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EXECUTIVE ORDER

Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to the Imminent Threat of Wildfires

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Office of the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, Colorado Revised Statute § 24-32-2104, I, Bill Owens, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order making certain funds available from the Emergency Management Fund for wildfire mitigation and preparation activities.

1. <u>Background and Purpose.</u>

The State of Colorado must begin to prepare for the 2004 wildfire season. Colorado continues to face drought conditions throughout most of the state. The United States Department of Agriculture monitors drought conditions and recently reported that all of Colorado was in the "Abnormally Dry" to "Extreme Drought" categories. While we continue to hope for significant precipitation this spring, we must take measures to ensure that the State of Colorado is prepared for an active wildfire season.

The wildfires of 2001 demonstrated that it is nearly impossible to stop a full-blown wildfire in drought conditions. For this reason, I began focusing state resources towards mitigating wildfire risks and extinguishing wildfires before they become uncontrollable. For the past two years, I have made state disaster emergency funds available several months before the wildfire season in order to staff wildfire mitigation activities and contract wildfire early response equipment.

This has been an extremely effective strategy. The Colorado Forest Service reported that 95.5% of the 2003 fires were controlled at under 10 acres. The 4.5% of fires that became uncontrollable burned 22,160 acres or 95% of the total acreage burnt in 2003. Similar results were achieved the previous year. Mitigation and suppression activities have proven to be a successful tool for minimizing damage caused by wildfires.

Wildfires pose a dangerous threat to Colorado citizens' lives and property. I am committed to taking decisive and forceful measures to mitigate the destructive consequences of wildfires. As envisioned by the Colorado Disaster Emergency Act, threats to the public safety of this magnitude confer upon the Governor unique powers and responsibilities. As Governor, I am responsible for meeting the dangers to the state and

people presented by disasters (C.R.S. § 24-32-2104 (1)). The Act defines disasters as the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural cause or cause of human origin, including but not limited to fire (C.R.S. § 24-32-2103 (1.5)). The purpose of the Disaster Emergency Act is to reduce the vulnerability of injury to the people of Colorado and damage to property located within the state (C.R.S. § 24-32-2102(1)(a)) and provide for coordination of activities relating to disaster prevention, preparedness and response by the state (C.R.S. § 24-32 –2102(1)(f)).

In order to reduce the imminent threat of wildfires, extensive resources are immediately necessary to increase the level of fire mitigation and suppression capability. In accordance with the Disaster Emergency Act, I issue this Executive Order making certain Emergency Management Funds immediately available for wildfire mitigation and preparedness activities. These activities include the pre-positioning of Single Engine Air Tankers and staffing additional wildland interface fire engines.

2. Directive.

I hereby declare that the imminent threat of wildfires constitutes a disaster for purposes of C.R.S. §24-32-2103.

Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-32-2106, I order $1.1 million in disaster emergency funds be made immediately available for wildfire mitigation and preparation activities. These funds shall remain available for this purpose until December 31, 2004.

3. Duration.

This Executive Order shall expire thirty (30) days from its date of signature unless extended by Executive Order.

GIVEN under my hand and the Executive Seal of the State of Colorado, this ___ day of March, 2004.

Bill Owens
Governor