications. The CSFS is updating the widely distributed, non-technical woody biomass heating guide for communities. Using wood for heat is important for people across Colorado, especially in rural areas. Working with other agencies to support and implement the best available technology provides benefits to all involved.

IMPROVED OUTREACH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

One-stop Shop for Forestry Information – The CSFS hired a full-time temporary web coordinator to update and enhance the CSFS website on a daily basis, and is in the process of replacing that position with a temporary web manager who possesses advanced web design and web management skills to further enhance the CSFS website. The web manager also will assist with development and implementation of a web marketing plan to promote the site as the go-to source for forestry information. Our website is an important venue to present information, including the *Colorado Statewide Forest Resource Assessment* and *Colorado Statewide Forest Resource Strategy*. These documents identify important forest landscapes and provide strategies to address current and emerging threats. The use of GIS technology and the World Wide Web allow us to combine diverse sources of information to answer specific questions about our forest resources and wildfire risk. We can provide a comprehensive overview to address questions about where our forest resources are being negatively affected by insects and disease, where areas of high wildfire risk are located in important watersheds or close to communities, and where important wildlife habitat needs to be conserved.

In addition, the CSFS Outreach Division is developing a series of forestry “Quick Guides” that will provide information about forest types, forest management, wildfire mitigation and other topics to landowners, forestry professionals and other stakeholders. The guides are designed to be print-on-demand publications that can be easily downloaded from the CSFS website. In addition, the CSFS is printing quantities of some of the guides for use at workshops, homeowners’ association meetings and targeted special events.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information about HB09-1199 accomplishments, contact Joe Duda, Forest Management Division Supervisor, Colorado State Forest Service, at 970.491.7546 or jduda@lamar.colostate.edu; Katherine Timm, Outreach Division Supervisor, Colorado State Forest Service, at 970.491.7698 or katherine.timm@colostate.edu; or Jeff Jahnke, State Forester/director, Colorado State Forest Service, at 970.491.6303 or jeff.jahnke@colostate.edu.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Colorado State Forest Service website – <http://csfs.colostate.edu/index.shtml>

Colorado Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy – <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/statewide-forest-assessment.html>

Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing Program (CoWood) – <http://csfs.colostate.edu/cowood/>

Community Wildfire Protection Planning – <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/community-wf-protection-planning.html>