

COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE

Wildfires in Colorado are increasing in frequency, size, and intensity with attendant impacts on our communities and local watersheds. The solutions are not easy or quick; so, the time to start working to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfires is NOW!

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) were authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) passed by Congress and signed into law by President George Bush in 2003. Following the passage of SB09-001, Colorado added a requirement for Colorado counties to create countywide CWPPs. These initial CWPPs tended to center around wildland/urban interface communities at risk and firefighting capability. They generally failed to consider mitigation plans for other values at risk, such as critical watersheds and water supply infrastructure, roads, power corridors, and communications infrastructure. Communities and municipalities don't tend to think of these values until after a fire, when they lose services due to post-fire flooding and debris flows, or find reservoirs filled with sediment.

Critical Community Watershed Wildfire Protection Plans (CWP²), *build on and broaden* the CWPP concept to incorporate critical watersheds and source-water supplies—like catchment areas for streams, rivers and lakes—and critical infrastructure across the landscape. CWP² provides a more thorough and comprehensive planning process in order to prioritize wildfire mitigation. It is critical that participants involved in developing a CWP² think about all the important values that overlap with their community's wildfire preparedness. Water-rights holders and other water stakeholders should be key players in CWP² planning efforts, as should other infrastructure experts. The CWP² process may evaluate and update existing County CWPPs rather than creating whole new plans or may be part of a major update to a County CWPP.

Planning should *identify, assess, and prioritize wildfire mitigation* in areas managed by federal, state, local governments, along with land under private and other types of ownership, where forest management work is needed to reduce wildfire risks to the community as a whole, including critical water supplies and infrastructure.

NOW is the time to start working on a CWP², especially if your county is in an area at risk for large-scale, high-severity wildfires! Considering Colorado often suffers extreme drought, and wildfires are increasing in size and severity, planning should identify and prioritize wildfire risk-reduction needs and allow flexibility for treatment mitigation across the landscape. The suggested planning and implementation horizon is 10 years, with more frequent updates to include changing forest health conditions or new values such as new developments or infrastructure.

The ultimate goal is not to complete just another plan, but to effectively identify risks, prioritize needs, and implement projects that will protect watersheds, essential infrastructure, and your communities.

For additional information and assistance contact your local Colorado State Forest Service office, or visit <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wildfire-and-watershed-assessment>.

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