

**Summit County Wildfire Council  
Meeting Minutes  
September 20, 2018  
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.  
Buffalo Mountain Room  
County Commons  
Frisco, CO**

**Attendees:** Paul Kuhn, Dan Gibbs, Bill Jackson, Dan Schroder, Ken Wiegand, Beth Huron, Lisa Loncar, Jim Curnutte, Maggie Hillman, Matt Benedict, Lisa Lewis, Joel Dixon, Jen Barchers

- I. Approval of Agenda:** The Chair opened the meeting at 1:38 p.m. and introductions were made around the room. The agenda was approved without changes.
- II. Approval of June 20, 2018 Minutes:** Matt Benedict moved to approve the June 20, 2018 minutes. Ken Wiegand seconded the motion; all were in favor and the minutes were approved without changes.
- III. Fire District Community Engagement:** The fire districts have been very busy with community engagement activities this year. Red, White and Blue has performed 215 voluntary individual structure evaluations to date, compared to 74 last year. Matt Benedict has spoken to approximately 400 people at HOA meetings, with requests for presentations still coming in. The district has helped to establish more Firewise neighborhoods than in previous years and has distributed 60 new reflective signs. The Town of Blue River installed five new cisterns and plans to install seven more next year; an additional two are under construction near Hoosier Pass. With new mutual aid agreements in place between fire districts, Red, White & Blue has sent firefighters to five fires on mutual aid, and crews have spent 11 weeks outside the county. The wildfires in Northern Colorado this season have been significant in that many are occurring in spruce/fir forests, and several have flared up again after a short monsoon season. Residents of mountain communities are increasingly aware of the need for wildfire mitigation and public engagement is much higher than it has been in years. Since May 1, Steve Lipsher with Summit Fire & EMS has conducted 45 voluntary defensible space/wildfire preparedness reviews with local residents, and 71 mandatory defensible-space inspections at new construction sites. The increased demand for wildfire mitigation assistance, along with increasing costs of firefighting and mitigation projects are very challenging for the fire districts. Summit Fire & EMS and Red, White & Blue are working together to ensure they are providing consistent messaging to the public.
- IV. Chipping Program Outcomes to Date:** Based on the tracking numbers received to date, we can extrapolate that the total number of homes at the end of the 2018 program will exceed last year's participation, which was the highest number of participants since the program's inception. Staff will know the total chip volume in mid to late October when Timberline loads and hauls chips to Climax. The chipping program captures a lot of small debris, which is important in terms of wildfire mitigation (small flashy fuels). The contractor asked for a change order in the third week of the program to hire a third crew to keep up with the volume. The

initial contract was \$110,505.00, with \$55,252.50 added for the third crew. Dan has received 117 emails through the county website, and countless phone calls concerning missed piles. Discussion followed on how to improve program management with the increased demand:

- Staff suggested that the council form a workgroup to brainstorm program changes for next year.
- It has been a challenge to keep up with the volume and stay on schedule this year.
- The amount the county has paid on the contract has gone down since the first year, but overall volume of wood has increased.
- Initial suggestions:
  - Pay based on volume;
  - Choose contractor based on adequate equipment;
  - Multi-year contract approach;
  - Address the issue of HOA's that put out large volumes of wood.
- Staff will invite contractors to participate in the work group to get their input, as well as representatives from each town.

**V. Round Table Discussion – Activities of Wildfire Council Members and Partners:**

- Ken Wiegand suggested that staff contact the Summit Daily News to write a full article outlining the challenges of this year's program.
- Dan Gibbs attended the Colorado Wildland Fire Conference meeting yesterday, including a panel discussion of management of the Buffalo Mountain Fire. The discussion provided a great way to tell a success story in our back yard.
- Jim Curnutte and Dan Schroder will present an overview of wildfire mitigation efforts in Summit County at the American Planning Association next month.
- The Dillon Ranger District hosted Senators Bennet and Gardner at the Buffalo Mountain Fire site. The Forest Service ran a story on their website and issued press releases about the fire, and the district has received positive feedback on their management of the fire. The district has received many requests for wildfire mitigation work. There have been more than the usual number of large fires in Colorado this year, including several on the White River District as well as the 416 fire and others throughout the state. Containment does not mean that a fire is out. The Silver Creek fire has come back to life, as well as a few others, and these fires will not be completely out until snow covers them. Many neighborhoods have requested cutting on adjacent forest property. Ruby Ranch is immediately adjacent to wilderness, which presents a challenge as the District Ranger doesn't have the authority to treat in a designated wilderness area. Vegetation manipulation in wilderness areas requires Forest Service Chief approval or Congressional/legislative action to change the wilderness boundary.
- Other Dillon Ranger District updates:
  - About 200 acres of the Ophir Mountain project are complete, which is a little less than half of the total project. The contractor has focused on Ophir North and will finish Ophir South next summer. Thick dog hair stands (around 3,000 stems/acre) have made work on the ground difficult. The contractor plans to finish two more small units near Miner's Creek trail before snowfall.
  - Forty acres in Shadow Creek Ranch will be harvested this fall, followed by South

Deep Creek.

- The District will fix the road from Spruce Creek, above Indiana Creek, in 2019 to improve access for harvesting in Indiana Gulch in 2020. Wood will come out on Boreas Pass Rd.
- The Forest Service will burn piles on Swan Mountain Road when conditions are favorable, followed by piles in Montezuma and Keystone Gulch. Crews may need to re-pile some of the piles in the Highlands and along Tiger Road before burning them. The burn plan doesn't require there to be snow on the ground, but does take fuel conditions and weather into account – but most will be done when snow is on the ground.
- The Town of Blue River has received over \$120,000 in grant funds from the county since 2011, which has allowed participating residents to receive a 50% discount on mitigation efforts. The Town provides incentive to homeowners to participate in the grant program and promotes the program each spring. The Town partners with Beetlekill Tree Guys on wildfire mitigation work, and with Red, White & Blue Fire District to inform residents of the free mitigation inspections. Fifty-seven homes (56 acres) have been treated along Hwy 9 through 2017, with 13 more homes receiving mitigation in 2018. The Town plans to contract with A Cut Above Forestry in 2019 to conduct an assessment of the properties in town and make recommendations to homeowners for needed mitigation. Cisterns have been placed in 14 locations throughout Blue River, and seven more locations are planned for 2019. Each location has two 2,600 gallon tanks.
- Summit Fire & EMS still has a crew in Kremmling at the Silver Creek fire. Ruby Ranch is considering installing a dry cistern.
- The County Emergency Manager is overseeing a working group to determine how the county can more effectively issue fire bans while working closely with the Forest Service.

**VI. Education Updates:** Staff prepared posters, banners and flyers for distribution this summer, but were unable to distribute many of the materials before the county issued fire bans. The Buffalo Mountain fire was great advertising for the chipping program and wildfire mitigation in general. The Summit Daily published an article that led some people to believe the chipping program would extend an extra three weeks. Overall, the increased wildfire activity in Colorado ended up being the best advertising for county and fire district mitigation programs.

**VII. Legislative Updates:** Bill H.R. 5171, the Ski Area Fee Retention Act, has been introduced in Congress. The Act would allow national forests to keep at least 50 percent of monies generated in that district. Ski resorts had a major part in drafting the legislation, but fire districts haven't been well represented. The county is working with Sen. Bennett and Gardner's offices to make the bill more well rounded and broaden the language to give the Forest Service more flexibility in managing fires.

## **VIII. Other Updates:**

- The four person crew hired by the Forest Service and partially funded by the county has made tremendous progress this summer. Messaging seems to have been effective, and the public did a fairly good job of following the fire ban. The seasonal crew made almost 3,000 contacts, issued 30 warnings, cleaned up many dispersed campsites, built a lot of buck and rail fencing to define allowed camping areas, installed over 200 signs, cleaned up many of redundant fire rings, and put out 10 abandoned campfires and 5 unattended campfires. Additionally, the crew closed 84 dispersed campsites across the district, cleaned up 16 squatter camps, collected 156 bags of trash, and contacted 641 occupied campsites. The Sheriff's deputies accomplished a great deal in addition to the seasonal crew's efforts.
- The Board of County Commissioners voted to enact a Stage I fire ban at noon tomorrow, consistent with the Forest Service. The restrictions will probably remain in effect until there is snow on the ground.
- Measure 1A will appear on the November ballot. The measure is a 10 year tax levy and includes \$1 million for wildfire, along with funding for other county programs. The BOCC will ask the council for recommendations on how to utilize the wildfire funds. If passed, the funds will help the county cover the cost of wildfires and could potentially help fund an attack or hand crew, address items on the "get it done" list, and partner with the Forest Service on projects that are already NEPA approved.

**IX. Next Meeting Date:** November 15, 1:30-3:30 p.m., Buffalo Mountain Room, County Commons, Frisco

**X. Adjournment:** The chair adjourned the meeting at 3:29 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Beth Huron, Summit County Community Development