

# Building Fire Adapted Communities from Within: A Neighborhood Ambassador Approach

Wildfire Adapted Partnership  
(Formerly FireWise of Southwest Colorado)

Charlie Landsman and Amanda Brenner-Cannon



# Charlie Landsman

WAP Coordinator for La  
Plata County and San Juan  
County





# Amanda Brenner-Cannon

WAP Coordinator for  
Montezuma County and  
Dolores County



# Changes to our Organization

FireWise of Southwest Colorado is now Wildfire Adapted Partnership. While the name has changed, we are the same organization, and our mission, programs, and partnerships remain the same.



**WILDFIRE  
ADAPTED**  
PARTNERSHIP





# Wildfire Adapted Partnership



Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP) inspires, motivates, educates and serves individuals, organizations and communities joining together to protect lives and property from wildfire.

# Our Roles as Wildfire Adapted Coordinators



- Coordinate Volunteer Neighborhood Ambassador program
- Promote our program and recruit new volunteers
- Connect neighborhoods with the resources they need in order to educate residents about and reduce wildfire risk

# Our Roles as Wildfire Adapted Coordinators



- Coordinate, write, and edit CWPP's and Community Assessments
- Implement individual and neighborhood scale mitigation projects
- Manage incentive programs



# Our Roles as Wildfire Adapted Coordinators



- Plan educational meetings and workshops
- Connect Ambassadors with local and federal agency partners
- And so much more...



# Ambassador Program



The WAP Neighborhood Ambassador Program is a community-approach that leverages volunteers to serve as catalysts within their neighborhoods, encouraging their neighbors to become more aware, active, and prepared for wildfires. Ambassadors are an internal presence that leads to building community trust and capacity. This allows WAP to capitalize on preexisting social connections to create physical change within the community.



# Ambassador Program

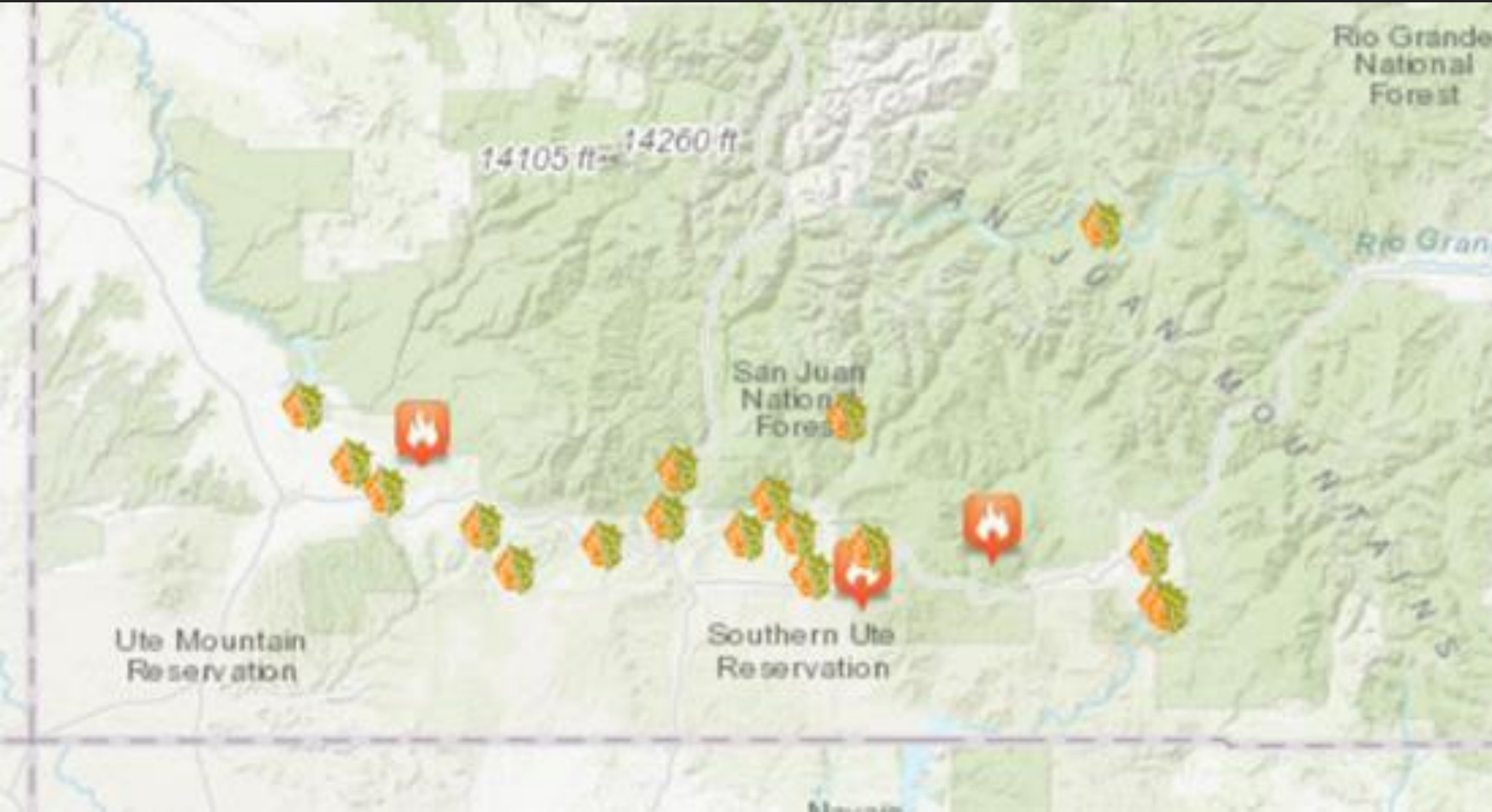


“Through volunteer Neighborhood Ambassador program that’s operated by FireWise of Southwest Colorado, volunteers are utilized as ambassadors who commit to mobilizing their neighborhoods as it relates to wildfire safety; and where they link their neighbors and neighborhoods to trusted wildfire education resources, promote mitigation projects and also act as a contact for local firefighting entities.”

Cathy Prudhomme, Firewise USA®



# Ambassador Program



Firewise USA®  
Neighborhoods in  
Archuleta, La  
Plata, and  
Montezuma  
counties.  
(As of 2018)



# Ambassador Program



Ambassadors receive:

- training
- support
- ongoing education
- access to wildfire and forest health experts,
- and notice of grant opportunities to reduce risk within their communities.





# A Few Partner Organizations

- BLM
- Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control
- Colorado State Forest Service
- Colorado State Extension
- Local Emergency Management
- Local Fire departments
- NRCS
- Mountain Studies Institute
- Southwest Conservation Corps
- US Forest Service
- WiRē
- And more...

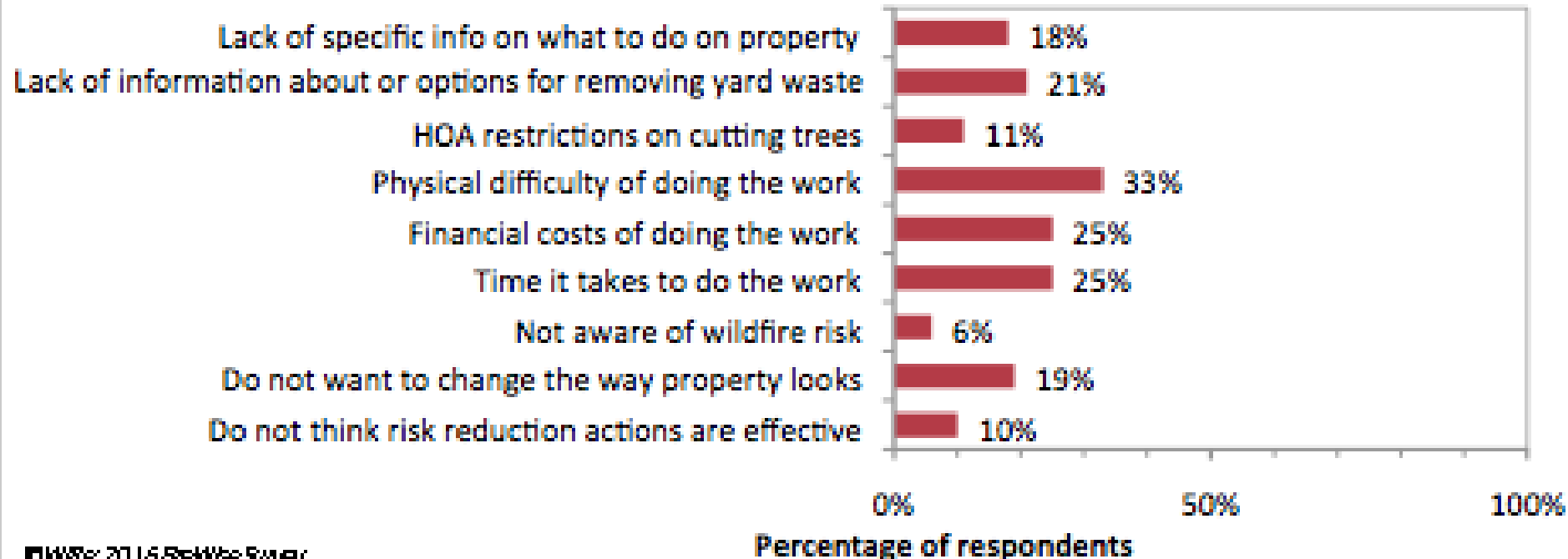
Ambassadors are connected with WAP partners to encourage them to build relationships with their local fire departments, emergency managers, foresters and more.



## What affects whether residents reduce wildfire risk on their property?

*Barriers that stop residents from reducing their wildfire risk*

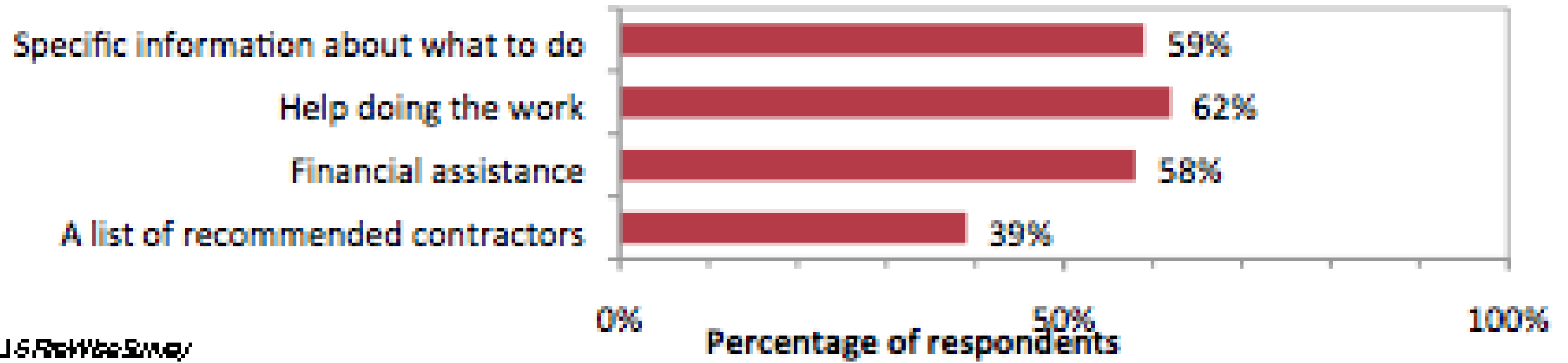
### No single barrier stops most residents from reducing their wildfire risk





## *Incentives that would encourage residents to reduce their wildfire risk*

**More specific information would encourage many residents to reduce their wildfire risk**



# Incentive Programs



- Defensible Space Cost Share
  - Site Visit
  - Up to 50% paid by W.A.P.
- Chipper Rental Rebate
- Kickstart Grant
- Mini Grant





# HIZ Workshop



A one day course designed for residents to

- learn how to recognize vulnerabilities their homes have to radiation and ember showers from wildfires
- and gain the tools to help teach their neighbors what they need to do to be prepared for wildfire.





# Beetle Workshop



With support from partners, this workshop was designed to

- increase knowledge of beetle tree issues,
- understand how to identify trees at different stages infestation,
- understand beetle management options and,
- spread knowledge of locally available resources



# Wildfire Mitigation Fair



- Stations focussed on educating residents about mitigation, forest health, evacuation, safe equipment operations, equipment rentals, contractors, and more
- Equipment and tree felling demonstrations
- Free food and raffle





# Contractors



- Annual Contractor Meeting
- Educate contractors about mitigation and incentive programs
  - ensure requirements are met on both sides
- Mutually beneficial relationship
  - Contractors bring in Ambassadors
  - Contractors can increase project size



# Realtors



- CE Credits for Realtors
- Educate new residents
- New residents acknowledge risk
- Connect new residents with resources to expand effectiveness of Ambassador Program





# Community Examples



- Ambassadors from a range of neighborhoods were surveyed.
- Examples of how they benefit from the Ambassador program, and what struggles they have working with neighbors.
- What do communities do to come together as a community?
- No community is alike.





# Falls Creek Ranch



“It is the leadership, training, motivation, collaboration, attitude and passion of Wildfire Adapted Partnership and their Ambassador Program that has taught us how to create the knowledge base and attitudes needed for our residents to keep working year after year to cultivate a healthy forest.”

10 homes lost in Valley Fire in 2002

# Falls Creek Ranch



Falls Creek Mitigation  
Efforts Make a Difference



# Falls Creek Ranch



- Create a community event out of work days
- Wood yard and slash depot
- Purchased air curtain burner
- Ensure HOA does not hinder progress





# North Mancos POA



Why become an Ambassador?

“Became involved when neighbors asked”





# North Mancos POA



**Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:**  
“Receiving a grant for mitigation - the mitigation has made a positive difference in the forest health and wildfire reduction.”

**Challenges?**  
“Some neighbors are not enthusiastic about participating in WAP activities and mitigation.”

**Positive Outcomes**  
“Have met nice people and people who have knowledge of mitigation. Saw how mitigation can reduce wildfire risk. Gained knowledge of the importance of preparedness.”



# North Mancos POA



The neighborhood has benefited from grant funding for defensible space work around their neighborhood and homes.

Including:

- Colorado State Forest Service's Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program
- And WAP's Defensible Space Cost-Share program



"The mitigation has made a positive difference in the forest health and wildfire reduction."



# Aspen Trails



## Why become an Ambassador?

“Wildfire concern as SW CO is getting drier. Having experienced first hand the Missionary Ridge Fire, the poor winter snowpacks of the last few years created an elevated concern for me in my community about fire risk. FireWise seemed like a good vessel to help get things going towards more mitigation.”



# Aspen Trails



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

“Learning about the many grants available...the willingness of FireWise reps to come & share info in our community”

## Challenges?

“People really like living in the woods here, and don't want ‘big brother’ recommending that they cut trees to improve wildfire risk.”

## Positive Outcomes

“Working with individual landowners to give wildfire information from a perspective of one who has previously dealt first hand with wildfire and recovery.”



# Aspen Trails



- Mitigation Fair
- Grant Coordination by Ambassador
- Utilized every incentive program offered by FireWise





# East Canyon



## Why become an Ambassador?

“I knew fires were inevitable and I wanted to be part of a solution in dealing with the dangers of wildfire.

I wanted to be part of the solution in dealing with wildfire dangers.”





# East Canyon



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

“Because enough mitigation work had been done by residents before the 2012 Weber Fire, firefighters were able to come in and no structures were lost.”

## Challenges?

“Apathy from non residents.”

## Positive Outcomes:

“We have received very important information from the WAP organization about the resources available to us.”



# East Canyon



The neighborhood has taken advantage of WAP programs including our Kickstart.

They have their own cost-share program, and Ambassadors helped write their CWPP.

Before



After





# Rafter J



## Why become an Ambassador?

- Voluntold
- Pre-evacuated during Lightner Creek Fire in 2017
- High risk neighborhood with one way in and one way out



# Rafter J



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

“the defensible space assessments have had the most effect, followed by the grant programs”

## Challenges?

“Less than 50% participation in major effort to date, miniscule participation in educational programs.”

## Positive Outcomes:

“Small core group of willing volunteers put in time and physical effort to mitigate common areas, nearly 50% of residents have done some mitigation as part of our efforts.”



# Rafter J



- HOA willing to commit to mitigation
- Snow Plow Budget → Fire Mitigation Budget
  - Road Thinning
  - Chipping Day
- “Block Captain” System
- BLM treatment on adjacent land





# Wingspread



Why become an Ambassador?  
Community service is important to us. We want to help educate neighbors about wildfire.





# Wingspread



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

Working with motivated neighbors & attending workshop-educational meetings with staff & other ambassadors.

## Challenges?

Many neighbors are too busy to get involved or do not have personal funds available to hire mitigation contractors

## Positive Outcomes:

Education materials.  
Financial assistance

# Wingspread



- Site Visits
- Cost-Share
- Community Assessment
- Support with Gaining FireWise USA Status
- Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX)

WAP Programs the  
Community has Utilized

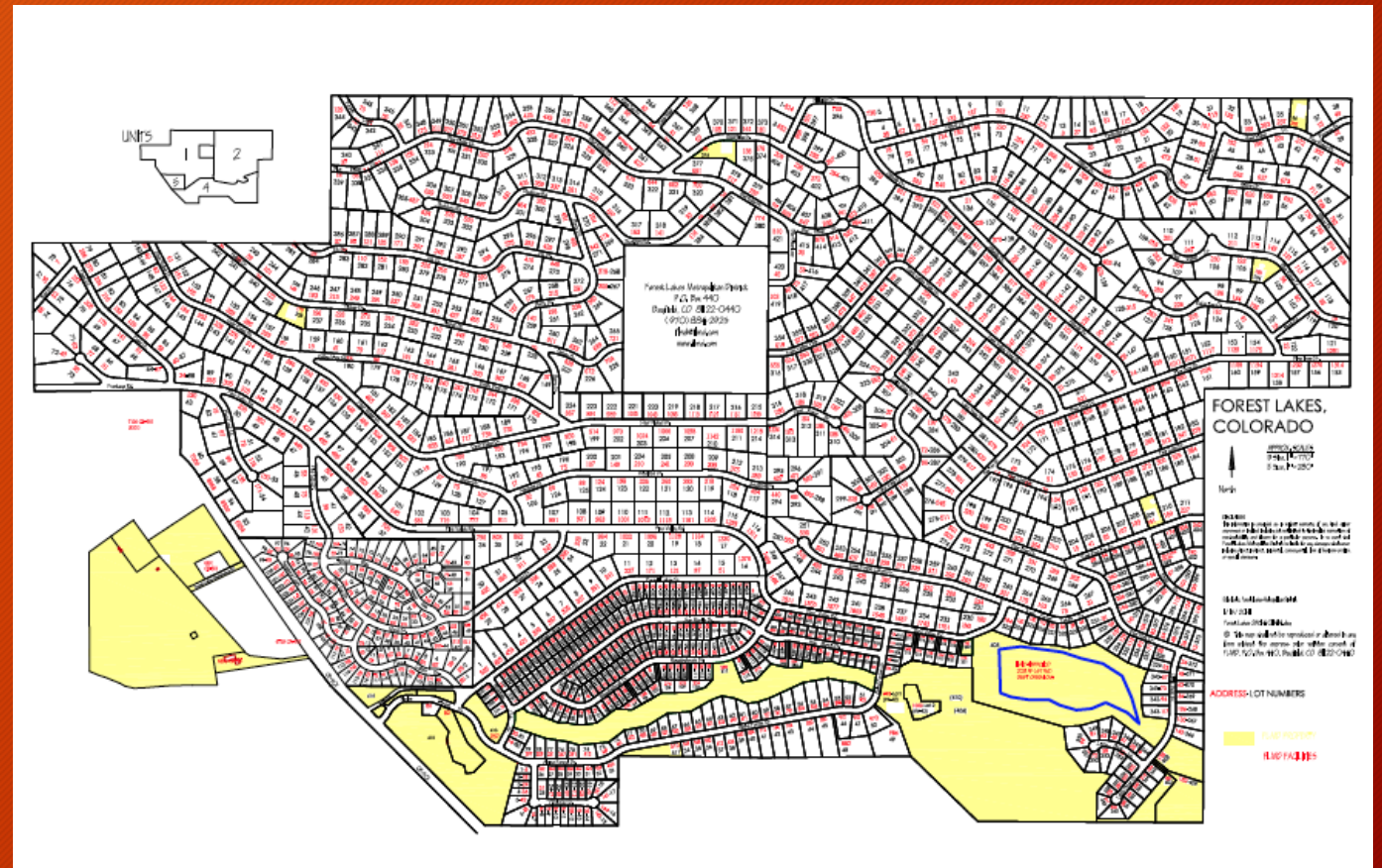


# Forest Lakes



Why become an Ambassador?

“I wanted more information on how to be firesafe and to share with others like me, who were new to the area.”



# Forest Lakes



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

“just showing people positive outcomes of mitigation work and being a sounding board for questions.”

## Challenges?

“Community understanding and therefore involvement with basic mitigation”

## Positive Outcomes:

“I've made new friends and watched a decent turnover of attitudes towards the work FireWise has done.”



# Forest Lakes



## WAP Programs the Community has Utilized

- Mitigation work day raffle
- Neighborhood connections
  - Firewood for felling
- Evacuation drill using Code Red
- Mailing to undeveloped and second landowners





# Cedar Mesa Ranches



## Why become an Ambassador?

“I grew up around brush fires. I wanted to be involved in helping our neighborhood be as fire safe as it could be.”





# Cedar Mesa Ranches



## Benefits of being an Ambassador in your Community:

The presence of a County Coordinator is extremely helpful. Residents know there is an expert they can consult with on how best to mitigate their properties.

## Challenges?

Time to meet with all landowners.

## Positive Outcomes:

We do have a very positive attitude towards fire safety in our community. I have not met anyone that doesn't feel it is important. I was pleased to see our First Responders list grow to 12 people this year with two more expressing interest once they move here full time.

# Cedar Mesa Ranches



## WAP Programs the Community has Utilized

- Site visits
- Cost-Share
- Chipper Rebate
- Roadside Thinning Grant
- CWPP Support
- EFSF Grant



# Lessons Learned



- Increase capacity whenever possible
- Don't overcomplicate things
  - Find the easy solution
- Create cultural change
- Know your audience and market message to them
- Duplicate successful programs in similar neighborhoods

# Ambassador Toolkit



For other fire adapted communities practitioners looking to start a similar program in your area, please check out the [Fire Adapted Communities Neighborhood Ambassador Toolkit](#), or for more information please contact [Wildfire Adapted Partnership's Executive Director Ashley Downing](#).



# Questions?



“Their model works well and residents have stepped up to the challenge and are making good things happen in their own backyards.”

Cathy Prudhomme, Firewise USA®

Charlie Landsman

(206) 697-2613

[CLandsman@wildfireadapted.org](mailto:CLandsman@wildfireadapted.org)



Amanda Brenner-Cannon

(970) 364-3473

[ABrenner@wildfireadapted.org](mailto:ABrenner@wildfireadapted.org)



# Thank you!



Charlie Landsman

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