



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WILDFIRES?

One of the recurring themes that fire information officers share with the public is "we all work together in fire." Specifically, for the 2012 wildfire season, the message is:

Teamwork and cooperation are essential in managing fire.

As wildfires know no boundaries, the response to wildfires are coordinated among all affected agencies. Nonetheless, one of the first things to determine on a wildland fire is ownership of the land where the fire is occurring - which has implications on who responds to the fire, how the fire is handled (managed vs. suppressed), and who has financial responsibility for the fire operations.

In 2009, legislation was passed which clearly addressed who has the responsibility for wildland fires in Colorado and how that responsibility could be transferred. Senate Bill 09-020 (SB09-020), concerning the responsibility for responding to wildland fires was signed into law in April 2009. The legislation states:

- **The Chief of the Fire Department in each Fire Protection District in the State is responsible for the management of wild land fires that occur within the boundaries of his or her District and that are within the capability of the Fire District to control or extinguish...**
- **The Fire Chief may utilize mutual aid agreements and unified command with neighboring Fire Protection Districts to suppress and control fire that cross or threaten to cross the boundaries of the District...**
- **The Fire Chief may transfer any duty or responsibility the Fire Chief may assume under this Section to the County Sheriff with the concurrence of the Sheriff.**
- **The Fire Chief shall not seek reimbursement from the County for expense incurred by the District for their own apparatus, equipment, and personnel used in containing or suppressing a wildfire occurring on private property within the boundaries of the District.**
- **The Sheriff is the Fire Warden of the County and is responsible for the planning for, and the coordination of, efforts to suppress wildfires occurring in the unincorporated area of the**

County outside the boundaries of a Fire Protection District or that exceed the capabilities of the Fire Protection District to control or extinguish...

- **In the case of a wildfire that exceeds the capabilities of the Fire Protection District to control or extinguish and that requires mutual aid and outside resources, the Sheriff shall appoint a local Incident Management Team to provide the command and control infrastructure required to manage the fire. The Sheriff shall assume financial responsibility for the fire fighting efforts on behalf of the County and the authority for the ordering and monitoring of resources.**
- **In the case of a wildfire that exceeds the capabilities of the County to control or extinguish, the Sheriff shall be responsible for seeking the assistance of the State, by requesting assistance from the (Colorado State) Forest Service, the Sheriff and the State Forester shall enter into an agreement concerning the transfer of authority and responsibility for the fire suppression and the retention of responsibilities under a unified command structure.**
- **In case of a wild land fire that exceeds the capability of the County to control or extinguish, the (Colorado State) Forest Service may assist the Sheriff in controlling or extinguishing such fires, and may assume command of such incidents with the concurrence of the Sheriff under a unified command structure.**
- **Notwithstanding any other provisions of law, and subject to the provisions of any local or regional mutual aid agreements or plans for wild land fire response, the first emergency response agency to arrive at the scene of a wild land fire, regardless of whether the incident occurs within its jurisdiction, shall act as Incident Commander and be responsible for the initial emergency action necessary to control the wild land fire or to protect life or property until the emergency response agency that has jurisdiction over the incident site arrives.**

The complete Senate Bill (SB09-020) can be viewed at: http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2009A/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/58E594812246296B87257537001EDCC4?Open&file=020_enr.pdf

FIREWISE COMMUNITIES USA



The West Region Wildfire Council welcomed Keith Worley, National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Regional Firewise Coordinator to the March WRWC meeting. Keith's presentation to the WRWC included background information on the Firewise Communities USA program, steps for communities wishing to obtain recognition and covered the program's link to other like wildfire education programs such as Ready, Set, GO! and Fire Adapted Communities.

Keith pointed out to the Council that the vision of the Firewise Communities USA program is to encourage communities to reach a point that "with adequate planning and cooperation among varying interests, wildfires can occur without disastrous loss of life, property, and resources." The program promotes individual homeowner responsibility, wildfire education and risk reduction measures, and seeks to involve multiple agencies and promote multi-level collaboration.

Communities wishing to obtain Firewise recognition must:

- Complete a community assessment and plan
- Form a Firewise board/committee
- Hold a Firewise Day/ Activity
- Invest a minimum of \$2/capita in local wildfire mitigation projects. (Volunteer hours, equipment use, time contributed by agency fire staff, and grant funding can be included)
- Submit an application

Keith's visit to the area was timely, as the Log Hill Mesa Fire Protection District (LHMFPD) in Ouray County has begun working towards obtaining Firewise Communities USA recognition. Pending approval, the LHMFPD will be the first community in the WRWC's six county region to obtain Firewise Communities USA recognition. The WRWC is working with LHMFPD to help coordinate the application process and an upcoming Firewise Day. A formal recognition ceremony will take place after award receipt. For more information about the Firewise Communities USA program, please visit: www.firewise.org or contact Lilia Colter, WRWC Coordinator at wrwc.lilia@gmail.com.

WILDFIRE RISK AND HOMEOWNER'S INSURANCE



In February, the West Region Wildfire Council hosted a panel discussion on wildfire risk and homeowner's insurance. As defensible space and other fire mitigation measures have come to the forefront of wildfire awareness and preparedness, a number of questions have been raised concerning wildfires and homeowners insurance.

Insurance company representatives from Chubb, Farmer's and State Farm Insurance companies attended the meeting to participate in a panel discussion. Prior to the meeting, WRWC members were asked to compile questions for the representatives to address during the panel discussion. Most of the questions brought up by the WRWC had to do with underwriting guidelines, homeowner incentives, policy cancellations and collaboration between the insurance industry and wildfire professionals. Some of the panel questions and abbreviated responses are included below.

What underwriting guidelines are used with respect to wildfire risk?

Panel participants explained that each insurance company has different policies for determining underwriting guidelines. Participants explained that companies will typically send out inspectors to assess defensible space and other significant criteria such as slope, vegetation and home construction. As a trend, new policy requirements are becoming stricter because of the recent losses due to not only wildfire, but other natural disasters as well.

Companies are using GPS/ Google Earth to make decisions on policies, and will sometime designate entire areas as high risk. Panel participants also highlighted that they depend on distance to the nearest fire station and the ISO rating for determining policies.

Will policies be canceled if a homeowner has been proactive to mitigate their wildfire risk?

Panel participants responded saying that they also send out inspectors to review homes after policies have been written. Typically, the companies will send letters outlining the issues that need attention. Participants stated they have never cancelled a policy due to defensible space/ wildfire risk issues. However, the take home message for this question was that while policies may not be cancelled, insurance premiums may increase significantly. Furthermore, work that homeowners do to mitigate their wildfire risk won't result in premium decreases, but completing risk reduction measures will help mitigate against increased premiums.

Is the insurance industry interested in partnering with topic experts to address risk and thereby potentially reduce claims?

This question was prefaced with a discussion about wildfire risk assessments that are conducted by subject matter professionals and whether or not these assessments will ever factor into insurance companies decisions about premiums or policies. While insurance companies work to provide homeowners with wildfire education resources, panel participants clearly stated that local level planning efforts and/or wildfire risk assessments have not affected underwriting guidelines or policies thus far, and it is highly unlikely that they will in the future.

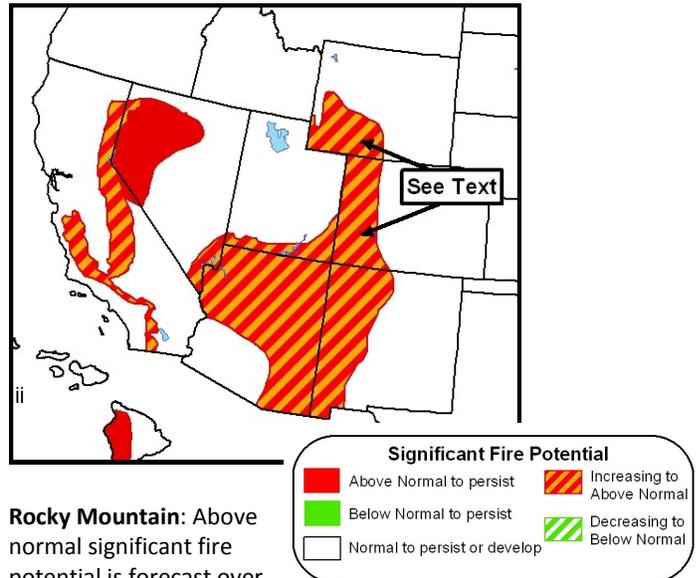
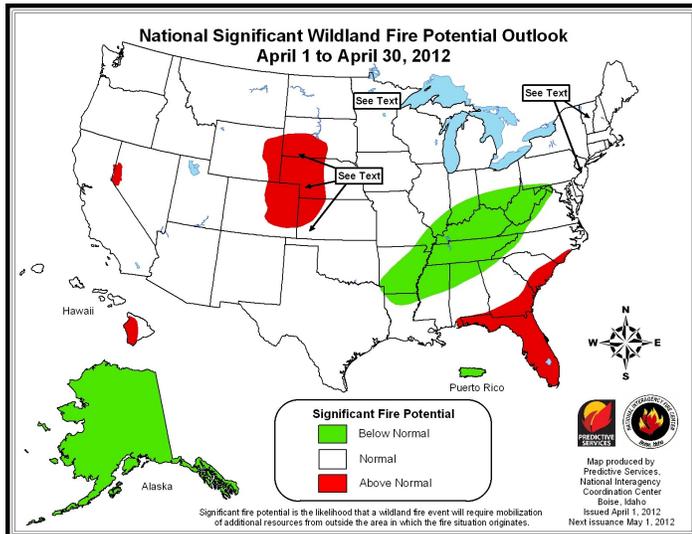
For a complete summary of the panel questions and participant answers, please contact Lilia Colter, WRWC Coordinator at wrwc.lilia@gmail.com.

WILDFIRE OUTLOOK: APRIL - JULY

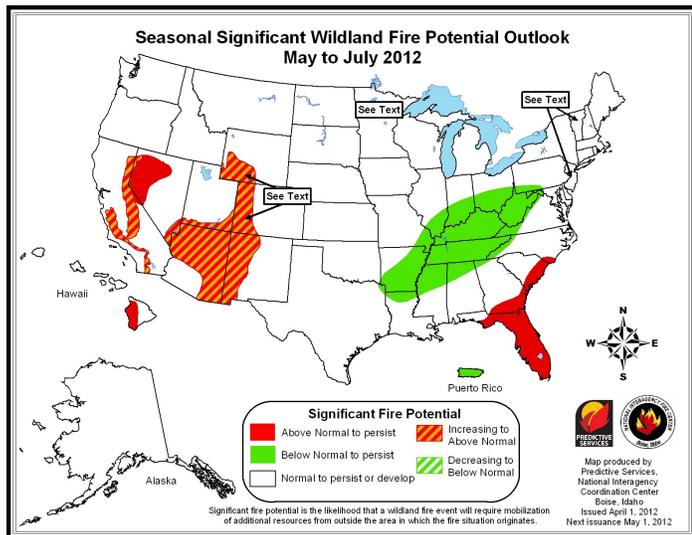


The April through July 2012 significant fire potential outlooks are shown below.

and leading to some increased fire behavior when coupled with wind events. Elsewhere, moisture and temperatures across the northern tier have helped reduce fuels concerns. In the southwestern quarter of the country a combination of prevalent fine fuels and the possibility of a drier than normal season could lead to significant fire concerns as the season progresses. In the southeast drought continues to create abnormal fuel dryness.



Rocky Mountain: Above normal significant fire potential is forecast over portions of the Rocky Mountain Area during April, mainly during the early portion of the month. Specifically, early in April look for above normal significant fire potential across east central to northeast Colorado below 8500 feet, northwest Kansas, eastern Wyoming, western South Dakota and western Nebraska. An active weather pattern is anticipated to continue during the early portion of the month with dry and warm conditions in conjunction with periodic high wind events. Although precipitation opportunities are expected as well, amounts are not anticipated to be enough to compensate for the abnormally dry and warm conditions that have depleted snowpack and stunted greenup thus far. In the latter portion of the month it is expected that diminishing La Niña conditions in the equatorial Pacific will translate gradually into a more normal precipitation and temperature pattern and a corresponding moderation in significant fire potential. Above normal significant fire potential is anticipated to reemerge over western Colorado below 8500 feet by June through July, while normal significant fire potential is predicted across the remainder of the Area during the May through July period. Precipitation amounts during the late April through May periods is predicted to keep significant fire potential normal, greenup is not expected to be robust enough to keep significant fire potential from moving quickly back to above normal over western Colorado. Meanwhile for the remainder of the Area, closer to average precipitation amounts are forecast to result in normal significant fire potential during the May through July period.



The primary factors influencing these outlooks are:

La Niña/El Niño: Conditions in the equatorial Pacific continue to trend toward a neutral state with some hint of weak El Niño conditions developing in the summer months.

Drought: Severe to extreme drought conditions continue for much of eastern New Mexico, western Texas, parts of the upper Midwest and much of the Southeast coast. Worsening drought was occurring over much of the Southwest including California and the Great Basin.

Fuel Dryness: Heavy loadings of fine fuels across the central U.S. coupled with pre greenup conditions are causing control problems



INCREASE IN FIRE ACTIVITY ACROSS THE UNIT

Several fires in Gunnison County kept firefighters busy in early April. Local fuel and weather conditions have been indicative of the potential for significant fire activity with multiple Red Flag Warnings issued during the early part of the month. In all, five wildfires occurred un Gunnison County during the holiday weekend, and firefighters from Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU) responded to four of them - working along with out cooperators.

The **Ohio Creek Fire** was reported on April 6th. The fire was the result of an escaped ditch burn on private property. The fire burned a total of 85 acres and remained entirely on privately-owned land. Nearby residents were evacuated briefly on April 6th, but were allowed to return to their homes that evening. The fire was contained on April 7th. Resources from Gunnison County Fire Protection District, Gunnison County Sheriff's Office and the US Forest Service responded to the Ohio Creek Fire.

The **MM 125 Fire** was reported on April 6th. Firefighters from Paonia Fire Department, Gunnison County Sheriff's Office, Colorado State Forest Service, and MIFMU responded to the fire. The MM 125 Fire was the result of an escaped pile burn which started on private land and moved on to land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. An additional Type 2 hand crew was brought in from out of the area to assist with the suppression effort. The fire was contained on April 9th—with a final size of 117 acres.

The **Brush Creek Fire** was reported on April 7th. This fire was a result of an escaped ditch burn that started on private land and moved on to National Forest System lands. Crews were able to have the fire contained by April 8th—keeping the fire size to 31 acres. Resources from Crested Butte Fire Protection District, Gunnison County Fire Protection District, Gunnison County Sheriff's Office, Colorado State Forest Service, and the US Forest Service responded to the Brush Creek Fire.

The **Little Henderson Fire** was reported on April 8th. Fire crews found another human-caused fire that originated on private land and moved onto National Forest System lands. Fire crews from Paonia Fire Department, Gunnison County Sheriff's Office, Colorado State Forest Service, and MIFMU responded to the Little Henderson Fire. Additionally, several resources were reallocated from the MM 125 Fire to assist with the Little Henderson Fire. The fire was contained at 35 acres on April 10th.



MIFMU MONTHLY



Follow us on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/MIFMU>



Look for new updates to come to the MIFMU website in 2012

http://gacc.nifc.gov/rmcc/dispatch_centers/r2mtc/

April Events

- Interagency Fire/Fuels Conference Call, April 4
- Interagency Fire/Fuels Conference Call, April 11
- CSO Fuels/MEP Conference Call, April 12
- West Region Wildfire Council Meeting, Montrose, April 12
- IAWF's Human Dimensions of Wildland Fire Conference, Seattle, WA, April 17-19
- Interagency Fire/Fuels Conference Call, April 25
- "Strategic Thinking...Strategic Speaking" 2012 PIO Webinar, April 25
- IAWF's Global Wildfire Awareness Week, April 29 - May 5

Historic Events

- *Adirondack Fire, New York, April 1903*
- *Wandilo Fire, Australia, April 5, 1958 - 8 firefighters killed*
- *Bugaboo Scrub Fire, Georgia/Florida, April 16, 2007*