

**Update & Preliminary Recommendations**

**to the**

**Wildfire Matters Review Committee**



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**Updated August 4, 2014  
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## Update From the Colorado State Fire Chiefs

**TO:** Wildfire Matters Review Committee

**FROM:** Garry Briese  
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Colorado State Fire Chiefs

**DATE:** **August 4, 2014** (Update on October 1, 2013 document)

The three highest priority recommendations remain the same as given to the Committee on October 1, 2013:

- #1 Insure the stability and reliability of the current Colorado state-wide emergency radio system
- #2 Continue to invest in the development, expansion and implementation of the State resource mobilization plan
- #3 Expand the current local, regional and state command, control, coordination capabilities

The members of the Colorado fire service live the threats and realities of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fires each and every day. The nearly 400 local fire departments in Colorado remain committed to the citizens of Colorado and deeply appreciate the work of the Wildfire Matters Review Committee

These recommendations are based on this recognition and on the primacy of firefighter and civilian safety. The recommendations are rooted in the essential requirement for local, state and Federal inter-agency cooperation and coordination, and highlight the state's roles and responsibilities in WUI and wildland fires. **The recommendations are ranked in order of priority.**

The first three recommendations are inter-related and provide the essential components necessary effective WUI/wildfire and all-hazards response. The remaining four recommendations are supportive of the first three.

***The August 2014 Updates are bold and italicized following each recommendation.***

## **#1 -- Ensure the stability and reliability of the current Colorado state-wide emergency radio system**

Simply put, we need to be able to talk to each other and the single most important action that the legislature can take to improve WUI and wildfire response is to provide sufficient funding to stabilize the deterioration of the current statewide emergency radio system

Being able to talk to each other is a simple concept but one that is in jeopardy in our state. We don't want "*Can you hear me now?*" to be the tagline used to describe Colorado's emergency radio system.

Without reliable radio communications, mission critical decisions and actions are compromised or dangerously degraded, jeopardizing the lives of firefighters, law enforcement officers, first responders and civilians

Colorado a "system of systems" as the operators of the various radio systems across the state worked to establish connections between systems to achieve basic interoperability. There is still much to be done to assure seamless interoperability on a routine basis. Further, the progress that has been made is now in jeopardy. .

There are two major trunked digital systems in use throughout the State. The State Digital Trunked Radio System (DTRS) and a Harris system used by Denver, Aurora, and some surrounding jurisdictions. Significant grant funds have been invested in tying these systems together for interoperability.

But, ongoing maintenance challenges with the DTRS has resulted in Weld and Adams counties (Front Range Communication Consortium) purchasing another radio switch, effectively creating yet another radio system that may not provide seamless interoperability with the two existing systems

The reason for the third split is a very real concern that the DTRS is not being maintained by the state and the anticipation that with this maintenance neglect the DTRS will predictably fail.

Creating multiple and duplicative radio systems raises significant concerns that interoperability may be lost and has tremendous cost through duplicated costs of multiple systems.

The solution is that the State of Colorado must develop a more robust radio system within the DTRS radio system that allows inter-region operability and the capability to use radios within the various regions of the state without having the necessity to adding radios.

State controlled regional radio caches need to be established and maintained in the appropriate radio frequency range, keeping the DTRS elements of the cache in a hibernation mode for activation. Radio support technicians should be dispatched to significant events to rapidly

reprogram radios to address and operability challenges. Fees should be applied when these radio caches are used.

The State should map and develop those areas within the State where DTRS cannot be used and VHF is used on a daily/routine basis to support the need for VHF supply levels.

Expand the capabilities of the State FMOs by supplying appropriate radios to expand and utilize their DTRS capabilities

For the longer term, develop and implement, as a local, state and federal collaborative effort, a State-wide Wildfire Communications Plan to effectively utilize both VHF and 800 mghz DTR systems based upon available coverage for initial attack, tactical operations, mutual aid and air operations

The Communications Plan should be developed to recognize and account for the continued predominant utilization of VHF frequencies by both local fire resources and federal wildland firefighting agencies.

**Estimated cost to State of Colorado = \$140 million over 4 years**

*August 2014 Update: The CSFC is encouraged by the communications legislation that was proposed by the Committee and championed by its members and subsequently passed by the Legislature. However, the need for speedy work and adequate funding cannot be emphasized enough.*

*The stability of the DTRS system remains a significant concern for the fire service and for all users of the system. The identification of sources of long term re-occurring revenue to sustain & update the system is essential and multiple options for sources of this revenue need to be discussed.*

## **#2 -- Continue to invest in the development, expansion & implementation of the State resource mobilization plan**

If we cannot effectively mobilize, deploy and utilize firefighting resources then the efforts of this committee and the fire services across this state are minimized and lives are placed at risk.

DHSEM received three FTEs as part of HB13-1031 for this purpose. Due to multiple circumstances and back-to-back disasters there has been a delay in filling these three positions. These positions must be filled expeditiously and certainly before the end of 2013.

The resource mobilization plan provides the resources, and the incident command structure organizes the resources for the most effective fire suppression and evacuation efforts.

**Estimated cost for the State of Colorado** = already allocated

*August 2014 Update: The CSFC continues to work with both the DHSEM and DFPC to support the continued enhancement of the State Resource Mobilization Plan. Significant effort has been made by DHSEM to apply the LEAN process to the State Resource Mobilization Plan which should result in efficiencies across the mobilization process.*

*In coordination with the DHSEM & DFPC, the CSFC is in the initial stages of developing an all-hazards statewide mutual aid system that will serve as the initial expansion of existing local & county mutual aid programs when local, county and regional mutual aid is expended. The statewide mutual aid system will be complimentary to the State Resource Mobilization Plan. The next phase of the development of the statewide mutual aid system will take place in September & October 2014. Meetings will be held on the Western Slope, Front Range, SW Colorado and in the SE and NE of the state.*

*It is expected that some type of enabling legislative action may be necessary to address liability and workers' comp concerns with a statewide mutual aid system.*

### **#3 -- Expand the current local, regional and State command, control, and coordination capabilities**

Third in priority, after communications and resource mobilization is a solid incident command system that is rapidly scalable from a single jurisdiction incident to a multi-agency/multi-jurisdiction event

An incident command structure is essential to quickly organizing and efficiently utilizing the firefighting assets that will be mobilized under the State resource mobilization plan

Fully develop, fund and implement the All-Hazards Incident Management Team (AHIMT) concept across Colorado. AHIMTs are organized as local (Type IV), regional (Type III) and national (Type II and Type I). AHIMTs provide an excellent return on investment.

Each county needs at least one Type IV All-Hazard IMT which would provide significant capabilities enhancement at the county level.

The state currently recognizes five (5) Type III All-Hazard Incident Management Teams. In addition to these five teams, there needs to be eight (8) Type III All-Hazard IMTs in the state to provide the necessary resources to manage four (4) simultaneous events

The same communications system, resource mobilization system and incident management system that is used for fighting WUI and wildfires also could be used for all other non-fire incidents and disasters.

**Estimated cost for State of Colorado** = about \$2 million over 2 years

*August 2014 Update: The Broken Arrow Mobilization Exercises highlighted the need for rapid deployment of incident management teams and key positions to organize and utilize the significant resources that could be rapidly mobilized under a robust statewide mutual aid system and State Resource Mobilization Plan.*

*Organizing incident management teams for the more efficient and safer utilization of the existing fire service resources in Colorado will provide one of the highest ROI's for each dollar of state funding.*

*CSFC recommends that the State invest \$2.5 million over two years in the development and sustainment of the current 5 Type III AHIMTs and in the development of an additional three (3) Type III AHIMTs.*

*These funds should also support the delivery of statewide training for Strike Team Leaders and Staging Area Managers, two key positions identified as significant gaps in the Broken Arrow Mobilization Exercises.*

#### **#4 -- Provide sufficient funding to the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) to fulfill its stated missions**

Ensure that all regions of the State have their assigned Fire Management Officers (FMOs). The FMOs are a capability that, when coordinating with a local firefighting force, significantly increases their firefighting potential and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment.

However, the FMOs in each region are only one person deep and all FMOs can easily be fully engaged without any backup and sustained 24/7 operations are not possible with the current FMO staffing levels, especially when multiple regions are experiencing multiple fires (which is now considered the normal status operations during wildfire season)

Previously some regions in the state had as many as three district foresters from the Colorado State Forest Service. Currently all regions are staffed by only one FMO (and one region is vacant)

Funding for the DFPC also provides that initial response from the State to assist local agencies with determining if the fire will be handled locally or what additional resources will be required.

DFPC has multiple other responsibilities that are currently either underfunded or unfunded. The Legislative Committee should request a report from DPS/DFPC concerning the status of allocated funding for each of its areas of responsibilities.

**Estimated cost to the State of Colorado = to be determined**

*August 2014 Update: CSFC recommends that appropriate funding be allocated in 2015 and beyond to the DFPC to provide two (2) FMOs per region with appropriate supervisory staff. Most of the regions still are only one FMO deep.*

*The Wildfire Matters Committee should request a new report from DPS/DFPC concerning the status of allocated funding & FTEs for each of its areas of responsibilities to include gaps in staffing vis-à-vis DFPC's key role in the State's WUI and wildfire responsibilities.*

#### **#5 -- State aviation resources are an essential and integral part of the initial attack on WUI fires**

Provide funding support for the appropriate mix of firefighting aircraft to fill the gap between what is needed on WUI and wildland fires in Colorado and what the federal interagency system will provide

The Colorado Air National Guard (Title 32) using its helicopter air support capabilities and fully qualified and trained crews, should become an integral part of the air attack plans and operations for WUI fires in Colorado

**Estimated cost to the State of Colorado = \$20+ million**

*August 2014 Update: The General Assembly made significant investments in the State's ability to provide firefighting aircraft for WUI and wildland fires in Colorado. These assets have already been effectively utilized this summer on multiple fires. CSFC fully supports the current and on-going funding for these firefighting aircraft.*

*Fortunately, most of Colorado experienced significant snowpack this winter and rainfall this summer. Precipitation usually means fewer fires, although we still have several months to go in the traditional wildfire season where the Colorado aircraft will be utilized.*

*CSFC is concerned that, given this year's drop in both WUI and wildfires, that the General Assembly may reprioritize the funds appropriated in 2014 for Colorado firefighting aircraft for other uses in 2015. CSFC believes that would be a mistake.*

*The growth of fuel this year, when dry conditions return, will provide more than significant opportunity to aggressively utilize Colorado's firefighting aircraft.*

**#6 -- Develop measureable and clearly articulated performance goals for response to WUI fires to guide the response of local, mutual aid and State resources**

Such as:

- Hold 98% of WUI fires to five (5) acres or less
- Initial local attack on the scene of 95% of WUI fires in 20 minutes
- Initial air support over WUI fires within 30 minutes anywhere in the state
- 30/90/90 -for WUI incidents occurring with specific weather conditions, set a goal of 30 pieces of fire apparatus on the scene in 90 minutes 90% of the time

Some will say that there are too many variables to set measureable goals. But, CSFC disagrees and believes that *"if a goal is not measured, then it is not a goal – it is only a wish."*

We need to consider the vastness of our State in the development of measureable performance goals and establish "stretch goals" depending on population density and local resources. But we still need easy to understand goals!

Over the past five years 95% of all wildfires (local and State fires) have been contained to 10 acres or less and these fires have accounted for about 2% of all acres burned. One-half of one percent (0.5%) of all wildfires have accounted for 81% of all acres burned.

In addition to keeping WUI and wildfires small, we need to get resources on these 0.5% wildfires much quicker

The Colorado State Fire Chiefs has accepted the responsibility of developing the concept to implement these performance goals and has established a multi-agency task force to do this work. The initial status report will be presented in December 2013 with the final implementation strategy due by April 2014.

**Estimated cost to State of Colorado** = in-kind participation of the DFPC & DHSEM (Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management) with sustaining operations & exercises funded by re-prioritization of state homeland security funds in FY 2014 and beyond



*August 2014 Update: CSFC, working in cooperation with nearly 125 different organizations and agencies, began work in November 2013 on the 30/90/90 goal.*

*The Broken Arrow Mobilization Exercise was developed and two mobilizations took place in May 2014 (Larimer & Douglas counties).*

*Broken Arrow was a first.....mobilization exercises of this size and complexity have never been done before in Colorado*

- *68 fire engines from 46 fire departments participated in the two events*
- *More than 400 firefighters & supporting personnel*
- *Multiple communications and dispatch centers*
- *Local, county, state & Federal agencies (including DFPC, DHSEM)*
- *Douglas & Larimer County Sheriffs*
- *Non-profit & for-profit organizations*
  
- *While 30/90 was not achieved, all apparatus for both exercises arrived at the staging area within 2 hours of activation. Both “rally times” and travel times are significant factors with most apparatus taking 45 minutes to arrive at the rally point and then some apparatus driving 60 miles or more to the staging area*
  
- *Western slope meetings to implement their “version” of Broken Arrow will begin in September 2014*
  
- *CSFC is evaluating a goal of developing 20 strike teams across Colorado, with an plan in place by June 1, 2015*
  
- *DHSEM estimated that the cost for each Broken Arrow exercise would have been about \$125,000 if this was an actual mobilization under the State Resource Mobilization Plan*
  
- *All fire departments and participating organizations participated at their own expense because of the value they saw in the exercise*
  
- *Broken Arrow mobilization exercises should be held in multiple locations around the state each year prior to the traditional summer wildfire season*
  
- *CSFC recommends that \$150,000 be allocated to the DHSEM for technical and administrative support for at least 5 Broken Arrow type mobilization exercises across the state in 2015 and each subsequent year*

**#7 -- Recognize that while community and individual homeowner mitigation is an essential component of a comprehensive WUI strategy, it is not an effective immediate or mid-term solution to our State's immediate threats**

Relying on individual citizens and communities to recognize the need for mitigation and to actually implement mitigation is no longer an acceptable methodology for WUI mitigation. Mitigation is always an important factor, however there needs to be a statewide effort to mitigate as homes are placed into the WUI

There also is a need for continual maintenance of the defensible space or that advantage will quickly be lost. It is unlikely that in a local control state we will mandate anything significant at the State level and probably very few counties will adopt regulations that control on-going maintenance on private property.

Quoting from the recent Yarnell Serious Accident Investigation Report, "*Although Yavapai County had a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, many structures were not defensible by firefighters responding to the Yarnell Hill Fire. The fire destroyed over one hundred structures.*"

It may be better for the fire service to have a statewide methodology to evaluate properties as to defensibility and work with homeowners and HOAs to lessen the hazards. If not, the following must be clearly communicated to the HOAs (Home Owner Associations) and individual homeowners.

- The fire service will not deploy personnel to attempt to mitigate, but instead will move on to the homes and structures that can be saved.
- Roads that are hazardous to pass through due to lack of mitigation will be identified and during a fire the fire service will not send personnel into the area.

It is important that this is statewide and advertised widely to motivate homeowners and to provide a unified stance after/while homes are being burned.

**Estimated cost to the State of Colorado = to be determined**

***August 2014 Update: Getting homeowners to accept more responsibility for the risk of living in wildfire zones is, and will continue to be, an uphill battle.***

***Based on 2010 US census data, it is estimated that about 17% of Colorado's population, or almost a million people, lived in high-wildfire-risk areas. Of the 7,000 homes in the area evacuated for the Black Forest Fire, half were not there a decade ago.***

*Creative, and aggressive, encouragements to homeowners to mitigate must continue. Prescribed burning must continue. And it must be clearly understood by citizens and elected leaders that....*

- *The fire service will not deploy personnel to defend unmitigated properties and will move to the homes and structures that can be saved.*
- *Roads that are hazardous to pass due to lack of mitigation will be identified and during a fire the fire service will not send personnel into the area.*

*The safety of firefighters, and the citizens we protect, is first and foremost.*

## **Closing**

The costs associated with fire mitigation and firefighting need to be measured against the real and total costs of fires in the WUI.

As expensive as fighting a fire is, the cost of recovery is even greater. Even if the loss of life is not considered, the ensuing flood damage to water quality, roads, bridges, utilities, and private property dwarf the cost of effective fire suppression.

But, when WUI fires are over....black and cold....the local fire service is still there as a part of the communities we serve, preparing to respond to the floods that will soon follow.

WUI fires are increasing in frequency and intensity and despite the cycles of periodic heavy rains, Colorado will always be an arid climate and we will always have WUI fires and wildfires.

As a State we must continue to prepare for the next fire season because there will be the next fire season and fires will occur within the WUI

*“The grasses will ignite instantly, and then the fire will load up on the dead vegetation on the ground here; then it’ll ignite the dead tree branches low on the tree trunks, and the trees will go up like a Roman candle, showing the area with embers. Temperatures will reach a thousand degrees.”*

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2014