Custer County | 2026

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Signatories

The individuals listed below participated in the development of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and serve as signatories in the adoption of the following plan. The signatories of this CWPP agree that it is viable, complete, and realistic in terms of wildfire risk reduction and implementation, at a minimum. The 2003 Healthy Forests Restoration Act requires Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) to establish minimum standards for development of CWPPs in Colorado and must approve all CWPPs to ensure its content and certifies that it meets or exceeds CSFS CWPP minimum standards.

_____ _____

Danny Schell, Supervisory Forester Date
Colorado State Forest Service

_____ _____

Jeremiah Coleman, Fire Chief Date
Wet Mountain Fire Protection District

_____ _____

Ross Gallegos, Fire Chief Date
Rye Fire Protection District

_____ _____

Clayton Masar, Fire Chief Date
Wetmore Volunteer Fire Department

_____ _____

William R. Canda, Chairman
Custer County Board of County Commissioners Date

_____ _____

Lloyd “Rich” Smith, Sheriff, Fire Marshall Date
Custer County Sheriff’s Office

_____ _____

H.A. “Buck” Wenzel, Mayor Date
Town of Silver Cliff

_____ _____

Paul Wenke, Mayor Date
Town of Westcliffe

“Sincere thanks to the Custer County Fire Council members and the CWPP Planning Team—past and present—including our federal, state, and local agency partners and participating landowners. The Office of Emergency Management and the Fire Adapted Colorado team are to be commended for their collaborative approach, meaningful community engagement, and commitment to identifying cross-boundary planning opportunities across towns and counties. After extensive surveys, research, and analysis of the imminent wildfire risk facing our community, I am proud to present this plan to the residents of Custer County.”

Robyn Knappe
Director, Custer County Emergency Management

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Commonly Used Acronyms

AAR	After Action Report
AOP	Annual Operating Plan
ARWC	Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative
BCR	Benefit-Cost Ratio
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BoCC	Custer County Board of County Commissioners
CCCD	Custer County Conservation District
CCCSD	Custer County Consolidated School District
CCOEM	Custer County Office of Emergency Management
CCMT	Custer County Mitigation Team
CCSO	Custer County Sheriff's Office
CDPS	Colorado Department of Public Safety
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CFRI	Colorado Forest Restoration Institute
cNVC	Conditional Net Value Change
CO-WRA	Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment
CSFS	Colorado State Forest Service
CSRMS	Colorado South Region Mitigation Stakeholders
CWPP	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
CWRC	Colorado Wildfire Resilience Code
DOA	Delegation of Authority
DFPC	Division of Fire Prevention and Control

EAS	Emergency Alert System
EFF	Emergency Fire Fighting Fund
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
eNVC	Expected Net Value Change
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAC	Fire Adapted Community
FACO	Fire Adapted Colorado
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FIL	Fire Intensity Level
FPD	Fire Protection District
GIS	Geographic Information System
HFRA	Healthy Forest Restoration Act
HIZ	Home Ignition Zone
HOA	Home Owners Association
HVRAs	Highly Valued Resources and Assets
ICS	Incident Command System
IMT	Incident Management Team
IWUIC	International Wildland Urban Interface Code
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	Non-government Organization
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology

NRCS	US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWR	National Weather Radio
NWCG	National Wildfire Coordinating Group
PCLs	Potential Control Location Suitability
PODs	Potential Operational Delineations
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
PSPS	Public Safety Power Shutoffs
RADS	Risk Assessment and Decision Support
RAWS	Remote Automatic Weather Stations
ROW	Right-of-way
SDI	Suppression Difficulty Index
SFB	Shaded Fuel Break
SFCWPP	Sangre Foothills Community Wildfire Protection Plan
SOW	Scope of Work
SSD	Structure-Separation Distance
TFRA	Temporary Fire Refuge Areas
UAWCD	Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District
USFS	United States Forest Service
WEA	Wireless Emergency Alert
WRAP	Wildfire Ready Action Plan
WMFPD	Wet Mountain Fire Protection District
WMVO	Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface / Wildland Urban Intermix

Executive Summary

Purpose & Need

The Custer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) has been developed in response to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). This legislation established incentives for communities to develop comprehensive wildfire protection plans in a collaborative, inclusive process. Furthermore, this legislation directs the Departments of Interior and Agriculture to address local community priorities in fuels reduction treatments on both federal and non-federal lands.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) provide a locally driven framework for understanding wildfire hazards and identifying strategic, cost-effective investments to reduce risk and strengthen preparedness. Through collaborative assessment and discussion, the CWPP process supports coordinated mitigation planning, helps residents prioritize risk-reduction actions, and provides valuable context for wildfire response and recovery.

The purpose of the Custer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan is to support informed wildfire mitigation decisions that enhance public safety and community resilience. The plan identifies wildfire risks across the county and outlines practical strategies to reduce potential impacts to people, property, infrastructure, and natural resources, while promoting long-term community and landscape resilience.

Wildfire is a natural and necessary ecological process across much of the West, but changing climate conditions, prolonged drought, and accumulated fuels have increased the likelihood of larger and more severe fires. In Custer County, wildfire is the highest-ranked hazard in the 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan, underscoring that wildfire occurrence is inevitable and that proactive planning is essential to reduce consequences when fires occur.

This CWPP focuses on adapting how communities build, live, and manage land in fire-adapted landscapes. It emphasizes mitigation actions that improve defensible space, reduce hazardous fuels, strengthen evacuation and response capabilities, and support safer coexistence with wildfire. By aligning community priorities with science-based strategies, the plan provides a roadmap for reducing wildfire risk while recognizing fire's role in sustaining healthy ecosystems.

CWPP Planning Area

The CWPP planning area encompasses all of Custer County, including the towns of Westcliffe, Silver Cliff and all unincorporated communities in the county. The Rye Fire Protection District, serving a portion of Custer County along SH165, in the southeast section of the county, is included in the plan. It does not include those portions of Fremont County within the Wet Mountain Fire Protection District.

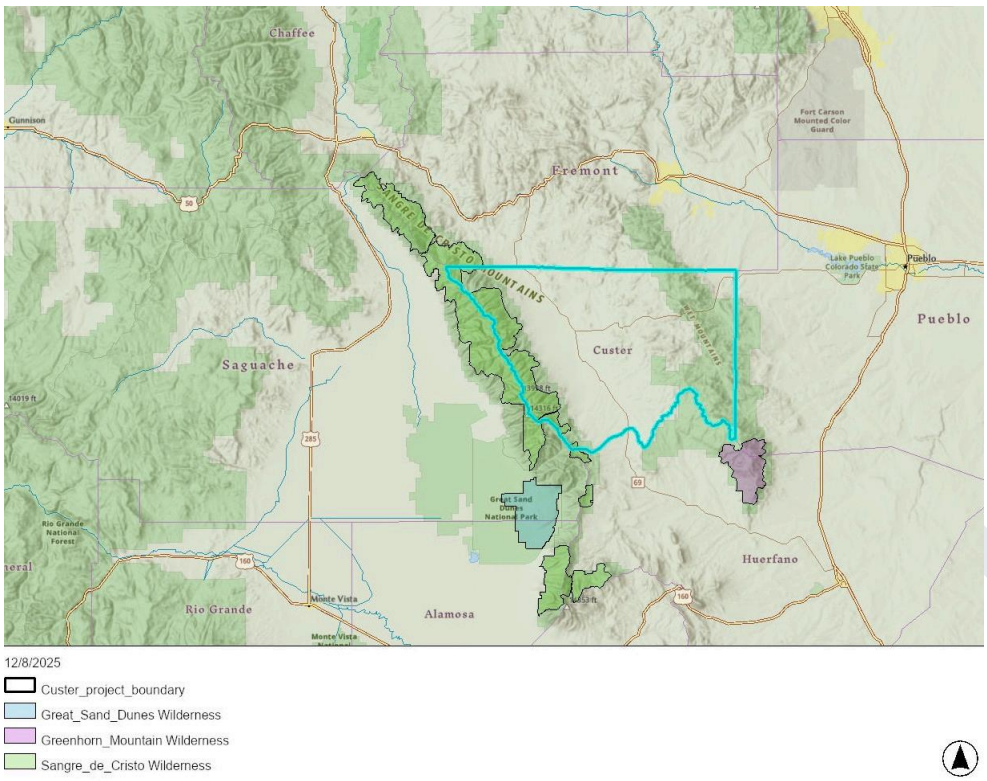
This CWPP is intended to supplement existing or future Community CWPPs, such as the Sangre Foothills and Cuerno Verde CWPPs, whether those plans are updated or new plans are established. (Figure 1)

The CWPP study area does not replace or correspond directly to the Landscape Neighborhoods defined in the 2007 Custer County CWPP. Instead, it takes a broader, current look at the county's communities and subdivision developments, aligning with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy's approach of assessing fire risk and mitigation needs at multiple scales.

Adjacent Counties:

The South Region Colorado counties adjacent to Custer County include Fremont, Pueblo, and Huerfano, each presenting high wildfire risk in lands contiguous to Custer County. Saguache County lies west of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range, which features some of the highest peaks in southern Colorado, including several over 14,000 feet. These steep, rugged mountains generally reduce wildfire risk to Custer County from the west, although under extreme conditions, a fire could potentially cross the range.

Figure 1: CWPP Planning Area Boundary (*Source*: Custer County)



Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Communities

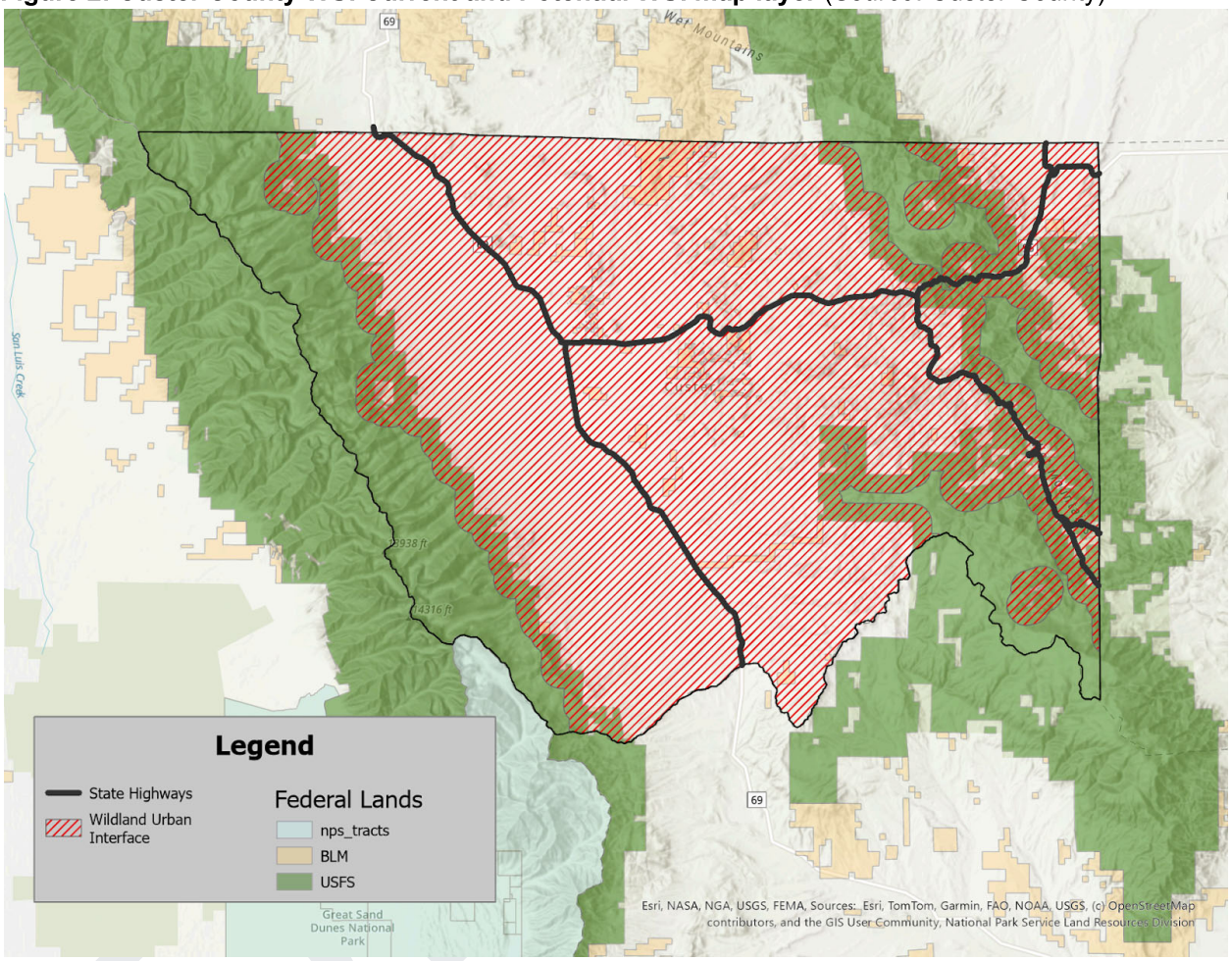
> **The wildland urban interface (WUI) is any area where the built environment meets vegetative fuels and wildland fire. These communities are especially at risk as places where wildland fire can move from vegetative fuels to the built environment and result in negative impacts on the community and alter fire behavior. Additionally, WUI communities adjacent to urban communities can facilitate urban conflagration, where a wildfire in vegetation transitions into a WUI community and then transitions into urban areas where it becomes an urban fire.**[1]

For the purposes of *this* **Community Wildfire Protection Plan**, the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in Custer County is defined as all areas where public lands and human development intersect or influence one another. This includes all private lands—whether developed, subdivided, or undeveloped—as well as public lands within one mile of any private lands, structures, communities, or critical infrastructure. Smaller state and

[1] Colorado State Forest Service CWPP Template Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) definition.

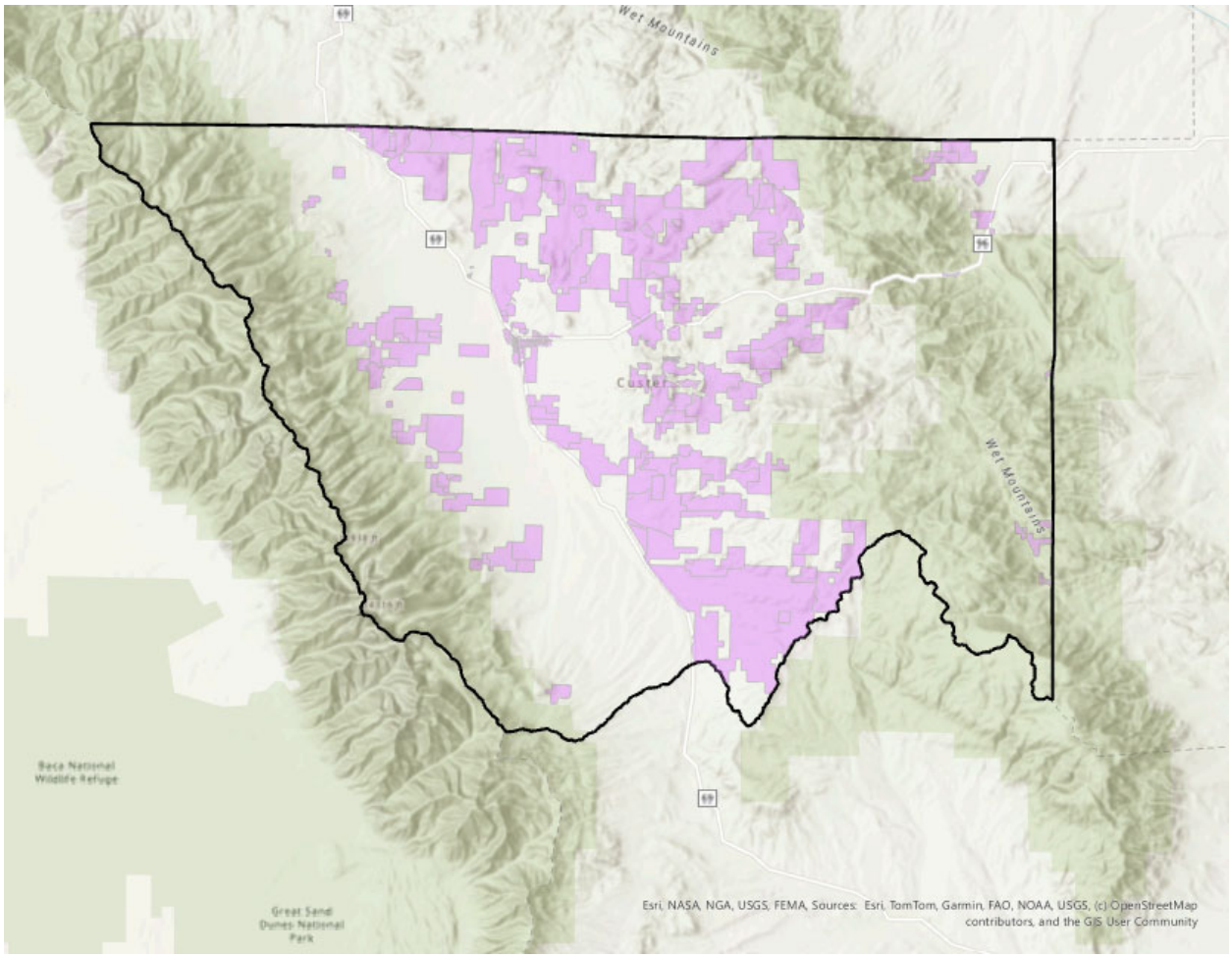
federal parcels, including BLM lands, are incorporated through this one-mile delineation. This definition reflects the extensive intermix of public lands and development across the county and emphasizes the shared wildfire risk, as well as the cross-boundary nature of wildfire behavior, response, and mitigation. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Custer County WUI Current and Potential WUI map layer (*Source*: Custer County)



A list of WUI communities shown within the CWPP area boundary is detailed in Appendix D: Community & Subdivision Table

Figure 3 Custer County Subdivision Map (*Source*: Custer County)



For the Custer County project area, it is estimated that 98% percent of the total project area population (5,050) live within the WUI.

A more detailed description of the risk assessment algorithms is provided in the Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment (Colorado WRA) Final Report.

Figure 4: Custer County Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Density Map (*Source*: CSFS Colorado Forest Atlas Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report)

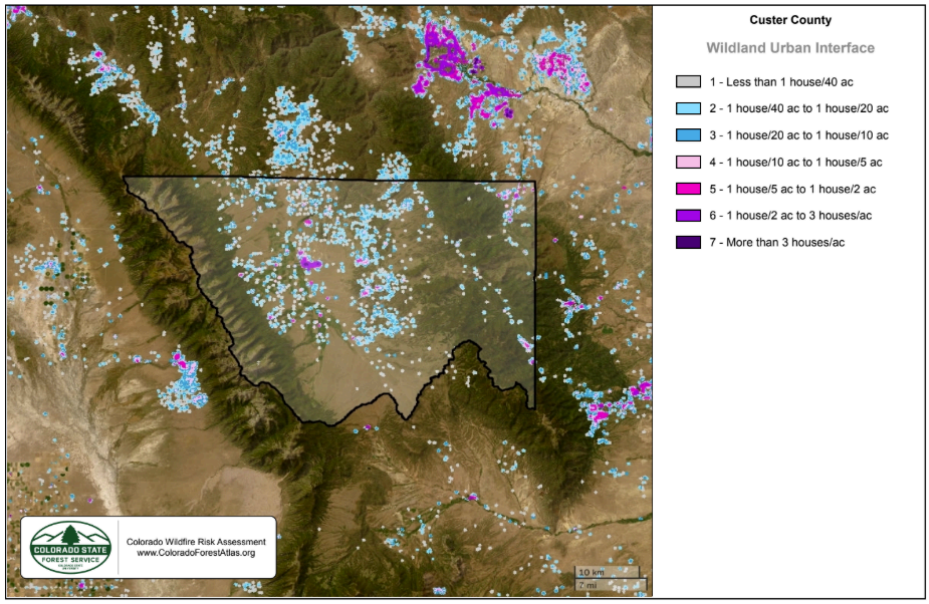


Figure 5: Custer County Housing Density (*Source*: CSFS Colorado Forest Atlas Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report)

Housing Density	WUI Population	Percent of WUI Population
1 - Less than 1 house/40 ac	411	8.2%
2 - 1 house/40 ac to 1 house/20 ac	796	15.9%
3 - 1 house/20 ac to 1 house/10 ac	806	16.1%
4 - 1 house/10 ac to 1 house/5 ac	804	16.1%
5 - 1 house/5 ac to 1 house/2 ac	483	9.7%
6 - 1 house/2 ac to 3 houses/ac	1,172	23.5%
7 - More than 3 houses/ac	521	10.4%
Total	**4,993**	**100%**

Housing Density	WUI Acres	Percent of WUI Acres
1 - Less than 1 house/40 ac	28,491	43.2%
2 - 1 house/40 ac to 1 house/20 ac	20,229	30.6%
3 - 1 house/20 ac to 1 house/10 ac	9,879	15%
4 - 1 house/10 ac to 1 house/5 ac	5,060	7.7%
5 - 1 house/5 ac to 1 house/2 ac	1,382	2.1%
6 - 1 house/2 ac to 3 houses/ac	854	1.3%
7 - More than 3 houses/ac	99	0.2%
None	**65,994**	**100%**

Wildfire mitigation on private property in the WUI is essential because these are high-risk areas where property, infrastructure, and people could be impacted by wildfire.

Without proper mitigation, wildfire in the WUI can spread rapidly, endangering lives, overwhelming emergency responders, and causing devastating economic losses. Strategies such as: creating defensible space and reducing structural ignitability (home hardening) can significantly lower the risk of fire spreading to homes and critical infrastructure.

From 2010-2020, Colorado's population grew by almost 15% according to the US Census Bureau. Colorado may continue to be one of the fastest growing states in the nation, with much of this growth occurring outside urban boundaries. This increase in population across the state will impact counties and communities that are located within the WUI.

Wildfire Resiliency Code Map

Colorado Senate Bill 23-166 established a Wildfire Resiliency Code Board (WRCB) in the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) to help enhance community safety and resiliency from wildfires through the adoption of codes and standards. On 01 July 2025, the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code (CWRC) was adopted.

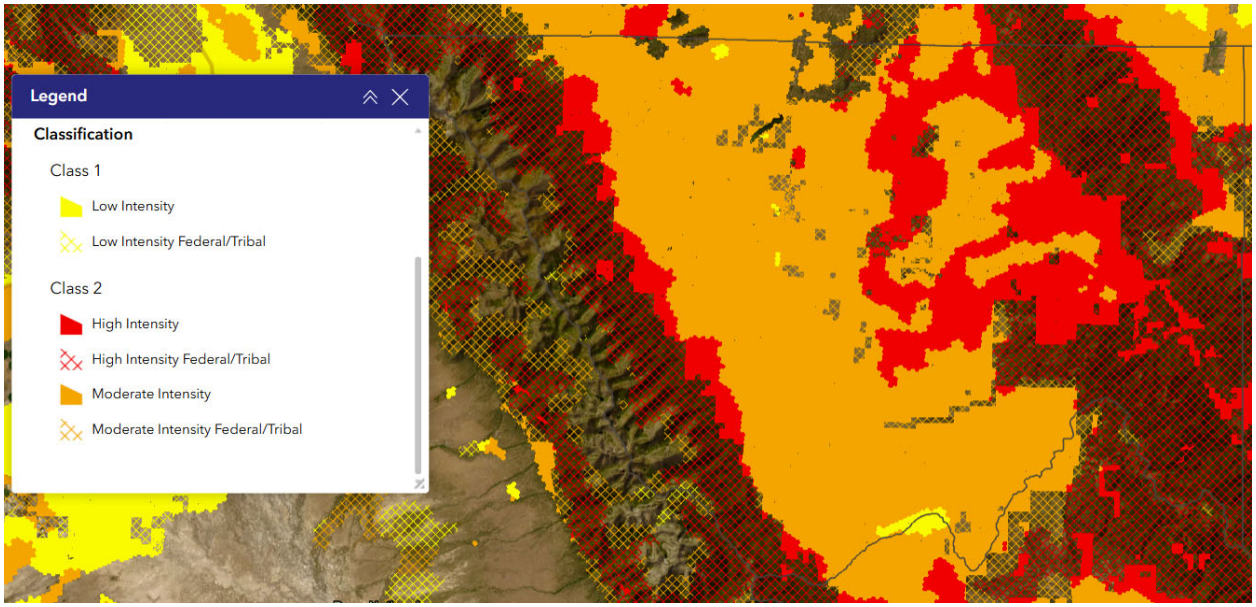
The Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Board (WRCB) also adopted a statewide map that delineates Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas . This map is a critical component of the new 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code, which establishes minimum building standards for construction within these designated areas. The map defines areas of varying fire intensity (Low, Moderate, and High) based on factors such as vegetative fuels, topography, and weather patterns. These classifications determine the specific code requirements that apply to new construction and additions in a given location. The WRCB map is designed as a tool for the application of the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code. It is not intended for other use.

Custer County does not have its own WUI definition in the county's land use regulations, nor does it maintain a local WUI map layer of its own. As part of a future Master Plan update, the county (as the "Governing Body" or "Authority Having Jurisdiction") could develop its own WUI map layer, rather than relying solely on the state's version. A political subdivision's alternative WUI map must be formally submitted to the Wildfire Resiliency Code Board for review and approval. The WCRB will evaluate the map to ensure it meets or exceeds the state's minimum standards before the map may be adopted or used.

You can explore the WUI boundaries and fire intensity areas using the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Map on ArcGIS Experience Builder. For a more general,

educational assessment of wildfire risk, the Colorado State Forest Service provides a WUI map as well. (Figure 6).

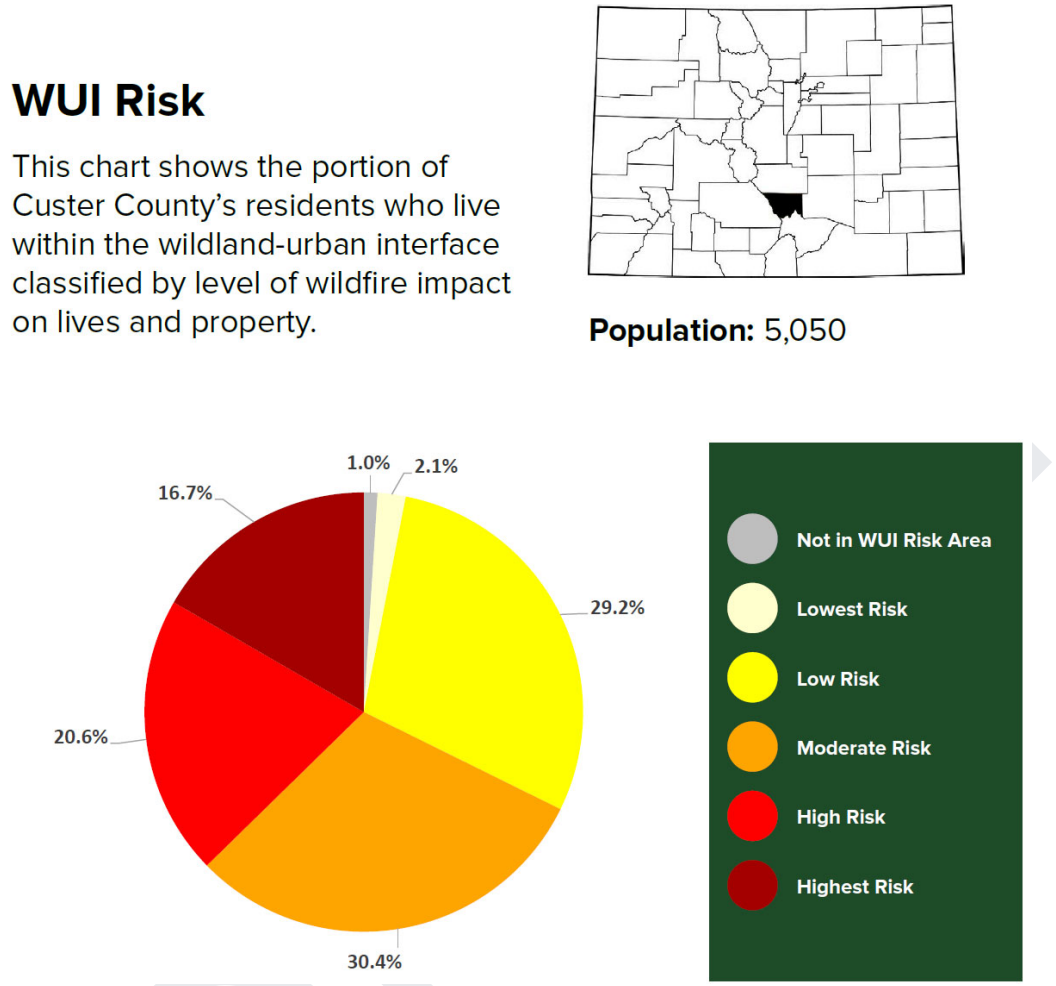
Figure 6: CWRC Current and Potential WUI map*(Source*: 2025 CWRC Code Map (DFPC/CSFS))



(This map is designed as a tool for the application of the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code. It is not intended for other use. Questions about the map can be sent to cdps_dfpc_wrcb@state.co.us.)

WUI Risk Chart

Figure 7: Colorado Forest Atlas Wildland Urban Interface Risk Index - Custer County Summary



67.7% of residents are in the Moderate-to-Highest Risk WUI Zones.

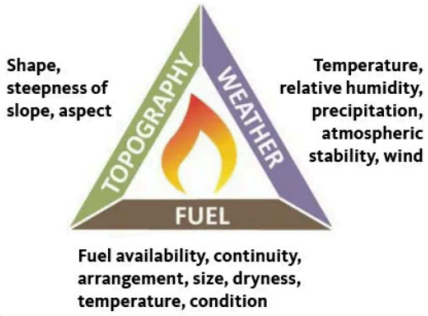
Additional Localization Notes for Custer County WUI Mapping

Among WUI definitions, the overall concept of the NIST Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Classification (2022) is that:

Structure-Separation Distance (SSD) is the key factor controlling parcel-to-parcel fire spread and guiding appropriate building hardening. NIST defines seven WUI types that fall within three density bands: high, medium, and low density.

In addition to the Structure-Separation Distance (SSD), there are several additional factors to consider, including the Fire Weather Triangle.

The **fire weather triangle**, more commonly known as the **fire behavior triangle**, is an instructional model used in wildland fire management to illustrate the three primary environmental factors that determine how a fire will behave: **fuels, weather, and topography**.



Fire Behavior Triangle: Fuel, Weather, and Topography as factors in determining fire behavior.
Credit: Oregon State University

Other considerations include:

- **Wind exposure:** High-wind corridors (Wet Mountain Valley and parts of Custer County are at risk for extreme wind-driven fire behavior).
- **Access limitations:** Dead-end roads, single-lane driveways, insufficient turnarounds. (Cuerno Verde HOA has thirty (30) dead end roads ending in cul-de-sacs that radiate off of five (5) main ingress/egress roads).
- **Water availability:** Areas lacking reliable hydrants or draft sites.
  Slope & aspect: Steep slopes in the Wet Mountains and Sangre de Cristo range could accelerate fire spread, with slope orientation influencing fire behavior during high-wind and dry weather events.
- **Auxiliary fuels:** Auxiliary fuels—including outbuildings, propane tanks, wooden corrals, and perimeter fences—represent common ignition pathways. These features are part of the “built environment” and are not typically represented as fuels in wildfire risk modeling frameworks.
- **Grass-fire potential:** Lower valley areas with flashy fuels and rapid spread potential.
- **Fire history:** Incorporate past incidents and near-misses into hazard weighting.
- **Fire response limitations:** Sparse apparatus, limited qualified personnel, and long travel distances increase response times and overall vulnerability.

Local Area Fire History 2000-2025

Table 1: Fire History 2000-20025

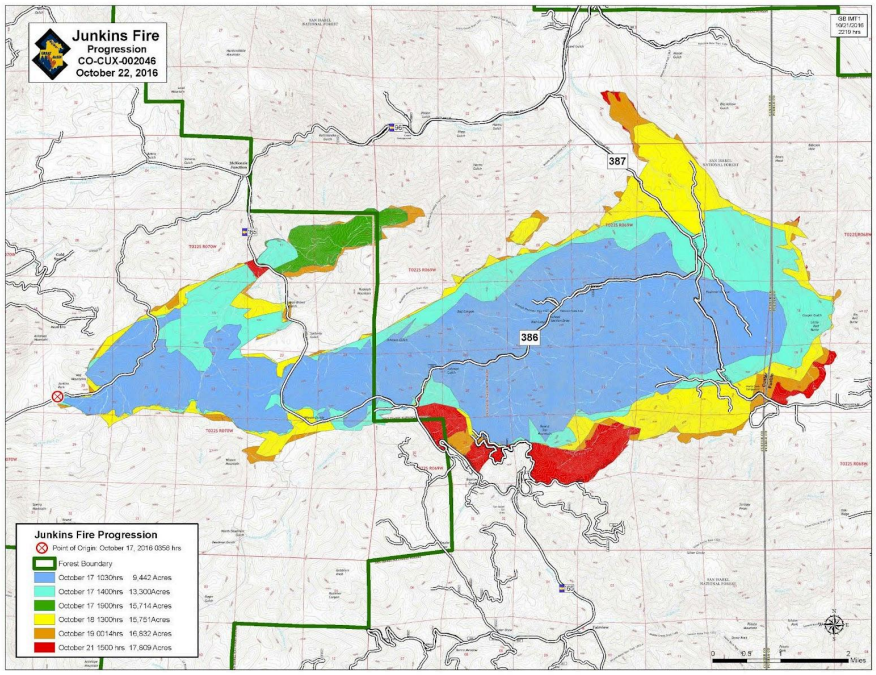
Date	Fire	Counties	Total Acres	Cause	Structures Lost / comments
06/22/24	Oak Ridge Fire	Pueblo/Custer	1,310	Lightning	0
10/14/23	Saint Charles Fire	Pueblo/Custer	492	Lightning	0
06/27/19	Spring Creek Fire	Huerfano	108,045	Human caused	140 structures (+cattle)
10/17/16	Junkins Fire	Custer/Pueblo	18,403	Power line / Wind Event	9 residences / 17 outbuildings / 28 cattle
10/03/16	Beulah Hills Fire	Pueblo	5,232	Human caused / Excavator	8 residences
07/12/16	Hayden Pass	Fremont/ Custer	16,562	Lightning	2 residences in Fremont County
10/23/12	Wetmore Fire	Custer	1,998	Power line	15 residences
07/07/11	Mason Fire	Custer	154	Unknown	
06/12/11	Duckett Fire	Custer	4,690	Campfire	
04/26/11	Sand Gulch Fire	Custer	555	Lightning	Near Greenwood
06/14/06	Tyndall Gulch	Custer	541	Power line	8 miles E on SH 96
07/09/05	Mason Gulch	Custer/Pueblo	11,716	Lightning	
04/30/02	Cuerno Verde	Custer	442	Human caused/burning trash during a burn ban	4 structures incl. 2 residences
06/02/02	Iron Mountain Fire	Fremont	4,400	Tipped over charcoal grill during a burn ban	100+ structures, incl 88 homes

Fast Fires

A **fast fire** is a wildfire defined by its *rate of spread*—often thousands of acres per day—rather than its total size. These fires are driven by dry, easily ignitable fuels

(especially grasses and shrubs) combined with strong winds. Although they represent only a small fraction of all U.S. wildfires, they account for the majority of structure loss.

Figure 8: Junkins Fire 2016 Progression Map (*Source: Great Basin Incident Management Team)*



High winds on October 17, 2016, fueled the Junkins Fire, growing over 15,000 acres in the first fifteen hours - and meeting the key characteristics of a fast fire. The Junkins fire was first reported shortly before 4 am, and moved into Pueblo County the same day. Widespread evacuations were ordered, including for the town of Beulah.

Key Characteristics

- **Extremely rapid growth:** Fast fires can expand at rates such as 4,000 acres per day- roughly two football fields per minute in some regions.
- **Highly destructive:** From 2001–2020, nearly **90%** of all U.S. homes destroyed by wildfire were lost to fast-moving fires.
- **Fuel- and weather-driven:** They commonly occur in grasslands and shrublands during dry seasons, when winds can carry embers far ahead of the flame front.
- **High societal impact:** Their speed leaves little time for evacuation or a coordinated emergency response, creating severe threats to life and property.

Why They Are Worsening

Recent research shows fast fires are becoming more extreme, with the average maximum growth rate of the fastest fires in the Western U.S. increasing by **about 250%** over the last two decades. These firestorms typically require three elements:

1. **An ignition source**
2. **Dry, receptive fuels**
3. **Strong winds**

How Common They Are — and How Much Damage They Cause

Nationwide analysis from 2001–2020 shows that fast fires:

- Represent only **2.7%–3%** of all wildfires
- Cause roughly **89%** of all destroyed or damaged homes
- Are associated with a majority of wildfire-related fatalities and a substantial portion of suppression costs

Home Destruction, Embers, and the Home Ignition Zone

Research consistently shows that most homes ignite from **embers and small surface flames**, not from large flame fronts. Jack Cohen's pioneering work in the late 1990s established the concept of the **Home Ignition Zone (HIZ)**—the home itself and the immediate surroundings where building materials, vegetation, and debris create vulnerability.

Cohen demonstrated that:

- Embers can ignite structures even when the main fire is far away.
- The condition of the HIZ largely determines whether a home survives.
- Managing vegetation, maintaining defensible space, and using fire-resistant materials significantly improves structure survival.

These principles form the foundation of the **Fire Adapted Communities** approach, which helps communities reduce risk by preparing homes, infrastructure, and residents to withstand wildfire impacts. Fire Adapted Communities (FAC) work is ongoing because it is not a one-time checklist or an end-point, but rather a holistic and adaptive framework for communities to **coexist with wildfire risk indefinitely**.

CWPP Goals

Goals are essential to establishing clear direction and focus for the CWPP. They define what the county seeks to achieve and help ensure that implementation efforts align with local priorities, available resources, and community capabilities. Below are the *overarching* goals for Custer County.

Goal 1: Fire Resilient Landscapes
Develop and maintain landscapes across the county that are resilient to wildfire, mitigate undesirable fire outcomes, and protect highly valued resources and assets.
Goal 2: Fire-Adapted Communities
Empower the county and its residents to “live with wildfire” including being prepared to withstand, respond to, and recover from wildfires.
Goal 3: Safe and Effective Wildfire Response
Enable safe and efficient wildfire response through improved planning, coordination, and education.

Planning Process

The development of the Custer County CWPP required multiple steps and the involvement of individuals from various groups and organizations. The first step in the process was to create the Custer County CWPP Fire Council, the planning team that would serve as the decision-making committee for the plan.

This team consisted of representatives from Custer County, the Wet Mountain Fire Protection District, the Rye Fire Protection District, the Wetmore Volunteer Fire Department, BLM, USFS, CSFS, NRCS, Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors Regional Partnership Initiative, and consultants from Fire Adapted Colorado and the Arkansas Watershed Collaborative (Table 2).

Members of the planning team began meeting in mid-2023 and throughout the planning development cycle to discuss plan components, review data, and plan upcoming activities.

Actively engaging stakeholders was essential to ensuring the plan's success. The Custer County CWPP Fire Council meetings provided an excellent way for the planning team to work with local stakeholder groups.

Community Engagement Survey

Other stakeholder engagements include a CWPP public survey and community meetings. The CWPP public survey received 163 responses (Appendix A: CWPP Public Survey Summary) and helped the planning team better understand community values, wildfire knowledge, and support for different wildfire mitigation options.

Not all questions were required to be answered, and the response rate varied from 96 to 163 responses for each question.

All 163 respondents responded to the question: *How do you perceive the wildfire risk to Custer County?* Only 3% (five responses) indicating a Low Risk. See Figure 9.

I believe my county and local community/subdivision are prepared for a wildfire - also received all 163 responses, with 45% of the respondents stating they disagree or strongly disagree that the county and their local community/subdivision are prepared for a wildfire. See Figure 10.

Figure 9: Survey Bar Graph (*Source: CWPP Community Engagement Survey Dec. 2025)*

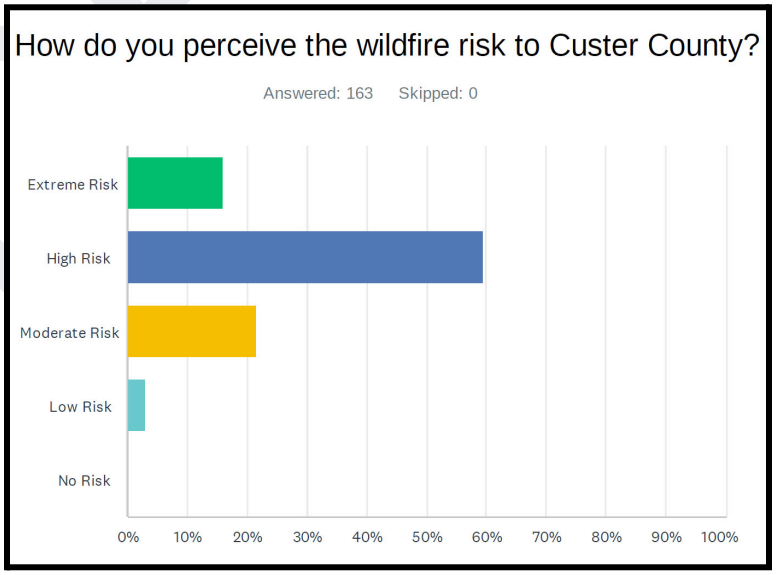
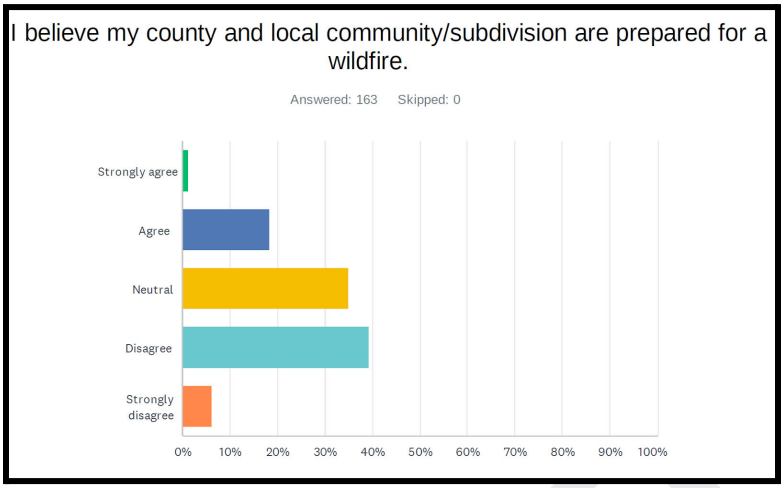


Figure 10: Survey Bar Graph *(Source: CWPP Community Engagement Survey Dec. 2025)*



CWPP Fire Council Planning Team Members

Table 2: Custer County CWPP Fire Council Planning Team Members

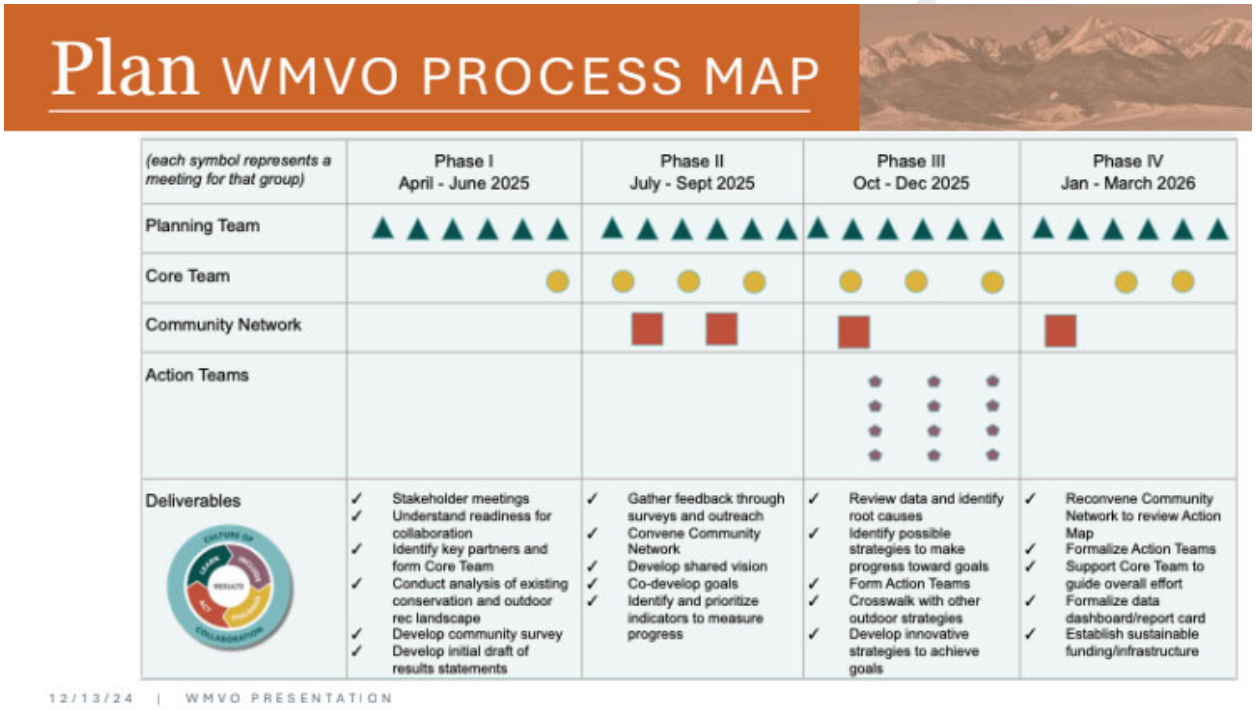
Name	Agency/Jurisdiction
Robyn Knappe	Custer County Emergency Management
Reggie Foster	Custer County Emergency Management
John Mapes	Custer County IT Department
Steven Wiebke	Custer County Mitigation Team
Lloyd Rich Smith	Custer County Sheriff's Office
Susan Barnes	Custer County Sheriff's Office
Justin Robinson	Custer County Sheriff's Office
Jeremiah Coleman	Wet Mountain Fire Protection District
Ruth Roper	Wetmore Volunteer Fire Department
Ross Gallegos	Rye Fire Protection District
Destiny Chapman	US Forest Service, San Carlos Ranger District
Alfonso Montoya	US Forest Service, San Carlos Ranger District
Glenda Torres	Bureau of Land Management
Matthew Norden	Bureau of Land Management
Robert Bidner	Natural Resources Conservation District
Danny Schell	Colorado State Forest Service
John VanDoren	Wet Mount Valley Outdoors (RPI Initiative)
Chris McKellip	Building & Zoning Town of Silver Cliff
Melane Rella	Deputy Clerk Town of Westcliffe
Yates McConnell*	Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative (ARWC)
Sophie Pullen*	Fire Adapted Colorado
Cindy Howard*	Fire Adapted Colorado

**Served in a consultant/advisory role.*

Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors

The Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors Regional Partnership Initiative launched its own planning process in April 2025. Building on the proven Envision Chaffee County model, this RPI has held dozens of board, core planning team, action team, and public meetings, as well as several community surveys. Collectively, this engagement points to the same conclusion: wildfire resilience and watershed protection are among the community's most consistent and urgent priorities.

Figure 11: Wet Mountain Valley Outdoors Process Map (*Source*: WMVO)



The final piece of CWPP outreach was the project mapping and story map, which would serve as an interactive online version of the CWPP. The online StoryMap can be viewed here. (*to be added.)

Community and Partner Engagement, Cross-Boundary Collaboration

Community engagement and diverse collaboration is an essential part of CWPPs. Engaging community members in wildfire preparedness and risk reduction activities is a critical component of wildfire resilience efforts and is based on communication and trust. The relationships and processes that are developed during the creation of this CWPP can be a great foundation for future mitigation efforts.

Wherever possible, the planning team worked collaboratively to align planning efforts with partners in surrounding regions. CWPP integration and cross-boundary collaboration strengthens wildfire risk reduction and community resilience by coordinating efforts with partners and other planning participants. Through this coordination, the goal is to establish an inter-connected mosaic of landscape treatments that work across boundaries.

Wildfire Mitigation Action Themes

- **Enhance Alert, Warning, Evacuation, and Reentry Systems:** Strengthen community life-safety response capabilities before, during, and after wildfire events.

- **Strengthen Evacuation Routes:** Improve road signage, reduce hazardous fuels along key corridors, and identify or establish Temporary Fire Refuge Areas (TFRAs).

- **Secure Resources for Implementation:** Obtain funding and staffing to carry out identified wildfire mitigation projects and actions.

- **Support Risk Assessment and Prioritization:** Fund and implement a Risk Assessment Decision Support (RADS) project to identify additional vegetation management and mitigation opportunities, improve project prioritization, and cross-boundary collaboration.

- **Protect and Restore Watersheds:** Improve or create wet meadows and implement other wildfire-related watershed actions identified in related planning efforts.

- **Integrate Wildfire Preparedness across Departments:** Promote and coordinate education and outreach by embedding best practices, preparedness actions, and appropriate land use actions into all relevant county (and town) departments' standard operating procedures, ensuring consistent guidance before, during, and after wildfire events.

- **Enhance Wildfire Response Capabilities:** Strengthen operational readiness for wildfire suppression and emergency response.

- **Reduce Hazardous Fuel in High-Value Risk Areas (HVRAs):** Address fuel loading in areas where wildfire poses the greatest threat to people, property, and

critical infrastructure.

- **Facilitate Beneficial Wildfire Management:** Allow for controlled or natural fire use where appropriate to maintain ecosystem health and reduce long-term risk.

About Custer County

Topography

Custer County encompasses 738 square miles of land area, extending from the high plains at its northeastern corner, across the Wet Mountains, into the Wet Mountain Valley, and to the Sangre De Cristo Range. Elevation ranges from 6,081 feet in the northeastern community of Wetmore to the 14,294-foot summit of Crestone Peak in the Sangre De Cristo Range. Other peaks in excess of 14,000 feet, framing the western boundary of the county, include Crestone Needle, Kit Carson, Challenger Point, and Humboldt Peak, with numerous additional peaks ranging from an elevation of 10,185 feet (Middle Knob) to 13,931 feet (Mount Adams). The Wet Mountain Valley lies at an elevation of approximately 8000 feet between the Sangre De Cristo Range and the Wet Mountains, which rise to an elevation of 11,784 feet at St. Charles Peak.

The natural topography of the landscape can either accommodate future land use activity or be a constraint to development. As slope increases, land generally becomes less suitable for development, with increased risks for wildfire and unstable soils, problems with road design, construction and maintenance, and access difficulties for fire protection equipment.

Slopes generally greater than 15 percent present specific challenges to development, with slopes in excess of 30 percent considered hazardous. Slopes in excess of 15 percent are generally found in the Wet Mountains and the Sangre De Cristo Range. Slopes less than 15 percent are generally found in the Wet Mountain Valley, surrounding foothills and within the incorporated communities of Westcliffe and Silver Cliff. The Zoning Resolution and Subdivision Regulations have been revised to address development activities in environmentally constrained areas such as steep slopes, wildlife corridors, and wildfire hazard areas, and areas with adverse soil properties.[2]

[2]Custer County Master Plan 2016

Ownership

Of Custer County's 474,424 acres, 190,524 acres (40%) is public land, and 283,881 acres (60%) is private land (Table 3). Agricultural land comprises approximately 75 percent of private land ownership in Custer County. (Table 4) See also Land Ownership Map, (Figure 12).

The majority of residential and vacant land is located in over 136 platted subdivisions. According to the 2020 Census, Custer County has 4,198 housing units; approximately 88.23% are owner-occupied.

Public land is managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State of Colorado, and the local governments of Custer County, Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. USFS lands include portions of the San Isabel National Forest, and the Sangre De Cristo Wilderness Area.

Table 3: Public Land Ownership in Custer County - Source: Custer County Assessor's Office; 2024

Public Land	Number of Acres	Percentage of Total
U.S. Forest Service	163,647	85.90%
Bureau of Land Management	14,578	7.66%
State of Colorado	10,160	5.33%
Local Government	2,139	1.11%
TOTAL	**190,524**	**100%**

Table 4: Private Land Ownership in Custer County - Source: Custer County Assessor's Office; 2024

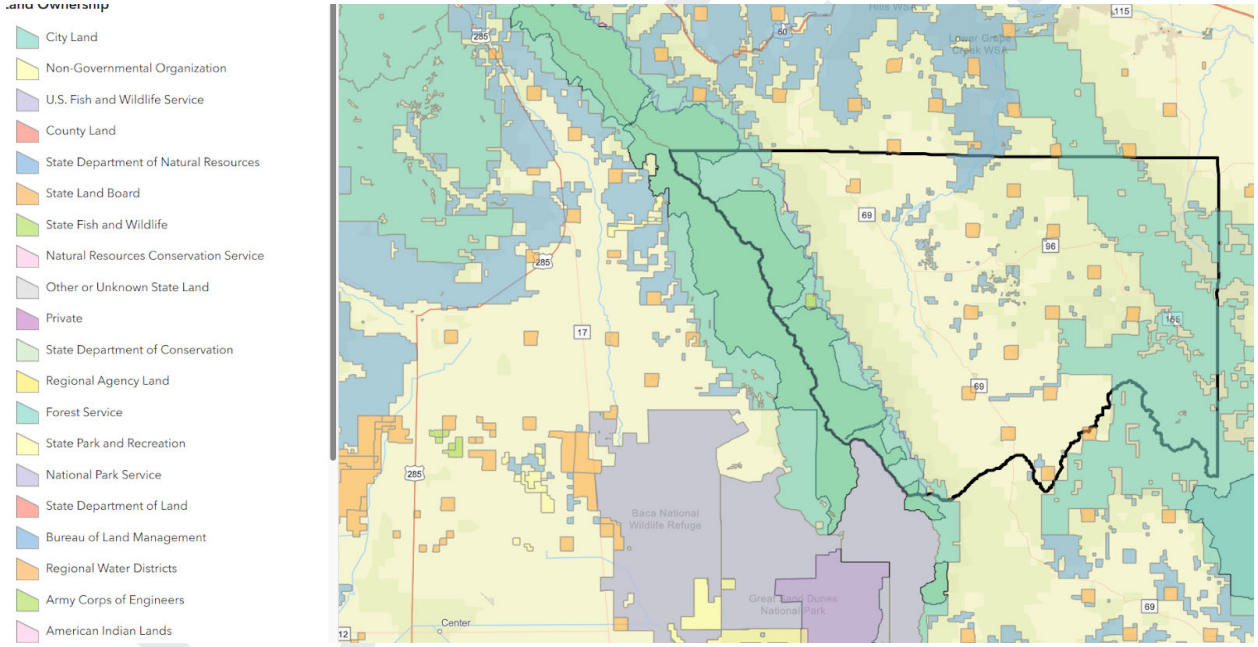
Private Land	Number of Acres	Percentage of Total
Agriculture	231,095	76.59%
Residential	42,862	14.21%
Commercial	558	0.18%
Industrial	11	0.00%
Vacant	24,936	8.26%
Religious	290	0.10%
Other	1,983	0.70%
TOTAL	**283,881**	**100%**

The Custer County Abstract of Assessment for 2024, total Residential Property valuations in Custer County of over $117 million. (Table 5)

Table 5: Assessed Valuation - Source: Custer County Assessor's Office; 2024

Private Land	Assessment
Vacant Land	26,739,760
Residential	90,468,340
Commercial	11,533,340
Industrial	321,820
Agriculture	18,797,950
Natural Resources	685,650
Producing Mines	0
Oil & Gas	0
State Assessed	6,567,600
Assessed Value	159,401,590
Exempt Value	14,767,020
TOTAL VALUATION	**174,232,580**

Figure 12: Land Ownership



Living with Fire - Wildfire Preparedness & Situational Awareness

Individual Preparedness

While the wildfire mitigation actions and vegetation management projects listed in this plan will help mitigate the impacts of wildfire, homeowners and residents must also do their part to protect themselves and their property.

All property owners in Custer County need to take steps to harden their homes and have defensible space. Research has demonstrated that homes with a Class A-rated roof and defensible space have an 85% chance of surviving a wildfire. Information and recommendations regarding structural ignitability and defensible space can be found in CSFS publications available here.

In addition to improving structure survivability, proactive mitigation is increasingly important in the context of insurance **affordability and availability.** Wildfire risk is fueling a recent, steep increase in the cost of insurance for Colorado homeowners, making it some of the most expensive in the country, according to a new report by Colorado State University's Regional Economic Development Institute.

The analysis of recent trends in Colorado's homeowners insurance market ranks Colorado as the sixth-costliest state for homeowners' insurance in the nation. The average insurance premium is $4,072 annually for $300,000 in coverage, and costs are rising — particularly in wildfire-prone areas. From 2018 to 2023, premiums increased a staggering 58%. [3]

Homeowners who take steps to reduce wildfire risk—such as implementing defensible space, using fire-resistant building materials, and maintaining safe landscaping—may improve their eligibility for coverage and reduce premiums. Conversely, properties lacking these protections may face higher insurance costs, limited coverage options, or even loss of coverage entirely. Taking mitigation actions not only safeguards lives and property but also helps address the financial and insurance challenges posed by growing wildfire risk.

Planning Preparedness

Wildfire planning is a crucial process that helps communities, land managers, and emergency responders prepare for, mitigate, and respond to wildfire threats. The plans and programs below all relate to wildfire mitigation, response, and recovery within Custer County.

County Planning Documents:

- Custer County Zoning Resolution (2024)
- Custer County Land Use Master Plan (2016)
- Custer County Subdivision Regulations (2019)
- Custer County Emergency Operations Plan (2023)
- Custer County All Hazard Mitigation Plan (2023)
- Custer County Noxious Weed Management Plan (2025)
- Custer County Noxious Weed Management Plan - Implementation (2025)
- Custer County Homeowners Packet "Getting Started" (2019)

[3] Regional Economic Development Institute -REDI@CSU report | August 2025

Existing CWPPs:

The previous Custer County CWPP was completed and approved in 2007. The Custer County CWPP is a valuable resource that provides the foundation for understanding wildfire risk and presents attainable milestones designed to reduce potential losses from wildfire.

Communities, homeowners associations, and individual fire protection districts can take further action by developing their own area-specific CWPPs, which would tier to the countywide CWPP.

The following area-specific CWPPs can be found in Custer County.

- Sangres Foothills (2018) (11 MB PDF)
- Cuerno Verde Homeowners Association (2019) (17.3 MB PDF)

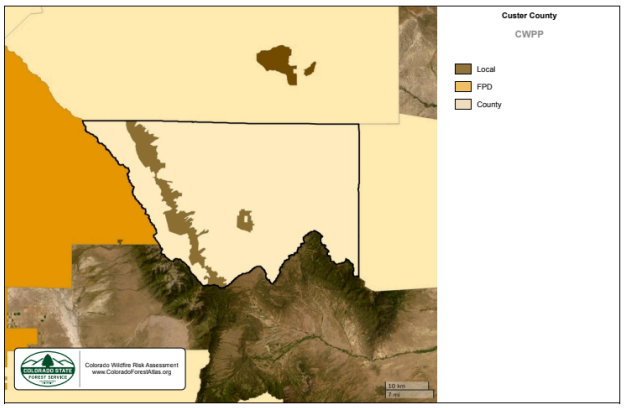
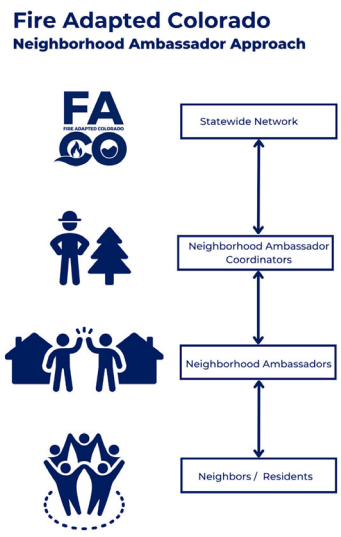


Figure 13: County CWPP's (Source: CSFS)

Firewise USA: The National Fire Protection Association administers the Firewise USA recognition program and provides a framework for neighborhoods and communities to increase ignition resistance of homes and reduce wildfire risks locally. There is currently one Firewise participant in Custer County:

- Spread Eagle Home Owners Association.



Neighborhood Ambassadors: The Neighborhood Ambassador Program empowers residents to drive wildfire adaptation in their communities, providing training, resources, and support to volunteers while fostering partner collaboration—effective regardless of Firewise status. The program in Custer County began in 2024, and there are currently several neighborhood ambassadors organizing efforts in thirteen homeowners associations:

- Blumeneau
- Bull Domingo Ranch
- Cuerno Verde
- Dipert Tracts
- Juniper Hills South
- Ley Subdivision
- Rosita Hills
- Schulze Ranch
- Silver Cliff Ranches
- Spread Eagle
- Wakefield Hills
- Wapiti Creek
- Woods at Buck Mountain

Custer County Mitigation Team:

Established in April 2024, the Custer County Mitigation Team (CCMT) is a volunteer-based program composed of community volunteers and participants from the Neighborhood Ambassador Program, the Custer County Sheriff's Office, and the Wet Mountain Fire Protection District. The CCMT maintains an ongoing commitment to training, community outreach, and on-the-ground wildfire mitigation projects.

CCMT provides training opportunities to its members through county support and a variety of State of Colorado grant programs. These resources help build workforce capacity, support equipment acquisition, and advance outreach, implementation, and mitigation efforts. The program supports Home Ignition Zone assessments and a broad range of wildfire prevention and risk-reduction activities.

Members receive training in home ignition and structural risk assessments for private landowners, prescribed fire implementation and mentoring, and fuels reduction skills such as tree felling and slash removal or chipping. The program is further strengthened through regional partnerships and collaboration with fire-adapted community networks and related organizations.

The team is currently supervised by the Custer County Office of Emergency Management. Available equipment includes

- 1 - 16' dump trailer,
- 1- Vermeer BC1500 chipper
- 4- Chainsaws, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and small tools.

Emergency Notifications

Emergency notifications are used to communicate critical public safety topics, including evacuations, wildfires, and other emergency notifications. All residents, visitors, and family members are encouraged to sign up for alerts.

- These **Opt-In Alerts** can be received through landline phones, cell phones, text messages, and email - however they won't reach you without first signing up.

- When residents create an opt-in account, they choose how they want to receive emergency alerts. All landline phones are automatically in the system. If you would like to receive emergency alerts on your cell phone, text device or email, it is important that you register!

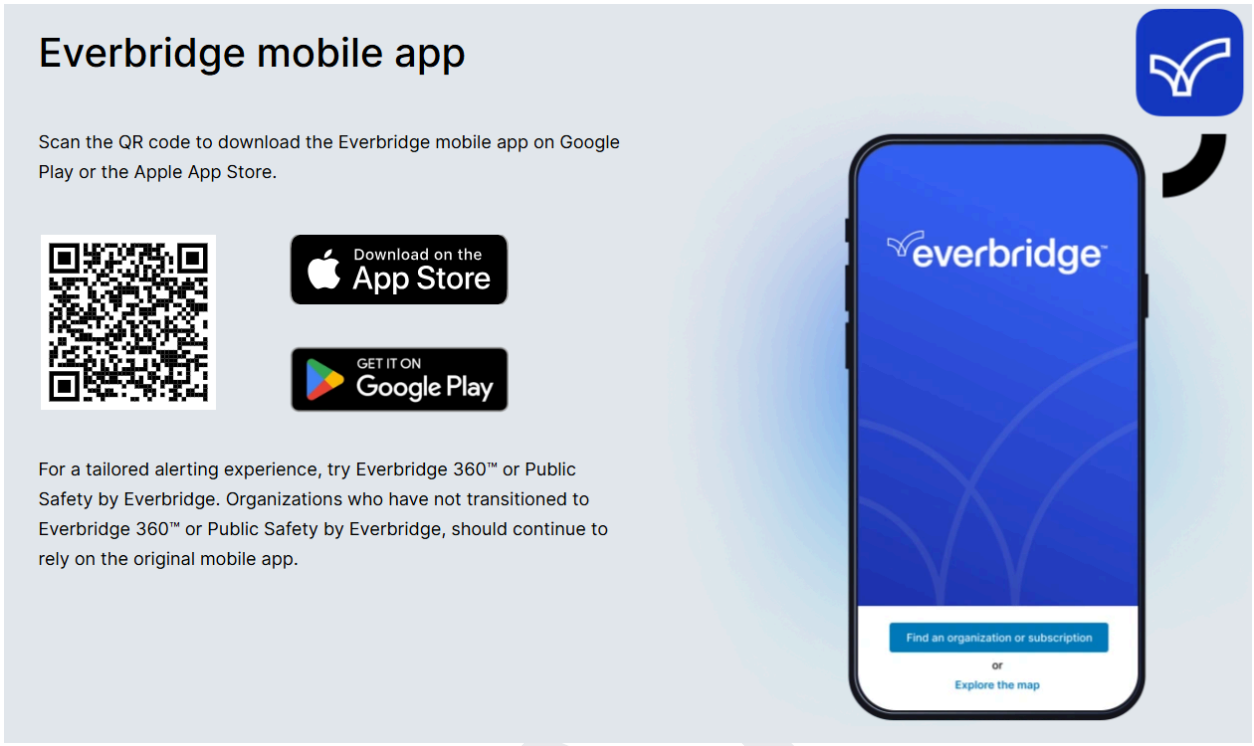
Targeted messages by location can be received if addresses are provided. It is essential that everyone listens to all emergency notifications and follows any directions within those messages. There are many areas in the county with limited cell coverage. These areas can be challenging for the county to reach folks with emergency messaging - Emergency personnel can't notify every house that could be in danger during an emergency. These alert notifications are the best way to stay updated on critical information, including evacuations.

Custer County utilizes the Everbridge Mass Notification system - a trusted emergency notification system that allows you to receive critical alerts—such as severe weather and public safety information—directly to your phone or email from.
Get alerted about emergencies and other important community news by signing up for the Emergency Alert Program. This system can provide you with critical information quickly in a variety of situations, such as wildfires, flooding, severe weather, unexpected road closures, missing persons and evacuations of buildings or neighborhoods.

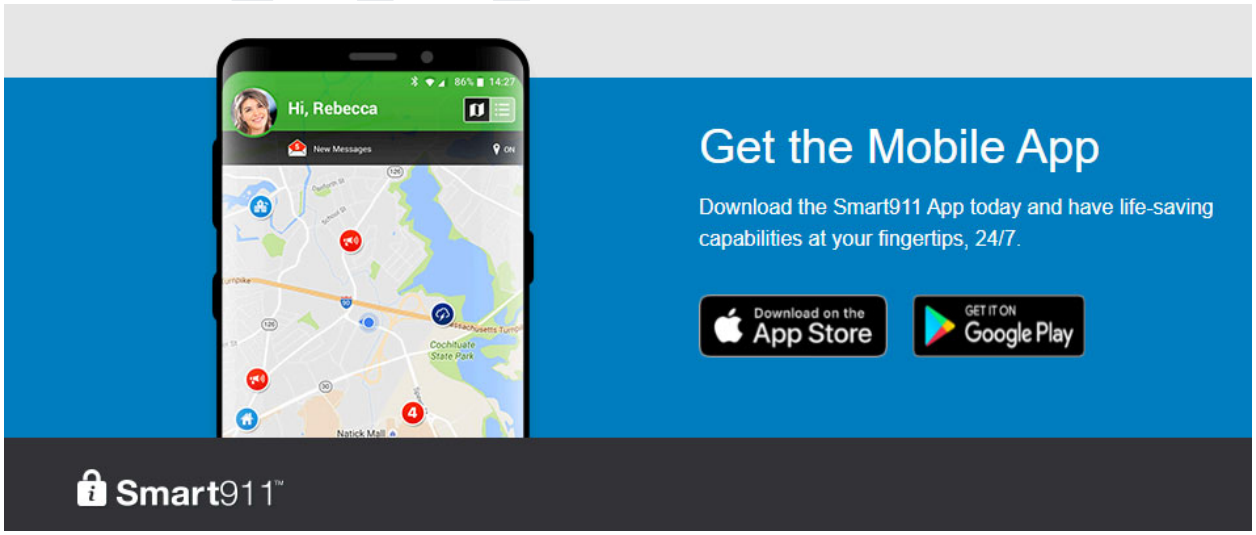
You will receive time-sensitive messages wherever you specify, such as your home, mobile or business phones, email address, text messages and more. You pick where, you pick how.

Signup for Everbridge notifications for Fremont and Custer Counties at:
https://member.everbridge.net/355009111785665/login.

The Everbridge app allows you to view Everbridge notifications in a map view, even when the alert is not targeted to your specific location. This feature offers situational awareness of emergency notifications that may be occurring in the area, but not at your location.



[Pueblo County](#) uses the Rave Alert System **Emergency Notification System (ENS)** The ENS is utilized by their emergency managers and 911 center to notify the public about critical situations, life-safety protective actions, and other important information.



Rave Signup: https://www.smart911.com/smart911/login.action?lpse=1.
The number on your caller ID will be (719).

See also, the Pueblo County Emergency Status Board and Evacuation Report Links at https://www.pueblosheriff.com/394/Pueblo-Emergency-Status-Board.

- Custer County residents located in the Rye Fire Protection District inclusion are encouraged to sign up for the **Rave Alert system**[4] **-** ***as well as Everbridge.***

About Wireless Emergency Alerts

During an emergency, alert and warning officials must quickly provide the public with life-saving information. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs), made available through the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) infrastructure, are one way public safety officials can quickly and effectively alert and warn the public about serious emergencies.

WEAs (Wireless Emergency Alerts) are short, geographically targeted emergency messages sent by authorized officials to WEA-enabled mobile phones via cell towers, without requiring app downloads or subscriptions. These warnings cover imminent threats, AMBER alerts, and public safety information, using a unique audio/vibration signal to grab attention.

What you need to know about WEAs:

- WEAs can be sent by state and local public safety officials, the National Weather Service, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the President of the United States
- WEAs can be issued for three alert categories – imminent threat, AMBER, and presidential
- WEAs look like text messages but are designed to get your attention and alert you with a unique sound and vibration, both repeated twice
- WEAs are no more than 90 characters and will include the type and time of the alert, any action you should take, as well as the agency issuing the alert
- WEAs are not affected by network congestion and will not disrupt texts, calls, or data sessions that are in progress
- Mobile users are not charged for receiving WEAs, and there is no need to subscribe

[4] Rave Mobile Safety (Rave) acquired the SwiftReach Networks (SwiftReach)

- To ensure your device is WEA-capable, check with your service provider
- How to Opt In to Wireless Emergency Alert Tests
    - https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/weatest_opt-in_instructions.pdf

Emergency Alert System

- The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) modernizes and integrates the nation's existing and future alert and warning systems, technologies, and infrastructure.
- The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is a national public warning system that requires broadcasters, satellite digital audio service and direct broadcast satellite providers, cable television systems, and wireless cable systems to provide the President with a communications capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency.
- State and local authorities may also use EAS, in cooperation with the broadcast community, to deliver important emergency information, such as weather information, imminent threats, AMBER alerts, and local incident information targeted to specific areas.
- The President has sole responsibility for determining when the national-level EAS will be activated. FEMA is responsible for national-level EAS tests and exercises.
- EAS is also used when all other means of alerting the public are unavailable, providing an added layer of resiliency to the suite of available emergency communication tools.

NOAA Weather Radio

NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards (NWR) is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information from the nearest National Weather Service office.

- NWR broadcasts official warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- It also broadcasts alerts of non-weather emergencies such as national security, natural, environmental, and public safety through the Emergency Alert System.

Vulnerabilities of Technology-Based Alert & Warning Systems

- **Power outages:** Wildfire, wind, and severe storms can knock out the electrical grid, disabling cell towers, internet routers, landline infrastructure, and home alerting devices. Even short outages can interrupt the flow of critical warnings.
- **Telecommunications failures:** Cell networks can become overloaded during emergencies, causing delays or preventing message delivery. Physical damage to towers or fiber lines can also disrupt service.
- **Opt-in limitations:** Many alerting platforms require residents to sign up manually. Participation is often low, leaving significant portions of the population unregistered and unreachable during fast-moving events.
- **Device dependency:** Alerts rely on people having access to a working device—charged phones, internet-connected computers, functioning landlines, or powered radio/TV receivers.
- **Geographic accuracy issues:** Systems that use geo-targeting may under- or over-alert depending on signal coverage, GPS accuracy, and network congestion. Rural and mountainous areas are especially affected.
- **Accessibility and language barriers:** Individuals with hearing, vision, cognitive, or language limitations may not receive or understand alerts unless the system supports accessible formats and multilingual messaging.
- **Human factors:** People may silence notifications, have weak signal areas in their homes, ignore tests, or assume alerts are false alarms, reducing the effectiveness of the system.
- **System-level failures:** Software glitches, delayed IPAWS (Integrated Public Alert & Warning System) processing, or coordination issues between agencies can slow or interrupt message delivery.

Related Content

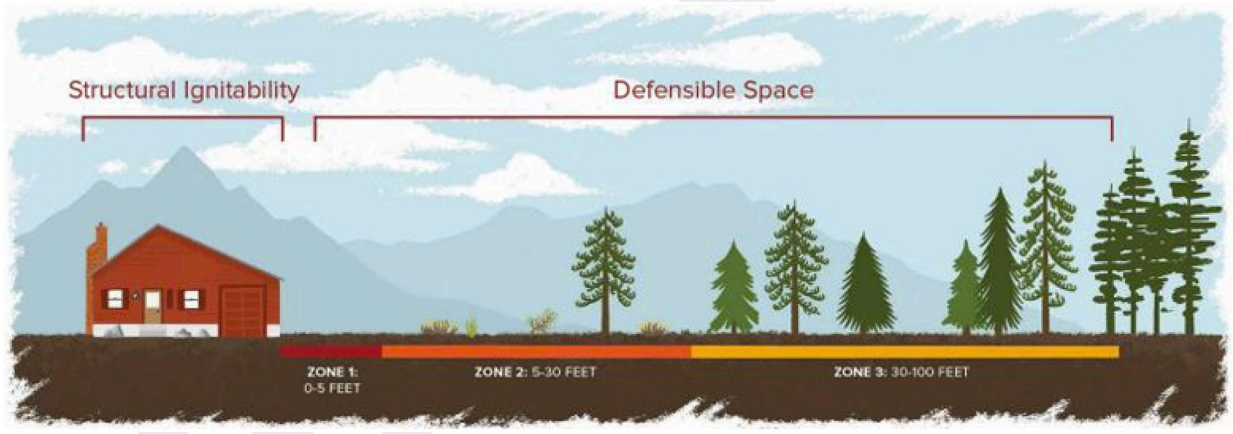
- Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)
- FEMA.gov- Emergency Alert System
- NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards (NWR)

Defensible Space

The purpose of defensible space is to reduce the amount of fuel near a home or structure. Defensible space can reduce the chance of home ignition and provide a safe space for firefighters to protect the house. For a structure to survive a wildfire, radiated heat and fire intensity must be kept to a minimum. Defensible space is accomplished by clearing and thinning trees and other vegetation around the proposed or existing structures and along the driveway. Defensible space requirements are designed to minimize the impact on the property while providing safety for the structures, the inhabitants, and the firefighters.

The Home Ignition Zone Guide developed by CSFS[5] provides guidelines for creating a defensible space. In order to establish the most effective defensible space plan possible, the property is evaluated and divided into three zones (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Home Ignition Zone Graphic (*Source: CSFS)*



Zone 1 (Immediate Zone) is the area nearest the home (0-5 feet). This zone requires the most vigilance to reduce or eliminate ember ignition and direct flame contact with your home. Use nonflammable, hard surface materials in this zone, such as rock, gravel, sand, cement, bare earth, or stone/concrete pavers.

Zone 2 (Intermediate Zone) is the area transitioning away from the home where fuels should be reduced (5-30 feet). This zone is designed to minimize a fire's intensity and ability to spread while significantly reducing the likelihood of a structure igniting because of radiant heat.

[5] Alternatively, NFPA® and CalFire defines the three zones above as Zone 0, Zone 1 and Zone 2.

Zone 3 (Extended Zone) is the area farthest from the home (30-100 feet). It extends 100 feet from the house on relatively flat ground. Efforts in this zone are focused on keeping fire on the ground and getting fire that may be active in tree crowns to move to the ground where it will be less intense.

Beyond 100 feet: This outermost zone (sometimes labeled Zone 4) is managed for forest health and to further slow a fire's progress before it reaches the more critical inner zones. It may involve professional forest thinning or prescribed burning under supervision.

Overlapping Home Ignition Zones (HIZ) occurs when the Home Ignition Zones of neighboring properties meet or cross property lines. The HIZ—typically 100–200 feet around a home—is the area where wildfire mitigation efforts focus to reduce the risk of ignition.

When zones overlap:

- **Interconnected Risk:** Fire prevention (or lack thereof) on one property directly affects neighboring homes.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Collaborative mitigation across adjacent properties enhances community-wide resilience.

Figure 15: Overlapping Home Ignition Zone Graphic (*Source: King CD, Washington)*

Key home hardening measures

- Roof: Use Class A fire-rated materials (metal, composite, tile) and clear pine needles/debris.

- Vents: Install 1/8-inch metal mesh screens to block embers.
- Windows/Doors: Upgrade to multi-pane, tempered glass; seal gaps with weather stripping.
- Siding/Eaves: Use fire-resistant materials (stucco, fiber cement, metal) and enclose soffits/eaves.
- Decks/Attachments: Use non-combustible decking and ensure proper construction/maintenance. The area under a deck often traps embers and debris, creating a significant fire hazard.
    - **Under-Deck Enclosure:** Screen or wall-in areas below decks and patios with 1/8-inch metal mesh to prevent debris from accumulating.
    - **Surface Maintenance:** Keep the deck surface clear of flammable items like pine needles, leaves, and wooden furniture during high-risk seasons.
- Fences: Avoid wood fences that attach to or are located within 8 feet of the structure. Use metal or other non-combustible fencing materials in this zone.
- Gutters: Clean regularly and consider non-combustible covers.

Resident Situational Awareness

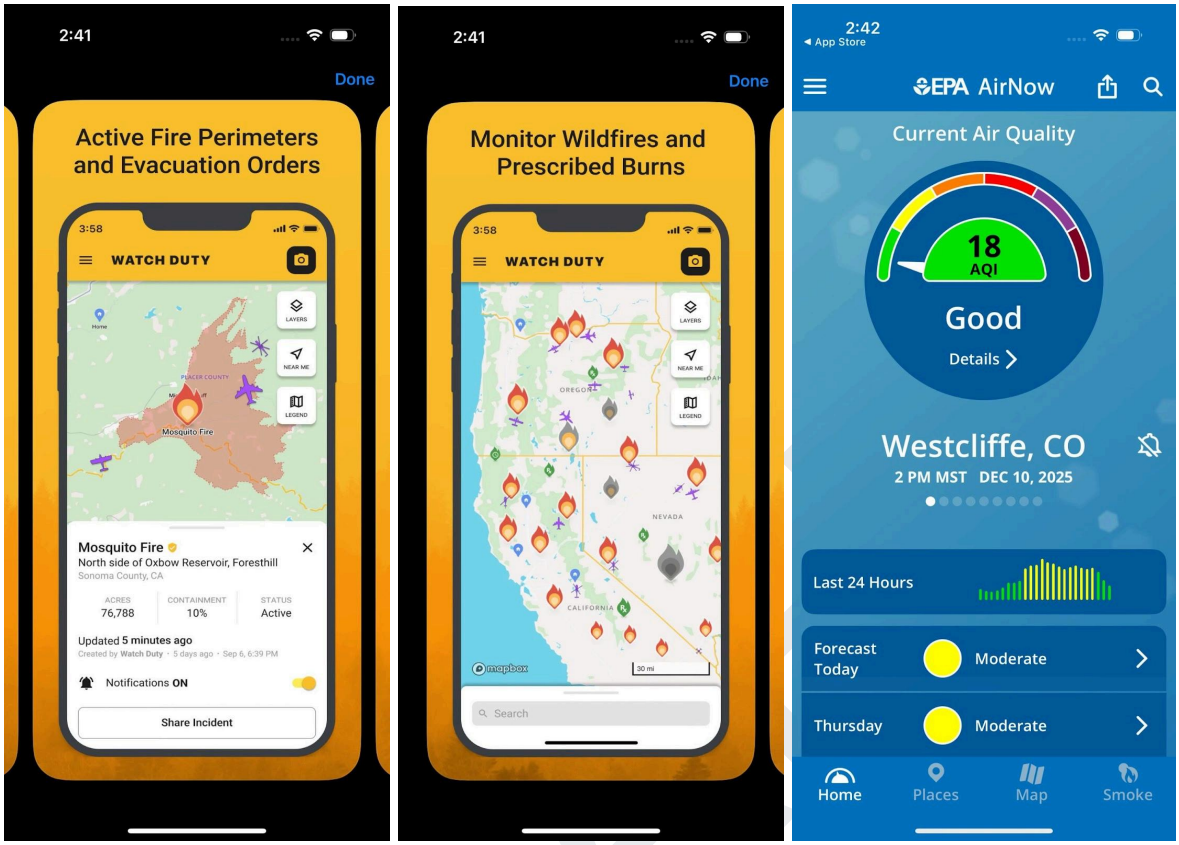
Maintaining strong situational awareness is essential for timely and safe evacuation during wildfire events. Residents should rely on trusted, real-time information sources to monitor fire activity, air quality, and preparedness guidance.

During fast-moving events, it is important to critically evaluate the information you receive—or recognize when information is delayed or unavailable—and rely on your own situational awareness. If conditions feel unsafe, if smoke or fire behavior is changing rapidly, or if your instincts tell you it is time to go, ***do not wait for an official evacuation notice****.*

Leaving early is often the safest option in wildfire-prone areas, especially where limited road access or fast-moving fire can quickly cut off escape routes.

Tools such as **Watch Duty** and **InciWeb** offer real-time, verified wildfire updates from trained volunteers and first responders, helping residents follow developing incidents and any evacuation changes. Watch Duty - https://app.watchduty.org/; InciWeb - https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/

Examples of other Mobile Apps:



AirNow provides up-to-date air quality information that helps residents understand smoke conditions and make informed, health-protective choices during wildfire events. This resource is especially important for communities like Custer County, which has the oldest median age in Colorado—approximately 58.3 years compared to the statewide median of 38.5 - ***based on the 2020 census.***

Older adults are more vulnerable to smoke-related health impacts, making reliable air quality monitoring essential for knowing when to limit outdoor exposure, use clean-air spaces, or take other protective actions. Air Now - https://www.airnow.gov/

Figure 16: Wildfire Smoke graphic *(Source:Fire Adapted Colorado)*

Public Safety Power Shutoffs

Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) are proactive, temporary power outages implemented by electric utilities during severe, high-risk weather (e.g., strong winds, low humidity, dry fuel) to prevent wildfire ignition. These safety measures are commonly used in California and increasingly in other regions, including Colorado.

Key details regarding PSPS and utilities include:

- Primary Purpose: To prevent electrical infrastructure from sparking wildfires during hazardous conditions.
- Trigger Factors: Utilities monitor real-time data, including high wind speeds, low relative humidity, and dry vegetation.
- Affected Areas: Power may be turned off in specific high-risk circuits or areas, which can impact downstream customers even if they are not in the immediate risk zone.
- Notification: Utilities are required to provide advance warning, typically aiming for 72 hours, 48 hours, and 24 hours prior to shutoffs, though communication during initial events can be a point of friction.
- Restoration: Power is restored only after conditions improve and crews physically inspect lines to ensure it is safe to re-energize.
- Key Utilities: Major utilities in Colorado employing PSPS include Xcel Energy and Black Hills Energy.

Key Preparation Steps for PSPS

- Communications & Alerts: Update contact information with utility companies, to receive notifications up to 72 hours in advance.
- Emergency Supplies: Prepare a kit with flashlights, batteries, bottled water, non-perishable food, and a first aid kit.
- Food Safety: Set refrigerators and freezers to their lowest temperatures. Keep doors closed to maintain cold for ~4 hours in the fridge and ~48 hours in a full freezer.
- Backup Power: Utilize portable charger banks and ensure generators are used only outdoors, away from windows and doors.
- Medical Needs: Contact medical providers to create a plan for devices dependent on electricity and for refrigerated medicine.
- Home Prep: Unplug sensitive electronics to avoid damage from surges when power is restored. Learn how to manually operate electric garage doors.
- Consider a battery operated NOAA Weather Radio.

Additional Sources for Wildfire Mitigation and Preparedness

- **Colorado Insurance Support Tools** - https://fireadaptedco.org/resources/property-insurance/
- **Neighborhood Ambassadors** - https://fireadaptedco.org/programs/fac-naa/
- **Firewise USA** -https://www.nfpa.org/Education-and-Research/Wildfire/Firewise-USA
- **Ready, Set, Go! Action Plan** Ready-Set-Go-Wildland-Fire-Action-Plan-Pages-8-11.pdf https://10afad46-e440-4c33-bd98-4a4b1a9a3288.filesusr.com/ugd/92b9d1_880c6b7d11304432b429434e8ca3e326.pdf
- **Colorado State Forest Service Resources for Home and Land Owners** - https://csfs.colostate.edu/homeowners-landowners/
- **Colorado State Forest Service Home Ignition Zone Guide** - https://csfs.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021_CSFS_HIZGuide_Web.pdf
- **Wildfire Prepared Neighborhood Technical Standard** - https://wildfireprepared.org/wp-content/uploads/Wildfire-Prepared-Neighborhood-Standard-2025.pdf
- **Nine Fact Sheets That Will Make Your Job Easier: NFPA Resources about Wildfire-Resilient Homes** - https://fireadaptednetwork.org/nine-fact-sheets-that-will-make-your-job-easier-nfpa-resources-address-questions-from-residents-about-home-hardening/
- **Live Wildfire Ready - Live Wildfire Ready** https://csfs.colostate.edu/live-wildfire-ready/
- **Fire Adapted Colorado** - https://fireadaptedco.org/
- **CMAT: Pike San Isabel National Forest (2016): A Blueprint for Mitigation** fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_wysiwyg/a_blueprint_for_mitigation.pdf
- **After the Flames - Post Wildfire Resources** - https://aftertheflames.com/resources/

Fire District / Department Capabilities

Wet Mountain Fire Protection District Apparatus

Chief 901	2011 Chevy Tahoe (Command) Take Home
Chief 902	Chevy Tahoe (Command) Take Home
Chief 903	Chevy Tahoe (Command) Take Home
Engine 911	2017 International (Type 1) Main Station
Engine 912	1992 Chevy (Type 1) Rosita Station
Engine 931	2024 Freightliner (Type 3) Main Station
Engine 932	1997 International (Type 3) Dewees Station
Engine 961	2008 Ford F550 (Type 6) Airport Station
Engine 962	2008 Ford F550 (Type 6) Main Station
Engine 963	2005 Ford F450 (Type 6) Dewees Station
Engine 964	2012 Ford F450 (Type 6/Rescue) Main Station
Engine 965	1990 Chevy (Type 6) Dewees Station
Engine 967	2011 Ford F550 (Type 6) Main Station
Rescue 971	2020 Ram (Rescue) Main Station
Tender 951	2012 International (Tactical Tender) Main Station
Tender 952	1974 Kenworth (Support Tender) Rosita Station
Tender 954	2005 Hawk Extreme (Tactical Tender) Main Station
Utility 991	2012 Polaris (UTV w/water) Main Station
Utility 992	2013 Polaris (UTV w/water) Main Station
Utility 993	2008 Chevy Truck (¾ ton truck) Main Station
Wet Mountain UAV 1	Drone (1) (Tracking, thermal imaging, oversight, etc) Main Station
Wet Mountain UAV 2	Drone (2) (Tracking, thermal imaging, oversight, etc) Main Station

Rye Fire Protection District Apparatus

Vehicle ID	Year	Make/Model	Type of Vehicle
231	2010	Pierce	Engine Type 1 1500/500
232	1993	International	Engine/Tender Type 2 1000/1500
281	2001	Freightliner	Rescue
282	2016	Can-Am	ATV
283	2008	Chevy Tahoe	Rapid Response Vehicle
284	2011	GMC Yukon	Rapid Response Vehicle
201	2014	Chevy Tahoe	Command Vehicle

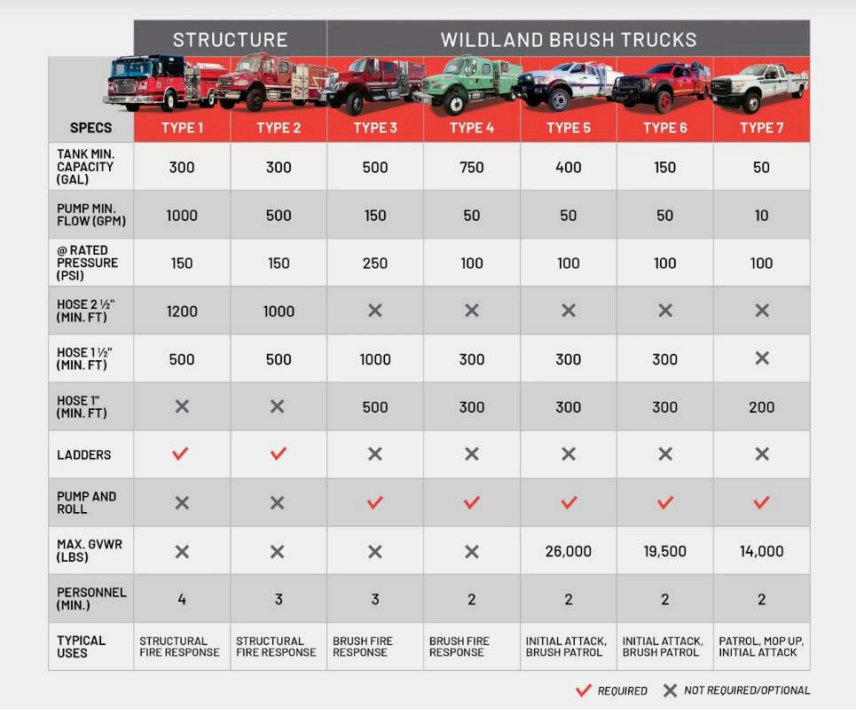
211	2007	Ford F-350	Ambulance Type 1
212	2013	Ford F-350 XLT	Ambulance Type 1
213	2017	Dodge Ram 4500	Ambulance Type 1
214	2016	Chevy 2500 HD	Ambulance Type 1
261	2020	Ford F450 XL	Engine Type 6
262	1998	Ford F550	Engine Type 6
291	1987	GMC Brigadier	Tender Type 2 1000/3000
272	2009	International	Engine Type 3 750/500

Wetmore Volunteer Fire Department Apparatus

2 - Type 5 Brush Trucks w/250 gallon tanks

1 - Type 4 Truck w/750 a gallon tank (state owned)

Figure 17: NWCG Types of Fire Engines (*Source: BME Fire Trucks)*



	STRUCTURE		WILDLAND BRUSH TRUCKS				
SPECS	TYPE 1	TYPE 2	TYPE 3	TYPE 4	TYPE 5	TYPE 6	TYPE 7
TANK MIN. CAPACITY (GAL)	300	300	500	750	400	150	50
PUMP MIN. FLOW (GPM)	1000	500	150	50	50	50	10
@ RATED PRESSURE (PSI)	150	150	250	100	100	100	100
HOSE 2 ½" (MIN. FT)	1200	1000	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
HOSE 1 ½" (MIN. FT)	500	500	1000	300	300	300	✗
HOSE 1" (MIN. FT)	✗	✗	500	300	300	300	200
LADDERS	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
PUMP AND ROLL	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MAX. GVWR (LBS)	✗	✗	✗	✗	26,000	19,500	14,000
PERSONNEL (MIN.)	4	3	3	2	2	2	2
TYPICAL USES	STRUCTURAL FIRE RESPONSE	STRUCTURAL FIRE RESPONSE	BRUSH FIRE RESPONSE	BRUSH FIRE RESPONSE	INITIAL ATTACK, BRUSH PATROL	INITIAL ATTACK, BRUSH PATROL	PATROL, MOP UP, INITIAL ATTACK

✓ REQUIRED ✗ NOT REQUIRED/OPTIONAL

Wildfire Risk Analysis HVRAs

The planning team's assessment of **High-Value Resources and Assets** (HVRAs) began early in the CWPP process with an initial list of values, which were organized into broad categories and evaluated for inclusion in the modeling framework. The list was refined to better represent community priorities, critical infrastructure, and ecological and cultural resources. The planning team intends to further refine and validate these HVRAs using spatial data analysis through the RADs process, enhancing the accuracy of risk modeling and guiding targeted wildfire mitigation efforts.

The *Custer County Mapbook*, a report based on the **Colorado Forest Action Plan** contributed to the alignment of these priorities:

1. Life Safety

- Primary evacuation routes and emergency access corridors, including State Highways 69, 96, 165, and 78.
- Communities with limited ingress/egress and development in high wildfire hazard areas.
- Socially vulnerable populations, including the county's aging demographic.

2. Buildings & Critical Facilities

- **Residential structures**: Represent over 50% of the county's tax base and are at the highest potential wildfire loss risk.
- **Non-residential structures**: commercial, government, and community service facilities.
- **Critical public facilities**: Fire Stations, EMS Facilities, and other government buildings essential for emergency response and continuity of operations.
- **Historic properties**: Contributing to cultural heritage and community identity.

3. Critical Infrastructure

- Transportation corridors supporting evacuation and emergency response.

- Utilities including electrical substations and distribution lines, communications towers, and water system components (wells, water storage facilities, water distribution and irrigation systems).

4. Water Resources

- Municipal water storage facilities, wells, and reservoirs essential for domestic use and wildfire suppression.

- Watersheds, wetlands, and riparian corridors supporting water quality, agriculture, and ecological resilience.

5. Recreation & Economic Assets

- Trails, campgrounds, lakes, and access corridors such as the Rainbow Trail and other trail systems and recreation areas in the San Carlos Ranger District of the San Isabel National Forest.

- Tourism and recreation areas that contribute to local economic stability.

- Agricultural lands and working ranches are integral to the county's economy and cultural landscape.

6. Wildlife & Vegetation

- Forests, grasslands, shrublands, and riparian areas within San Isabel National Forest, Sangre de Cristo Wilderness, State Wildlife Areas, and BLM lands.

- Habitat supporting big game and sensitive species (bighorn sheep, elk, deer, pronghorn antelope, cutthroat trout, Mexican spotted owl, Canada lynx, greater sage-grouse).

- Vegetation communities influencing wildfire behavior and restoration priorities: aspen, lodgepole pine, mixed conifer, ponderosa pine, piñon–juniper, spruce–fir, high-elevation meadows, sagebrush shrublands, scrub oak, agricultural lands, and riparian zones.

CSFS HVRA Scoring Context:

CSFS scoring emphasizes **high-value areas where wildfire risk reduction can most effectively protect human life, property, and key natural and economic resources.**

Table 6: Highly Valued Resources and Assets (HVRAs)

Category	HVRA
Life Safety	Evacuation Routes
Buildings	Residential Buildings
	Non-Residential Buildings
	Historic Places (NRHP)
	Outbuildings
Infrastructure	Transportation & Critical Routes (SH 69/96/165/78)
	Communication Infrastructure
	Electrical Transmission Lines
	Substations/Electrical
	Public Safety & Ops Facilities
	Monitoring Infrastructure
	Substations/Electrical
	Water Infrastructure
Water	Wells Surface Water Distribution Systems Critical Watersheds
Recreation	Built Recreation Infrastructure
	Camping
	Trails
	Lakes
Wildlife	Bighorn Sheep
	Cutthroat Trout
	Mule Deer
	Elk
	Pronghorn Antelope
	Mexican Spotted Owl
	Pronghorn Antelope

	Canada Lynx
	Sage Grouse
Vegetation	Agriculture
	Aspen
	High Elevation Meadows
	Lodgepole Pine
	Mixed Conifer
	Pinyon-Juniper
	Ponderosa Pine
	Riparian
	Sagebrush
	Spruce Fir
	Shrubland

Vegetation and Wildfire Behavior in Custer County, Colorado

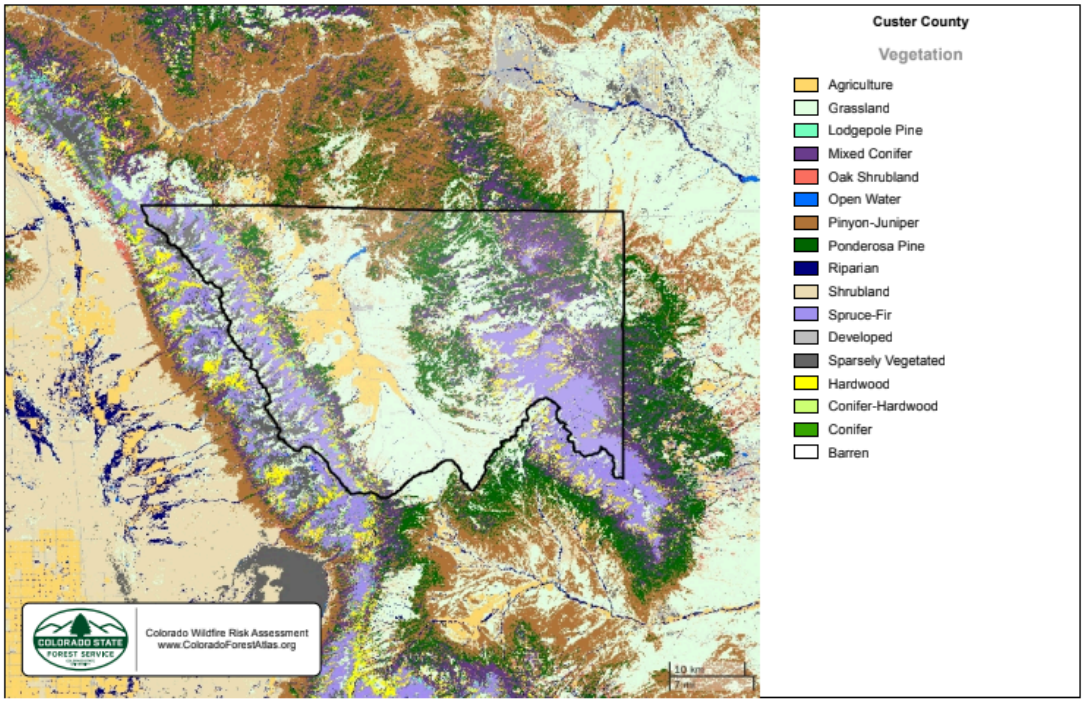
Custer County encompasses a diverse mix of vegetation types that influence wildfire behavior across varying elevations, terrain, and development patterns.

- Grasslands support fast-moving, wind-driven fires with high rates of spread during dry spring and early summer conditions.
- Pinyon–juniper and ponderosa pine forests contain continuous surface and ladder fuels that can produce moderate- to high-intensity fire, particularly on steep slopes and within WUI areas where development increases exposure.
- Lodgepole pine, mixed conifer, and spruce-fir forests are typically dense and capable of high-severity crown fire, long-range spotting, and rapid spread during drought and extreme weather events.
- Riparian areas and aspen-dominant stands generally exhibit higher fuel moisture and may slow fire spread, though embers can cross these features under high winds.

The built environment further elevates wildfire risk, as structure density, defensible space, and construction characteristics strongly influence potential damage.

Vegetation, fuel type, terrain, and structure density maps provide essential context for identifying wildfire hazards, assessing risk, and prioritizing mitigation efforts across Custer County.

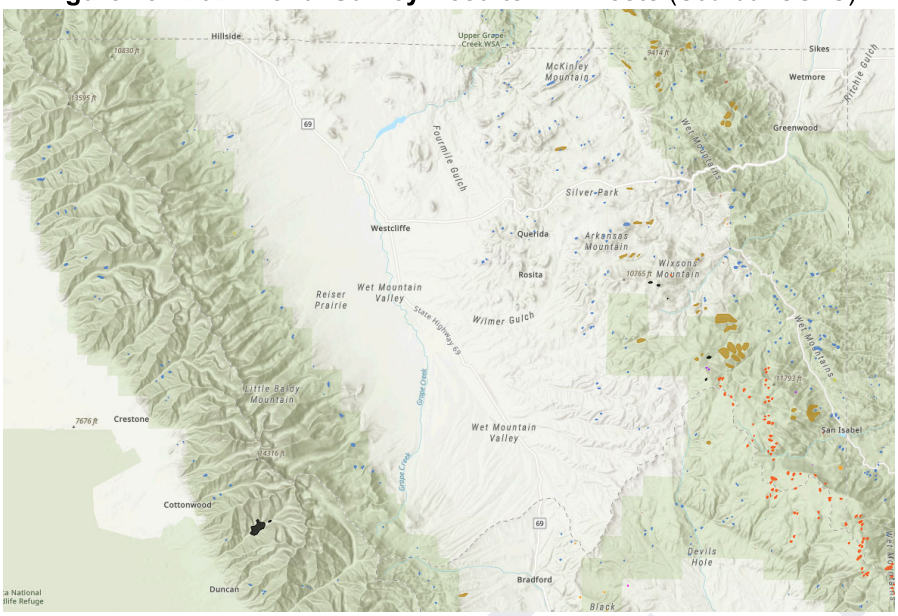
Figure 18: Vegetation Types in Custer County (*Source*: CSFS Colorado Forest Atlas)



2024 Insect and Disease Activity in Colorado

Explore the information and map below for data and insights on insect and disease activity in Colorado from the 2024 aerial forest health survey. More analysis, including a deeper dive into climate conditions last year, is available in the 2024 Forest Health ESRI StoryMap.

Figure 19: 2024 Aerial Survey Results - All Pests (*Source*: CSFS)



Goals & Objectives

Goals and objectives are essential to a CWPP because they help provide clear direction and focus for the plan and the planning process. Outlining what the county aims to achieve, along with its goals and objectives, ensures that efforts are aligned with local priorities, resources, and capabilities. Below are the goals and objectives of the Custer County CWPP as decided by the planning team. Specific actions related to the goals and objectives can be found in the Action Plan section of this document.

Goal 1: Fire-Resilient Landscapes

Develop and maintain landscapes across the county that are resilient to wildfire, mitigating undesirable fire outcomes and protecting highly valued resources and assets.

- **Objective 1A: Develop and Leverage tools to prioritize vegetation management and wildfire mitigation actions.**

[including a proposed Risk Assessment and Decision Support (RADs)*[6] project, the Custer County Evacuation Study, Potential Operational Delineations (PODs), and the Colorado Forest Atlas to prioritize vegetation management and wildfire mitigation actions.]

- **Objective 1B: Enhance safety and protect highly valued resources and assets** by implementing practical, effective strategies such as site hardening, creating defensible space, and vegetation management. Prepare critical infrastructure to withstand impacts before, during and after fire.

- **Objective 1C: Foster collaboration among stakeholders**, including governments, fire protection districts, land management agencies, non-profits, and landowners, to achieve effective cross-boundary project outcomes.

Objective 1D: Enhance watershed health by exploring new and supporting existing watershed protection opportunities.

Goal 2: Fire-Adapted Communities

Empower the county and its residents to "live with wildfire," including being prepared to withstand, respond to, and recover from wildfires.

- **Objective 2A: Engage the community** to increase public awareness of wildfire risks and benefits, improve personal preparedness, and reduce human ignitions.

- **Objective 2B: Provide resources and education** on best practices, including home hardening, defensible space, preparedness, and emergency notification.

- **Objective 2C: Build public support** for vegetation management, wildfire mitigation efforts, and prescribed fire.

- **Objective 2D: Engage socially vulnerable populations** to understand their unique challenges and opportunities for reducing wildfire risk, including identifying strategies to prepare for, withstand, and recover from power disruptions associated with wildfire and other hazard events.

[6] * *Risk Assessment and Decision Support Overview (Objective 1A)*
The Custer County Wildfire Council envisions an updated CWPP grounded in community values and local knowledge, integrating cutting-edge wildfire modeling and innovative planning tools. To advance this work, Custer County is seeking funding to activate a pending contract with the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), which would enhance wildfire-risk modeling and help identify the areas where vegetation-management efforts would provide the greatest return on investment in reducing wildfire risk and impacts.

Goal 3: Safe and Effective Wildfire Response

Enable safe and efficient wildfire response through improved planning, coordination, and education.

- **Objective 3A: Assess current wildfire response capabilities and identify opportunities to address gaps, while strengthening effective public communication strategies that keep residents and visitors informed before, during, and after wildfire events.**

- **Objective 3B: Strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders**, including governments, fire protection districts, and other emergency responders, to improve pre-planning, coordination, and incident management.

- **Objective 3C: Educate residents and stakeholders** on appropriate actions to take before, during, and after a wildfire.

CWPP Action Plan

The Custer County CWPP's overarching goals and objectives can be translated into wildfire mitigation actions. The goals and objectives set a broad framework for the desires and outcomes Custer County and the stakeholders wish to achieve. The actions listed below provide more details and directions for achieving these goals and objectives. They represent plans of action to help reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire on people, infrastructure, buildings, and the natural environment.

The identified action items were created through a collaborative process with planning team members discussing the wildfire needs in the planning area. Members were allowed to identify and discuss various actions over several meetings. The following lists the identified action items related to each goal and objective to enable people to live better with wildfire.

While many of these actions will be easy to implement, others depend entirely on funding, staff availability, and local buy-in. These hurdles may impact the time it takes to execute actions or determine if they can be implemented at all. As discussed later, these action items will be reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

Vegetation Management and Fuel Reduction Objectives

Vegetation management and fuel reduction is the process of modifying, removing, or maintaining hazardous naturally-occurring fuel sources such as trees, shrubs, and grasses to reduce wildfire risk. Vegetation management can minimize the risk by breaking up fuel continuity to slow fire spread, reducing fuel loads so fires are less intense, and improving firefighter access. Table 7 shows some of the common techniques used for vegetation management.

Table 7: Common Vegetation Management Techniques Method Description

Method	Description
Chipping/Mulching	Turning cut vegetation into mulch to reduce fire spread.
Herbicides	Targeted chemical applications to control invasive or fast-spreading vegetation.
Mowing / Grazing	Reducing grasses with machines or livestock.
Prescribed Fire	Fire professionals set controlled fires to reduce fuel loads safely.
Pruning	Cutting lower branches to prevent fire from climbing.
Thinning	Selectively removing trees or shrubs to reduce density.

The vegetation management and fuel reduction projects were put into three categories to better understand them, separate the planned projects, and prioritize focus areas.

- Short Term Planned Projects
- Mid Term Planned Projects
- Long Term Planned Projects

The three maps below show the short-term (1-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years), and long term (6-10 years) planned vegetation management project locations. These vegetation management projects were identified over several meetings with the Leads Team, and various fire management professionals. Already planned or ongoing projects from multiple entities comprise most short-term and mid-term projects.

In addition to the identified vegetation management projects, the Planning team members identified wildfire mitigation actions. These actions were linked to the goals and objectives identified in the CWPP. They represent plans of action to help reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire on people, infrastructure, buildings, and the natural environment. While many of these actions will be easy to implement, others depend entirely on funding, staff availability, and local buy-in. Many of the mitigation action themes are listed below. A complete list of wildfire mitigation actions and additional vegetation management project information can be found in the Action Plan section.

Planning vs Implementation:

Vegetation management projects on public lands identified in this CWPP are often dependent on meeting federal requirements, including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and completion of necessary biological, cultural (archaeological), and other resource surveys. In addition, projects located within or adjacent to designated Wilderness Areas are subject to further statutory limitations that restrict the type, scale, and methods of allowable treatments, often emphasizing minimal intervention and non-mechanized approaches.

These planning and review processes can take several years to complete and do not guarantee funding for implementation, as project prioritization and funding availability are subject to agency budgets and competitive grant cycles. As a result, wildfire may occur on the landscape during the planning phase—before treatments are implemented—altering site conditions, priorities, or treatment needs and requiring adaptive management as projects move forward.

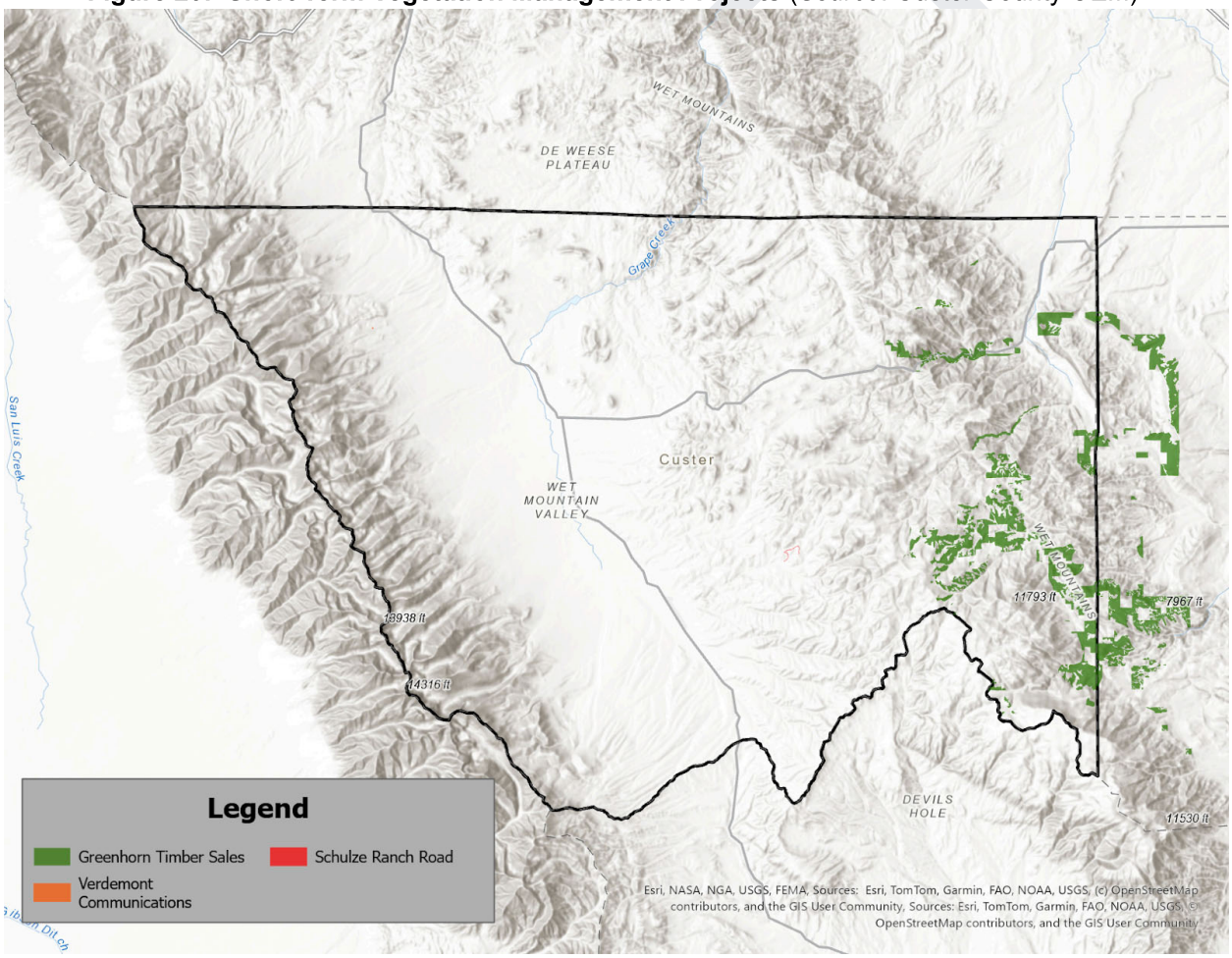
In certain circumstances, allowing naturally ignited fires to be managed for resource objectives may provide a more timely and cost-effective alternative.

The three maps below show the short-term (1-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years), and long term (6-10 years) planned vegetation management project locations. These vegetation

management projects were identified over several meetings with the Leads Team, and various fire management professionals. Already planned or ongoing projects from multiple entities comprise most short- and mid-term projects.

In addition to the identified vegetation management projects, the planning team members identified wildfire mitigation actions. These actions are linked to the goals and objectives identified in the CWPP. They represent plans of action to help reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire on people, infrastructure, buildings, and the natural environment. While many of these actions will be easy to implement, others depend entirely on funding, staff availability, and local buy-in. Many of the mitigation action themes are listed below. A complete list of wildfire mitigation actions and additional vegetation management project information can be found in the Action Plan section.

Figure 20: Short Term Vegetation Management Projects (*Source*: Custer County OEM)



Short-Term Planned Projects (1-2 Years)

These projects are likely to be implemented and completed within the next one to two years. Some are already underway, while others are finishing the planning process or awaiting funding. Information about these projects was gathered from the USFS, BLM, and CSFS and HOAs. Figure 32 shows planned projects locations.

Greenhorn Timber Sales

The Greenhorn Timber Sales are ongoing forest management projects intended to support fuels reduction, forest health, and local timber utilization objectives within the Pike–San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands (PSICC), San Carlos Ranger District. These projects have been underway since 2012, implementation of the final sale will begin in summer 2026.

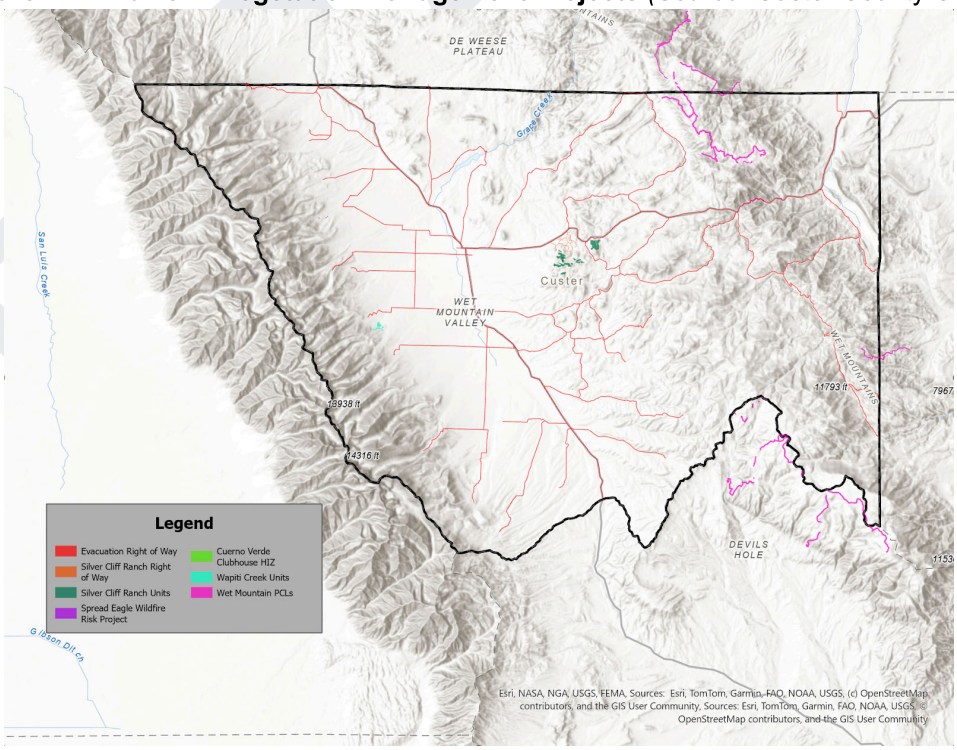
Verdemont Communications Site D-Space - Proposed

Create defensible space by clearing fuels around the Verdemont Communications site adjacent to Silver Cliff Ranch on BLM property.

Schulze Ranch Rd ROW Fuels Reduction

This project proposes targeted fuels thinning within the road right-of-way to improve emergency vehicle access and resident evacuation during a wildfire. Vegetation encroachment has reduced roadway clearance and increased roadside fuels; thinning will restore safe width and vertical clearance, reduce fire behavior, and improve visibility and maneuverability. The treated corridor may also serve as a potential control location, supporting safer evacuations and more effective suppression for residents with a limited evacuation route.

Figure 21: Mid Term Vegetation Management Projects *(Source*: Custer County OEM)



Mid-Term Planned Projects (3-5 Years)

These are currently planned projects that are not likely to be implemented for another three to five years. Most still have significant steps to complete in the planning process, such as land surveys and the NEPA process. Information about these projects was gathered from the USFS, BLM, CSFS, and HOAs.

Figure 21 shows where these projects are planned to be located. Additional projects may be added to this list as opportunities become available. For example, the Custer County Evacuation Study (Ladris) will likely identify additional detail for fuels projects along evacuation route ROWs, and could include adjacent private landowners, but specific locations have not been determined yet.

Evacuation Routes ROW Fuels Reduction - Proposed

This project will thin hazardous fuels within the road right-of-way along Sheriff's Office–designated county evacuation routes to improve emergency vehicle access and resident evacuation during a wildfire. Targeted thinning will restore roadway clearance, reduce fire behavior, and establish a safer evacuation corridor and potential wildfire control locations. (Evacuation Routes are delineated and specific treatment areas will be refined)

Silver Cliff Ranch ROW Project - Proposed

Apply fuel treatments along right-of-ways (ROWs) to strengthen Potential Control Locations (PCLs), by reducing hazardous vegetation, enabling safer evacuations, and protecting communities through mechanical or chemical methods. Removing invasive species and dense vegetation reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfire spread.

Silver Cliff Ranch Wildfire Risk Project - Proposed

Improve life safety and emergency response within the subdivision by installing clear, durable signage along evacuation routes and dead-end roadways, including reflective address signage to support rapid identification of homes during wildfire and other emergencies. In coordination with this effort, identify and prioritize Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) projects and complementary fuels reduction treatments to reduce wildfire risk, improve access and egress, and support safe, efficient evacuation and response operations.

Spread Eagle Wildfire Risk Project - Started

Create defensible space by clearing fuels along all town road right-of-ways, thinning 14 parcels totaling approximately 29.8 acres in mixed conifer forest type within the Spread Eagle HOA. Additionally, approximately 6 acres of community open space will be selectively thinned in 4 separate areas if funding allows.

Cuerno Verde HOA Clubhouse HIZ Project - Proposed

The purpose of this project is to reduce wildfire risk to the Cuerno Verde HOA Clubhouse by enhancing defensible space and reducing structural ignition hazards within the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) out to 200 feet. This includes improvements in the immediate zone, such as: installing 1/8-inch metal screening around deck areas and replacing combustible ground cover with gravel in Zone 1 to reduce ember intrusion and ignition potential.

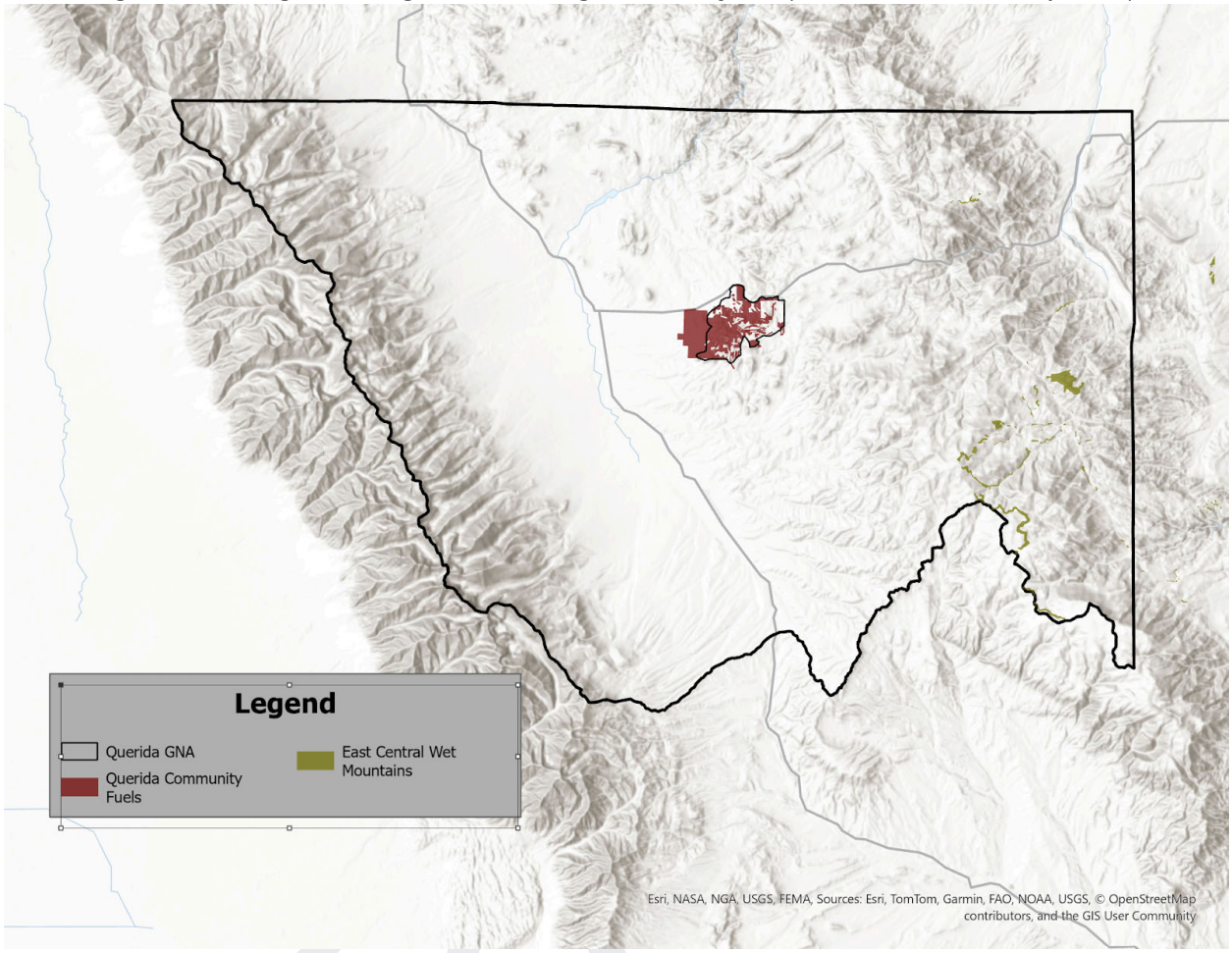
Wapiti Creek Wildfire Risk Project - Proposed

The project will cut and remove trees across diameter classes within the 100 ft. HIZs of 6 properties creating defensible space. The HIZ work will occur in primarily the mixed conifer and Gambel oak forest types and total approximately 13.1 acres of treatment. Additionally, approximately 50.6 acres of forested land has been identified for selective thinning. The acreage of this treatment will depend on bid prices and may decrease depending on cost per acre. The selective thinning will occur primarily in mixed conifer and lodgepole pine forest types. Logging systems will be a combination of hand-felling, traditional ground based logging and mastication.

Wet Mountain Potential Control Locations - Proposed

The project will create fuel breaks (not fire breaks) and reduce hazardous fuels loading via mechanical, hand, and prescribed fire treatments in several treatment areas on Forest System lands around the approximately 235,000-acre Wet Mountains portion of the San Carlos Ranger District to improve and maintain Potential Control Locations (PCLs) for future wildfires. Treatment areas are up to 1,000 feet in width and contiguous with or incorporating existing linear features (roads and trails). Treatments are intended to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire (flame lengths greater than four feet, and crown fire activity) on USDA Forest Service lands. The proposed treatments include 2,446 acres in numerous areas across the Wet Mountains. Treatments are proposed to occur in Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, and Pueblo Counties. The approximate width of treatments is 200’ on either side, or are centered around roads or trails, with the widest distance from those features being 1,000 feet. The types of treatments include hand cutting, piling, mechanically thinning (mastication or removal), burning of piled material, and burning of proposed treatment areas. Treatments will vary, based upon the type and density of vegetation that occurs in the unit. No permanent or temporary roads would be constructed.

Figure 22: Long Term Vegetation Management Projects *(Source*: Custer County OEM)



Long-Term Proposed Projects (6-10 Years)

Project Prioritization Activity Map These projects will likely take longer to be implemented and have not started the planning process. Because of this, specific types and methods of treatments have yet to be identified.

The proposed RADS process will be used to continue identifying and prioritizing long-term vegetation management projects, focusing on those that offer the greatest reduction in wildfire risk to high-priority values while maximizing cost-effectiveness. By integrating wildfire behavior modeling, community values, and treatment feasibility, RADS ensures that resources are directed toward projects that deliver the most significant benefits for risk mitigation, public safety, and landscape resilience. Projects identified through the RADS process will be incorporated into the CWPP revision upon completion of the study.

Querida GNA - Proposed

Forest sanitation treatment to remove dead and dying tree impacted by disease and insects. Heavily thin unhealthy white fir and favor retention of more drought tolerant/fire resistant ponderosa pine. Pockets of pine will also be removed when infested with dwarf mistletoe. Target residual basal area for forested stands will be 50 sqft/acre. Logging systems will consist of traditional ground based logging, mastication, and hand thinning on steep slopes. This project aims to tie in with additional treatments planned for private land.

Querida Community Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project - Proposed

Treat private parcels within the Querida community for fire mitigation and forest health. Reduce stand densities on entire large and small sized private parcels to historic pre-fire suppression densities and species compositions. Create defensible space around homes by reducing hazardous fuels within HIZs. Target grant funding yearly to treat as many homes as possible for interested landowners. Accelerate outreach to community to communicate risks, opportunities for mitigation funding and benefits to the community and forest ecosystem post treatment.

East-Central Wet Mountains Hazardous Fuel Reduction & Forest Restoration Project - Proposed

The project will complete the following vegetation treatments: thinning, creating openings, prescribed burning and fuel breaks on approximately 16,700 acres within the East-Central Wet Mountains Project Area. Approximately 2,352 acres of treatments are within Colorado Roadless Areas. No new roads would be constructed in Colorado Roadless Areas and the proposed activities are consistent with the Colorado Roadless Rule.

Table 8: Vegetation Management Projects Summary

Project Name	Short, Mid, Long Term	Implementation Leader
Greenhorn Timber Sales	Short-Term	USFS
Verdemont Tower Communications D-Space Maintenance - (Annual)	Short-Term	Custer County
Schulze Ranch Rd ROW Fuels Reduction	Short-Term	Schulze Ranch HOA
Evacuation Routes ROW Fuels Reduction - Proposed	Mid-Term	Custer County
Silver Cliff Ranch ROW Fuels Reduction - Proposed	Mid-Term	TOSC
Silver Cliff Ranch HIZ Project - Proposed	Mid-Term	TOSC
Spread Eagle Wildfire Risk Project - Started	Mid-Term	Spread Eagle / CSFS
Cuerno Verde HOA Clubhouse HIZ Project - Proposed	Mid-Term	Cuerno Verde HOA

Spread Eagle Wildfire Risk Project - Started	Mid-Term	Spread Eagle / CSFS
Wapiti Creek Wildfire Risk Project	Mid-Term	Wapiti Creek / CSFS
Wet Mountain PCLs Project - Proposed	Mid-Term	USFS
Querida GNA - Proposed	Long-Term	BLM, CSFS
Querida Community Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project	Long-Term	County, ARWC, CSFS
East Central Wet Mountains Hazardous Fuel Reduction and Forest Restoration Project - Proposed	Long-Term	USFS

Expanded Goals & Objectives:

Goal 1: Fire-Resistant Landscapes

Develop and maintain landscapes across the county that are resilient to wildfire, mitigate undesirable fire outcomes, and protect highly valued resources and assets.

- Objective 1A: **Develop and leverage tools** to prioritize vegetation management and wildfire mitigation actions.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
1A.1	Conduct a Risk Assessment Decision Support (RADS) project to identify where targeted vegetation management can make the greatest impact in reducing wildfire risk to **high-priority values** in Custer County.	OEM, WMVO	Fund by Q4/26; Complete by Q4/27
1A.2	Plan and prioritize additional vegetation management and wildfire mitigation actions using primarily outcomes from the RADS process and/or other existing tools.	OEM, Fire Council, WMVO & Stakeholders	Q4/27-Q1/28 (Complete CWPP & HMP Updates Q1/28)
1A.3	Crosswalk Custer County Hazard Mitigation Plan updates with the Custer County CWPP Update	OEM, Fire Council, WMVO & Stakeholders	Complete CWPP & HMP Updates Q1/28

1A.4	Map Critical Infrastructure and Cultural Resources for further prioritization of community values at risk of impacts from wildfire and/or post-fire flash flooding, and to inform the proposed RADS planning process.	OEM, WMVO	Q1/-Q4/2026
1A.5	Continuing to map past and ongoing fuels treatments is essential for understanding treatment effectiveness and demonstrating landscape-scale continuity.	OEM, CSRMS	Annually, Ongoing

- Objective 1B: **Enhance safety and protect highly valued resources and assets** by implementing practical, effective strategies such as: site hardening, creating defensible space, and vegetation management. Prepare critical infrastructure to withstand impacts before, during and after fire.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
1B.1	Implement the identified short-term planned vegetation management projects. Information about these projects can be found under Short-Term Planned Projects above and is listed in Figure 20.	OEM, HOAs	Q1/26-Q4/27
1B.2	Implement the identified midt-term planned vegetation management projects. Information about these projects can be found under Short-Term Planned Projects above and is listed in Figure 21.	OEM, WMVO, Federal and State Partners, Stakeholders	Q1/28-Q4/30
1B.3	Implement the identified long-term planned vegetation management projects. Information about these projects can be found under Short-Term Planned Projects above and is listed in Figure 22.	OEM, WMVO, Federal and State Partners, Stakeholders	Q1/31-Q4/35
1B.4	Identify and prioritize locations across Custer County with invasive and high-risk species such as cheatgrass (downy brome)	CCCD, Weed Board, Extension	Q1- Q4/2026
1B.5	Implement the 2025 Custer County Weed Plan actions across Custer County targeting all weed	CCCD, Weed Board, Extension	Q1/2026-ongoing

	species, with emphasis on invasive and high-risk species such as cheatgrass (downy brome) - coordinating with landowners, agencies, and stakeholders to reduce ecological, agricultural, and wildfire-related impacts and promote resilient landscapes.		
1B.6	Promote and increase the installation of reflective address markers at parcel driveways by establishing, funding, and implementing a coordinated program to improve emergency response and evacuation efficiency.	Custer County, P&Z, WMFPD Auxiliary	Q1/2026-ongoing
1B.7	Develop, and implement a county-supported program, including funding mechanisms, to install signage along evacuation routes and dead-end cul-de-sacs, (including non-county subdivision roads), to enhance emergency response capabilities and evacuation efficiency.	Custer County, R&B, TOSC, Subdivisions	Q1/26-Q4/27
1B.8	Implement a county-supported vegetation management program for all egress right-of-ways, (including non-county subdivision roads), to reduce wildfire risk and maintain safe evacuation routes.	Custer County, R&B, TOSC	Q1/26-Q4/27, + maintenance
1B.9	Land Use and Access - Update land use policies to reduce wildfire risk by requiring multiple ingress and egress routes for new development.	TOWC, TOSC, Custer County P&Z, Planning Commissions	Q1/26-Q4/27
1B.10	Site Design and Development Standards - Revise development standards to increase setbacks, improve structure separation distances, and integrate defensible space requirements into subdivision and site design.	TOWC, TOSC, Custer County P&Z, Planning Commissions	Q1/26-Q4/27
1B.11	Building Codes and Construction Practices - Update building codes to incorporate the CRWC. Require NFPA-compliant spark arrestors and the use of fire-resistant construction materials for new construction and substantial remodels in wildfire-prone areas.	TOWC, TOSC, Custer County P&Z, Planning Commissions	Q3/2026
1B.12	Standardize local ordinances between jurisdictions, ex: Silver Cliff: Sec. 7-4-60. - Duty of property owner to cut.	TOWC, TOSC, Custer County	Q1/26-Q4/27

1B.13	Protect critical functions in key buildings by providing backup power sources where needed.	TOWC, TOSC, Custer County, FPDs	Q1/26-Q4/27

- Objective 1C: **Foster collaboration among stakeholders**, including governments, fire protection districts, land management agencies, non-profits, and residents, to achieve effective cross-boundary project outcomes.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
1C.1	Schedule and facilitate meetings where stakeholders can collaborate and plan cross-boundary vegetation management projects using outcomes from the RADS process.	WMVO; OEM, CSRMS, Fire Council, Federal and State Partners	Q4/27-Q1/28
1C.2	Secure funding and hire an individual to implement wildfire mitigation actions, possibly in partnership . This individual could assist Custer County Planning and Zoning with WUI Code implementation.	WMVO; Custer County, TOWC, TOSC	Q1/26-Q4/26
1C.3	Work with neighboring private landowners and homeowners associations when planning vegetation management projects to expand the treated areas.	OEM, Council, NA, CCMT	Q1/26-Q4/27
1C.4	Partner with a qualified non-governmental organization to establish a Mitigation Fund. The fund will collect donations, grants, local tax revenues (under agreement), and other funding sources to support vegetation management projects and other wildfire mitigation actions, providing a flexible mechanism to advance risk-reduction efforts across the County.	WMVO, Council	Q1/26-Q4/27
1C.5	Explore working with county officials to establish a voter-approved levy or other funding mechanism that could direct local tax revenues into Mitigation Fund, providing an additional, flexible source of support for priority vegetation management and wildfire mitigation projects.	WMVO	Q1/26-Q4/27

- Objective 1D: **Enhance watershed health** by exploring new and supporting existing watershed protection opportunities.
  [Wildfire risk assessment maps for the Upper Arkansas Watershed are available here.]

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
1D.1	Create or improve wet meadows and other landscapes that burn less intensely and can act as fire breaks. Work with the UAWCD and other partners on locations that will help reduce fire risk and meet other resource objectives. Priority locations include: Taylor Creek, Horn Creek, Grape Creek, Colony Creek, South Hardscrabble Creek, Newlin Creek.	ARWC, UAWCD, CPW	Q1/26-Q4/27
1D.2	Develop a Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP) plan that equips the Upper Arkansas Watershed Conservancy District with a shared roadmap for reducing wildfire risks and safeguarding critical resources in Custer County.	ARWC, WMVO	Q1/26-Q4/27
1D.3	Map irrigation ditches and infrastructure to support pre-disaster mitigation, identify funding opportunities for agricultural property owners, prioritize areas at risk of post-fire flash flooding, reduce threats to critical infrastructure, and inform the proposed RADS planning process.	WMVO, ARWC	Q1/-Q4/2026

Goal 2: Fire-Adapted Communities

Empower the county and its residents to “live with wildfire,” including being prepared to withstand, respond to, and recover from wildfires.

- Objective 2A: **Engage the community** to increase public awareness of wildfire risks and benefits, improve personal preparedness, and reduce human ignitions.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
2A.1	Coordinate education and outreach across all the partners (WMVO, Custer County, and local	WMVO, FPDs, OEM, SO	Q1/26-Q4/27

	fire protection districts) for county-wide wildfire education, utilizing coordinated messaging		
2A.2	Target locations with elevated wildfire risk and/or elevated risk of ignitions with strategic messaging to promote preparedness, home hardening, defensible space, and reducing human ignitions. Include popular recreation sites and campgrounds.	OEM, Trails for All, USFS, BLM, CPW	Q1/26-Q4/27
2A.3	Promote the CWPP StoryMap. The StoryMap can be found here. (to be added)	OEM, Media, Stakeholders	Q2/26

- Objective 2B: **Provide resources and education** on best practices, including home hardening, defensible space, preparedness, and emergency notification.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
2B.1	Share information about Colorado's Wildland Urban Interface code and other best practices, encouraging voluntary compliance to increase insurance availability and insurability of homes.	Zoning - Custer County, TOWC, TOSC	Q2-2026-ongoing
2B.2	Share updates with Custer County HOAs on House Bill 24-109 **(C.R.S. § 38-33.3-106.5)** regarding fire-hardened materials, mitigation measures, exemptions, fencing, and the Home Ignition Zone, emphasizing that covenants cannot prohibit hazard reduction or the use of fire-resistant building materials in residential and common-interest communities.	P&Z - Custer County, TOWC, TOSC	Q2-2026-ongoing
2B.2	Establish a comprehensive property assessment program that uses a standardized structure-ignition model to evaluate and document ignition risks consistently. Use scheduling tools to maximize the number of assessments and improve efficiency by organizing them by geographic area and subdivision. | Consider utilizing an off-the-shelf program such as the REALFire® program.	WMVO, WMFPD, OEM,NA, CCMT	Q4-2026
2B.3	Share information and encourage homeowners to participate in the (ASIP) Program.	WMVO, WMFPD, OEM, NA, CCMT	Q4-2026

2B.4	Enhance the existing community chipping program to include scheduled curbside chipping days, improve outcomes across subdivisions and increase cubic yards chipped.	WMVO, WMFPD, OEM, CCMT	Q4-2026
2B.5	Deliver "The Role of Wildfire Mitigation in Real Estate" continuing education program, to real estate agents in Custer County, providing 4 accredited CE credits and equipping local realtors with practical, place-based knowledge on wildfire risk, mitigation, and real estate considerations relevant to the County.	RGAR / CAR, NA	Q1/26-Q4/27
2B.5	Explore development of a slash collection and pile-burning training site in the Wet Mountain Valley, potentially utilizing the Wet Mountain Fire Protection District (WMFPD) training site, to support safe, hands-on training and vegetation management efforts.	WMFPD, OEM	Q4-2026

Example Chipping Program – Chaffee Chips
Created by Chaffee County, Chaffee Chips empowers community members to create defensible space by coordinating neighborhood slash and removal and chipping services. More information can be found here.

- Objective 2C: **Build public support** for vegetation management, wildfire mitigation efforts, and prescribed fire.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
2C.1	Provide information on the importance of vegetation management via pre- and post-treatment photos, how treatments affect wildfires, and other outreach materials. Coordinate outreach between Custer County, WMVO, USFS, BLM, NRCS, CSFS, local fire protection districts, and other stakeholders.	CSRMS, Stakeholders	Q1/26-Q4/27

2C.2	Increase public awareness and support for prescribed fire as a tool for wildfire risk reduction and ecosystem restoration. Educate on planning versus implementation timelines, noting that naturally ignited fires managed for resource objectives can provide a timely, cost-effective, and safe way to restore fire to the landscape, reduce hazardous fuels, and enhance ecosystem resilience.	CSRMS, FPDs, OEM, Stakeholders	Q1/26-Q4/27

- Objective 2D: **Engage socially vulnerable populations** to gain insight into their unique challenges and opportunities to mitigate wildfire risks, including identifying strategies to prepare for, withstand, and recover from power disruptions associated with wildfire and other hazard events.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
2D.1	Engage socially vulnerable populations through accessible communications and outreach to understand wildfire risks, barriers, and community-identified mitigation needs.	OEM, PHA, NA	Q1/26-Q4/27
2D.2	Improve preparedness for wildfire-related power disruptions by promoting practical strategies that support health, safety, and communication during outages.	PHA	Q1/26-Q4/27
2D.3	Encourage neighbor-to-neighbor engagement to support socially vulnerable residents and improve community preparedness, response, and recovery.	OEM, PHA, NA, civic groups	Q1/26-Q4/27

Goal 3: Safe and Effective Wildfire Response

Enable safe and efficient wildfire response through improved planning, coordination, and education.

- Objective 3A: **Assess current wildfire response capabilities and identify opportunities to address gaps, while strengthening effective public communication strategies that keep residents and visitors informed before, during, and after wildfire events.**

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline

3A.1	Work with local and county building departments, the Custer County Workforce Housing Committee (WHC), and other local organizations to promote innovative housing solutions to increase the number of qualified firefighters living in the county.	WHC	Q1/28-Q4/30
3A.2	Improve cell coverage across the county to make it easier for citizens to report emergencies and to reach people for emergency messaging.	Cell Providers, County	Q1/28-Q4/30
3A.3	Increase water supplies and storage for wildfire response by enhancing existing infrastructure, creating redundancies, and increasing water storage capacity and location. Identify locations in the county that most need water supply or storage improvements.	WMFPD, County	Q1/28-Q4/30

- Objective 3B: **Strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders**, including governments, fire protection districts, non-profit collaboratives, and response agencies, to improve pre-planning, coordination, and incident management.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline
3B.1	CRRF Updates: Create a list of available resources (equipment, radios, etc.) between Custer County, local fire protection districts, DFPC, USFS, BLM, and CSFS that can be shared between agencies.	OEM, SO, WMFPD, EMS	Q1/26-Q4/27, + (annually)
3B.2	Collaborate between agencies to help sponsor Incident Qualification Cards (Red Cards).	FPDs	Q1/26-Q4/27
3B.3	Develop an Evacuation and Reentry Plan for Custer County—or for specific areas within the county and exercise the plan.	OEM, SO	Q1/26-Q4/26
3B.4	Develop a communications strategy for mass notifications, utilizing mobile applications, the county website, and social media posts to connect and inform community members in an emergency within seconds, using best practices that reach the broadest audience possible.	OEM, SO	Q1/26-Q4/26

	Include annual testing | Utilize media releases to promote alert and warning systems testing annually and increase signups.		
3B.5	Develop a communications strategy for Fire Restrictions (AHJ) and Burn Permits (FPDs) that includes the full text for all statutes, resolutions, and ordinances referred to. (and/or links to source documents)	SO, FPDs, USFS, BLM, DFPC	Q1/26-Q4/26
3B.6	Compile and verify GIS/E911 data and conduct E911 parcel/address updates twice per year, at six-month intervals (e.g., Jan-Jun and Jul-Dec cycles.	IT / GIS	Q4/26, + ongoing
3B.7	Compile and verify structure data layers with parcel/address updates twice per year, at six-month intervals (e.g. Jan-Jun and Jul-Dec cycles. Last updated 2017 by USFS on behalf of Custer County.	IT / GIS	Q4/26, + ongoing
3B.8	Compile and verify GIS data layers for both the WMFPD and Wetmore VFD that exclude all federal lands from the dataset. Publish a GIS layer for the WMFPD and update key stakeholders who currently share incorrect information.	WMFPD, IT / GIS	Q2/2026
3B.9	Promote and help create Continuity of Operations Plans for communities and organizations.	OEM, BoCC, Stakeholders	Q1/26-Q4/27
3B.10	Promote and support the creation of RED Books for communities and organizations, including conference centers, schools, assisted living facilities, and camps.[7]	OEM, SO, Stakeholders	Q1/26-Q4/27

- Objective 3C: **Educate residents and stakeholders** on appropriate actions to take before, during, and after a wildfire.

Action ID	Action Description	Lead / Partners	Timeline

[7] A RED Book is a written emergency plan that outlines procedures, resources, and responsibilities for responding to emergencies, including wildfire, evacuation, and other hazards. It serves as a reference for staff, residents, or visitors to ensure safety and coordinated action during a crisis.

3C.1	Coordinate education and outreach between Custer County Emergency Management, USFS, BLM, ARWC, CSFS, and local fire protection districts on actions to take before, during, and after wildfires.	County, All	ongoing
3C.2	Increase outreach and education to short-term rentals and second homeowners on appropriate actions to take before, during, and after wildfire.	P&Z, Tourism Board	Q1/26-Q4/27
3C.3	Encourage residents to sign up for Custer County Emergency Alerts . Educate residents on the importance of following emergency instructions and the limitations of the emergency notifications. | Encourage Custer County residents within the Rye FPD to register for Rave Alert for Pueblo County as well.	OEM, SO	Q1/26, + ongoing

The actions listed in this section of the CWPP are not all-inclusive. Conditions, funding, and opportunities change over time, and it is critical to update this CWPP. Custer County will add appropriate new actions to meet changing needs and opportunities and make this a living CWPP.

Living CWPP

To fulfill the intended purpose and remain effective, this CWPP shall be reviewed and updated on a recurring basis, no less than once every five years for an official update. More frequent and less formal updates may occur to incorporate relevant information, such as updates to hazardous fuel reduction treatment projects status, cross-boundary planning, or other relevant information. It is the intent of the Custer County CWPP Wildfire planning team to update this CWPP within two years by incorporating RADs data into the project and cross-walking the plan with the Custer County Hazard Mitigation Plan updates.

Appendices

Appendix A – CWPP Community Engagement Survey Report

Appendix B – CO-WRA report for Custer County (Dec 2025)

Appendix C – Fire Restrictions & Open Burning Ordinances

Appendix D – Community & Subdivision Table

Appendix E – County Demographics & Evacuation Planning

Appendix F – Custer County Evacuation Study (Ladris) coming March 2026