



## WEST REGION WILDFIRE COUNCIL

The West Region Wildfire Council (WRWC) met on July 8<sup>th</sup> at the Ridgway Events Center. Those in attendance reviewed a new educational brochure titled "Ready, Set, Go – Your Personal Wildfire Action Plan." This publication was prepared by the Fire & Life Safety Educators of Colorado, Fire Marshals Association of Colorado and Colorado State Fire Chiefs Association. The brochure was created so that Colorado's fire departments and life safety professionals could have a common resource for educating their citizens about wildfire prevention, mitigation and evacuation. The Ready, Set, Go program is not meant to replace any existing wildfire prevention or mitigation programs, but rather acts as another tool to communicate to homeowners the value of creating defensible space around their homes and understanding the concept of personal responsibility for welfare in a wildfire environment. WRWC plans to join others in endorsing the brochure and is expected to make it available to communities during ongoing outreach to communities.

The council members also reviewed progress that has been made to date on development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for

Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose and Ouray Counties. As a part of the CWPP discussion, members continued to evaluate the future direction of WRWC. There is common support to pursue hiring a coordinator to assist WRWC and the various counties during the development and implementation of the CWPPs. The Council plans to apply for Community Assistance funding to support a coordinator position. Details about the position description and the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the job are still being discussed.

WRWC has used several entities as fiscal agents over the years. As such, funds awarded to the council are located in various places. Those funds should be used in the near future to pay for portions of the CWPPs currently in development. WRWC plans to move forward with choosing a new fiscal agent as a way of consolidating that responsibility to one entity and possibly reducing the administrative fees required to manage the funds.

The council will be meeting again on Thursday, August 26<sup>th</sup> from 1000-1200 at the Ridgway Events Center.

## COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Hinsdale County held two public meetings in June as a part of their county's CWPP development. The infamous gun raffles associated with these meetings were fairly successful. Although the gun raffles did not draw as much interest as was initially anticipated, there was good attendance at both meetings. Those in attendance were supportive of developing a CWPP for the county and provided good feedback to the county and contractor developing the plan. Hinsdale County's CWPP is now available as a DRAFT plan. The Core Team for Hinsdale County's plan will be meeting on August 4<sup>th</sup> to discuss the DRAFT CWPP and make recommendations to the contractor. If you are interested in seeing a copy of the DRAFT CWPP, please contact Chris Barth.

The Upper Crystal River Valley (UCRV) CWPP was completed recently. The UCRV plan serves an area in Gunnison County near the Town of Marble. Members of the UCRV Core Team will be meeting on July 20<sup>th</sup> to review the recommendations presented in the plan, and to ensure that those

responsible for implementing the recommendations are identified within the document.

San Miguel County, the Town of Telluride, and the Town of Mountain Village recently expressed their support for the completed San Miguel County CWPP (2009) at an intergovernmental meeting. The intergovernmental group expressed preliminary support in working with federal land managers to implement the recommendations identified in San Miguel County CWPP. Related to efforts in San Miguel County, the Town of Mountain Village recently passed the first reading of a wildfire mitigation ordinance. The ordinance is expected to pass in the coming months.

Delta, Gunnison, Montrose and Ouray Counties are working with Anchor Point to establish a timeline for the respective counties' CWPPs to begin. Anchor Point and the counties' representatives anticipate that some or all of those plans will be developed concurrently. Each of the CWPPs will begin with a "kick-off" meeting for the Core Team members.

# TYPE 3 FIRE MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

Last winter a group of MIFMU fire management personnel got together to evaluate and modify the Type 3 Fire Management Organization originally developed in 2005-2006. The local Type 3 organization was used for the first time since it was originally developed on the Grammer Fire in July 2009. During the Grammar Fire it became apparent that some minor adjustments could improve the organization. In May 2010, MIFMU had the opportunity to apply the revised organizational structure during the Beaver Fire.

The purpose of the local Type 3 organization is to allow MIFMU and Agency Administrators to manage more complex fires with local knowledge, appropriately sized organizations, better involvement of cooperators and agency resource specialists, improved attention to resource objectives, and hopefully a reduction of taxpayer dollars.

From the initial development of the Type 3 organization, safety of firefighters and the public has been the primary concern. To address firefighter and public safety, particular attention has been given to incorporating Safety Officers, Medical Unit Leaders, Aviation Specialists, Public Information Officers, and experienced operational leadership into the organization. Recent updates to the organizational structure include adding a Type 3 Deputy IC on

incidents with jurisdictional complexity, an Air Operations Branch Director when aviation operations become complex, a Fire Behavior Analyst to assist with long-term fire projections – (particularly significant as we move toward longer term management of incidents to achieve objectives), a Status/Check In Recorder to document and track resources, a Supply Unit Leader to manage and track accountable property and supplies, and Personnel and Equipment Time Recorders.

The Type 3 organization consists of qualified individuals in as many as 24 positions. MIFMU does not have specific individuals assigned to a team, but rather assembles an incident specific team from those that are qualified and available. Seven key positions will be filled anytime a Type 3 organization is required: Incident Commander, Safety Officer, Resource Advisor, Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, and Finance Section Chief. Other positions will be assigned as needed.

If you have interest in becoming involved with the Type 3 Fire Management Organization, please contact Becky Jossart (970.240.5359) or Dan Huisjen (970.240.5339). There are many non-operational positions that do not require medical exams, pack tests, or significant training commitments.

## BEAVER FIRE REHABILITATION

On May 24, 2010, the Beaver Fire burned approximately 422 acres in the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) and 2219 acres in the Uncompahgre National Forest. It is suspected that the fire was caused by a downed powerline during a high wind event on May 24<sup>th</sup>. The fire started northwest of the Lower Beaver Recreation site in the San Miguel River riparian area approximately 5 miles east of Norwood in San Miguel County. The fire initially burned the riparian area in the bottom of the San Miguel Canyon. The fire quickly burned up the south side of the canyon in mostly mountain shrub communities of oak brush and serviceberry, with stringers of Douglas fir and piñon juniper in very steep, rocky terrain. As the fire reached the canyon rim, it spotted across the San Miguel Canyon into Gutshall Basin and McKenzie Creek and ran up onto national forest lands.

Overall the burn severity was rated as moderate with small areas of low to high severity. Most of the high severity burned area was concentrated in Gutshall Basin where heavy fuels had accumulated in the Douglas fir/Ponderosa pine forest cover on the north facing side of the basin.

The goal of the Beaver Fire rehabilitation plan is to re-establish a perennial plant

community across the burned area in Gutshall Basin as quickly as possible. This will be accomplished by aerially seeding a mix of native perennial grasses and an aggressive sterile cover crop as soon as possible. Given the steepness of the slopes in Gutshall Basin and the results of watershed modeling it has been determined that waddles and/or contour felling would not be cost effective to limit the potential accelerated hydrologic response from the basin. The seeding will also limit the potential for establishment of invasive weeds in the burned area.

The objective of these treatments is to rapidly establish a native desirable vegetation community capable of inhibiting soil erosion and meeting land health standards for soils and vegetative communities, and progressing through natural successional pathways to the climax vegetative community. Also, the treatment objectives are to prevent detrimental invasion by invasive species, and to maintain the existing perennial state-listed noxious weed populations at no more than pre-wildfire conditions.

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) will clean out the culvert under highway 145 and

remove any obstructions that could inhibit water and debris flow into and out of the box culvert. It is believed that with this cleaning coupled with seeding that the highway should remain functional in anything but a 50 or 100 year type rain event.

Monitoring of all treatments will be conducted through the next three years following the seeding and the herbicide treatments to determine the level of success. Studies will be designed and located to evaluate overall seeding performance, potential soil movement and erosion, and the response of invasive and noxious weeds to the treatments.



# WILDFIRE RESTRICTIONS

Prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday, local governments and fire districts began discussing implementation of fire restrictions. Several counties surrounding the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU) initiated fire restrictions in July including Mesa and Saguache counties. However, as fire restrictions and closures should be planned for the long-term danger rather than short-term fluctuations in risk, weather, and fire danger; restrictions were not initiated in the local area after careful analysis of the current and predicted conditions.

The purpose of fire restrictions and closures are to reduce the risk of human-caused fires during unusually high fire

danger and for the protection of life and property. Fire restrictions impose many limitations on the general public, and therefore should be implemented only after all other prevention measures have been taken. Fire restrictions are generally considered when high to extreme fire danger is predicted to persist, adverse fire weather conditions and risks are predicted to continue, there is an increase in the number of human-caused fires, and fires are impacting suppression resources making adequate initial attack difficult. Restrictions should not be considered the equivalent of a prevention program.

Public information about restrictions must be clear and coordinated. The intent is to

better inform the public of fire restrictions when they may be planning activities to areas away from their home. Several cooperators in the area have expressed a desire for a central location to inform and educate the public about current fire restrictions throughout Colorado. Coincidentally, there has been a renewed effort to publicize a website maintained by volunteers for this very purpose ([www.cofireban.org](http://www.cofireban.org)). Those having jurisdictional authority for lands are encouraged to provide updates to the site's web master at least annually or as conditions change.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media continues to be new territory for agencies at all levels, and its use is somewhat limited due to security concerns. It is however, without a doubt, the biggest trend in communication. While the federal agencies have different policies on its use and limit access to various social networking sites, there are *some* allowable uses of this valuable tool.



With respect to wildland fires and incident communications, local units can not create a Facebook or YouTube account. Existing Twitter accounts may be used to alert followers that new information is available on websites managed by those responsible for the content.

MIFMU is one of twenty Twitter pilot programs nationally for the BLM. The MIFMU Twitter account (<http://twitter.com/MIFMU>) is used to share wildfire prevention and mitigation messages, notices of Red Flag Warnings, fire restrictions, prescribed burning activities, and emerging incidents in the area. As communication needs expand beyond educational or informational, the MIFMU Twitter account would be used in accordance with the FS policy of "tweeting" to alert followers to where they can get more detailed information about an incident.

On the Beaver Fire, the MIFMU Twitter account was used to direct followers to the MIFMU Information Hotline and InciWeb.

Updated fire information is also "tweeted" via InciWeb for those following InciWeb on Twitter.

The following primer (taken from [www.publicinformationofficer.com](http://www.publicinformationofficer.com)) speaks to the benefits of social media for our internal and external customers:

### **Social Media: Why Is It Important?**

**Social Media provides increased visibility among stakeholders:** We can share our stories directly with stakeholders. By putting material out there for consumption, our stakeholders become aware of our message on a personal, detailed level. We also benefit from the information they share via social media.

**Outreach to Traditional Mainstream Media:** Mainstream media outlets are reaching out via social networking. We need to be where they are. While the outlets that regularly cover our issues may already be on our press lists, making publicly available information more accessible via social media increases the likelihood that other news outlets will pick up on a particular story or overall messages.

Social media also allows us to reach news outlets in ways we previously couldn't. Increasing our presence online sends the message of accessibility.

**Inreach to Co-Workers and Peers:** Our people are our most important asset, and it's our job to help keep them informed of our message and how it's being received. More

importantly, we need to make sure people know what others in the organization are doing. That's an easy task to accomplish when staff members have the option to receive updates on their own terms. Our people have the option, even if on their personal time, to sign up for these updates.

**Emergency Public Information:** The benefits of social media for emergency management purposes are widely documented. Sites such as Twitter allow emergency management professionals to quickly disseminate short messages updating followers (including traditional news media outlets) about a situation. It also can be accessed using SMS technology, which often works when cell service is overwhelmed.

In the event of an emergency, it's necessary to have an established audience to receive information. That means sites need to be set up and used now to make those audiences aware of their presence in the event of an emergency.

**Limited Time Investment for Large Potential Return:** Some government agencies dedicate full-time staff members to social media outreach, but the technologies can be effectively utilized with a commitment of as little as minutes a day and with a tool as easy to use as your standard email.

The potential return on that investment of time can be significant if the outreach results in mainstream media coverage or increased message visibility over time.



# WILDFIRE PREVENTION GUIDE

Historically, July is the most active month for wildfires across the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU) with 439 fires over a ten year period. This represents 31% of the unit's annual fire occurrence. Lightning is the dominant cause of wildfires in July (84%).

Another significant fire cause in July for both the Gunnison and Ouray Zones has been Fire Use/ Debris Burning - those fires started for purpose of burning slash, garbage, right-of-way, or other controlled burning. The most effective prevention strategies for addressing debris fires are to develop a specific educational campaign and contact with the public. Both strategies require involvement with the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), respective county officials, and the fire districts of the areas impacted.

Related to the issue debris burning, there have been some recent changes to Colorado legislation.

On March 15, 2010, Governor Ritter signed House Bill 10-1123 (HB10-1123). The Bill states that it is not an arson offense if the person started a fire as a controlled agricultural burn in a reasonably cautious manner and there was no personal injury as a result.

Governor Ritter also signed Senate Bill 10-102 (SB10-102). SB10-102 directs CSFS to establish training and certification standards for users of prescribed fire, including certified burner and noncertified burner designations, recommendations for certified burners to conduct a prescribed fire, organizational structures for prescribed burn operations, training standards, and identification of preexisting fees, requirements, liabilities, exemptions, and penalties for prescribed burn personnel and landowners. Despite the new legislation, there are some questions as to whether CSFS will take on the responsibilities in SB10-102.

MIFMU Fires by Cause: July (1999-2008)

	Lightning	Campfires	Smoking	Fire Use	Incendiary	Equipment	Railroads	Juveniles	Misc.	Total
Gunnison	60	1	0	11	1	0	11	0	2	86
Ouray	106	2	2	11	3	0	9	1	12	146
Norwood	202	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	207
Total	368	4	3	22	5	0	20	1	16	439



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Look for new updates to come to the MIFMU website in 2010

[http://gacc.nifc.gov/rmcc/dispatch\\_centers/r2mtc/](http://gacc.nifc.gov/rmcc/dispatch_centers/r2mtc/)

## July Events

- Gunnison Basin Wildfire Meeting, July 1
- West Region Wildfire Council Meeting, July 8
- *South Canyon Fire, Colorado, July 6, 1994 - 14 firefighters killed*
- MIFMU Fuels Conference Call, July 12
- *Rattlesnake Fire, California, July 9, 1953 - 15 firefighters killed*
- *Thirtymile Fire, Washington, July 10, 2001 - 4 firefighters killed*
- *Guide Fire, New Mexico, July 12, 1994 - 4 firefighters killed*
- *Battlement Creek Fire, Colorado, July 16, 1976 - 2 pilots & 3 firefighters killed*
- *Cart Creek Fire, Utah, July 16, 1977 - 3 firefighters killed*
- *Bass River Fire, New Jersey, July 22, 1977 - 4 firefighters killed*
- *Kareas Fire, Greece, July 22, 1998 - 4 firefighters killed*
- *Melanios Cape Fire, Greece, July 28, 1999 - 2 firefighters killed*
- *Rock Creek Fire, Nevada, July 28, 1939 - 5 firefighters killed*
- *Kirikos Fire, Greece, July, 30, 1993 - 13 people killed*
- MIFMU Fuels Conference Call, July 26



MIFMU MONTHLY