

2013

# Accomplishment Report

FireWise  
Southwest Colorado



Front Cover: West Fork Fire, Archuleta County, June 16, 2013

Photo courtesy of Hon Schlapfer,  
Type 3 Incident Commander



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*The FireWise Council of Southwest Colorado strives to keep lives, homes, and property from being damaged by wildfire. We provide education, planning and mitigation support to spark wildfire preparedness in the hearts of our neighbors!*

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**Find us on the Web at:**

[www.southwestcoloradofires.org](http://www.southwestcoloradofires.org)

**Find us on Facebook at:**

[www.facebook.com/FireWiseSouthwestColorado](http://www.facebook.com/FireWiseSouthwestColorado)

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**FireWise Vision -- 2017**

FireWise of Southwest Colorado is recognized by our communities and partners as the source for wildfire preparedness education, planning and implementation. We lead the way in establishing Fire-Adapted Communities that can survive a wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters. All of the Fire Protection Districts understand and advocate the FireWise message throughout Southwest Colorado.

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## *From the Executive Director:*

It's hard to believe that our little organization is now 10 years old! Yes, that's right. It was March of 2002 when Durango Fire & Rescue stepped forward and hosted a Firewise Communities workshop in Durango in an effort to change the way that residents looked at wildfire. At the end of that workshop, then-Deputy Chief Allen Clay challenged the group as to what they were going to do with their new-found knowledge. Two months later, about 60 of the 100 participants met and decided to form FireWise of Southwest Colorado.

As with any new group, it took awhile for us to find our momentum. But momentum we now have! Ambassadors and residents reported an outstanding 17,000 volunteer hours this year!

I view 2013 as our "regroup and renew" year. We took a step back to see what we could do better or differently and made some changes. We offered several workshops in an effort to bring our many new Ambassadors (from 2012) up to speed. Re-vamping our website was also at the top of our list; though not complete, it is up and running. We also started a "Friends of FireWise" program to supplement dwindling grant funding and provide us with a discretionary funding source.

A big change in 2013 was the addition of a La Plata County Coordinator, Melody Walters, who came to us from CDOT, where she managed the Adopt-a-Road volunteer program. With over 95 Ambassadors in La Plata County, having a dedicated coordinator had become imperative. This change will allow me, as Executive Director, to focus more on strategic planning, grant writing, and partnerships.

Another goal in 2013 was to find a way to reach out to the broader community. We accomplished that through our tree-planting efforts and Chipper Rental Rebate program. In May, FireWise partnered with the SW Colorado Bar Association and planted over 2,000 seedlings at seven residences impacted by the Weber Fire in 2012. Participants included FireWise Ambassadors, community residents, and even a Girl Scout troop.

In November, myself and the Coordinators all attended the national Backyards and Beyond Conference in Salt Lake City. We took advantage of the opportunity to share the story of how firefighters were able to save all the homes in Elk Stream Ranch during the Weber fire due to the great work done by homeowners. It was a great opportunity to showcase one of our active Firewise communities and tell their story as well as learn from other good examples across the country.

Many thanks to all who help make our communities better prepared for wildfire and safer for our residents and emergency responders! I look forward to what we can accomplish in the next 10 years.

With much gratitude,

*Pam*

Pam Wilson  
Executive Director



## Weber Fire Recovery: *FireWise Lends a Helping Hand*

A \$50,000 grant award from the Colorado Fire Relief Fund allowed FireWise to assist residents impacted by the 2012 Weber Fire east of Mancos. Goals for using the funds were set in late 2012 and the projects came to fruition in 2013.

All residents with property that burned in the fire received information enabling them to apply for assistance and receive further information on a variety of recovery topics. A survey of all of the fence line reported to need replacement or repair showed that just over three miles of fencing was needed by twelve property owners.

After being informed that the BLM would not be able to replace burned fence lines around resident's grazing allotments, replacing fence was determined to be the greatest unmet need that could be provided for with this grant funding. To assist residents, FireWise shopped around for the best deals on materials, ordered in bulk for all of the applicants, and assisted in the distribution of materials. In addition to receiving the materials, the property owners were reimbursed up to \$1.20/foot for the fencing once it was rebuilt, substantially reducing the cost to the homeowners of rebuilding the fences.

A small portion of the grant also went to planning and carrying out a volunteer seedling planting project on four properties affected by the fire. Planting 1200 seedlings is no easy task, but FireWise, in partnership with the Southwest Colorado Bar Association, Colorado State Forest Service, and a bunch of volunteers did just that! Citizens State Bank, Mancos Lions' Club, and the Colorado Bar Association all provided donations and over 60 volunteers of all ages came out on April 27<sup>th</sup> to help plant these seedlings, not counting the dozen women who came together the day before to put together 100+ sack lunches.

The Dolores Conservation District provided materials to increase the trees chances of survival, including weed barrier to reduce competition and improve water retention, and mesh tree guards to keep wildlife from eating the tasty green seedlings. A great time was had by all!

Finally, the remaining funds went to help the Elk Stream Ranch Home Owners Association which has spent over \$50,000 on road maintenance after continued post-fire flooding issues.







# OBJECTIVES

The FireWise Council takes a three-pronged approach in its efforts to help residents understand their wildfire risk and actions they can take to mitigate that risk – Outreach and Education, Planning, and Mitigation. Goals within these areas that the Council strives towards annually include:

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH:

- 1) Increasing the number of Neighborhood Ambassadors
- 2) Reaching more southwest Colorado residents with information about their wildfire risk and how they can reduce that risk, and move towards becoming fire-adapted communities
- 3) Coordinating Fire Prevention and Education Month every May

## PLANNING:

- 4) Encouraging the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)
- 5) Getting subdivisions recognized in the Firewise Communities USA program

## MITIGATION/IMPLEMENTATION:

- 6) Increasing the number of homeowners undertaking mitigation efforts
- 7) Other mitigation efforts

### The Five Elements of A Fire Adapted Community

- Built Environment**
  - Appropriate home construction and maintenance resists ignition.
  - Decks should be built and enclosed with fire resistant materials to reduce heat and embers from being trapped beneath and igniting the deck.
  - Fire resistant roofing material and a well maintained roof and gutters are significant factors in protecting a home.

*A FireWise Ambassador's home features a fireproof deck. Photo courtesy of Odin Christensen.*
- Defensible Space**
  - Proper management of vegetation surrounding the home reduces the wildfire threat.
  - Creating a lean, clean, and green area within at least the first 30' of a home and along the driveway will reduce the threat from the flaming front of a fire and enable firefighters to defend a home.
  - Trees and dense shrubs should be thinned to keep the plants from touching each other or the ground, out to at least 100'. More info available through FireWise or the Colorado State Forest Service.

*Home survived 2012 Weber Fire as firefighters safely worked from its defensible space. Photo courtesy of Dan Bender.*
- Access**
  - Good access helps residents to evacuate safely and emergency responders to quickly find your home.

*Ambassadors lead residents in thinning project to improve community road access in Rancho Mira Sol, East of Durango. Photo courtesy of John Glover.*
- Evacuation**
  - Prepared communities can evacuate safely and effectively.
  - Pre-pack a bag to meet your household's needs for a week.
  - Register for reverse 911 where you live.
  - Calmly follow any evacuation orders.

*Gambel Oak was hydro mowed into a mosaic pattern and grazed by goats to create a community fuel break on BLM land adjacent to Elk Stream Ranch, a subdivision challenged by the Weber Fire in 2012. Photo courtesy of San Juan Public Lands.*
- Community Protection**
  - Well-designed fuelbreaks and safe areas protect the community.
  - Our FireWise Neighborhood Ambassador Program helps neighbors encourage their neighbors to become more aware, active, and prepared for wildfires.
  - A Community Wildfire Protection Plan can create priority fuels reduction projects within a neighborhood and on adjacent public lands.

[www.southwestcoloradofires.org](http://www.southwestcoloradofires.org)

Graphic on the inside of our 2013 phone book insert. All photos except the "Access" photo on the left are from the Weber Fire/Elk Stream Ranch area.

# EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

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## 1) FireWise Ambassador Program

The FireWise Ambassador Program is the backbone of the Council's programs. Ambassadors are volunteers within neighborhoods that help their neighbors who live in or near forests to become more aware of their fire risk and actions they can take to reduce that risk. They strive to make their community more prepared to survive a wildfire. Ambassadors may spearhead the Community Wildfire Protection Planning effort, write grants, initiate work days or numerous other actions.

Compared to 2012, our growth this year was much smaller, with only 10 new Ambassadors coming on board. In our minds, that was okay, as it allowed us to spend more time nurturing and supporting our current Ambassadors, especially those that joined the program in 2012. It also allowed us time to undertake new programs and workshops.

Lake Purgatory, Lake Durango, and Pine Ridge are all new to FireWise; the remaining communities already had representatives on the Council. All the new Ambassadors are from high-risk communities as defined on our Communities of Concern maps prepared by the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College or in county-level Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs).

**La Plata County:** 8 new Ambassadors representing: Lake Purgatory (3), Lake Durango (1), The Peaks (1), Happy Scenes (1), Enchanted Forest (2).

**Montezuma County:** 1 new Ambassador – Pine Ridge

**Archuleta County:** 1 new Ambassador – Pagosa Lakes Property Owners Association

Currently, the total number of Ambassadors is 141; with 14 from Archuleta County, 29 from Montezuma County, 1 from Dolores County, and 97 from La Plata County. We currently have 10-12 potential Ambassadors who are awaiting Orientation or have not yet submitted their paperwork.

Cumulatively, Ambassadors and area residents recorded **17,000** hours of volunteer time in 2013 -- 8823 by Ambassadors and 8177 by neighbors -- more than doubling the 7,100 hours incurred in 2012. Using the Independent Sector Value of \$22.43 for a volunteer hour, the value of these hours is **\$381,406**. Ambassadors also reported a total of 6677 miles valued at \$3672.35

These hours represent time spent mitigating their own properties, sharing information with neighbors, reporting at HOA meetings, CWPPP development, and attending Fire Council meetings and FireWise workshops. Some Ambassadors host community work days and track hours put in by neighbors, others ask for volunteer hours from their neighbors on a monthly basis. Our new volunteer database allows residents doing mitigation work or helping with CWPPs to enter their own hours, if desired.

Accomplishments for the **Education and Outreach** component are listed below by County.



# Archuleta County

This year the citizens of Archuleta County continued working to educate themselves and their neighbors about the risk of wildfire and ways to minimize that risk. As the skies filled with smoke from the West Fork Complex fire last summer, many more people began to realize that wildfire is part of the ecosystem, and yes, it can happen here.

## Ambassador Program:

The number of Ambassadors grew by only one, however, we have several others that have expressed interest and we hope to get them signed up and to an Orientation in early 2014. Meetings with the Ambassadors were held almost every month where ideas and techniques were shared and enthusiasm refueled. There are currently four subdivisions working on Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), including Pagosa Lakes Property Association, which should be completed in 2014. Numerous mitigation efforts were undertaken.

**Participating Subdivisions/Areas**

- Aspen Springs (1)*
- Chimney Rock area (1)*
- Crowley Ranch (1)*
- Echo Canyon Ranch (2)*
- Loma Linda (1)*
- Lower Blanco (2)*
- Pagosa Lakes POA (2)*
- Sportsmans Campground (1) (Hinsdale County)*
- Spring Valley Ranch (1)*

## Education/Outreach:

Across the county, FireWise participated in numerous activities in an effort to reach out to more residents and get them interested in becoming FireWise. As with 2012’s Little Sand Fire, the West Fork Complex in mid-June provided us an opportunity to share information with residents. Coordinator Bill Trimarco participated in community information meetings that were held during the Fire and FireWise shared fire updates with their ever-expanding e-mail list.



FireWise articles were published in the Pagosa Sun every two weeks during fire season and occasionally at other times. Bill was a guest speaker on the “Positive About Pagosa” radio show which was aired on both AM and FM stations.

In partnership with the Archuleta County Extension Office, FireWise offered a Home Ignition Zone & Defensible Space Workshop and also conducted home ignition zone and property assessments throughout the county.



FireWise also hosted a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, or CWPP, workshop in Pagosa Springs to help Ambassadors better understand the effort that goes into a CWPP.

Using grant funding from Archuleta County, FireWise instituted a Chipper Rebate program, which paid out almost \$2300 to 22 lot owners, helping them chip slash on 65 acres of private land.



## Collaborative Efforts:

FireWise continues to be an active collaborator with both the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership (SJHFHP) and the Stollsteimer Watershed Working group.

The **San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership**, a diverse group of citizens and agency representatives, has done a significant amount of work within the community to identify the issues in the area concerning our forests and what we envision for them. The group was instrumental in gaining funding for Cloman Park, a new county park on what used to be a parcel of BLM land. Besides providing valuable open space, this park will also be a monitoring site where residents can see various types of mitigation practices and their effectiveness. SJHFHP is currently working on a watershed assessment for the area encompassed by the Pagosa Ranger District, which will identify wildfire threats to the watershed as well as actions to minimize those threats.



*Looking at a map on the field trip.*

In partnership with the SJHFHP and the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, FireWise co-sponsored a review of the 2012 Little Sand Fire, as this 25,000-acre fire was the largest the county had seen in decades. This event comprised a full day of interactive talks with experts and community members who were impacted by the fire. Day two of the event was a guided tour of the fire area where participants could see the changes that had occurred one year after the fire. Coincidentally, participants on the tour were present to view the pyrocumulus cloud that marked the beginning of the West Fork Complex Fire's flare-up into a major event.



*Participants on the Little Sand fire field trip.*

FireWise facilitated several meetings of the **Stollsteimer Watershed Working Group** in 2013. Over the past year, this group of concerned citizens and agencies has mapped out mitigation work done within the Stollsteimer Creek watershed and on adjacent federal and Southern Ute lands. Fire behavior modeling was used to help determine what areas in the watershed are most at risk from a large wildfire. This project was part of a larger effort to try and determine where hazardous fuel treatments are needed on both public and private lands.



*The column from the West Fork Fire, June 16, 2013.*

The group has chosen a location for a new demonstration area in Aspen Springs, which includes both road right-of-way areas and private lots, which will be mitigated this spring and can be easily viewed by residents. The demonstration site(s) will be funded by a grant that FireWise received from Archuleta County. The project was delayed last summer due to the West Fork Complex Fire but is ready to be implemented as soon as weather permits.

# La Plata County

## Ambassador Program:

We welcomed eight new Ambassadors in La Plata County this year. Two of the neighborhoods, Lake Durango and Lake Purgatory, have not participated with FireWise in the past.

In July, Melody Walters became our new La Plata County Coordinator. Melody came to us from CDOT where she managed the Adopt-a-Road volunteer program for 16 counties. Melody was born and raised in the rural landscape of the South. Her love of the mountains and wide open spaces brought her to Durango in 2008. She lives in the Bayfield area with her husband and two daughters, as well as several “four-legged children.” She has an extensive background in fire science, firefighting and emergency medicine, as well as with volunteer/non-profit programs. Melody will also be serving as our Webmaster. Welcome Melody!

## Education and Outreach:

FireWise hosts bi-monthly Fire Council meetings beginning in January and these meetings are open to all Ambassadors as well as partners and the public. Meetings are generally attended by 30-45 people and all include an educational in-service on topics that might be of interest to Ambassadors and/or help them with their educational efforts with neighbors. This year’s topics included:

- A recap of the 2012 Fire Season (*Rich Graeber*) and FireWise Accomplishments (*Pam Wilson*)
- Getting Ready for Fire Season; “1/3 Mile to Safety” video
- No Excuses: Top Reasons People Don’t Mitigate and Opportunities to Address those Excuses (*Becca Samulski*)
- Deciding How to Manage a Wildfire: A Re-Cap of the West Fork Complex (*SJNF Forest Supervisor Mark Stiles*)
- WUI Residents and Wildfire Risk: Findings from On-going Research in Colorado (*researchers from the University of Colorado at Boulder and the USFS Rocky Mtn. Research Station*)
- What’s New in the World of FireWise: A Look at the Backyards & Beyond Firewise Conference (*FireWise Director and County Coordinators*)

In addition to these meetings, FireWise also wrote and sent out eleven “Don’t Get Burnt, Get Firewise” newsletters and/or a monthly E-News to our Ambassadors, partners, and other residents interested in FireWise happenings, as well as notices of upcoming presentations, articles of interest and updates on local wildfires.

### NEW PARTICIPANTS:

*Enchanted Forest (2)*  
*Happy Scenes (1)*  
*Lake Durango (1)*  
*Lake Purgatory (3)*  
*The Peaks (1)*

### EXISTING PARTICIPANTS:

*Aspen Trails (1)*  
*Cherry Creek area (1)*  
*Columbine (1)*  
*Cougar Mesa Estates (1)*  
*Deer Valley Estates (2)*  
*Durango Ridge Ranch (1)*  
*Durango West 1 (4)*  
*Enchanted Forest Estates (1)*  
*Electra Lake (1)*  
*Falls Creek Ranch (2)*  
*Florida River Estates (2)*  
*Forest Lakes (5)*  
*Grandview area (2)*  
*Heartwood Co-housing (1)*  
*Hermosa Acres (2)*  
*Hidden Ridge Ranch (1)*  
*Los Ranchitos (1)*  
*Mesa Vista (1)*  
*Rafter J (4)*  
*Rockridge (1)*  
*Sheanandoah (2)*  
*Shenandoah Highlands (2)*  
*Songbird (1)*  
*The Peaks (1)*  
*The Ranch (1)*  
*Trimble Lane area (1)*  
*Tripp Creek (1)*  
*Tween Lakes (6)*  
*Vista de Oro (1)*  
*Wilderness Lakes Estates (1)*



As part of our effort to make FireWise a household name, we started distributing our FireWise rack cards and Ambassador Program brochures to real estate and insurance companies, as well as equipment rental companies and libraries throughout the area.

FireWise was an active participant in property assessments this year, generally in coordination with the Colorado State Forest Service. FireWise talked to HOA Boards and/or assisted with assessments at: Cherry Gulch, Shenandoah Highlands and Shenandoah Estates, Tween Lakes, Rafter J, Trappers Crossing, and other miscellaneous properties.



*Bill Szilva (far left), Colorado's 2013 Tree Farmer of the Year, talks to the group about the work he has been doing on his property (located east of Bayfield, north of Hwy. 160).*

We also spoke to several different groups/events in the county including the La Plata Conservation District Landowner Workshop, Leadership La Plata, Four Corners Backcountry Horsemen, Community Connections (Vallecito), Vallecito Homeowners Association, and the Colorado Tree Farmers.

We took part in the annual Falls Creek Ranch "Fire Awareness Day" attended by our partners and about 50 residents. This is always a great opportunity to answer questions from residents and acknowledge the many hours of volunteer work put in.

a number of people who were very interested in learning more as smoke from the West Fork Complex and the Papoose Fire to the northeast had been quite prevalent in the community in mid to late June. This also gave us a chance to try out our new E-Z Up canopy!

In July, we participated in the Vallecito Arts & Crafts Fair. Though a seemingly unlikely venue, we talked to

In August, we partnered with the American Red Cross on an Emergency Preparedness Seminar in Durango; similar to ones previously done in Mancos, Dolores, and Cortez. We also had the pleasure of presenting Timberdale Ranch with their Firewise Communities recognition at their annual meeting.



As the Chipper Rebate program wound down in late fall, we were asked to visit a number of different properties to see the work that had been done over the summer and make recommendations on additional work needed. This occurred mainly in the Rafter J and Trappers Crossing subdivisions.

Also in late fall, along with local fire department personnel, emergency managers, mitigation contractors and others we participated in two different meetings with Senator Ellen Roberts. The first was to discuss recommendations made in the Governor's Task Force on Wildfire and Forest Health; the second, to discuss the recommendations that actually made it into bills to be presented in 2014.

# Montezuma County

## Ambassador Program:

In Montezuma County, one new Neighborhood Ambassador joined FireWise from the Pine Ridge/Wapiti Rim neighborhood with approximately 50 homes in a high-risk area where Summit Ridge meets Lost Canyon.

In addition, nine Montezuma County Ambassadors attended the Home Ignition Zone workshop in Mancos and five attended the Mitigation 101 workshop. An emphasis was made on evacuation preparedness this year, and expanding or improving emergency access and egress routes.

The Montezuma Chapter had several programs for ongoing education of Neighborhood Ambassadors as well as for the community and Ambassador recruitment purposes.

- CWPP mini-workshop – helping Ambassadors understand the CWPP process
- Impacts of Climate Change on Wildfire Evacuations with Marci Bidwell from the Mountain Studies Institute
- Evacuation Planning – Overview of the Ambassadors roles before and during an evacuation, and the key evacuation messages. Paramount is the concept that evacuation preparedness happens one household at a time.
- Foams and Sprays and Planning in our neighborhoods – A review of the pros and cons of exterior sprinkler or foam home protection systems and 2014 community goal setting
- Home Ignition Zone Workshop in Mancos - This weekend workshop provided participants with the knowledge and tools for examining fire hazards on and directly surrounding a home.
- Mitigation 101 Workshop – This full-day workshop gave participants the basics of how to perform mitigation and various slash treatments through demonstrations and hands-on experience. Thanks for the support by Affordable Fellers and Rent-All-Rentals.

**Participating Subdivisions/Areas**

- Cash Canyon/Stinking Springs area (3)*
- Cassidy/Sundance Canyons (4)*
- Cedar Mesa Ranch (2)*
- Elk Springs Ranch (1)*
- Elk Stream Ranch (4)*
- Glade Ranch (Dolores Cty.) (1)*
- Green Gate (1)*
- Indian Creek Ranch (3)*
- Kernen Creek Ranch (1)*
- Oakview (3)*
- Pine Ridge/Wapiti Rim (1)*
- Rd. 38.7 (1)*
- Rd. 41.2 (2)*
- Summit Lake East (1)*
- Sunwest (1)*

## Education and Outreach:

Broader community education and outreach activities included:

- Presentations to Four Corners Home Builders Association, Mancos Lions' Club, Empire Electric Association Board, and the Board of County Commissioners
- Presentations at Homeowners Association Meetings at Elk Stream Ranch, Cedar Mesa Ranches, Kernan Creek Ranch, and Pine Ridge/Wapiti Rim
- Booths at the LDS Community Emergency Preparedness Fair and the Four Corners' Ag Expo



- Partnered with the Montezuma County Fire Chief's Association to provide FireWise materials and the Ember House kids game at the Four Corners Home and Garden Show, Dolores River Festival, Mancos Days, Escalante Days, Ute Mountain Ute Sundance Festival, Cortez Wal-Mart, and Hospice of Montezuma.
- Displayed our banner in the Mancos Days and Escalante Days parades. The Chapter Coordinator made it to the semi-finals of the Escalante Days women's arm-wrestling championship sporting a Smokey Bear bandana!

In the media, the Montezuma Chapter Coordinator provided articles and interviews throughout the year. Many FireWise principles were also shared through bi-weekly articles in the paper through the Montezuma County Fire Chiefs' Association. Dove Creek youth interviewed the Montezuma Chapter Coordinator in early May on DCTV. FireWise participated in four radio interviews in Montezuma County throughout the summer.

## 2) Reaching more southwest Colorado residents:

FireWise had six main areas of focus this year to outreach to residents not involved in FireWise:

- 1) Distribute the FireWise rack card and Neighborhood Ambassador Program brochures to real estate and insurance offices as well as popular locations like county building departments, equipment rental outlets, and local libraries in all three counties.
- 2) Partnered with Directory Plus to design and distribute 33,000 copies of an informational and promotional insert in phone books within unincorporated areas in the 5-county region of southwest Colorado. The insert shared information on the services that FireWise offers and described how to create a Fire-Adapted Community.
- 3) Listed our contact information and phone number(s) in the phone book (Fire Mitigation and Protection Services – yellow pages).
- 4) Rolled-out our new website at: [www.southwestcoloradofirewise.org](http://www.southwestcoloradofirewise.org). The URL remains the same but the content is new. The new site focuses just on FireWise and contains a Volunteer Hour database where both FireWise Ambassadors and residents can report their volunteer hours and mileage. Thanks to J3 Media for their outstanding work in designing our new logo and the website!



- 5) Offered workshops that were open to both Ambassadors and the public including:
  - Home Ignition Zone Workshops in Mancos and Bayfield
  - Community Wildfire Protection Planning Workshops in Archuleta, La Plata, and Montezuma Counties
  - Mitigation 101 Workshop, Mancos
  - HIZ and Defensible Space Workshop, Pagosa Springs
- 6) Offered a Chipper Rental Rebate Program to residents in Archuleta, La Plata, and Montezuma Counties.

For more information on items 5 and 6 please refer to the section titled “Special Projects in 2013.”



### 3) Fire Prevention and Education Month:

FireWise has been coordinating with the US. Forest Service, BLM, Colorado State Forest Service, Mesa Verde National Park, and local fire departments since 2003 to sponsor Wildfire Prevention and Education Month, the theme of which is “What Are You Waiting For? Activities during the month of May include a multitude of presentations, news articles and public service announcements, and other activities to increase awareness about wildfire in southwest Colorado.

Our main activity for Fire Month in 2013 was to offer two Home Ignition Zone workshops, one in Bayfield and one in Mancos. Both were attended by 16-18 people, mostly FireWise Ambassadors. The workshops were taught by consultant (and former fire chief) Rich Graeber with assistance from BLM Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist Chris Barth, and were a big hit with the participants.

The workshops talk about wildfire cycles in the U.S., fire behavior and vulnerabilities around the home. After the classroom portion is completed, participants get some hands-on experience when they go out and conduct property assessments on a couple properties.

Following the workshop, participants are able to perform property assessments for their neighbors if they choose to, though it is strongly encouraged that someone with wildfire expertise from the Colorado State Forest Service or BLM/USFS be called in to look at larger acreage properties.



*Bayfield Workshop*



*Mancos Workshop*





# PLANNING

## 4) Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)

In 2003 the Healthy Forest Restoration Act authorized the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans, or CWPPs. HFRA calls for communities to collaborate with state and local agencies to determine priorities for hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal and private lands in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). The CWPP allows communities to develop and list priorities that affect their ability to survive a wildland fire in their area. In addition to mitigation needs, egress, education, and water availability are some of the other issues that community plans may address.

Benefits to a community include:

- ▶ Improving coordination and communication between emergency response agencies and the community
- ▶ Restoring healthier, more resilient conditions in adjoining forests
- ▶ Priority funding for projects on adjoining or nearby federal lands
- ▶ A competitive advantage in applying for grant funding

Though the Council is not directly responsible for writing CWPPs, we offer support to communities wishing to undertake them in the form of presentations to Homeowner Associations, meeting facilitation, and document review. We also assist with getting maps made through one of our partners. The Council and its partners (USFS/BLM, CSFS, Fire Departments, County GIS Departments, and County Emergency Managers) are an integral part of the collaborative CWPP process.

This year FireWise sponsored three CWPP Workshops, one in each county. Presentations were made by FireWise, CSFS, and a BLM or FS representative.

Echo Canyon Ranch in Archuleta County was the only community to complete a subdivision-level CWPP in 2013; this was also the first subdivision-level CWPP to be completed in Archuleta County.

We are very excited about several of the CWPPs that are in progress. After experiencing the Vallecito fire in November 2012, which occurred in the old Missionary Ridge burn area, the community of Vallecito decided it was time to become FireWise! They have a number of FireWise Ambassadors, hold bi-monthly Ambassador meetings, and decided to undertake writing a CWPP for the entire community surrounding Vallecito Lake. They plan to introduce the CWPP for review to seasonal residents in June, with approval to follow shortly thereafter.

And we have a couple of “firsts” happening in Montezuma County. Following the 2012 Weber Fire, the two subdivisions in East Canyon, Elk Springs Ranch and Elk Stream Ranch, decided to work together to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan; this will be our first joint community plan. Elk Stream Ranch will be the first community plan that has been updated in our area, and the



*Partners discussing work that needs to be done during a field trip at Echo Canyon Ranch in Archuleta County.*

new plan will take in a larger area and include a few parcels from outside of either association's boundaries as part of the community. The CWPP committee comprised of residents from both subdivisions hopes to complete their plan in time for adoption by their Associations in June and July of 2014.

In addition, some residents of the Cash Canyon/Stinking Springs area decided in 2013 to develop a CWPP for their area which involved defining the boundary of their community as there are no HOAs in the area. They have compiled detailed community information for inclusion in the plan, ground checked emergency access information for a detailed access and resource map for emergency responders, and drafted their mitigation plan for their CWPP. The plan is slated for completion prior to the 2014 fire season. The preliminary mitigation plan enabled them to establish priorities for mitigation work that took place this year.

In Archuleta County, work began on a CWPP for the Pagosa Lakes Property Owners Association, which supports 17 subdivisions and represents a large portion of County residents. Work is also continuing on two of the larger subdivisions in the county, Loma Linda and Timber Ridge.

The following CWPPs which are underway in each county that should be completed in 2014 or early 2015 include:

**Archuleta County:**

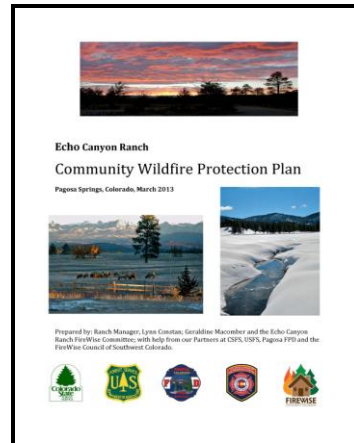
- Loma Linda
- Timber Ridge Ranch
- Pagosa Lake Property Owners Assn.

**La Plata County:**

- Edgemont Ranch
- Enchanted Forest Estates
- Forrest Groves
- Timberline View Estates
- Vallecito

**Montezuma County:**

- Cash Canyon
- East Canyon, comprised of Elk Springs and Elk Stream Ranches



Copies of completed county and subdivision-level CWPPs may be found, organized by county name, at: <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/CommunityWildfireProtectionPlans.html>

## 5) Firewise Communities USA Program

Four southwest Colorado communities became part of the FireWise Communities USA Program in 2013 bringing our total to six. Timberdale Ranch in La Plata County received their recognition in August and Rancho Mira Sol and Vista de Oro, both in La Plata County, and Elk Stream Ranch in Montezuma County received theirs in December. The other two Firewise Communities, Deer Valley Estates and Falls Creek Ranch had their status renewed for 2013.

Timberdale Ranch and Vista de Oro completed their CWPPs in 2012 and Rancho Mira Sol's was done in 2013. Elk Stream Ranch, in coordination with Elk Springs Ranch, is currently working on a CWPP for East Canyon where both subdivisions are located. The joint CWPP should be completed this year.

All four communities have active FireWise committees spearheaded by FireWise Ambassadors and have applied for and received several grants for mitigation work. In addition to creating defensible space on many properties and creating emergency contact lists for residents, each of these subdivisions has also undertaken several unique activities:

**Elk Stream Ranch** mitigated 150 feet on both sides of the single-access road which is what allowed firefighters to safely take a defensive stand against the Weber Fire in 2012.

**Rancho Mira Sol** has retrofitted a couple of ranch vehicles with water tanks, hose and other equipment that could be used during a fire emergency and has widened roads and parking areas for emergency vehicles. They also reconstructed a pond, making it deep enough for a helicopter to dip water from as well as adding a high-pressure pump to fill water tenders.

**Timberdale Ranch** instituted a line item in their budget for mitigation work and last year received a grant to purchase a brush hog attachment for their tractor to help keep the copious amounts of oakbrush at bay.

**Vista de Oro** talked a neighboring landowner into donating 8 acres of land for a new fire substation and has added several large underground storage tanks for water.



*CSFS District Forest Kent Grant and FireWise Director Pam Wilson present Ambassador Jim Tencza with the Firewise Community signs and plaque at the annual Timberdale Ranch HOA meeting in August.*



*CSFS District Forester Kent Grant presents the Firewise Communities plaques and signs at the January 2014 Fire Council meeting. L to R – JT Coyne, Philip Walters, Kent Grant, John Glover, Dustin Crandall.*

# MITIGATION/IMPLEMENTATION

## 6) Increasing the amount of mitigation undertaken

It is often difficult to gauge how much mitigation work is occurring because some people are not good at reporting their accomplishments, some think that what got done is too insignificant, and others just want to see the work done.

In FireWise language, the term “mitigation” most often refers to reducing vegetation to make a home or property more defensible against wildfire but it can also refer to a myriad of other actions that can be taken to help a community become more prepared to survive a wildfire such as improving access and egress; adding reflective home and street signage; adding water storage; maintaining emergency contact lists, and more.

There are several factors that help us determine the level of interest and work being done including:

- 1) The number of volunteer hours reported by Neighborhood Ambassadors and residents was 17,000, up from 7,100 in 2012.
- 2) The interest in our Chipper Rebate Program – we added money to the account three times and extended the deadline by one month.
- 3) The number of residents or entities not affiliated with FireWise that are applying for grants.
- 4) Local mitigation contractors were busy throughout the summer.
- 5) The number of Ambassadors wanting to complete CWPPs for their communities and who are willing to gather information and write the CWPP on their own.

Though we chose not to give reports from individual communities in this report this year, we are very excited by some of the work going on.

The quality and quantity of mitigation work is noticeably improving throughout Montezuma County. All of the Neighborhood Ambassador communities in Montezuma County reported having had some fuels reduction work done in 2013.

Road right-of-way and driveway thinning projects have become more main-stream. Within our Neighborhood Ambassador communities, mitigation work was done on evacuation routes in Cash Canyon, south from Sundance/Cassidy Canyon, Elk Springs Ranch, Kernan Creek Ranch, Pine





Ridge/Wapiti Rim, Cedar Mesa Ranches, Oakview, and North Mancos POA. Many Chipper Rental Rebate applications also indicated fuel reduction along access roads.

Several subdivisions, like Edgemont Ranch and Timberline View Estates in Durango, and Loma Linda in Pagosa sponsored community chipping days and the HOA paid for the chipping.

In addition to hazardous fuels reduction work, many of our communities are becoming much more proactive about evacuation issues. Vallecito and Echo Canyon Ranch have both posted evacuation route signs. Many communities distributed information on “Go Bags” and promoted their counties emergency notification system (Reverse 911 or Nixel).



*Oak brush piled alongside the road in Edgemont Ranch in preparation for the chipper.*

And several communities have started adding line items to their budgets for mitigation work and to support the efforts of FireWise through our Friends of FireWise program.

Please read our ***Community Success Stories*** to learn more about actions being undertaken by residents.



## 7) Other Mitigation Efforts

Back in 2010, the Colorado State Forest Service offered up some special funding called Emergency Supplemental Funding, or ESF, that would reimburse property owners up to \$470/acre for completed mitigation work. More than \$330,000 was awarded in southwest Colorado. At the end of 2012 there were still funds that had not been used which CSFS awarded to interested parties in southwest Colorado.

In 2013, \$99,059 was awarded to seven parties that completed 212.20 acres of mitigation. See the **Grants to Others** section on page 26 for a list of recipients of both ESF and other funds. Though not all the entities awarded funds are affiliated with FireWise, we appreciate, and wanted to recognize, their efforts in creating wildfire preparedness, healthier forests and safer communities.



*The city of Durango used their ESF funds to reduce ladder fuels and clump oak in open space in Twin Buttes, west of Durango.*



*Alpine Lakes (Archuleta County) used ESF funds to create a demonstration site.*



## 2013 Chipper Rebate Program

This program was designed to help residents dispose of the slash from their fuels mitigation work as the only alternatives in La Plata County and Montezuma County are burning on site (which they were reluctant to do because of drought conditions) or hauling to the transfer station. For many residents (in all counties) this trip may be 30 miles or more and many have reported making up to 20 trips to dispose of their slash and pine needles.

	Rebates	Rebate Amt.	Chipping Expenses	Mitigation Expenses	Acres Treated	Volunteer Hours
La Plata	71	\$ 13,150.77	\$ 49,866.02	\$ 63,624.45	205.3	1,038.00
Archuleta	20	\$ 2,263.55	\$ 6,473.19	\$ 2,570.00	64.5	732.50
Montezuma	19	\$ 3,005.97	\$ 9,921.03	\$ 1,000.00	95.0	484.00
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>\$ 18,420.29</b>	<b>\$ 66,260.24</b>	<b>\$ 65,474.45</b>	<b>360.8</b>	<b>2,254.50</b>

Comments on the numbers:

- Funding from BP and LPEA went just towards the La Plata County program.
- The La Plata County program started with \$7500. Additional funds were added three times and the deadline was extended once because of the program’s popularity.
- Acres are self-reported and probably a little high.
- Volunteer hours were not requested until part way through the season so are low.

Two items of note that we found very encouraging:

- 1) 11 rebates went to out-of-town property owners, demonstrating that our FireWise Ambassadors are sharing information and opportunities with their neighbors, debunking the myth that second homeowners don’t care about their property or doing mitigation.
- 2) More than 2/3 of the participants asked to be added to the FireWise e-mail list.

Typical comments received on the program included:

**Great program to help reduce the risk of wildfires and assist homeowners to defray the cost of mitigation.** Arthur Gravely, Pagosa Springs

**Great incentive!** James Sutherland, Durango

**I was able to chip approximately 4,000 pounds of dead wood and create good defensible space.** Jeff Hammon, Durango

**I am 24 and inherited four acres from my father. This program helped me make the decision to properly take care of the forested area.** Danielle Ghear, Bayfield

**I was able to gain some support from residents in part by applying for this rebate.** Dan Parkinson, Bayfield

**We knew the work was needed but this program incentivized us to do the work now.** Ronald Wooten, Pagosa Springs

***MANY THANKS to our generous sponsors – BP, La Plata Electric Association, American Red Cross, and the BLM Community Assistance program!***

## Mitigation 101 Workshop

On October 20, a pilot Mitigation 101 Workshop was held in Montezuma County to help Ambassadors and residents learn more techniques for fuel reduction in the forest. Thirteen Ambassadors and neighbors joined Rebecca Samulski, Pam Wilson, and Hans Hartman of Affordable Fellers, who put on the workshop. The workshop attendees got to explore and discuss how mitigation treatments might vary between piñon/juniper and ponderosa/oak forests.

The day began with learning how to do a slash pile burn in a backcountry setting -- from building the pile and watching it burn -- to making sure there were no hot embers left. In addition to the pile burn as a method of treating slash, attendees participated in chipping, lop and scatter, building a wildlife pile, and got to visit an area of recently hydro-mulched forest to learn additional techniques to deal with slash from forest thinning.

The workshop also discussed thinning for forest health and various methods for treating Gambel oak. Participants had a chance to try out hand and mechanized pole saws, a 15" chipper, chainsaw, brush mower, and loppers.

This was a great pilot and we hope to do more of these workshops tailored to the needs of the participants, in the future.



*Building the pile*



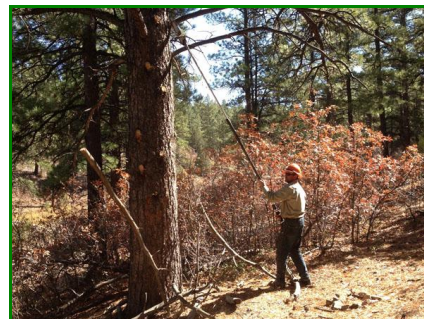
*The burning pile*



*Almost done*



*Making sure the fire is out*



## **Grant Monies Received by FireWise**

### **Grants to FireWise**

The FireWise Council was fortunate to receive several grants in 2013. All were invaluable in allowing us to sustain and grow the FireWise program and we are most grateful to all our funders. In 2013, all three counties funded the Coordinator positions for their counties and contributed to the Executive Director position, which is also funded by BLM Community Assistance. La Plata and Archuleta Counties will again be funding their Coordinator positions in 2014 and Montezuma County partially funded their coordinator.

FireWise also received funding from Archuleta County (awarded in 2012) to assist with mitigation efforts, chipper rebates, and CWPP development in the county, primarily in the Stollsteimer Watershed.

We received a \$42,600 BLM Community Assistance grant which will partially fund both the Executive Director and Montezuma Coordinator. Some funds were also used towards the 2013 Chipper Rebate Program; the remainder will be used on special projects in 2014.

We also received \$20,000 from the San Juan National Forest Service earmarked for education efforts. Part of the money helped send our Coordinators to the NFPA Backyards and Beyond Conference in Salt Lake City in Nov. 2013 and the WUI Conference in Ignacio, CO; the remaining funds will be used for Fire Prevention and Education Month activities and other education efforts in 2014.

Please see the spreadsheet on the next page for **Grants Awarded to Others**.

## 2013 Mitigation and Other Grants Awarded in Southwest Colorado

GRANT TYPE	AMOUNT	ACRES	PROJECT/NOTES
<b>Emergency Supplemental Funds (ESF)</b>			
<b>Archuleta County</b>			
Alpine Lakes Ranch	\$ 1,410.00	3	Wildfire hazard mitigation demo site
Echo Canyon Ranch	\$ 28,670.00	61	Fuels reduction on individual lots
<b>La Plata County</b>			
City of Durango, Twin Buttes Property	\$ 8,319.00	17.7	Oak mastication
Rancho Mira Sol	\$ 15,510.00	33	Forest thinning on private land
Timberdale Ranch Owners Association	\$ 16,480.00	36.5	Fuels reduction on individual lots and road ROW
<b>Montezuma County</b>			
Ray Kysar	\$ 25,380.00	54	Forest stand improvement
Sundance Bear	\$ 3,290.00	7	Fuels reduction
<b>Stevens Grant</b>			
Falls Creek Ranch	\$ 115,200.00	44.5	CWPP Project 11.0
<b>CSFS Forest Restoration Grant</b>			
Edgemont Highlands	\$ 25,000.00	38	Fuels mitigation in subdivision
San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership	\$ 101,000.00	1000	Mitigation on private & USFS lands to protect water storage facilities in the Four Mile Area (Arch. Cty)
<b>Department of Natural Resources, HB-13-269</b>			
Archuleta Chapter, FireWise	\$ 54,310.00		Establish a drop-off site for slash (for residents in Archuleta County)
Montezuma Fire Chiefs Association	\$ 22,800.00		Assist low-income residents in Montezuma Cty w/d-space
Timberdale Ranch	\$ 3,778.00		Purchase of a brush hog
Forest Lakes Metro District	\$ 260,000.00		Purchase of an air curtain burner
<b>TOTALS: \$ 681,147.00 1294.7</b>			



## Friends of FireWise

In 2013, we kicked off a “*Friends of FireWise*” program to help secure private donations to assist with our educational efforts in southwest Colorado. These funds give us some discretionary money to use as events or opportunities arise that FireWise would like to offer, be part of, or attend.

In 2013, donations allowed the sponsorship of:

- *Two Community Wildfire Protection Plan Workshops*
- *One Mitigation 101 Workshop*
- *Partnering with the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership and Colorado Forest Restoration Institute to offer the Little Sand Fire Review in June 2013.*

**MANY THANKS** to our new “Friends” and generous sponsors!

*Assn. of Wildcat and Lower Oak residents (AWOL); Colorado Timber Ridge HOA; Edgemont Ranch; Enchanted Forest Estates HOA; Forest Lakes Metro District; Kernan Creek Ranch HOA; Lake Purgatory Property Owners Association; Shenandoah HOA; Shenandoah Highlands HOA; Vista de Oro POA;*

*Bill and Laura Bales; **Bill and Marilyn Brown**; Rachele and Jeffrey Gavlinski; **Julie Hartman; Julie Hartman and Jim Forleo**; Archie Hansen; Roberta Henes; Mike and Janet Jenkins; **Maureen Keilty (book club)**; **Wayne and Barbara Kennedy**; **Ken and Debbie Kurz**; Shelley and Malcolm Leader; **Carol and Matt Linvall**; **Geraldine Macomber**; **Marilyn McCord**; Kathy and Jim Merrill; Ed Merritt Jr. Living Trust; Jo and Dianne Milarch; **Mel and Becky Owen**; **Bob and Sue Scott**; **Jim and Judy Winzell**; **Arthur and Carol Van Der Harten**; (*FireWise Ambassadors are in bold lettering*)*

*American Red Cross; Archuleta County; BLM – Southwest District; BP; Hans Hartman (Affordable Fellers); La Plata Electric Association; La Plata County; Montezuma County; John Westrup (Fire Ready); San Juan National Forest; Southwest Seed, Inc.; Ken Willyard (State Farm);*

You helped make 2013 an **AWESOME** year!



# Focus on FireWise

## Community Success Stories

A few years ago we had stories written on some of our communities that had been working really hard and made some significant accomplishments in their wildfire preparedness efforts. We decided this year would be a good time to do that again. These stories, for the most part, represent the culmination of several years' worth of work. The Ambassadors would tell you they still have a long ways to go, but all of these communities are well on their way to becoming fire-adapted communities; that is, communities that could survive a wildfire with little help from firefighters.

- Cash Canyon/Stinking Springs (Montezuma)
- Coolwater/Los Pinos (La Plata)
- Coolwater Estates (La Plata)
- Echo Canyon Ranch (Archuleta)
- Falls Creek Ranch (La Plata)
- Rancho Mira Sol (La Plata)
- Sundance/Cassidy Canyons (Montezuma)
- Timberdale Ranch (La Plata)



## Cash Canyon/Stinking Springs:

*Mitigation Helps Protect Livelihoods*

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The Cash Canyon/ Stinking Springs area sits in central Montezuma County between Dolores, Mancos and Cortez and is home to two major canyons with tributaries. The self-defined neighborhood with no homeowners association borders BLM land and consists of 3,204 acres; with 68 homes on 110 properties. Unlike many areas, most of the homes are occupied by full-time residents.

“There is a real variety in the size of the lots. Some properties are 3 acres and some are 120,” according to Montezuma FireWise Coordinator, Rebecca Samulski.

It’s a unique situation according to Ambassador, Julia Garratt, because the first thing they had to do was define ‘the community.’ “We had to invent a community based on topography and access roads in this large rural area,” explained the former archeologist and Forest Service employee. Garratt “started from square one” in January of 2012 collecting data to begin writing their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

The three FireWise Ambassadors, Everett Whitehead, Catherine Kraus and Julia Garratt, conducted a survey and collected baseline data on all the properties.

“The residents here are very independent, so it was sometimes difficult to get participation,” explained Garratt.

They compiled information on properties with special needs or unique risk conditions, along with the length of each driveway, and made notations of all access roads. Garratt also assessed the fuel load on each property which included trash and slash piles, as well as junked cars. She outlined the defensible space and created a map showing all driveways and access roads to each property for the emergency responders who come from Dolores, Cortez and Mancos Fire Departments.

In 2011, the neighborhood was awarded a \$35,000 BLM Community Assistance Grant and used it to hire a mitigation contractor to create 100-300 foot fuel breaks on the private property along the canyon rim; areas the Ambassadors felt were at greatest risk from wildfire. To date, about 60 acres of piñon and juniper have been treated by mowing dead and diseased trees and thinning others to prevent a crown fire. Ladder fuels have also been eliminated.



*An area along the canyon rim thinned using a hydro-mower.*



Another complicating factor is the amount of open farmland interspersed with ancient pinion/juniper woodland that contains “a high fuel load.” Open fields are surrounded by canyons and canyon rims with grass, sage, pinion, juniper and Gambel oak. “Pinion and juniper fires can run fast in canyons,” Garratt explains.

Several of the property owners depend on the land for their livelihood.

“At risk are a farm that supports a restaurant in Cortez, a potter who works out of her home, farms that grow hay and alfalfa, and an excavation business with lots of equipment,” said Garratt.

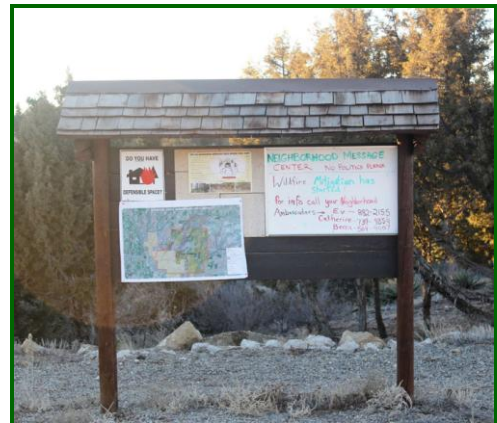
The area serves as “significant habitat” for wildlife including the bald eagle, Ferruginous hawk, leopard frog and is winter habitat for elk and mule deer. The mitigation efforts must consider their habitats while protecting against a wildfire.

Residents contributing to the effort include Ambassador Whitehead, the former Safety Officer at Mesa Verde National Park, who hosted a Chainsaw Workshop with a field exercise on his property. Montezuma County FireWise Coordinator, Rebecca Samulski, and Hans Hartman, a mitigation contractor with Affordable Fellers, also conducted a mitigation workshop in the neighborhood for the community at large.



In the past few years, there have been a few spot fires in the area that neighbors contained while waiting for the Fire Departments to arrive. As a precautionary measure, the FireWise Ambassadors set up a neighborhood burn day in the spring of 2013, encouraging burning of slash piles on safe days.

The community has set up a bulletin board with relevant wildfire preparedness information which also serves as a place they can leave messages for each other. The board was built and posted in an area that most people drive by since the neighborhood does not have a group of mailboxes.



Ambassador Garratt concludes, “To get all the work done on this enormous amount of acreage could take us 25 years. But, we’ve got a plan and we’re making progress.”

## Coolwater/Los Pinos: *The Part-Time Resident Dilemma*

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FireWise Ambassadors Julie Hartman and Susan Jones had a unique situation to deal with before they even started their FireWise program as the subdivisions have no formal HOA. Coolwater consists of 96 acres with 49 residents and Los Pinos has 43 acres and 3 residents and very few of them are year-round residents.

These subdivisions were some of the first in the Vallecito area. They were constructed by World War II veterans who loved to come there to fish. Most of the original owners are elderly, absentee or deceased and have left the properties to their children. The Ambassadors' first task was to research the current owners and build a database with contact information. Since Susan Jones is a retired Albuquerque City Planner, she went to the County Register to determine property owners.

Hartman knew the importance of creating defensible space to protect the whole subdivision. She called the fire department to get assistance and then Upper Pine Fire Chief Rich Graeber came to inspect the area.

Hartman says, "He is a very persuasive and forward-thinking advocate and helped us begin to learn how to protect ourselves from wildfire." Since the subdivision had not seen a fire in over 100 years, they knew they were living on borrowed time. "He persuaded me to get my neighbors together and taught me about FireWise."

Hartman got nominated to be the FireWise Ambassador and worked with Susan and other neighborhood volunteers. They "got their feet wet" educating themselves about the kinds of



*Visiting with the Fire Chief, District Forester, and residents about the mitigation work that was done.*

trees on the property, the history of the land, what access was needed for fire trucks and their relationship to the federal lands that surround the property through the development of their Community Wildfire Protection Plan, completed in 2012.

Hartman took the FireWise training and met the key players in the area, which included Kent Grant from the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) and representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, FireWise of Southwest Colorado and local forestry and fire mitigation professionals. She learned about BLM and CSFS grant money available, which they applied for

and received. Neighborhood volunteers complied with the required in-kind hours.

Hartman made calls and got people engaged in the process. Firefighters from the Upper Pine River Fire Protection District, now under the leadership of Chief Bruce Evans, recently mitigated

21 subdivision properties according to guidelines from the Colorado State Forest Service. The trees were cut to a prescribed density and residents made use of much of the firewood.

Though residents will use some of the wood from the mitigation project, getting rid of all the wood and slash has been a challenge. The Durango-Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and individual wood contractors were invited to take advantage of this free firewood.

“We had a very productive first year,” said Hartman. She hopes their CWPP will help them qualify for future grant money.

In 2012, the community had an end-of-the season potluck where they met for the first time with people they’d only spoken with over the phone and whose land had been mitigated through the grant.

In April of 2013, Hartman attended a two-day workshop sponsored by FireWise on the Home Ignition Zone, or HIZ, focusing on how to protect your home from wildfire and how to create wildfire-defensible zones. As a result of this workshop, a quick guide to safeguarding one’s HIZ, published by the Colorado State Forest Service, was mailed to all subdivision residents. The mailing was funded by a FireWise mini grant. Hartman will consult with anyone who wants to learn how to protect their home.



*Woodpiles like this were common throughout the neighborhood.*



*A good turnout for the first community picnic and slash clean-up day.*



*FireWise Ambassador  
Julie Hartman*

During the summer of 2013, Julie and Susan began conferring with Fire Mitigation Specialist Anthony Cabales from Upper Pine Fire Protection District regarding an evacuation plan for the subdivisions. Susan drew up preliminary maps of the roads in and out of the subdivisions and plans are underway for a neighborhood meeting to present the plan. The meeting is scheduled for early July in 2014 when many of the out-of-town owners visit. La Plata County FireWise Coordinator Melody Walters will present information on preparing for evacuation.

“We’ve learned there are a lot of people that are willing to offer their expertise and advice on making our community more prepared for wildfire,” said Hartman, “and we are so grateful for their help.”



## Coolwater Ranch Estates:

*Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

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The residents of Coolwater Ranch Estates were really lucky (thanks in part to the efforts of firefighters, ranch owners Carl and Freda Brown and Travis Leonard of Leonard and Sons Excavation) that only minimal damage was done to some trees on private property in the subdivision during the Missionary Ridge Fire in 2002. The subdivision, created in the early 1960s, sits a few miles below Vallecito Dam and consists of 12 lots ranging from one to two-and-a-half acres along the Pine River. Large portions of Coolwater Ranch (from which the lots were subdivided) and hillsides adjacent to the little subdivision were severely burned in that major fire event. That wake-up call made Coolwater Estates residents realize that wildfire can happen at any time.

Dry conditions in recent years and the increasing threat of another fire event encouraged Dan Parkinson to want to learn more and become a Firewise Ambassador. He attended many Firewise meetings and gathered a lot of information on wildfire protection planning, mitigation and creating defensible space around each property.

Prior to the Missionary Ridge Fire there was no coordinated effort to reduce the risk of wildfire damage in the subdivision. Following the initial clean up after the fire, homeowners agreed to roadway mitigation and removing debris such as downed trees and brush that were removed in 2008. With the eventual re-growth of brush and small trees the roadway had become overgrown again.

Using what he learned as a Firewise ambassador, Parkinson decided it was time to do an assessment of wildfire risks within the entire subdivision and to educate owners about wildfire readiness. With the input of fire mitigation experts Les Kole of FireWise and Dan Bowman of Woodchuck Tree Service, he reviewed the threat of fire for the entire subdivision as well as each structure and came up with a coordinated plan. He contacted all the property owners and it was decided that in addition to scheduling mitigation along the roadway, owners would have an opportunity to have mitigation done to their individual properties at the same time.



Woodchuck Tree Service cut down brush, trees and low-hanging branches that were crowding the roadway, thus creating a buffer of 15 to 25 feet on both sides of the road. In addition to providing an easier and safer access for emergency responders, “the mitigated road acts like a fire break that may protect the subdivision in the event of a ground fire approaching from the south,” shared Parkinson.



Nearly all of the property owners had some mitigation done on their lots and more work will be completed this spring.

“The overgrown areas that have been mitigated look park- like. The lots were not clear-cut but professionally manicured and it really improved overall appearance and property values,” Parkinson explains. “The forest is more open and you can appreciate the difference. We got our first hair cut and we like the look. We’ll go back for more!”

In addition to the mitigation efforts the neighbors agreed to:

- Install a Knox Box on the gated entrance to the subdivision for use by all emergency responders. Fire companies, sheriff’s officers, EMT’s etc. each have a universal key allowing them to enter the subdivision when necessary.
- Install a county-approved reflective address sign on each property for easy identification by emergency responders.
- Establish an emergency exit plan for the subdivision in cooperation with the neighbors to the south, Steve and Jolene Benoit. In the event of a wildfire, Coolwater Estates residents could cross the Benoit property to gain access to another route out to County Rd. 501. Likewise the Benois and possibly even Kamp Kivu will have another emergency exit through Coolwater Estates.
- Create and maintain adequate turn-outs and turn-arounds for fire trucks.

All of the above work was completed by the end of October 2013. More wildfire preparation efforts are being planned including a community get together to discuss reverse 911 calls and individual evacuation plans.

The neighborhood is grateful to Pam Wilson and Les Kole for their support and for sharing their knowledge. Parkinson noted that Pam and Les encouraged all the Ambassadors to be patient and to realize that the work can’t all get done at once. “They were creative and non-judgmental in their support of projects in the area.”

Parkinson concludes, “We’re really on to something with this neighbors helping neighbors model.”

## Echo Canyon Ranch:

### *Moving Forward with CWPP Recommendations*

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Echo Canyon Ranch in Archuleta County pulled together an impressive team to write a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) to help protect their 1,376 acres from wildfire. Partners included the USFS/BLM, Colorado State Forest Service, Pagosa Springs Fire Protection District, and FireWise of Southwest Colorado. Echo Canyon Ranch's CWPP, the first in Archuleta County, was completed in March 2013.

The Ranch sits five miles south of Pagosa Springs and is accessed from Highway 84. It includes 24 parcels ranging in size from 37 to 66 acres and 183.5 acres of open space.

There were a couple different factors that spurred the residents of Echo Canyon to form a FireWise committee and undertake a CWPP. The Bass Ranch, adjacent to Echo Canyon Ranch on the west side, has put out over 30 lightning-caused wildfires since 1991. Additionally, in 2012, the 25,000-acre Little Sand Fire, the largest fire in recent history occurred just north of Pagosa Springs, and there were several other large fires in Colorado as well.

"Residents understood that it was not a matter of if a fire would occur, but when," said Geraldine Macomber, the FireWise Ambassador who spearheaded the CWPP effort.

One of the first things the FireWise committee did with the help of their partners was to determine their WUI (Wildland-Urban Interface) boundary which encompasses 21,103 acres. The WUI relates to the varying degree to which the ranch is vulnerable on all sides.



*Grandkids have fun watching the arborist take down a tree near a house.*

Almost two years ago, the Forest Service recommended mitigation along the access road to the main gate of the community, which connects them to Hwy. 84, as well as along Echo Canyon Ranch Lane. What residents refer to as the 'S-Curve', the Forest Service considered to be a particularly vulnerable section of the lane, since it is located on the western, more densely forested side of the ranch. In 2012, the HOA received a grant of \$5,925 from the Colorado State Forest Service that contributed to the cost of thinning and 'limbing up' ponderosa pine, as well as thinning juniper, oak brush and other ladder fuels, within the 65-foot recreation easement on either side of the road.

The goals outlined in the CWPP include: education, communication, assessment of parcels, promoting fire mitigation, applying for grant money and addressing emergency preparedness and evacuation.

As part of their educational outreach, the Firewise committee invited a State Farm agent to attend a board meeting to explain the new procedures being instituted, such as satellite imaging of properties and more frequent inspections of defensible space before policies are issued or renewed.

FireWise committee member, Ron Halvorson, created a customized brochure outlining preparedness and evacuation details. To provide additional egress, the Board asked for and received permission from a resident for an emergency evacuation route through his property for ECR residents in the lower part of the valley.

The Fire Department checked the width and steepness of a number of driveways for accessibility of firefighting equipment.

Scott Wagner from the USFS visited 23 of the lots and recommended a list of specific mitigation projects for both the HOA as well as individual lot owners. His detailed maps include infrastructure, fire hydrants, fuels mitigation, and escape routes. Following Wagner's recommendations, a reflective sign was installed on Hwy 84, enabling fire trucks to find the subdivision at night. New reflective number signs were installed on each property for the same reason. Reflective triangle signs were installed to indicate the emergency exit route. The HOA also voted to budget money to dredge a pond in the valley to provide a better water source for a water tender.



*One of the residents picking up firewood after the thinning project was completed.*

FireWise Ambassador and committee chair, Geraldine Macomber, explained, "If you don't remove ladder fuel, particularly the juniper and Gambel Oak from under the ponderosa pine, you would likely have a tinder box on your hands. By 'limbing up' 10 to 15 feet, you also reduce the risk of a crown fire, which is very hard to contain."

The most important benefit a subdivision gets from writing a CWPP is professional help in determining the top priorities for mitigation. "There are no laws in Colorado mandating mitigation," said Macomber, "so the Board cannot enforce mitigation on private parcels. Having a comprehensive CWPP makes it



*An "After" shot of one of the nine ESF projects ESF projects where ladder fuels were removed and a ponderosa pine stand was thinned.*

easier to apply for and be awarded grant money, as an incentive for homeowners to follow through on the Plan's mitigation recommendations. This also proves to insurance companies that you are doing everything you can to protect your home in the case of a wildfire."

In early August, Kent Grant (CSFS) awarded the Association a \$28,670 ESF grant, which nine residents took advantage of to carry out mitigation recommendations on their individual lots, totaling about 60 acres.

Scott Wagner (USFS) had also identified one HOA project on a private lot in the southwest corner of the ranch where the wind comes through the canyon. He recommended creating a shaded fuel break in this area, to allow firefighters to make a stand against a wildfire. The grant money enabled the HOA to complete this project as well.

Macomber concludes, "60+ acres was quite an accomplishment. Nobody thought we'd pull it off at such short notice."

## Falls Creek Ranch: *No Shortage of Volunteers Here*

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Falls Creek Ranch in LaPlata County consists of 100, 1-acre parcels on 940 acres, just northwest of Durango. The San Juan National Forest surrounds the remaining 840 acres of common property comprised of forests and meadows.

Firewise Ambassador Judy Winzell may have written the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) which was completed in August 2011, but she has lots of help from residents in implementing the plan; residents have contributed more than 3,000 volunteer hours over the past several years. Improvements already completed include four CWPP mitigation projects and a variety of road projects.

To help implement the CWPP, the Ranch is divided into nine FireWise CWPP teams that are overseen by Winzell. Team leaders help educate their neighbors by providing brochures and other resource materials as well as updates on planned mitigation projects. She meets team leaders once a month during fire season to do property assessments and offer mitigation suggestions.

“It makes it more personal when people are being contacted by a close neighbor they know,” Winzell explains.

Team leaders motivate neighbors to mitigate their own properties. The Ranch has designated an area for residents to haul slash to; the slash piles are burned in the winter. The community has the luxury of having a large common space to accommodate the slash pile, which has been approved by the Durango Fire Protection District, who also helps with the burning when the pile get too large.



On the second Saturday in June, Winzell hosts an Annual Firewise Day, which is an opportunity for residents to meet with agency partners for a panel discussion.

Panel members share information on creating defensible space, how to deal with a beetle infestation, and expected fire conditions for the upcoming season. Afterwards, neighbors enjoy a potluck and social hour.



On Fire Mitigation Day, also in June, residents come together to work. They clear trees and brush and get rid of ladder fuels. “And of course, there is another potluck,” said Winzell.



As with many subdivisions built in the mid to late 1900s, there are many items that need to be “retrofitted” to make safer conditions for both residents and emergency responders. In Falls Creek Ranch, one of those retrofits involved upgrading the roads. Since the CWPP was completed, the HOA has installed or expanded seven cul-de-sacs and added 11 turn-outs to allow for twp-way traffic.

Unique to Falls Creek is ‘The Chain Saw Gang.’ “We have one CWPP member who is passionate about getting projects done,” shares Winzell.



One Saturday a month, this group of volunteers enjoys getting together to do projects. Prior to the work day, the Community Property Committee Chair and Winzell tour the Ranch looking for dense vegetation the group can tackle like last year’s project which involved mitigating an area along the road where there is a sharp turn with trees close to the road.

The Ranch also has a Certified Chainsaw expert. He led a 2-hour class on the basic techniques of chainsaw use. Attendees brought their own saws and got a hands-on clinic. They got suited up and learned safety procedures so they wouldn’t be afraid to take down a whole tree. They learned how to tie ropes and how to guide the tree to where they want it to fall.

In January 2012, Falls Creek Ranch became the second Firewise Community in La Plata County. In celebration, Winzell hosted a tour for Senator Ellen Roberts and County Commissioner Kelly Hotter to see the progress they had made on road work and mitigation projects. When Winzell mentioned the state tax advantages would be discontinued, Roberts brought it to Governor Hickenlooper’s attention and the bill got extended. Roberts then brought Ambassador Winzell the pen Hickenlooper used to sign the bill!

Their plans for 2014 are to mitigate a 44.5-acre parcel that is very dense. Due to complicated topography they need the right combination of professionals and equipment who can work with the juniper, ponderosa pine, Gambel oak and box elder that are typical at that elevation.



Winzell keeps residents current on fire conditions with their new Fire Danger sign at the entrance to the Ranch as well as on the Ranch web site, [www.fallscreekranch.org](http://www.fallscreekranch.org), where residents will find links, electronic brochures and other resources under the Firewise tab.

## Rancho Mira Sol:

*Reducing fuels, improving forest health and wildlife habitat*



Rancho Mira Sol is unique in that it has no HOA and is not a subdivision – it is simply a large rural property tied together by a rural road. They have a road association to oversee snow plowing and other types of road maintenance. John Glover and Dustin Crandall both serve as FireWise Ambassadors and as members of the Road Association Board.

The men have been working on projects for about 2.5 years on the 17 parcels, which can each cover hundreds of acres. Nine parcels have homes on them. The 2,000-acre neighborhood, located between Durango and Bayfield and CR 228 and 502, is bordered by both BLM and State land.

The Rancho Mira Sol Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) was completed in Jan. 2013. The CWPP outlines what needs to be done to protect the wildlife, trees and the beloved area where they live, and completing that work is helping to keep their homeowners insured.

Well before the completion of their CWPP, Crandall and Glover started taking action using ESF grants from the Colorado State Forest Service, which reimburse homeowners up to \$470 per acre for mitigation work. Crandall and Glover figured the best way to keep the cost down was to do the work on their own. Their mitigation work included not only creating defensible space around each home but also mitigating large areas of open space which could serve as fuel breaks but also help improve the health of the forest and browse for wildlife.

“The area hasn’t had a fire in many decades, so there is a huge overstock of ground fuels,” explains John Glover. “And the wildlife loves the new shrub growth.” He reports herds of 200-400 elk in the area this winter.



In 2013, Crandall purchased a skid steer with tracks and a forestry mulching head to help with brush mitigation. The machine grinds up scrub oak and trees and creates mulch. Owning their own equipment facilitates completing projects and is easier than renting equipment. The group focused on reducing the fuel on a 30-35 acre section. Working evenings and weekends, the group mitigated the acreage in just 4 to 5 weeks.



*A variety of wildlife enjoy drinking at the water tanks as well as the more palatable shrubs that have come in after the mitigation work.*

“We love the land, enjoy doing the work, enjoy the cooperative relationship of coming together to do it and also want to protect our homes,” Glover said.

Another project undertaken involved making improvements to a pond on the property. Weeds were pulled out, it was sealed and a new pump was installed. A water stand was installed with an articulating arm that can be used to fill the fire trucks. Firefighters have already made use of water from the pond; they used it to put out a 5-acre fire up on the ridge last year. The wider and more accessible access roads that they had created as part of the CWPP helped contain that fire quickly.



Dustin and his step-father also rigged up two old trucks into make-shift fire trucks. John Glover explained, “To say that these guys are handy is a huge understatement. They got an old Ford ranch truck and mounted a 500-gallon water tank on it with an irrigation pump. They also loaded a 2500-gallon water tank on a goose-neck trailer.” They pull the trailer with a 100-horsepower tractor.

“There have been two fires close by in the last 2-3 years on the Vosburg Pike formation,” explained Glover. “They took the water wagons out to the homes closest to the fire and just waited.”

Since the area is very rural and is serviced by two different fire districts, Crandall explains, “We have to be self-sufficient until the fire trucks can get here. All the work we’ve done would keep a big disaster from happening if a fire came through.”



Crandall also has a backhoe that he used to dig a line to make a fire break and can drop down a fence if necessary to allow better access for fire trucks.

This year a few trees were struck by lightning – only one caught on fire. If the mitigation work had not been done the fire would have spread more easily. “The fire started at 3 p.m. and was under control by 6 p.m.” said Crandall.

Their homes are in a critical fire zone. Glover concludes, “We completed a significant amount of work with landscape-scale impact. The hard work we did created a significant buffer to slow down or even prevent a fire.”

Rancho Mira Sol applied for and received national “Firewise Community USA” status in Dec. 2013, becoming the fourth Firewise Community in La Plata County.



# Sundance and Cassidy Canyons:

## *Reducing fire hazard between canyons*

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The four FireWise Ambassadors at Sundance Bear and Cassidy Canyon know that their area is considered high risk by the Montezuma County map. Betty and Eric James, Bob Scott, and Tom Getts spearheaded the efforts to mitigate the common property while also educating and encouraging neighbors to mitigate their own properties.

The Ambassadors, with FireWise help, wrote a request and received a FireWise mini grant in 2011 to mitigate areas between the two canyons and along the road right-of-ways treating about seven acres total -- five acres along CR 38.5 and about two acres at the top of the canyon in the Sundance Bear neighborhood (CR 39). On a larger scale, this was a project to not just preserve private properties, but enhance them. The neighbors realize that if adjacent properties are not also mitigated, there is still danger of the fire spreading.



They thinned trees and raised the canopy to remove ladder fuels and reduce crown fires possibilities in about a 100-150 foot band.

The fire mitigation plan that they followed was prepared by an independent contractor, had three bids and was inspected post-work before grant funding was distributed. They were able to accomplish the work within budget – the homeowners contributing time and work as they were able.

Bob Scott and his neighbors worked at the top of the canyon on CR 39, a critical point where they could stop a potential fire.

He explains, “We can’t let the fire get into the canyon because the canyon acts like a chimney. If we take out the trees, we have an erosion problem, so we have to let it go up the canyon, then stop it at the top. We had to create a buffer to keep it from spreading.”



There are lots of homes at the top of the canyon on CR 38.5. The single road going in and out of the subdivision was lined with trees right up to the road. Residents were afraid cutting the



trees “would look awful,” but Getts understood they needed space for the fire trucks to get in and out. Their objective was to thin and prune while maintaining the visual aesthetics.

“It’s more open and park-like and looks nice,” explains Scott.

For both areas, they hired a professional with heavy equipment to do most of the work. Trees were strategically chosen to be taken out to create space between them preventing a dangerous crown fire while maintaining a natural look. The big “bobcat” had a rotating drum on the front with carbide teeth that reduced a 6-inch tree to chips in about a minute. The chips resulting were left on the ground for cost savings – not ideal initially because they are still fuel, but over time decomposition takes care of that.

Scott also created a web site for the community to communicate with everyone efficiently. He also hopes to educate other communities with valuable information, videos, etc. Check out: [www.firewise-81328.org](http://www.firewise-81328.org).

## Timberdale Ranch: *Getting Good with Grant Money*

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Jim Tencza, FireWise Ambassador at Timberdale Ranch is getting good at getting grant money. “We submit a lot of applications. If we don’t get it – we learn a few things and try again the next time,” he explains.

Tencza got ‘convinced’ to go to a few FireWise meetings a few years ago. He liked what he saw and wrote a small grant to ‘show the naysayers what could be done.’ “We are not tree huggers, but tree cuddlers,” he says.

He wanted to show his neighbors that mitigation work could make the area safer and healthier. Now they can see what it looks like and see the benefits.



Tencza’s neighbors have been supportive of the idea and they achieved the qualifications to become an official Firewise Community USA in August 2013. They completed a CWPP in July 2012, have shared safety information with neighbors, and have had both FireWise and the State Forest Service come speak to their group.

The Ranch, which consists of 80 lots on 585 acres, is located at the end of County Road 504 just north of Bayfield, Colorado.

In 2013, Timberdale received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources (as part of Senate Bill 13-269, the Wildfire Risk Reduction Act) to purchase some mitigation equipment. A Brush Hog was purchased to clear out the scrub oak that serves as ladder fuel beneath the towering ponderosa pine. The caretaker for the Ranch now uses the brush hog to maintain the premises, keeping the scrub oak from getting too big.

Their goal is to thin out the Gambel oak that has accumulated over the last 5-7 years after the last big mitigation effort and to eliminate it in the common areas and some residential properties. They have mitigated 5.5 miles along the ROW, creating a shaded fuel break for 10 feet on either side of the road the road.



Tencza makes sure to keep FireWise at the forefront with homeowners. He tries to make sure he is on every HOA agenda, and especially at the annual meeting, to present educational information, fire season outlooks, and grant opportunities.

A big coup for Tencza was getting the HOA to add a line item in the budget for fire mitigation beginning in 2013. The funding can be used as grant match for a community project or to cover expenses of operating the brush hog.

“Now that we have the brush hog and a line item for mitigation, the work is more likely to continue,” said Tencza.

In 2013, the HOA received a \$17,000 ESF grant from the Colorado State Forest Service which reimbursed homeowners up to \$470 an acre for mitigation. They used it to mitigate 36.5 acres that included 11 individual properties and some road rights-of-way.



In 2012, the Upper Pine River Fire Protection District fuels crew mitigated 15 acres, including six residential properties and some common areas with grant monies from the Colorado State Forest Service.

One on-going issue the HOA deals with is what to do with the slash piles. One year they chipped the branches and other slash, but then had to deal with another pile of wood chips. Another year, they wanted to burn it, but then had to leave it until the right time of year and the right conditions for burning. “We still haven’t decided what we’re going to do this year,” explained Tencza.

A campaign is being initiated to educate the non-resident homeowners about the importance of mitigation. Recently a potential new homeowner from the Virgin Islands was having problems purchasing insurance. Tencza connected the buyer with a mitigation contractor and an insurance agent. They all worked together to get the property mitigated in time to get insurance and close the sale.

“Since insurance companies are now doing inspections before renewing insurance, on-going mitigation work is more important than ever,” said Tencza.