




COLORADO

Division of Fire Prevention & Control

Department of Public Safety
690 Kipling Street, Suite 3000
Lakewood, CO 80215

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor John Hickenlooper &
Members of the Colorado General Assembly

FROM: Paul L. Cooke, Director 

DATE: April 28, 2015

RE: 2015 Wildfire Preparedness Plan

Colorado law; specifically Section 24-33.5-1227 (2) (a), C.R.S. requires the Director of the Division of Fire Prevention and Control to develop an annual Wildfire Preparedness Plan, in collaboration with a representative of the County Sheriffs of Colorado, a representative of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs' Association, the Director of the Office of Emergency Management and the Adjutant General.

The Wildfire Preparedness Plan shall be designed to address the following:

- (1) The amount of aerial firefighting resources necessary for the state of Colorado at times of high and low wildfire risk;
- (2) The availability of appropriate aerial firefighting equipment and personnel at times of high fire risk to respond to a wildfire;
- (3) The availability of state wildfire engines and staffing of the engines at different levels of wildfire risk;
- (4) The availability of wildfire hand crews, including state inmate wildfire hand crews, at different levels of wildfire risk; and
- (5) A process for ordering and dispatching aerial firefighting equipment and personnel that is consistent with, and supportive of, the statewide mobilization plan prepared pursuant to Section 24-33.5-705.4, C.R.S.

The Wildfire Preparedness Plan shall also provide recommendations on the use of the Wildfire Preparedness Fund created in §24-33.5-1227 (1) (a), C.R.S.

Wildfire Preparedness Fund - History

The Wildfire Preparedness Fund (WPF) in Colorado was authorized by the 2006 Legislature through Senate Bill 06-096, which also appropriated funding for state fiscal years 2006 through 2010 to support implementation of the actions directed by the legislation. SB11-238 extended the annual



transfer of \$3.25 million by the Department of Local Affairs from the mineral leasing fund to the Division of Fire Prevention and Control for two years beginning July 1, 2012.

Senate Bill 13-270 amended Section 10-3-209 (4), C.R.S., and allows for appropriations to be made by the General Assembly for the Wildfire Emergency Response Fund and the WPF from insurance premium taxes (IPT) collected by the Division of Insurance in the Department of Regulatory Agencies prior to their transfer to the General Fund. However, SB13-270 did not make an appropriation for FY 2014-15 to the WPF.

The Department of Public Safety requested an annual appropriation of \$4,150,000 Cash Funds from the proceeds of insurance premium taxes to the WPF for FY 2014-15, FY 2015-16, and beyond for the ongoing funding of wildfire suppression functions within the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC). The request was approved and the moneys in the WPF are now continuously appropriated.

Situation

Wildfires occur as unscheduled emergency events in wildland fuels (prairie or forest vegetation) and in fuels that include a combination of wildland and human introduced fuels such as houses and improvements. Wildfires involve or threaten human life, residential housing, other improvements, and natural resources.

Wildfire knows no boundaries; it does not recognize jurisdictional responsibilities. A single wildfire often crosses private, county, state, tribal and federal lands and threatens communities, infrastructure, economies, and valuable natural resources that affect citizens, landowners and fire managers across all landscapes. In-as-much, wildland firefighting in Colorado is interagency in nature involving state, county, local, federal, and tribal partners.

Due to natural fuels build-up and increased population in wildland-urban interface areas, wildfires that exceed the control efforts of local and county resources are becoming more common.

Since the 1990s, the number, intensity, and complexity of wildfires in Colorado have been growing exponentially, and experts predict that it will continue to worsen. In the 1960s, the average annual number of wildfires in Colorado was 457, and these fires burned an average of 8,170 acres annually. By the 1990s the average number of fires and acres burned had more than doubled to about 1,300 fires with 22,000 acres burned. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, the average number of fires and acres burned more than doubled again.

In 2012 alone, there were a reported 6,459 wildland fires in Colorado. These fires destroyed more than 648 structures, killed 6 civilians, burned more than 259,451 acres and have caused at least \$538 million in property losses.

In the "average year", there will be 30 large wildfires in Colorado that will destroy 113,000 acres of land and will result in \$41.8 million in fire suppression expenses.

Preparedness Planning Assumptions

- Public and firefighter safety is the priority.
- Wildfires that exceed the capabilities of local and county resources will occur.
- Wildfires will threaten lives, property, and natural resources.
- No single entity or jurisdiction alone can suppress every wildfire.
- Successful suppression and extinguishment of catastrophic wildfires require organized interagency cooperation at all levels of government.
- Ensuring that state wildfire resources are identified, staffed, and positioned to respond will prevent some wildfires from becoming large catastrophic events and will assist in the containment and suppression of those wildfires that do escape initial attack.

Fire Season Outlook 2015

In late April and early May of every year, scientists and land managers produce coordinated outlooks for fire season across the western US to better prioritize resources. While it is too early to forecast with accuracy what the 2015 fire season will bring, the current National Predictive Services models indicate a more active fire season than 2014, but not as active as 2012.

The driest conditions exist in northwest Colorado. Southwest and eastern Colorado benefited from several snow events in February and early March, but have experienced below average moisture since. Below average moisture is noted across the plains during the last several weeks as well.

Fire risk will remain elevated until green-up, especially east of the divide (Lower foothills and Plains). These areas will continue to be more susceptible to occasional wind/low humidity events as storms systems move through the region.

Colorado's Wildfire Management Goals

Suppression costs escalate significantly as fire size increases. A wildland fire becomes a local emergency before it evolves into a State, then regional, then national incident. Colorado's wildfire management program should continue to hold as a high priority the strengthening of first response firefighting forces to safely and effectively suppress wildland fires.

Fast, aggressive, initial attack on new fires (for fires where full suppression efforts is the appropriate management response) can reduce the number of mega fires that may burn hundreds of homes and cost the taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in suppression costs. The safety of firefighters and the public will continue to be the first priority in all fire management activity.

DFPC's goal for wildfire management is to keep all wildfires with values at risk smaller than 100 acres and to suppress all fires in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas at less than ten acres, 98% of the time.

Enabling Objectives

Because DFPC's role is primarily to support local and county firefighting organizations, in order to achieve this wildfire management goal, accomplishment of the following enabling objectives will be necessary:

1. Generate an incident assessment for every fire within 60 minutes of report or detection.
2. Deliver the appropriate aviation suppression resources to every fire within 60 minutes of the request.

Aviation assets will be strategically located based on preparedness levels, interagency situational awareness of fire activity, weather, National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) indices, location of other aerial assets, etc.

2015 Wildfire Preparedness Plan

Following is a summary of the activities that will be implemented to address the required components of the annual Wildfire Preparedness Plan as well as facilitating the achievement of DFPC's wildfire management goals:

Wildland Fire Management

Wildland fire management services, technical assistance, and will continue to be implemented and delivered to counties and local fire departments through the wildland fire operations branch, consisting of the Branch Chief of Wildland Fire Operations and the Area and Regional Fire Management Officers (FMOs).

Aerial Firefighting Resources

The 2015 plan for DFPC aerial firefighting resources will be based on wildfire risk and need, as well as available funding, and may include any number of potential arrangements. To the degree practicable and possible, the minimum deployment of DFPC aerial firefighting resources will be:

Multi-Mission Fixed-Wing Aircraft – In order achieve the goal of generating an incident assessment for every fire within 60 minutes of report or detection of a wildfire, DFPC will operate two fixed-wing multi-mission aircraft.

Rotor-Wing Multi-Mission Aircraft – In order achieve the goal of providing the appropriate aviation suppression resources to every fire within 60 minutes of the request, DFPC will operate a minimum of three helicopters through an exclusive-use contract.

Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs) – In order achieve the goal of providing the appropriate aviation suppression resources to every fire within 60 minutes of the request, DFPC will operate a minimum of two SEATs through an exclusive-use contract.

Principal funding for DFPC's fire aviation program will be from a General Fund appropriation. The estimated total program costs for 2015 are **\$9,491,686**.

Suppression & Prescribed Fire Program

DFPC's Suppression and Prescribed Fire Program will address the required availability of state wildfire engines and staffing of the engines at different levels of wildfire risk; as well as the availability of wildfire hand crews, including state inmate wildfire hand crews, at different levels of wildfire risk.

The 2015 plan for state engines will be based on wildfire risk and need, as well as available funding, and may include any number of potential arrangements, including:

- Strategically Located State Engines (with Permanent, Seasonal, and/or Interagency staffing)
- Strategically Located Super Modules (Type 4 and Type 6)

To the degree practicable and possible, the minimum deployment of state engines will be:

- 4 DFPC staffed engines
- 5 state engines staffed jointly by DFPC and local agencies; and
- 4 call-when-needed engines operated by local agencies.

Wildland Fire Modules

For the 2014 Wildfire Preparedness Plan, DFPC proposed the formation of two Wildland Fire Modules (WFMs), each staffed with ten individuals. Their purpose is to conduct operations involving planned and unplanned wildland fire events with expertise in the areas of initial attack, ignition, holding, suppression, prescribed fire preparation and implementation support, hazard fuels reduction, aviation operations and fire effects monitoring. However, implementation of the WFMs was predicated on approval of a budget decision item that would convert 20 temporary (seasonal) firefighter positions into permanent-part time positions. Since the budget decision item was not approved, the WFMs were not implemented. DFPC leadership believes there is significant benefit to be derived from implementing WFMs and is proposing to resubmit its request to convert 20 temporary (seasonal) firefighter positions into permanent-part time positions.

As proposed, the WFMs would be stationed on the Western Slope and Front Range areas of Colorado. Their key focus would be rapid response initial attack and they will have the skills and flexibility to change missions rapidly and to adapt to the unique character of each wildfire situation. The overriding objective is for these modules to be able to mobilize rapidly for emerging incidents, work with both air and ground-based firefighting resources, and help suppress fires before they become large and destructive. If requested, they may join together within a 4-5 hour time span into a fully qualified, equipped and skilled Type 2 (IA) hand crew. In addition, they may also serve as a helitack module; plan and implement prescribed fires at all complexities; assist with incident management on rapidly evolving incidents; collect and input data into the Colorado Wildfire

Information Management System (CO-WIMS); provide wildfire and prescribed fire training; and manage multiple resource objective incidents.

Veterans Fire Corps Program

Senate Bill 15-205 would authorize DFPC to utilize the Wildfire Preparedness Fund to assist in the training, equipping, and supervision of hand crews employed by Veterans Fire Corps Programs in Colorado for wildland fire mitigation and suppression.

There are three organizations in Colorado that currently maintain a veterans' fire corps program: the Southwest Conservation Corps in Durango and Salida, the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in Steamboat Springs, and the Western Colorado Conservation Corps in Grand Junction. Each organization forms its working members into 10-member crews. In total, the three programs will stand up four or five veterans' fire corps hand crews annually which will be available for wildland fire mitigation and suppression assignments.

Estimated Expenditures Under SB 15-205	
<u>Cost Components</u>	<u>FY 2015-16</u>
Crew Supervisor Personal Services	\$172,220
Crew Supervisor Capital Outlay and Operating Expenses	\$91,068
Training for Veterans' Fire Corps Hand Crews	\$120,400
Personal Protective Equipment for Hand Crews	\$25,000
Tools for Hand Crews	\$31,200
Total	\$439,888

State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT) Crews

DFPC will continue to support the State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT) crews operated by CCI; providing training, logistical and/or overhead support that may be needed to ensure operational readiness and hazardous fuel reduction projects.

DFPC will also ensure the maintenance of process for ordering and dispatching aerial firefighting equipment and personnel that is consistent with, and supportive of, the statewide mobilization plan prepared pursuant to Section 24-33.5-705.4, C.R.S. DFPC will provide the technical assistance and program management that identifies local, county, and state resources; their qualification to national standards; and their listing in interagency zone dispatch centers and in the Colorado Statewide Resource Mobilization System.

2015 Preparedness Fund Budget

The 2015 Preparedness Fund Budget estimate reflects funding specifically authorized and appropriated from §24-33.5-1227 (1) (a), C.R.S. It is based on state Fiscal Year 2015/16 that runs from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.

**Division of Fire Prevention & Control
2015 Wildfire Preparedness Budget Estimate**

	FY 2012-13 ACTUAL	FY 2013-14 ESTIMATE	FY 2014-15 ESTIMATE	2015 PLAN (FY 2015-16)
Beginning Fund Balance	\$2,849,811	\$2,152,158	\$1,809,075	\$1,973,100
Appropriation	\$3,250,000	\$3,250,000	\$4,150,000	\$4,150,000
Other Revenues	\$65,485	\$285,000 (1)	\$95,000 (2)	\$95,000 (2)
Total Revenue	<u>\$6,165,296</u>	<u>\$5,687,158</u>	<u>\$6,054,075</u>	<u>\$6,218,100</u>
Fire Aviation Program				
Salaries & Operating	\$518,520	\$255,581	\$101,206	\$0
SEATs (EU Contract)	\$1,279,675	\$1,082,750	\$0	\$0
Contingency	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Subtotal	<u>\$1,798,195</u>	<u>\$1,338,331</u>	<u>\$1,101,206</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
Fire Management Program				
Wildland Fire Management				
Section Management (3)	\$607,653	\$536,388	\$509,773	\$621,868
FMO Salaries	\$569,612	\$876,919	\$864,222	\$971,233
FMO Operating	\$130,564	\$343,516	\$314,072	\$376,479
Subtotal	<u>\$1,307,829</u>	<u>\$1,756,823</u>	<u>\$1,688,067</u>	<u>\$1,969,579</u>
Suppression & Prescribed Fire Program				
Engine Crews & Operating	\$375,798	\$495,410	\$647,890	\$680,285
Wildland Fire Module	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000
Severity	\$0	\$1,800	\$186,000	\$195,300
Veterans Fire Corps				
Program Support	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$439,888
Subtotal	<u>\$375,798</u>	<u>\$497,210</u>	<u>\$833,890</u>	<u>\$2,315,473</u>
Vehicle Maintenance Shop				
Salaries	\$33,751	\$38,733	\$39,587	\$41,566
Operating & Repairs	\$422,034	\$246,986	\$68,225	\$71,636
FEPP Engine Replacement	\$75,531	\$0	\$300,000	\$315,000
Subtotal	<u>\$531,316</u>	<u>\$285,719</u>	<u>\$407,812</u>	<u>\$428,203</u>
Contingency				
SWIFT Crew Contingency	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000
Subtotal	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>

Total Preparedness Fund	<u><u>\$4,013,138</u></u>	<u><u>\$3,878,083</u></u>	<u><u>\$4,080,975</u></u>	<u><u>\$5,763,254</u></u>
Ending Balance	<u><u>\$2,152,158</u></u>	<u><u>\$1,809,075</u></u>	<u><u>\$1,973,100</u></u>	<u><u>\$454,846</u></u>

Notes:

- (1) This amount represents a transfer from the Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Fund (HFVCF) pursuant to SB14-154.
- (2) This amount represents a transfer from the Severance Tax Operational Account pursuant to SB14-154.
- (3) This line includes funding for management of the Wildland Fire Management Section including a portion of the expenses related to Incident Business and General Office, and support of the Interagency (Zone) Dispatch Centers.

DFPC may use the moneys in the Wildfire Preparedness Fund to implement the Wildfire Preparedness Plan, including:

- (a) purchasing, acquiring, leasing, or contracting for the provision of firefighting aircraft, engines and other vehicles, facilities, equipment and supplies for firefighting and other emergencies;
- (b) the retrofitting, staffing, maintenance, operation, and support of firefighting aircraft, engines and other vehicles; and
- (c) to provide funding or reimbursement for the purchase of fire shelters by volunteer fire departments in order to comply with applicable federal requirements.

DFPC may enter into agreements to provide firefighting services, including personnel or firefighting aircraft, engines, or other vehicles to federal, state, or local agencies.

Concurrence

The following organizations and individuals were consulted in the development of the Wildfire Preparedness Plan and concur with the recommendations contained therein:

For the County Sheriffs of Colorado

Printed Name

Signature

For the Colorado State Fire Chiefs'

Printed Name

Signature

For the Director of the Office of Emergency Management

Printed Name

Signature

For the Adjutant General

H. MICHAEL EDWARDS

Printed Name

H. Michael Edwards

Signature



Concurrence

The following organizations and individuals were consulted in the development of the Wildfire Preparedness Plan and concur with the recommendations contained therein:

For the County Sheriffs of Colorado

JOSEPH K. PELLE

Printed Name

Signature



For the Colorado State Fire Chiefs'

Printed Name

Signature

For the Director of the Office of Emergency Management

Printed Name

Signature

For the Adjutant General

Printed Name

Signature

