



Board of County Commissioners

August 22, 2014

Dear Senator Nicholson and Members of the Wildfire Matters Review Committee:

Boulder County would like to express its appreciation for your ongoing commitment to reducing Colorado's wildfire risk through the work of the Wildfire Matters Review Committee. Although this summer has brought a welcome reprieve from the large catastrophic fires we have experienced in recent years, we know that it's not a matter of if, but when the next large wildfire impacts Colorado. We are grateful that the General Assembly continues to keep this conversation front of mind through the work of your committee.

On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners I am writing to provide input and address some of the concerns raised by the Committee at its August 4, 2014 meeting.

Reauthorize funding for SB 13-269 – Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program

We urge the Committee to support the ongoing funding of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant (WRRG) program created under Senate Bill 13-269. Through this generously-funded grant program, Boulder County was able to launch a new program called Wildfire Partners. Wildfire Partners is a voluntary program which helps mountain residents in Boulder County prepare for wildfire and reduce the risk of wildfire impacts to their home and property. The program provides a comprehensive on-site assessment of the home ignition zone; a customized report detailing actions homeowners should take; a rebate for mitigation work; and a follow-up inspection to ensure that homeowners are as prepared as possible for future wildfires. Grant funding is being used to conduct 500 home assessments throughout the Wildland Urban Interface in Boulder County – one of the highest risk WUIs in the state – and to provide rebates for the implementation of risk-reduction actions such as the creation of defensible space and improved home ignition zones. Mountain residents have responded enthusiastically to the program and many are urging their neighbors to join.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the SB 13-269 grant enabled Boulder County to establish a database that tracks homeowner actions and contacts with wildfire mitigation staff. This allows us to better measure the success of various actions and follow-up to remind homeowners of necessary maintenance efforts on an annual basis.

Renewed funding of the DNR WRRG program will support expansion of innovative programs like Wildfire Partners and the implementation of traditional wildfire mitigation efforts.

Wildfire Insurance Industry

Wildfire Partners is the first wildfire mitigation program in Colorado that partners local governments with the insurance industry to increase the insurability of homes in the WUI. Several insurance companies have partnered with Wildfire Partners and are impressed with our innovative assessment tool (or audit), which is an iPad application that can be used easily in the field. Allstate will soon become the first to adopt the Wildfire Partners assessment tool and certification as representation of homeowner initiative in addressing their wildfire risk.

This approach is aligned with Recommendation 2.4.4 of the 2013 Wildfire Insurance and Forest Health Task Force Report to *Develop and require a Wildfire Mitigation Audit for high risk properties in the WUI*, as the assessment tool can be easily replicated and used by local governments, insurance agencies,

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fire protection districts, and others. The insurance industry should be encouraged and incentivized to partner with programs like Wildfire Partners to provide clear and transparent requirements for risk reduction efforts in the WUI that are consistent from community to community.

Local Government efforts to address wildfire risk

At the August meeting several members of the committee asked if and how counties and local governments are working to address wildfire risk in their jurisdiction and in partnership with fire chiefs, the insurance industry, and public agencies like the Colorado State Forest Service. We would like to reiterate that we are among several counties that are working across the continuum to reduce development in the WUI, encourage the personal responsibility of wildfire risk reduction among homeowners already living in the WUI, and to address suppression and recovery when there is a fire. However, we recognize that on the whole, counties and local governments must do more to address this issue.

Boulder County supports a mandatory minimum statewide common standard for wildfire mitigation or a mandatory model code for new and existing development in the WUI. If a uniform building code is not feasible, Boulder County supports efforts to incentivize and reward counties for prioritizing wildfire mitigation in their planning processes for both new and existing structures.

As an example, the WRRG program extension could include specific provisions for bonus funding (or a larger allocation) to those communities who demonstrate meaningful fidelity to the NFPA model building codes, International Code Council WUI building codes, and/or CSFS defensible space standards. A portion of the WRRG funding could also be dedicated to assist local governments in the WUI with the implementation of wildfire mitigation land use and building codes or comprehensive planning for wildfire, if they currently have no wildfire mitigation component in place.

Prescribed Fire

We appreciate the committee members understanding that prescribed fire is an ecologically and cost-effective approach to improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk. Later this month the county is hosting a prescribed fire educational session for interested residents and others in advance of a planned prescribed fire on county-owned lands. Ongoing education and demonstration projects are necessary to help strengthen the public's trust in the use and benefits of prescribed fire. We urge the committee to continue to explore ways the state can effectively and safely expand the use of prescribed fire on state lands, and in partnership with local and federal land managers. In addition, further exploration is necessary to better understand the liability issues associated with prescribed fire, particularly for state employees.

The Wildfire Matters Review Committee and General Assembly as a whole have taken great strides to reduce the loss of life, homes, and the high costs of wildfires in Colorado. Boulder County looks forward to working with the Committee as you explore additional solutions to further reducing these risks.

Sincerely,



Cindy Domenico, Chair
Boulder County Commissioners