

## **Wildfire Suppression and Protection in Colorado**

Colorado law identifies the sheriff as the fire warden for the county and the individual ultimately responsible for controlling and extinguishing prairie and forest fires on private and state lands within that county. ([CRS 30-10-513](#)) The state forestry role is to aid and assist the sheriff and county fire departments with this responsibility. The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) fulfills this role by providing training, equipment, technical assistance, and funding, and facilitating interagency mutual aid agreements and annual operating plans.

**County Fire Planning** – CSFS may assist County Commissioners and the County Sheriff in their role to prepare, adopt, and implement a county fire management plan ([CRS 30-11-124](#)) that details individual county policies on fire management for prescribed burns, fuels management, or natural ignition burns on lands owned by the state or county.

**Mutual Aid Agreements & Annual Operating Plans** – Each year, federal land fire agencies, state forestry, and counties meet to reach agreement on the sharing of firefighters and equipment if wildfires exceed a particular jurisdiction's resources. The intent of mutual aid is for all fire suppression agencies to work as a team, avoid duplication, and suppress wildfires efficiently. The Annual Operating Plan defines the limits of interagency cooperation and contains a mobilization plan that identifies the location and availability of firefighters and equipment.

**Emergency Fire Fund (EFF)** – This fund, established in 1967 by some counties that recognized that some wildfires may exceed the counties' resources and abilities to manage. Participation in the EFF is voluntary. A ten-person committee comprising county commissioners, sheriffs, fire chiefs, and the state forester oversees the administration of the fund. Currently, 43 Colorado counties and the Denver Water Board contribute to EFF. A county's annual assessment for EFF is calculated using a formula based on the acreage of private watershed and the annual property tax valuation. Counties with large amounts of private watershed land and a high assessed valuation pay more into the fund than rural counties with large acreage of federal lands and low assessed valuation. Emergency funding requests must originate from the county sheriff and State Forester approval is required. Once accepted, an EFF fire is managed under the direction of CSFS. ([Map of EFF Counties](#))

**Federal and State Funding Assistance** – CSFS is authorized by the Governor as the primary point of contact with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) when wildfires pose an imminent threat to life and property. CSFS requests, and if awarded, administers FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG). FMAGs provide for up to 75 per cent of eligible costs in the suppression of catastrophic wildfires.

**Wildfire Emergency Response Fund (WERF)** – This State of Colorado fund was first designated and funded by the state legislature in 2002. ([CRS 23-30-310](#)) The fund reimburses a fire department or county for the first retardant load on state and private land initial attack fires at the request of the county sheriff, municipal fire chief, or fire

protection district. In 2006 the legislature expanded authorities in the WERF to include reimbursement of 2 days of hand crew use with preference to state inmate crews. The goal is reduced suppression costs by attacking fires quickly to keep them small.

**Interagency Incident Management Teams** – Once a wildland fire burns beyond the initial and extended attack capabilities of local forces, the local responsible agency often requests management assistance in the form of a local Incident Management Group or a Type II or Type I Incident Management Team. These teams are available across the nation; the Rocky Mountain Area currently has one Type I team, three Type II teams, and one Fire Use team. Rocky Mountain area teams are interagency, consisting of individuals from the private sector, local fire departments, counties, state and federal agencies.