

## **D 008 03**

### **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. Background and Purpose.

The State of Colorado must prepare for another challenging wildfire season. Last year, 4,612 fires burned 619,030 acres. These fires destroyed 384 homes and 624 non-residential structures. The exact cost of this destruction is still being calculated, however, a conservative estimate places it well above \$100 million. Most tragically, the fires of 2002 claimed the lives of nine wildland firefighters.

On April 23, 2002, I signed Executive Order D 009 02, which made state disaster funds available to pre-position Single Engine Air Tankers with the objective of putting out fires while they are still controllable. This proved to be a successful plan. The Colorado Forest Service reported that 92% of the 2002 fires were kept below 10 acres. Due to last year's high-risk wildfire conditions, fires that escaped initial attack quickly became the largest and most destructive wildfires in state history.

The State of Colorado must begin preparing for another dangerous wildfire season. Even with the most recent snowstorm, the current Drought Monitor shows approximately 75% of Colorado is still in extreme drought conditions. Summer temperatures are predicted to be above normal and moisture levels of fuel sources (brush and wood) are at risk of falling well below average during the fire season. Coincidentally, many federal aviation resources have been necessarily diverted to non-fire threats and the remaining federal aviation resources will have to be shared amongst wildfires throughout the country. State and local resources, both ground and air, will be more heavily relied upon during this fire season. For these reasons, I believe that the State of Colorado must take proactive measures to prepare for the 2003 wildfire season.

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).

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

2. Mission.

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 \$1,672,811 in disaster emergency funds be made immediately available for wildfire mitigation and preparation activities. These funds shall remain available for this purpose until September 1, 2003.

3. Duration.

This Executive Order shall expire thirty (30) days from its date of signature unless extended by Executive Order. It is within my authority to extend this Executive Order every thirty days until the imminent threat of wildfires has passed.

GIVEN under my hand and  
the Executive Seal of the  
State of Colorado, this \_\_\_ day  
of April, 2003.

Bill Owens  
Governor