

Community Fire Planning in Moffat County, Colorado

Introduction

In 2003, Moffat County, Colorado completed the last phase of a county-wide wildland fire planning effort. This report builds onto the Moffat County Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan by including more detailed community wildland fire mitigation plans for four communities identified at greatest risk from wildfire in Moffat County including Greystone, Wilderness Ranch, Bakers Peak and Knez Divide.

Funding for Community Fire Planning

This project is a joint effort by many "partners". The Bureau of Land Management supported this planning effort by providing almost ninety percent of the funding and numerous hours of expertise. The result is a compilation of all new (i.e., digital imagery) and existing data bases and reports into one strategic document that addresses the issues of fire protection, fire suppression, fuels reduction and emergency communications for the communities of Greystone, Knez Divide, Bakers Peak and Wilderness Ranch. It covers all land ownerships, private and public, within the wildland urban interface of each community.

Background and History of Fire Management in Moffat County

The landscape in Moffat County shows evidence of wildland fire impacts throughout history. Beginning in the early to mid twentieth century, wildland fires were viewed as having negative impacts on the natural environment, thus, suppressing them became policy. In recent history, stemming from a revision of State policy in 2000 with HR Bill 00-1283 along with the eye-opening fire season that same year, public awareness of the benefits of fire to the ecosystem and the potential for catastrophic wildland fires, a result of long periods of fire suppression that promoted the buildup of fuels coupled with more homes being built in fire-prone environments, has increased. Since then, significant efforts have been made in Moffat County toward reducing the potential for loss of life, property, and natural resources. This was mainly done by viewing fire as a natural and inevitable part of the environment and planning across all land ownership boundaries with that in mind. The goal is to reduce the amount of funds needed for firefighting in the future by turning planning into action and avoiding the loss of lives, homes and property from wildfires.

History of Fire Occurrences and Community Impacts

Fire management officers are often heard saying it is not 'if' but 'when' a wildland fire will threaten a community in Moffat County because it experiences more lightning strikes than most places in North America. Historically, fires burned through the vast open spaces resulting in few

impacts to humans. Recently, human habitation has been expanding, resulting in an increase of wildland urban interface in Moffat County. As a result, much more infrastructure exists in several fire-prone areas, inhibiting the ability of wildland fire managers to effectively manage fires across the landscape. Phases I through III of the Moffat County Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan (2001-2003) identified the developments that have been built in historically fire-prone areas as “communities at risk” and assigned these communities with fire hazard ratings. The four communities that were identified in the highest risk categories included Greystone, Bakers Peak, Wilderness Ranch and Knez Divide.

Activities for Community Fire Management

Previous wildland fire management planning efforts involved: Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service, Medicine Bow/Routt and White River National Forest Service, Moffat County Sheriff’s Department, Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Colorado State Land Board, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Moffat County Natural Resources Department, Moffat County Commissioners, local fire departments and private landowners.

The community wildfire mitigation plans included in this report continue to build from previous work, involving all stakeholders, and resulting in plans that can be directly used by federal, state, and private partners to implement on-the-ground projects for wildfire mitigation and community protection.

Planning Area Boundaries

Planning area boundaries for Greystone, Wilderness Ranch, Bakers Peak and Knez Divide were originally defined in the Moffat County Wildland Fire and Fuel Management Plan and were further defined through a detailed analysis of the wildland urban interface (WUI) through a digital imagery process using satellite photos. Knez Divide is the only community that is located in a fire district. The three remaining communities are under the protection of the Moffat County Sheriff’s Department.

Planning Process

Description of Partners

Several government agencies (BLM, National Forest Service, State Forest Service) and local fire departments (Craig Volunteer Fire Department and Maybell Fire Department) participated in the County’s planning process by attending community meetings and providing technical advice and expertise.

Collaboration and Community Input Process

A project “kick-off” meeting was held on July 8, 2004 at the Moffat County Courthouse to gather input on the information gathering process from the Bureau of Land Management, National Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Moffat County Sheriff’s Department and local fire departments. In order to assure community wildfire mitigation plans included specific recommendations that federal state, and private landowners could implement, field tours were

made to gather input from landowners and residents in the four communities at risk. Many site visits were conducted to discuss fuel treatment options available to landowners and communities.

*Description of Community Outreach and Meetings**

Community meetings were coordinated with the Sheriff's Department, volunteer fire departments, BLM, National Forest Service and other agencies and private organizations involved in fire management or fuel reduction.

The Greystone community meeting was held on Thursday, July 29, 2004 at 7:00 pm at the Maybell Community Center to discuss where and how to conduct fuel treatment projects to protect the homes in Greystone. Community residents also discussed their concerns about possible emergencies that may occur in the area and what kind of equipment and training is needed.

A meeting with the Moffat County Commissioners, Sheriff's Department, Craig Fire Department, State Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the National Forest Service to discuss planning for Bakers Peak and Wilderness Ranch was held on Tuesday, August 17, 2004 at 11:00 am at the Moffat County Courthouse.

ResourceLogic, LLC, met with several Bakers Peak Landowner Association board members and landowners in the community on September 5, 2004. Issues discussed included explanation of the planning effort, access issues, and information needed from landowners.

ResourceLogic, LLC, and a representative from the USFS attended the Wilderness Ranch Board of Directors meeting on October 9, 2004 at 6:00 pm at the Holiday Inn in Craig to discuss the project and request input and information from landowners. The USFS planning effort for fuel reduction and beetle infestation mitigation on adjacent public land was also discussed. Because many of the Wilderness Ranch and Bakers Peak landowners are absentee, the contractors mailed more than 760 letters describing the project and asking for input from landowners.

The Knez Divide community meeting was held on Wednesday, October 13, 2004 at 7:00 pm at the Shadow Mountain Clubhouse.

A meeting was held with the Moffat County Commissioners, Sheriff's Department, CRFPD, state and federal agencies on December 8, 2004 at 2:00 pm at the courthouse conference room to review draft community fire mitigation plans for Bakers Peak, Wilderness Ranch, Knez Divide, and Greystone.

1.0 Introduction Moffat County Community Fire Mitigation Plans

A meeting was held on December 11, 2004 at 11:00 am at the Center of Craig for landowners in the Bakers Peak and Wilderness Ranch communities to get input on the rough draft of the plans.

A meeting was held on December 13, 2004 at 6:00 pm at the Shadow Mountain Clubhouse for landowners in the Knez Divide community to get input on the rough draft of the plan.

A meeting was held on December 14, 2004 at 6:00 pm at the Maybell Community Center for landowners in the Greystone community to get input on the rough draft of the plan.

*Documentation of community outreach/meetings is included in the Appendix A of this report.