



Summer 2020 Newsletter



Engine 435 and crew assist on a burning operation at the Pine Gulch Fire near Grand Junction, CO

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"We continue to implement strict COVID-19 protocols in line with our medical direction and are taking great care to mitigate risk to both our firefighters and our patients."

Chief's Message

From Chief Jacob Ware

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new way of life for most of the residents of our mountain community. From social distancing to stay-at-home orders, 2020 has been quite a year so far.



As many have heard, Elk Creek did have some firefighters become sick and test positive for COVID-19. I am happy to report they are fully recovered and have returned to work. We continue to implement strict COVID-19 protocols in line with our medical direction and are taking great care to mitigate risk to both our firefighters and our patients.

While many things have changed, one constant is the risk and presence of wildfire. As this newsletter goes to print, Colorado is experiencing several fires that are exhibiting extreme and erratic fire behavior. Ours is a high-risk district; we must be vigilant in our efforts to mitigate our properties and prepare our homes, and we must remain ready to evacuate and stay safe in the event of a wildfire. This newsletter offers several resources for all the above.

Day to day operations move forward. Elk Creek Station 1 is getting some long overdue infrastructure improvements. The parking lot is being repaved to repair drainage issues and aging asphalt. Some bay doors will be replaced with new, energy efficient models. Elk Creek Station 4 in Aspen Park will have the water supply repaired, allowing firefighters to fill fire trucks at the station. These improvements would not have been possible without the backing of the community, and we thank you again. (cont. page 2)

*Chief's Message from
Chief Jacob Ware, cont.*

Elk Creek plans to have another Fire Academy in January. Our department was built on the foundation of neighbors helping neighbors; we hope you will consider joining our ranks.

"It is humbling to see all the neighbors that have reached out and helped one another during this unprecedented event."

As we adjust to our "new normal," the support of our residents has remained steadfast. It is humbling to see all the neighbors that have reached out and helped one another during this unprecedented event. That is what makes our district a special place, and it is an honor for the women and men of Elk Creek to serve the community.

Jacob Ware

Fire Chief

Elk Creek Fire
Protection District

SPOTLIGHT ON HEALTH

Mitigating the Impact of Wildfire Smoke

The haze of wildfire smoke has become a familiar sight. Smoke particles can irritate your lungs and impact your immune system, making you more susceptible to other illnesses. Likewise, having an illness or underlying condition can make symptoms of smoke inhalation worse.

Fortunately, you can take steps to reduce your exposure to smoke and other air pollutants, and to reduce their impact on your health.

Protect your health:

- **Check air quality conditions** at airnow.gov and airquality.weather.gov
- **Limit exposure** to poor quality air by staying indoors when possible. Keep doors and windows closed.
- **Exercise indoors** and/or reduce the intensity of your workout.
- **Use an air cleaner**, HVAC filters, or a do-it-yourself box-fan filter (go to tinyurl.com/DIYfanfilter) to improve indoor air quality.
- **Talk to your doctor** about a plan for staying healthy, especially if you have conditions like asthma or COPD or you are immunocompromised.
- **Minimize activities that make air quality worse** (indoors and out) like sweeping and vacuuming, frying foods, and unnecessary driving.
- **Drink plenty of water and eat a nutrient-rich diet** to help your immune system function at its best.
- **Keep an extra 7-10 days of medications** on hand in case you need to evacuate or stay home to avoid smoke exposure.
- While **facial coverings** are important for reducing the spread of COVID-19, they will not protect you from the harmful particles in wildfire smoke, so minimizing your exposure will do the most to keep you healthy.
- **Know the symptoms:** both wildfire smoke and COVID-19 can cause shortness of breath, dry cough, and sore throat. However, COVID-19 can also cause fever, chills, diarrhea, and body aches, symptoms not associated with smoke exposure.

Community Connect

Community Connect is a tool that allows you to share important information with first responders to help them serve you in case of an emergency.

Choosing to share information about your property, medical needs, and other concerns can help first responders plan accordingly so they can help you as safely and effectively as possible when they arrive.

Participation is free and solely up to you.

Any information you choose to share is stored and transmitted through secure means and is only used to better serve you in an emergency.

EXAMPLES OF INFORMATION YOU CAN SHARE INCLUDE:

YOUR PROPERTY AND HOUSE

- POTENTIAL HAZARDS
- ACCESS INFORMATION
- SPRINKLER SYSTEMS



YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

- PETS AND PEOPLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD
- EMERGENCY CONTACTS
- MOBILITY OR FUNCTIONAL NEEDS



GET MORE INFORMATION AND HELP KEEP YOUR FAMILY
AND FIRST RESPONDERS SAFE BY VISITING

WWW.COMMUNITYCONNECT.IO/INFO/CO-CONIFER



Coming soon...

The Wildfire Prepared program is a collaboration between Elk Creek Fire and Evergreen Fire with the goal of standardizing Home Ignition Zone criteria between both districts. Significant work has gone into development, training, and coordination. The program will be fully developed by the spring of 2021. Monitor Elk Creek social media and the Wildfire Prepared website for resources and updates (wildfireprepared.com). Please note that, while there is a place to sign up on the website, only a limited number of assessments will be available in 2020 for testing purposes during the initial program rollout. Please allow for extended scheduling times until Spring 2021.

Technical Rescue: Elk Creek Fire's New Rapid Extraction Module

This year, Elk Creek Fire officially established its Rapid Extraction Module (REM). The REM is capable of performing both low-angle and high-angle rescue to extract patients from difficult, steep terrain. The team consists of paramedics and EMTs who are trained in rope rescue and rigging systems. The team can lower a paramedic over a cliff edge to access a patient who is then placed in a stokes basket and secured. The riggers create a mechanical advantage haul system to bring both the patient and the medic back up or to lower them further down to safer ground.

Options for climbing routes are becoming more numerous at Staunton State Park, and our district continues to draw hikers, climbers, and mountain bikers. The REM amplifies Elk Creek Fire's rescue capabilities in recreational areas and in challenging terrain. The REM also serves in the unfortunate event of an injured wildland firefighter; the steep, rugged geography of our district creates environments where the chance of firefighter injury and entrapment is greater than average.



Firefighters prepare to lower a patient over a cliffside during a training exercise.



Firefighters use a mechanical advantage haul system to bring a patient and medic up a cliffside.



A paramedic guides a stokes basket and patient on a vertical cliff during a training exercise.

In May of 2020, several Elk Creek Fire members had the opportunity to participate in a week-long technical ropework seminar with Rigging for Rescue®, a renowned training organization that teaches students to competently incorporate ropework and rigging into effective rescue systems. During the week, students performed multiple simulations of potential rescue situations, as the pictures in this article depict.

Rotary Wildfire Ready and Preparedness

Imagine only having minutes to evacuate your home because a wildfire is bearing down upon you and your family. Imagine never receiving an emergency alert to get out. These things are possible and have happened in real emergencies. What steps have you taken to avoid these scenarios?

Did you know that Conifer is rated as having higher wildfire risk to homes than was Paradise, which was destroyed in the Camp Fire in California in 2018? Elk Creek Fire Protection District, our neighboring fire districts, residents, government entities, and nonprofits have worked hard to reduce this wildfire risk. Slash collection programs, chipping programs, home assessments, and government assistance for doing personal mitigation have all contributed, but more needs to be done.



The **Rotary Wildfire Ready** project by the Rotary Clubs of Evergreen, Mountain Foothills, and Conifer recognize the need to increase awareness of our wildfire risk and help share critical information on how you can harden your home, better prepare for evacuation, improve the chances of your home making it through a wildfire unscathed, and help lessen your neighbor's and community's wildfire risk.

Elk Creek Fire and Evergreen Fire have partnered with the Rotary Club to offer oversight on materials and educational plans. The Rotary Club has purchased an old fire truck and is in the process of remodeling it into a mobile education unit – it will be coming to events once they are allowed again. In the meantime, please see their website, www.rotarywildfireready.com, for great information to make you, your family, and your home safer from wildfire. Also, do not forget to register with CodeRED for Emergency Alert Notifications (see links below).

It is possible for each of us to take actions that will save lives and homes. In 2018, the 416 and Burro Fire Complex near Durango burned over 57,00 acres – and right up to the subdivision of Falls Creek Ranch. Firefighters were able to make a stand and save every home because the residents had dedicated themselves to becoming a FireWise Community in 2009; 85% of homeowners had mitigated their properties prior to the fire. If you have questions on how to get started preparing, please see the resources below or contact us.

Emergency Alert Notifications:

www.jeffco.us/473/Emergency-Notifications

www.parkco.us/97/CodeRED

It is important to remember that, even if you have not received an official evacuation notice, if you feel you are in danger, do not wait: leave immediately.

Resources for Wildfire Preparedness

WildfirePrepared - To learn more about wildfire risk assessments for your property and home, visit Elk Creek Fire and Evergreen Fire's wildfire preparedness program website at wildfireprepared.com

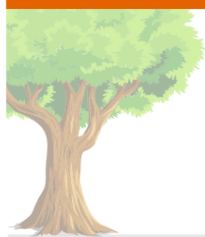
Rotary Wildfire Ready - For information on defensible space, home hardening, and links to many other resources, visit the local Rotary clubs' wildfire program site at rotarywildfireready.com

Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) - For information on managing large acreage, forest health, fire ecology, and defensible space, visit csfs.colostate.edu

Ready, Set, Go! - For extensive resources to help you with your evacuation planning, visit wildlandfireRSG.org

Community Wildfire Planning Center - CWPC is a non-profit dedicated to helping communities prepare for, adapt to, and recover from wildfires. Visit their website at communitywildfire.org

Fire Adapted Communities - FAC is a collaborative effort to enhance the practice of community adaptation and resiliency to wildfire. Explore an array of resources, including a self-assessment tool, at fireadapted.org



MITIGATION AS RESTORATION

Creating defensible space not only protects your family and your property: it can help restore forest health.

FIRE IS A NATURAL PART OF SHAPING THE LANDSCAPE

HISTORICALLY, FIRES WERE MORE FREQUENT AND USUALLY LOW TO MODERATE IN INTENSITY

Plants and trees, such as ponderosas, adapted to survive and even rely on fire. Fire thins competing trees, reduces ladder fuels so flames stay on the surface, creates forage areas and habitat for wildlife, encourages new plant growth, and promotes aspens and a diversity of tree species.

THE SHIFT TO FIRE SUPPRESSION

RISK TO HUMAN LIVES AND PROPERTY SPURRED A SHIFT IN POLICY

Unusually severe fires in 1910 led to a policy of near-universal fire suppression. This has continued for the last century. Reducing the risk to communities from wildfire is clearly necessary, but reliance on fire suppression as a primary means to do this has had problematic consequences on forest ecology and fire severity, with the result that our risk is increasing.

RESULTING CHANGES IN ECOSYSTEMS

FIRE SUPPRESSION AND OTHER FORCES HAVE CHANGED FOREST COMPOSITION AND DENSITY

As communities expand in the wildland-urban interface, landscapes have changed:

- Without frequent, low-intensity fires, forests tend to have denser growth, providing more fuel for fires.
- Crowding can lead to unhealthy trees, leaving them susceptible to pests and parasites such as pine beetle and dwarf mistletoe, resulting in stands of dead, dry trees.
- Smaller trees and shrubs have proliferated, creating ladder fuel for fire to climb into the canopy and burn more intensely.

MORE PEOPLE MOVING TO WILDLAND AREAS



MORE PEOPLE MOVING INTO THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE IMPACTS FIRE RISK

More contact between people and wildland areas means more widespread impacts on both communities and ecosystems. Human activity in wildland areas also creates additional sources of ignition (campfires, power lines, house fires, and sparks from tools or vehicles). Infrastructure and resource use can also impact forests and wildlife.

MORE SEVERE, MORE DESTRUCTIVE FIRES



SEVERE FIRES ARE INCREASING IN NUMBER AND INTENSITY, CAUSING SEVERE DESTRUCTION

Historically, fire response has been 95-97% successful in keeping fires small, but with overgrown fuels across the landscape, fires that do spread tend to be more severe. This is especially true in areas like ours with dry climates and steep terrain, and during extreme weather and drought conditions. Intense fires can be catastrophic to communities, economies, and the environment, and it can take watersheds and soils decades to recover.

It is impossible to completely control or eliminate fire, and fire is an important part of forest health. When we choose to live in the wildland-urban interface, we can choose to adapt to live with fire.

ADAPTING TO LIVE WITH FIRE



BY ADAPTING TO LIVE WITH FIRE, WE CAN BOTH ENJOY THE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY AND MOVE TOWARD BETTER LANDSCAPE HEALTH

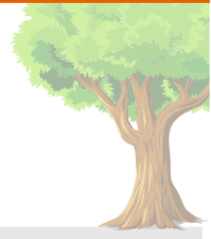
There are two main components of adapting to live with fire:

- **Defensible space** is a buffer you create around your home or other buildings to slow the spread of fire to and from the structure.
- **Home hardening** is constructing and maintaining your home in a way that reduces the likelihood of ignition.



MITIGATION Q & A

Clearing up common misconceptions about preparing your home for wildfire



DOES MITIGATION MEAN CLEAR-CUTTING AROUND BUILDINGS?



NO. YOU CAN MAINTAIN DEFENSIBLE SPACE WHILE KEEPING SELECT, WELL-MAINTAINED TREES AND SHRUBS AROUND YOUR HOME

Trees are part of the mountain landscape and one reason most of us love living here. The goal in creating defensible space is to select and maintain trees and shrubs so that they don't pose a risk of spreading fire to or from your home. While removal of some trees might be needed to create an adequate buffer, removal of all vegetation is not necessary or promoted. See www.wildfireprepared.com and www.rotarywildfireprepared.com for information on getting guidance from a wildfire mitigation specialist.

DOES MITIGATION MOSTLY ENTAIL REMOVING LARGE TREES?



NO. REMOVING LARGE TREES ISN'T ALWAYS NEEDED, AND TREE MAINTENANCE IS ONLY ONE OF MANY CONSIDERATIONS IN WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

There are many factors that influence the likelihood of fire spreading between vegetation and your home. Large trees near structures or other trees can be a hazard, but often less so than smaller trees growing densely packed together, dead branches on trunks near ground level, and dry leaves and needles collecting in gutters or under decks.

WILL I NEED TO HIRE CONTRACTORS?



WHILE PROFESSIONALS MAY BE NEEDED FOR SOME TASKS, HOMEOWNERS ARE CAPABLE OF TAKING MANY STEPS ON THEIR OWN.

How much work homeowners do themselves versus hiring out depends on the property and on the homeowners' skills, resources, and interest. Creating defensible space and hardening your home can encompass everything from choosing noncombustible patio decorations, keeping leaves swept up, and making an evacuation plan, to retrofitting building materials and removing trees and shrubs. Wildfire preparedness happens at many levels, and even small actions can make the difference in saving your home.

IS MITIGATION WORK EXPENSIVE?



MITIGATION COSTS VARY WIDELY BY INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. SOME TASKS COST MORE WHILE OTHERS COST ONLY A FEW MINUTES OF TIME.

It's true that protecting your home from wildfire can represent a significant investment in cost and labor, but it depends on the work needed for a particular property. For example, professional removal of large trees can be expensive, but storing combustible materials away from the house and keeping your deck free of leaves cost relatively little and are no less important.

WHAT ABOUT TREES THAT PROVIDE PRIVACY?



IT'S POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN DEFENSIBLE SPACE AND STILL HAVE TREES AND SHRUBS TO SCREEN YOUR HOME FROM ROADS AND OTHER HOUSES.

Planning and careful selection of trees and shrubs can provide a way to keep vegetation for privacy. Getting a home assessment is the best way to get guidance on how to balance protection and privacy in your particular circumstances. However, general guidelines include the following:

- Keep or plant trees and shrubs in alternating patterns to maintain distance between them while still blocking lines of sight.
- Promote aspens and other fire resistant vegetation.
- Maintain trees and shrubs regularly to make it safer if they are closer to the house.
- Select a variety of species, ages, and sizes of trees to maintain long-term screening.

SOURCES: WILDFIRE PREPARED, REALFIRE, UPPER SOUTH PLATTE PARTNERSHIP, WILDFIRE PARTNERS, COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE, FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES

Focus on Forest Health: The Douglas Fir-Beetle

Like many places in Colorado, the Conifer and Pine areas are affected by a myriad of forest health issues – from disease and drought to overgrowth and beetle infestations. The Douglas-fir beetle is the most destructive bark beetle to Douglas-fir forests in western North America.

The Douglas-fir beetle (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*) is a small brown insect which develops from larvae in bore holes beneath the bark of trees. Douglas-fir beetles will typically affect small groups of trees but can spread to involve entire stands of hundreds of trees. Stands of dead trees not only mar the appearance of the landscape, they present a significant wildfire hazard.

Signs of Douglas-fir beetle infestation include red, dead needles developing throughout the tree, resin (sap) leaking from bore holes in the bark, and red wood dust accumulating around the base of the tree.

In healthy populations, trees may be capable of fighting and controlling the spread of the beetle with their own built-in defenses. However, when stressed by drought, disease, other insects, and overcrowding, these defenses become increasingly less effective.

Preventing the spread of Douglas-fir beetle usually centers on thinning and removing vegetation from overcrowded forests. For trees to successfully fend off disease, it is essential that they get enough nutrients, sunlight, and moisture. These resources become scarce when an established tree is surrounded by dozens of smaller, competing trees.



Property owners concerned with tree-to-tree spread of the Douglas-fir beetle on their property can start by opening the canopy around individual, healthy Douglas-fir trees. Target smaller trees and saplings growing around the base of healthy, mature trees. This will also remove ladder fuels, helping reduce fire behavior in the event of a wildfire.

According to the Colorado State Forest Service, over 450,000 acres in Colorado have been affected by the Douglas-fir beetle since 1996, with 7,400 acres affected in 2019 alone. By taking steps to improve forest health, we can reduce the negative impact of the Douglas-fir beetle and prevent further widespread damage to Colorado's forests and landscape.

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