

# Colorado Wildfire Update

DFPC Update for  
Colorado Counties Inc

June 9, 2021



# How Fire Works in Colorado

## Fire Protection District

Initial Attack  
Exceeds Capabilities  
Requests County Assistance

## County Sheriff

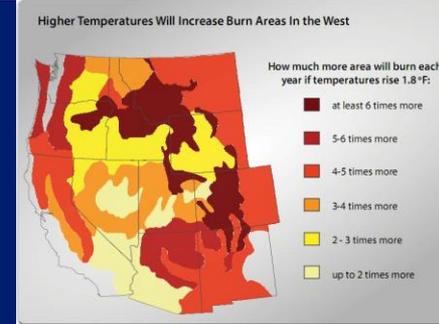
Required to Take Fire if Local Capability Exceeded  
Exceeds County Capabilities  
Requests State Assistance

## State Responsibility

Performs Analysis to Determine if Eligible  
If Eligible, State Assumes Cost with Ongoing Involvement from Local and County Partners  
State pays with EFF, Resource Mob, or Executive Order (DEF)

# The Increasing Fire Problem

- Core wildfire seasons are 78 days longer than they were in the late 1970's
  - By 2050 the area burned nationwide is expected to double to around 20M acres per year
    - Colorado is expected to experience up to a five-fold increase in acres burned
- State Demographers expect Colorado's population to grow from 5.5 million people to 8.5 million people by 2050
  - Includes ~ 380,000 people on West Slope



# Colorado Fire Trends

- Colorado's Top 20 Largest Wildfires:
  - All 20 have occurred since 2001
  - 9 of the 20 have occurred in the last 3 years (2018 and 2020)
  - 4 of the top 5 have occurred in the last 3 years (2018 and 2020)



# Impacts and the Total Cost of Fire

- Suppression Costs
- Insured Losses
- Secondary Losses
  - Flooding and Rehabilitation
  - Water Quality
  - Grazing
  - Recreation and Tourism
  - Loss of Property Taxes



March 2017 Logan Fire



# Traditional Colorado Model

- Wildfires only happen in the mountains between Memorial Day and Labor Day
- Being a wildland firefighter is a great summer job while you're in college
- Wait until it's over the hill, and then the State will bring the checkbook



# Stakeholder Planning

# The DFPC “Playbook”

- Winter of 2017 - 18
- Formalize and document an intentional long-term strategy for the future of DFPC’s support to fire agencies in CO
- Core working group of 43 individuals
  - Road show meetings: Fort Morgan, La Junta, Alamosa, Durango, and Steamboat
- Total of 114 meeting participants from 84 agencies

# The Concept of a Fire Commission

- Several groups already working on forest health and watershed issues (the Fire Commission is not a duplicate group)
- Evaluate and make recommendations related to Colorado's fire issues (not just wildfire)
- Who are the Stakeholders?
- Geographical Representation

# Colorado Fire Commission (SB19-040)

- 24 voting members; 7 ex-officio (non-voting) members with ability to appoint additional stakeholders or subject matter experts
- Mission Statement: Enhance public safety in Colorado through an integrated statewide process focused on the fire service's capacity to conduct fire management and use, preparedness, prevention, and response activities to safeguard lives, property, and natural resources, and increase the resiliency of local and regional communities.



# CFC Year #1 Recommendations

## Enhanced State Assistance Program:

- Evaluate funding methodology to encourage all counties to participate
- Convert County EFF contributions to fund Enhanced State Assistance (ESA) - no legislation needed to implement this
- Provide \$1.8M in continuously appropriated State funds to bolster ESA capacity (**included as part of Stimulus SB21-049**)
- Expand statutory use of Wildfire Emergency Response Funds (WERF) to include expanding the use of local and state resources to strive to keep fires small (severity, prepositioning, aviation, crews, surge, etc)

# Other Year #1 CFC Recommendations

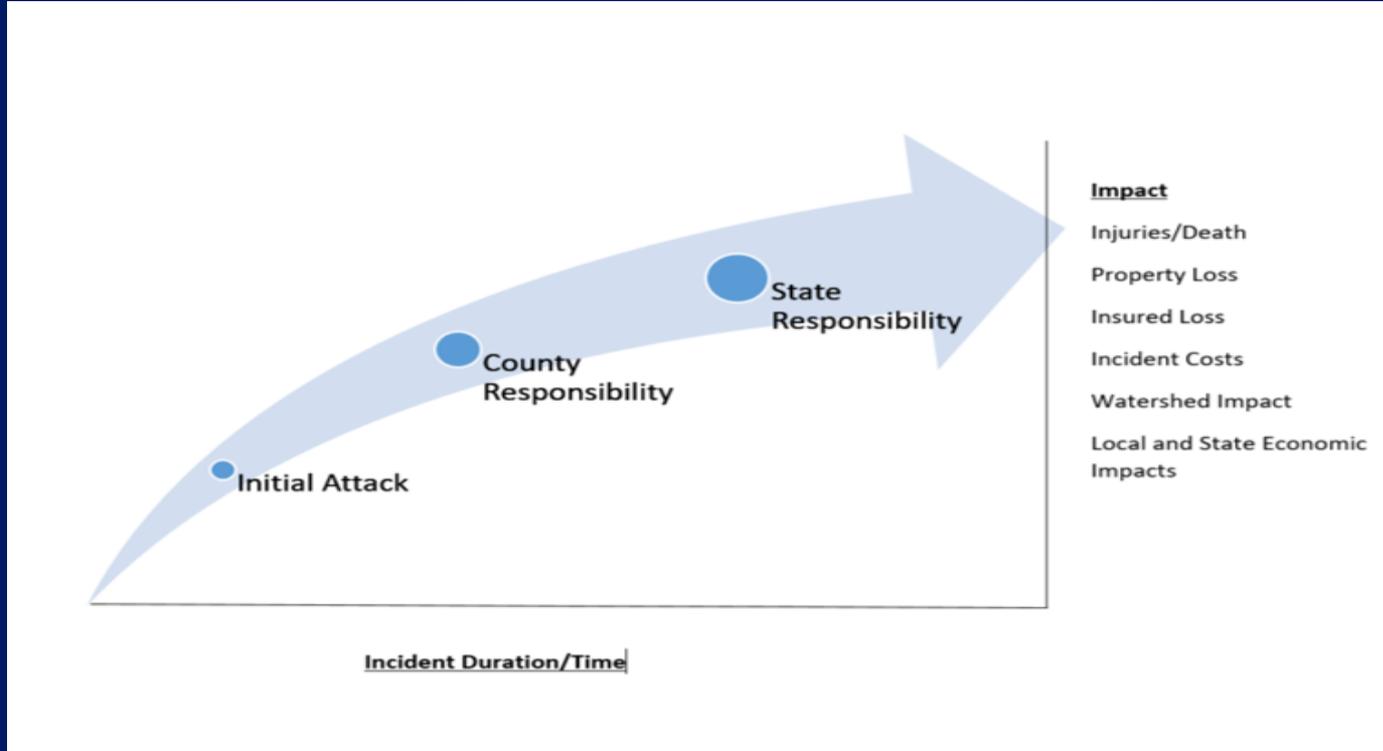
- Implement a Comprehensive Fire Data Collection and Dissemination Program
- Included in SB21-166 (as of 3/23/2021):
  - Implement the Colorado Coordinated Regional Mutual Aid System (CCRMAS)
  - Updates to Mutual Aid Statutes to Support CCRMAS
  - Establish a State Responsibility and Large Wildland Fire Fund within DFPC



# DFPC's Approach to Fire Response

# A New Concept for the State's Fire Agency

- Duration vs. Impact:



# Suppression and Mitigation

- Is suppression “or” mitigation the answer to the wildfire problem?
- National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy:
  - Resilient Landscapes
  - Fire Adapted Communities
  - Safe and Effective Wildfire Response



# Suppression and Mitigation

- **Defensible Space:** an area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been managed to reduce the wildfire threat and allow firefighters to safely and effectively defend the house.
- **Fuel Break:** a strip of land or block of vegetation that have been altered to slow or control a fire.
- 2018 Buffalo Mountain Fire
  - Example of an “AND” approach



# DFPC Involvement on Fires

- **State Assistance Fires** - available for all fires, with emphasis on early detection and rapid Initial Attack actions
  - Includes funding for aviation resources on Day 1+ of a fire
  - Includes funding for 2 days of a 20-person handcrew during IA
  - Includes DFPC Engines, Modules, and Overhead for first 2 days of a fire
  - Required additional appropriation and/or utilizes DFPC base budgets
- **State Responsibility Fires** - based on analysis to determine if local capability to manage the fire is exceeded
  - Currently funded through EFF/County and Executive Order (Disaster Emergency) funds

# State Assistance Funding - 2018 to 2020\*

Year	# of Requests	# Agencies Requesting	Handcrew Expenses	Aviation Expenses	Total Expenses
2020	52	33	\$ 262,000	\$ 2,005,000	\$ 2,267,000
2019	32	25	\$ 165,000	\$ 927,000	\$ 1,092,000
2018	75	36	\$ 396,000	\$ 2,182,000	\$ 2,578,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>\$ 823,000</b>	<b>\$ 5,114,000</b>	<b>\$ 5,937,000</b>

\* Note: Does not include wildfire and all-hazard assistance provided to local agencies by DFPC MMA, Engines, Modules, and Overhead resources

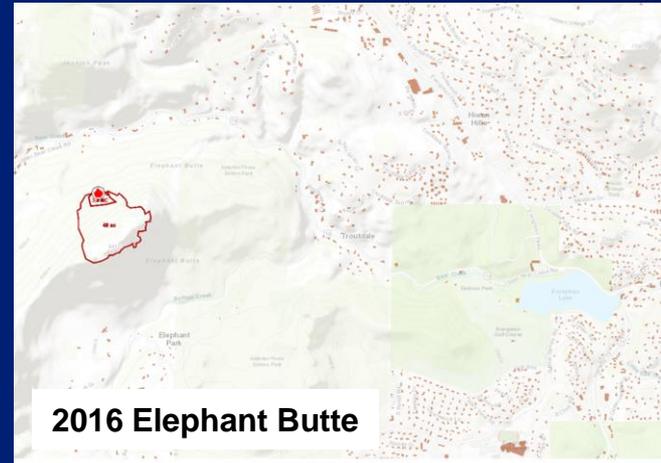
# 2020 State Responsibility Fire Analysis

- 5 of 16 (Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, Pine Gulch, Grizzly Peak, and Mullen):
  - 594,172 acres burned
  - \$265,503,000 estimated suppression expenses
  - Federal/State Acres = 85%/15%
  - Federal State Expenses = 90%/10%
- The Other 11 of 16:
  - 32,914 acres burned
  - \$20,686,470 estimated suppression expenses
  - Federal/State Acres = 26%/74%
  - Federal/State Expenses = 45%/55% of Fires



# Examples of Success in 2020

- Chatridge 2 Fire - Douglas County (2 day event, 450 acres burned)
- Elephant Butte Fire - Jefferson County (SRF for 3 days, 52 acres)
- 84 Fire - La Plata County (2 day event, 23 acres burned)
- Green Meadows Fire - San Miguel County (SRF for 3 days, 62 acres)
- Sunday Fire - Weld County (limited to 2,003 acres and 1 structure lost)



# **2021 Legislative and Program Updates**

# Why this Stimulus Package?

- Mitigation AND Suppression - holistic approach
- Even in coordination with significant mitigation efforts, we will still always have to respond to and suppress fires to protect life and property
- It has taken us decades to get here, it will take a comprehensive approach to get out
- The Colorado Fire Commission will continue to work with all stakeholders in a data driven manner to lessen the severity or likelihood of a fire when it does occur utilizing all facets of mitigation

# Wildfire Stimulus Package and Legislation - DFPC

- **Equipment for Fuels Management and Response (SB21-049)**
  - Shifting the model to be able to have resources when conditions are conducive to implementing work on the ground
  - Moving away from the traditional wildland fire model to have year-round firefighters available for response and fuels projects
  - Increased UAS Capacity
- **Critical Support Positions (Long Bill)**
  - Operational vs Support Needs
  - Equipment without people is just equipment

# Wildfire Stimulus Package and Legislation - DFPC

- **Extending Existing Aviation Contracts (SB21-049)**
  - Aviation resources to match Colorado's expanding fire "season"
  - 2 EU SEATs - 150 to 240 days each
  - 2 EU Type II Helicopters - 150 to 230 days each
- **New Aviation Resources (SB21-049 and SB21-113)**
  - LAT - 110 day EU, ongoing
  - Firehawk - year-round, State-owned, arrives 2022
  - Type 1 Helo - for 2021 only
  - Scoopers - new in 2020, CWN moving forward
  - Ag Applicator Program for Eastern Plains

# Wildfire Stimulus Package and Legislation - DFPC

- **Enhanced State Assistance (SB21-049 and SB21-113)**
  - Updated WERF Statute - increased flexibility
  - Dedicated, on-going funding
  - Increased flexibility and options
- **Mutual Aid Coordination (SB21-166)**
  - Updated Statutes (Fire vs. Law Enforcement)
  - Regional Mutual Aid System (CCRMAS)
- **Large Fire Funding (SB21-166)**
  - Proposed vs. Amendments

# Other Related Changes

- **24 Hour Wildfire Mutual Aid:**
  - Authorized in Master Agreement and State Operating Plan between DFPC and our Federal Partners
  - All Tools in the Toolbox
  - Impacts to DFPC (+/-)

# DFPC Next Steps

- Strategic Plan Updates
- Dispatching and Mobilization of Fire Resources

# In Closing

- 9 of the State's 20 largest fires in history occurred in 2018 and 2020, including 4 of the 5 largest fires in our history
- 2020 had the most expensive fire in Colorado's history (Cameron Peak) and 3 largest wildfires
- Fires occurred in some of the "worst" locations, yet we did have successes in the area of reducing losses and impacts
  - Aggressive initial attack
  - Enhanced State Assistance
  - A shift in policy

# Questions?

Wildfire in Colorado has grown beyond a natural resource problem and has become a public safety problem impacting lives, homes, watersheds, tourism, economy, and quality of life.

