

**Tara Mandala**  
**International Buddhist Community**  
**Community Wildfire Risk Assessment**  
**December, 2023**



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## **Location and Description**

The Tara Mandala Retreat Center is located in Archuleta County, Colorado, approximately 15 miles southwest of Pagosa Springs. The main entrance is located at 37° 09' 45" N and 107° 07' 05" W. The 700 acre Center is bordered on the north by the Friendly Forest subdivision, on the east by the San Juan National Forest, on the south by Southern Ute Tribal lands and private ranches and on the west by private ranches. A few hundred acres of the adjacent ranches are owned by people with connections to the Buddhist community.

The Center is accessed from Pagosa Springs by travelling 11 miles south on CR 500 (24 foot wide, gravel surfaced) and 4 miles through the San Juan National Forest via FR 649. This road is typical of a narrow, dirt USFS road.

## **Environment and Vegetation**

Elevations on the land range from 7500' to 8000'. The climate is semi-arid, typically with seasonal monsoons in mid-summer. Thirty miles to the north, the Continental Divide and San Juan Mountain range encourage above average precipitation compared to the rest of the Four Corners area. The location of the Center is in a drier zone. The past twenty-year cycle has trended considerably hotter and drier than previously recorded in this area.

Most of the area is covered with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain Juniper. There are sections of ponderosa pine with a Gambel oak understory. Large portions are open meadows and old pasture. This secluded, rural area is home to black bear, deer, mountain lions, wild horses, turkey and a host of other wildlife.

This is a frequent fire regime landscape that historically saw wildfire on 5 to 15 year intervals. Most of the area was clear cut for large ponderosa over 100 years ago and has grown back without any significant fire for over 130 years. Accumulated fuel loads are typical of a frequent fire landscape that has not had fire for decades.

## Fire History and Risk

<b>Significant Archuleta County Wildfires Over Twenty Two-Year Period (2002-2023)</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Fire Name</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>
2002	Missionary Ridge	73,000
2003	Bolt Fire	2,160
2003	Devil Creek Fire	234
2012	Little Sand Fire	24,500
2013	West Fork Fire (cross-county fire)	58,600
2018	Spruce Fire (close vicinity to ECR)	10
2018	Horse Fire	700
2022	Plumtaw Fire	735
2023	Chris Mountain Fire	511
2023	Coal Mine Fire	286
2023	Quartz Ridge Fire	2,850
2023	Bear Creek Fire	1,093

Maps showing Fire Intensity, Vegetation and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk are included in the Appendix.

## **The Community:**

Tara Mandala is a Buddhist Retreat Center that is the focal point of an international Buddhist community. It was founded by Lama Tsultrim Allione in 1993 and has seen ongoing construction and improvements since then. The centerpoint is a 12,000 sq. ft., 3 story temple with stucco siding. Nearby is a 16 room residence hall, also stuccoed. Both of these buildings have adequate defensible space around them. There is also a 6000 sq. ft. community building made of adobe. The community building has excessive vegetation around it and would be at risk during a wildfire event.

There are a few retreat cabins and a maintenance building on site. All of these structures lack defensible space and are at risk. Some have firewood piles attacked alongside of the structures. All of the structures mentioned above have metal roofs. There are canvas covered yurts on site that are set up on elevated wooden decking. These structures are surrounded by vegetation and lack defensible space.

Year round staff ranges from 12 to 20 residents. During the summer retreat season, 35 to 125 participants may be staying on site. On occasion, more visitors have been present for specific ceremonies.

**Access to and egress from the community is extremely limited.** Sections of CR 500 and all of FR 649 are in high wildfire risk areas. The Forest Road is at the bottom of a steep wooded canyon that is overgrown with ladder fuels. The road is of insufficient width to allow emergency vehicles and evacuating residents to safely pass each other.

In an emergency, there is a one lane, unimproved road cut that crosses 1.5 miles of hilly terrain and accesses Friendly Forest subdivision to the north. From here it is 10 miles of narrow, twisty gravel roads to reach CR 700, which is 24' wide and graveled for 3.5 miles to its intersection with US Hwy 160.

Both the single road in and out of the Center and the emergency alternate route, go through high wildfire risk areas with dense vegetation and ladder fuels along the routes. Places where response vehicles and evacuating residents could safely pass each other are very limited.

The Center has electrical service through La Plata Electric Association (LPEA). The main power lines running from Durango have no redundancy enroute to Pagosa Springs area. There are remote sections of line that would take up to 6 weeks to repair if they are lost to wildfire.

There is no municipal water system or fire hydrants. Water is supplied by a well and with cistern storage.

## **Values at risk**

- Lives, both human and animal (cats, dogs, horses, wildlife, etc.)
- Temple
- Residential structures
- Infrastructure (electricity, water, phone, roads, etc.)
- Sacred place for retreats and prayers
- Views

## **Resources**

The Center lies outside of any local fire protection districts. The Archuleta County Office of Emergency Management is the first responder for fire occurrences. Through inter government agreements, the Pagosa Springs Fire Protection (PFPD) is available to help. Response time in good weather is about one hour. Adverse weather conditions, could affect FR 649

The Office of Emergency Management, a department of the Sheriff's Office has 3 full time staff and 3 seasonal firefighters. They have two engines.

Pagosa Springs Fire Protection District has 18 paid staff and approximately 40 volunteers. District-wide, the firefighting equipment includes seven engines, five tenders (water trucks), one aerial truck with a 75-foot ladder, five brush trucks, a mobile command vehicle, a maintenance truck and other smaller vehicles.

## **Action Plan**

### **Priorities:**

1. Educate staff about wildfire risk
2. Encourage creation of Defensible Space around structures (WAP programs).
3. Encourage forest health treatments (NRCS EQIP program).
4. Educate retreat participants about wildfire risk.
5. Develop an evacuation plan for the community.
6. Identify shelter areas within the community.

## **Assessment Participants**

Clifton Carmody, Operations Director, Tara Mandala

Costanzo Allione, Tulku Osel Dorje, Resident Lama, Tara Mandala

Cady Allione, Director of Development, Tara Mandala

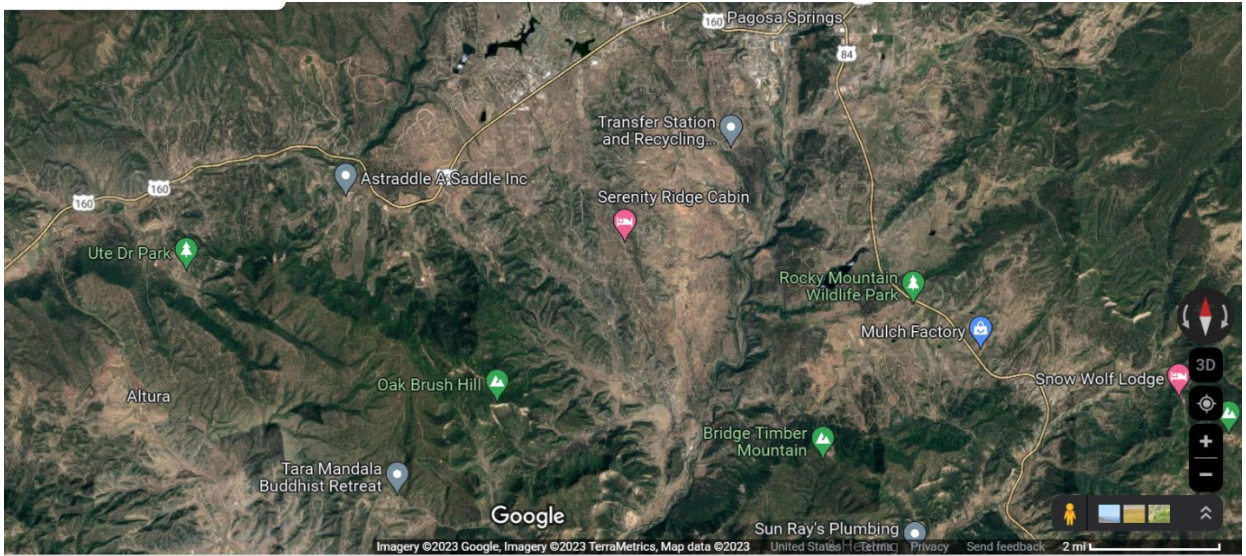
Fred Ellis, Assistant Fire Management Officer, USFS San Juan National Forest

Mike Le Roux, Archuleta County Sheriff

Bill Trimarco, Wildfire Adapted Partnership

# Appendix

## Tara Mandala Location Map



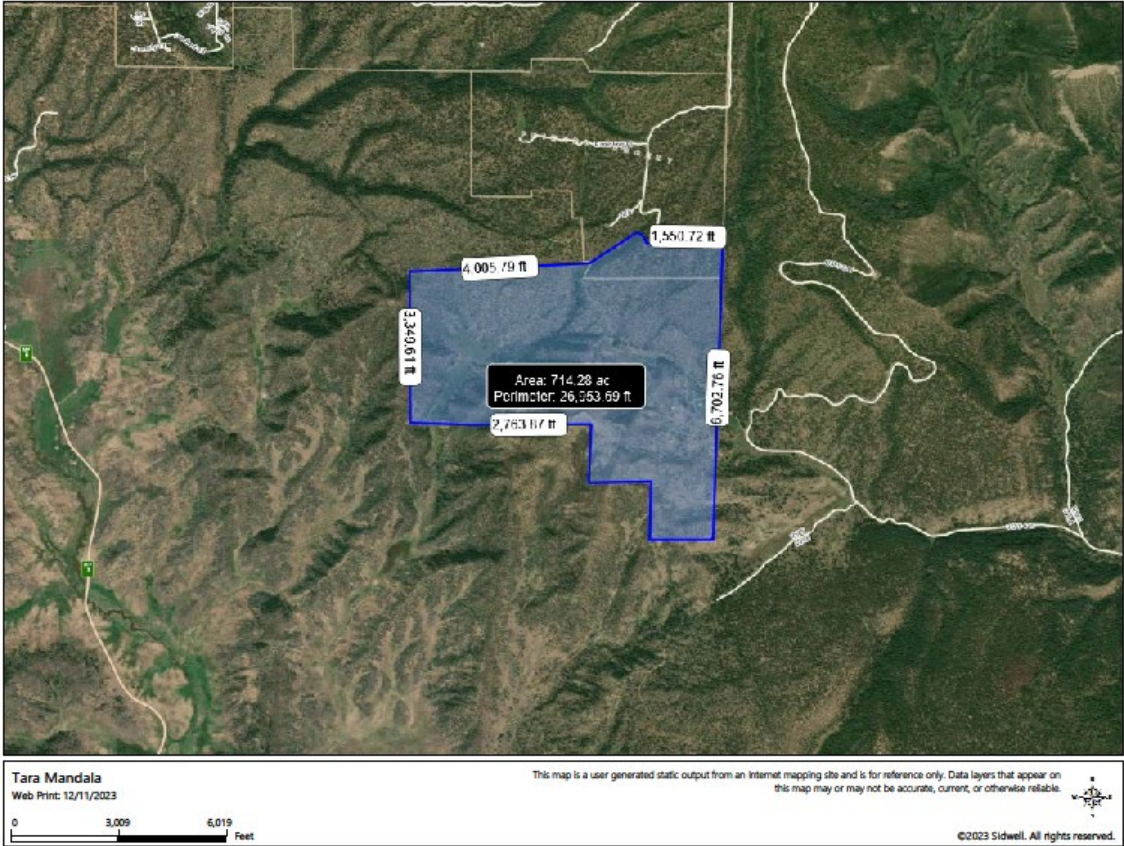
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# Boundary Map



# Wildfire Intensity Map



## Colorado Risk Reduction Planner

<https://co-pro.coloradoforestatlas.org>

### Tara Mandala Fire Intensity Scale

Quantifies the potential fire intensity by orders of magnitude.

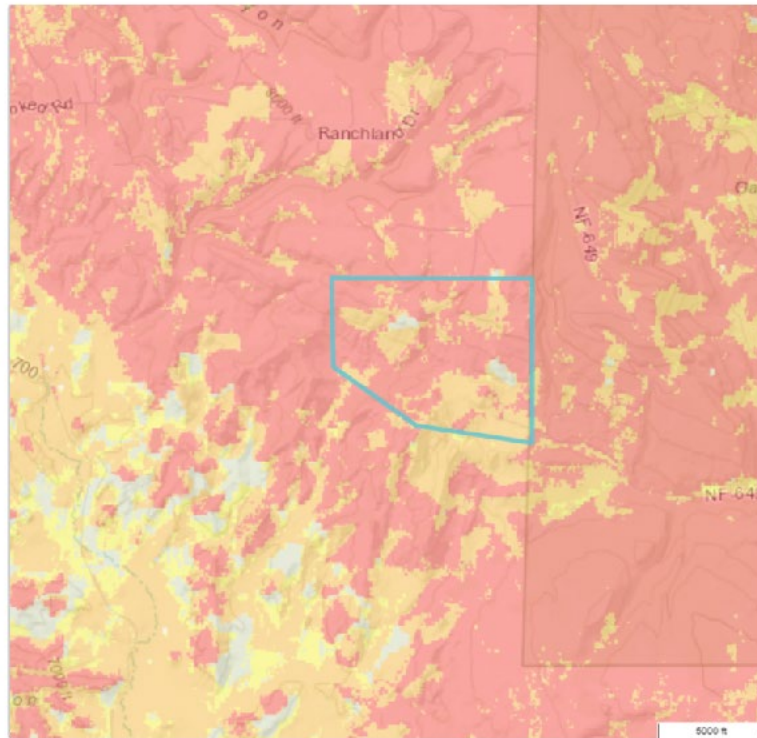
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### Fire Intensity Scale

-  Lowest Intensity
-  Low
-  Moderate
-  High
-  Highest Intensity

# Vegetation Map



## Colorado Risk Reduction Planner

<https://co-pro.coloradoforestatlas.org>

### Tara Mandala Vegetation

General vegetation and landcover types

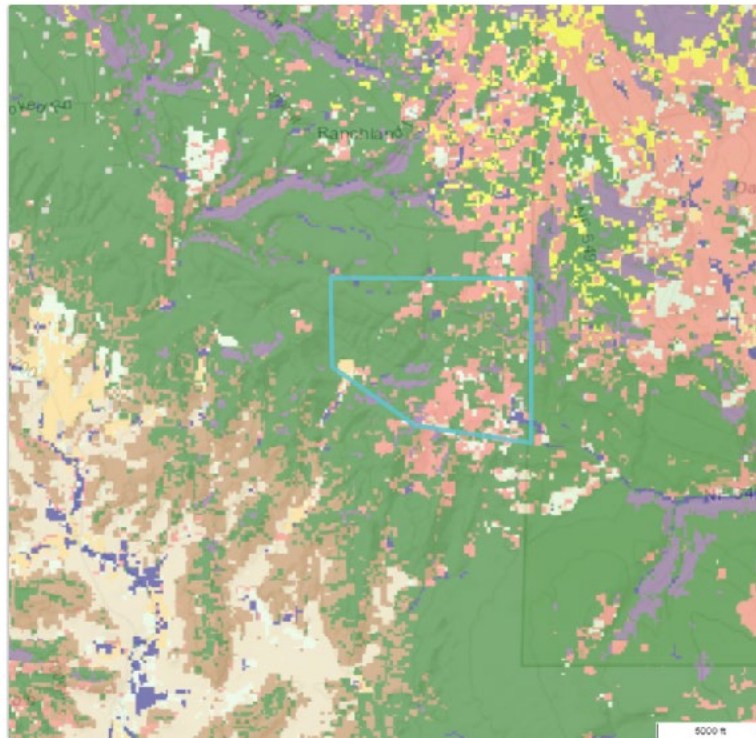
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#### Vegetation

- Agriculture
- Grassland
- Lodgepole Pine
- Mixed Conifer
- Oak Shrubland
- Open Water
- Pinyon-Juniper
- Ponderosa Pine
- Riparian
- Shrubland
- Spruce-Fir
- Developed
- Sparsely Vegetated
- Hardwood
- Conifer-Hardwood
- Conifer
- Barren

# Asset Risk Map



## Colorado Risk Reduction Planner

<https://co-pro.coloradoforestatlas.org>

## Tara Mandala Wildfire Risk to Assets

The overall composite risk occurring from a wildfire derived by combining Burn Probability and Values at Risk Rating

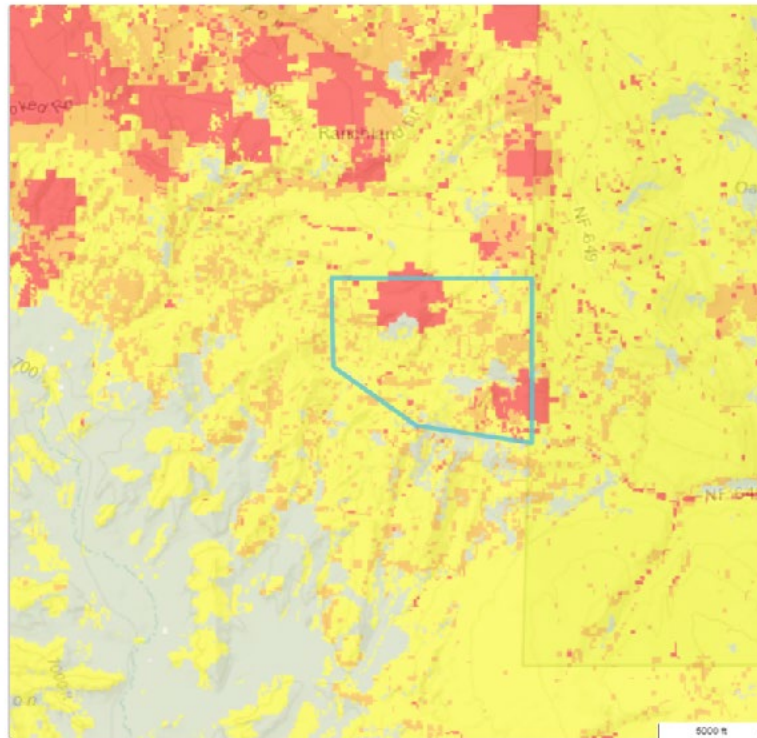
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## Wildfire Risk to Assets

-  Lowest Risk
-  Low Risk
-  Moderate Risk
-  High Risk
-  Highest Risk