

Rocky Mountain Region – Water Emphasis Front Range Watershed Wildfire Effort

In July 2007, the Pinchot Institute released an assessment report titled *Protecting Front Range Forest Watersheds from High-Severity Wildfires*. The report noted that the number, size, and severity of forest fires have steadily increased as the population of Colorado continues to explode and place ever-higher demands for clean water from source watersheds in the forest headwaters. The study concluded that climate factors and forest conditions place Front Range source watersheds at high risk from severe wildfires that threaten water supplies and the integrity of reservoirs with erosion and flood damage. The report urged that critical watershed-wildfire protection plans be considered to reduce these hazards.

The U.S. Forest Service and Colorado State Forest Service hosted a meeting with Front Range water providers in August 2007 to discuss the report's findings and explore ideas for joint action. All parties made a commitment to develop a strategic action plan for Front Range watersheds. In September 2007, the agencies and water providers met again and crafted the structural outlines of a partnership effort to protect Front Range source watersheds from severe wildfires.

The organizational structure of the partnership effort took shape through the results of meetings in the winter of 2007-08. An oversight group, the *Front Range Watershed-Wildfire Protection Group*, contains members of all 21 participating organizations and works cooperatively with the Front Range Fuels Treatment Roundtable. Participating organizations are listed below. Three work groups serve under the guidance of this oversight group:

- **Data Refinement:** This work group has refined a method to identify critical 6th-level watersheds within the larger source watersheds and prioritize them for potential forest treatments to reduce severe wildfire hazards. They have tested the approach in the Upper South Platte watershed. Deb Martin (USGS) and Dave Hessel (CSFS) are co-chairs.
- **Plan Development:** This work group has written a template for Critical Community Watershed-Wildfire Protection Plans to design effective forest treatments that reduce hazards of severe wildfire damage in critical sub-watersheds. Chuck Dennis (CSFS) is the group chair.
- **Communication and Outreach:** This work group is developing a strategy for public education and partner outreach that will be needed to build broad support and strong investment in actions that fortify forests against severe wildfires in source watersheds. Jim Maxwell (USFS) and Mike McHugh (Aurora Water) are co-chairs.

Participating Organizations

- **Agencies:** Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Emergency Management, Colorado Division of Public Health and Environment, Colorado State Forest Service, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Douglas County Public Works, U.S. Forest Service (Rocky Mountain Region, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest, Pike-San Isabel National Forest), U.S. Geological Survey
- **Water Providers:** Aurora Water, Boulder Public Works, Colorado Springs Utilities, Denver Water, Fort Collins Utilities, Loveland Water & Power, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Pueblo Water, Westminster Utilities, Farmers Reservoir & Irrigation Company
- **Others:** American Water Works Association, Colorado Watershed Network, The Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society