



COLORADO

**Division of Fire
Prevention & Control**

Department of Public Safety

2021 Wildfire Preparedness Plan

Prepared For:

Governor Jared Polis and

Members of the Colorado General Assembly

April 8, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Wildfire Preparedness Plan

Colorado law, specifically Section 24-33.5-1227(2)(a), C.R.S., requires the Director of the Division of Fire Prevention and Control to develop an annual Wildfire Preparedness Plan in collaboration with a representative of the County Sheriffs of Colorado, a representative of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs' Association, the Director of the Office of Emergency Management, and the Adjutant General.

The Wildfire Preparedness Plan shall be designed to address the following:

- 1) The amount of aerial firefighting resources necessary for the state of Colorado at times of high and low wildfire risk;
- 2) The availability of appropriate aerial firefighting equipment and personnel at times of high fire risk to respond to a wildfire;
- 3) The availability of state wildfire engines and staffing of the engines at different levels of wildfire risk;
- 4) The availability of wildfire hand crews, including state inmate wildfire hand crews, at different levels of wildfire risk; and
- 5) A process for ordering and dispatching aerial firefighting equipment and personnel that is consistent with, and supportive of, the statewide mobilization plan prepared pursuant to Section 24-33.5-705.4, C.R.S.

2021 Wildfire Outlook Summary

Current long range forecasts indicate above average temperatures and below average precipitation from now into August. That will result in the continuation of drought conditions across the State, and the emergence of above average significant fire potential over the southeast portions of Colorado this spring. The long range warm and dry projections suggest an earlier than normal start to the core fire season during the second half of May across all of southern Colorado. Continuation of the warm and dry conditions is expected to result in drought intensification and earlier than average spring snowpack runoff, leading to above normal large fire potential expanding northward through the month of June and affecting the majority of the western slope by July.

2021 Planning Summary

The 2021 Wildfire Preparedness Plan is part of a holistic, comprehensive approach to wildfire management that includes suppression and response, fuels and forest management, and mitigation activities of all types. The plan is based on lessons learned from the 2020 fire year, and also implements new tools and capacities as a result of recommendations of the Colorado Fire Commission and support from the Governor's Office and the State Legislature.

DFPC will coordinate with local, County, State and federal partners to leverage available resources to increase response capacity and effectiveness. This includes extending contracts for existing DFPC aviation resources, continued utilization of resources and activities that were introduced in 2020 (Firewatch detection program, a DFPC contracted Large Air Tanker, DFPC Modules, COVID-19 mitigation measures, and pre-positioning of ground-based resources), and the addition of new resources for 2021 (contracting for an additional Type 1 helicopter, and an Enhanced State Assistance program).

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Increasing Wildfire Problem

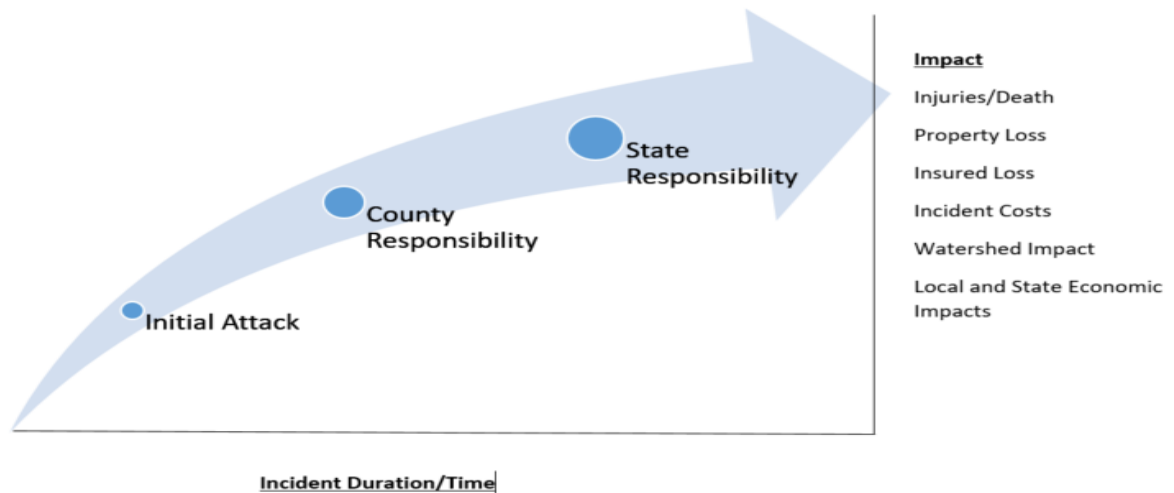
Wildland fire has always been a part of Colorado's natural ecosystems, but drought conditions, warmer temperatures, an increasing number of homes in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas, and declining forest health have elevated wildland fire from a manageable natural resource problem to a growing public safety concern that has caused catastrophic damage in the last two decades. In order to address the growing wildfire problem in Colorado, decision makers at federal, state, and local levels are taking a proactive approach and learning from the challenges faced by Colorado and other western states in recent years.

Historical data presents a clear picture of the increasing problem of large wildfires and climatologists predict that the problem is only going to get worse. Core fire seasons are now an average of 78 days longer than they were in the 1970s, and the United States burns twice as many acres as it did 40 years ago. Since the 1990s, the number, intensity, complexity, and impacts of wildfires in Colorado have been growing exponentially, and experts predict that it will continue to worsen. In the 1960s, the average annual number of wildfires in Colorado was 457. These fires burned an average of 8,170 acres annually. By the 1990s, the average number of fires and acres burned had more than doubled to about 1,300 fires with 22,000 acres burned. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, the average number of fires and acres burned more than doubled again. From 2011 through 2020, Colorado had an average of 5,359 fires and 233,728 acres burned per year on all ownerships. In 2020, there were a total of 6,761 fires reported on all lands that burned a total of 744,120 acres.

Looking at the historical data of the 20 largest wildfires in Colorado's history, nine of those (45%) have occurred since 2018, 15 of those (75%) have occurred since 2012, and all 20 (100%) have occurred since 2001. In addition, the three largest wildfires in Colorado's history all occurred in 2020, exceeding the Hayman fire that had held the top spot since 2002.

Colorado's Largest Recorded Wildfires			
Rank	Fire Name	Acres Burned	Year
1	Cameron Peak	208,913	2020
2	East Troublesome	193,812	2020
3	Pine Gulch	139,007	2020
4	Hayman	137,760	2002
5	Spring Creek	108,045	2018
6	High Park	87,284	2012
7	Missionary Ridge	70,485	2002
8	West Fork	58,570	2013
9	416 Fire	54,129	2018
10	Papoose	49,628	2013
11	Bridger	45,800	2008
12	Last Chance	45,000	2012
13	Bear Springs	44,662	2001
14	MM 117	42,795	2018
15	Beaver Creek	38,380	2016
16	Bull Draw	36,549	2018
17	Badger Hole*	33,421	2018
18	Grizzly Creek	32,431	2020
19	Logan	32,546	2017
20	Burn Canyon	31,300	2002

Although fire suppression costs are typically what is reported when a large fire occurs, these costs only make up a fraction of the total cost of wildland fire. Further compounding the problem, other secondary impacts from wildfires include flooding and damage to critical infrastructure like watersheds. The Colorado River alone provides water for drinking, agriculture and hydroelectric power for over 40 million Americans, including the cities of Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tucson, and San Diego.



As the frequency, size, and duration of wildfires has increased, the negative impacts to lives, property, and economies has correspondingly increased. These trends are expected to continue and the wildfire issue is expected to continue to grow more complex based on:

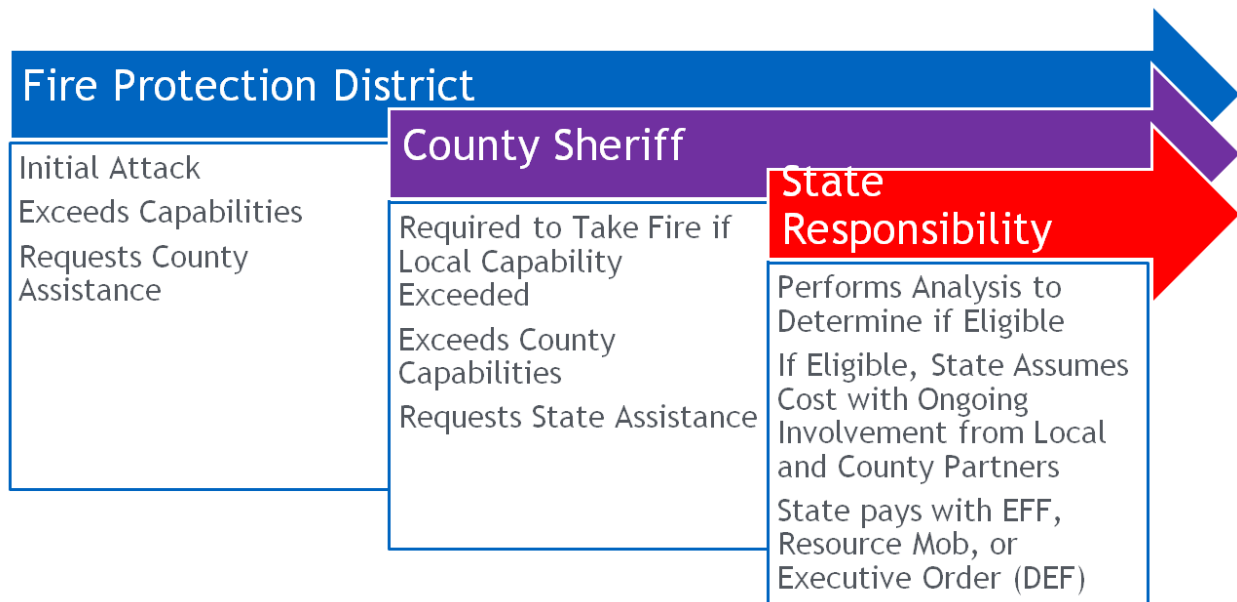
- By 2050 the area burned nationwide is expected to double to around 20 million acres per year
- Colorado is expected to experience up to a 5 fold increase in acres burned by 2050
- State Demographers expect Colorado's population to grow from 5.5 million people to 8.5 million people by 2050
- The number of homes in the Colorado Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is projected to increase from 300,000 to 720,000 by 2030

While Colorado may experience times of low fire occurrence, the overall long-term outlook requires robust preparedness planning, and we must continue to evaluate ways to improve our response capacity, coordination, and collaboration.

How Fire Works in Colorado

Wildfire protection responsibilities on non-federal lands in Colorado follow a hierarchy of local jurisdiction, to County Sheriff, and finally to the State of Colorado. The Chief of a Fire Protection District is responsible for fires that occur within the boundaries of their district, and that are within their capability to manage (C.R.S. 29-22.5-103(1)(a)). It is the duty of the County Sheriff to assume the responsibility for coordinating fire suppression efforts for: fires that occur in the unincorporated area of the county; or for fires that exceed the capabilities of a fire protection district (C.R.S. 30-10-513(1)(a)). When a wildfire exceeds the capability of the county to control or extinguish, the Sheriff shall request assistance from DFPC (see C.R.S. 30-10-

513(1)(d)). The Director of DFPC may assume any duty or responsibility given to the Sheriff, with concurrence of the Sheriff (C.R.S. 30-10-513(2))



State Assistance Fires

The DFPC State Assistance program is intended to encourage rapid initial attack actions where fire is unwanted to reduce the size, duration, costs, and impacts of wildfires. Key elements of the State Assistance program include:

- Funding and resources for local and county responsibility fires. The fire does not have to exceed the capacity of a Fire Department or the County to receive state assistance.
- Funding and reimbursement for aviation and handcrew resources during the initial attack phase of fires on non-federal lands. Ordered resources are based on the Closest Forces concept, whether they are State or Federal agency resources, to reduce response times.
- Enables local agencies to respond to their next incident, and volunteer firefighters to return to their regular jobs.
- The number of fires receiving aviation and handcrew funding and resources for the last 3 years is: 2020 (52 fires), 2019 (29 fires), and 2018 (75 fires)
- Additional State Assistance includes support from DFPC Engine, Module, and Overhead resources, as well as technical assistance from DFPC fire management staff.

State Assistance is utilized as part of DFPC's strategy to reduce the number of State Responsibility Fires. Funding for State Assistance has traditionally been covered by the Wildfire Emergency Response Fund (WERF) and the Colorado Firefighting Air Corps (CFAC) fund. Challenges with that traditional approach include: no regular appropriations to WERF; use of DFPC base aviation operating budgets (CFAC) to pay for federal aviation resource response on non-federal lands as part of the Closest Forces approach; and an increase in awareness and use of the program to the level that it is no longer sustainable from a financial standpoint.

While 2020 was a record setting year for wildland fires, it is important to note that there were numerous examples of successful initial attack actions throughout the year. 33 agencies requested state assistance for aviation and handcrew resources on 52 incidents. The majority of these incidents never became State Responsibility incidents, and on those that did, incident size, duration, impacts, and costs were significantly reduced. Examples from 2020 include:

- Incidents that did not become State Responsibility Fires: State Park and Incline fires (El Paso County), 84 Fire (La Plata County), Chatridge 2 (Douglas County), and the MM 45 (Mesa County).
- Incidents that did become State Responsibility Fires, but with reduced impacts compared to the high profile fires in 2020: Elephant Butte (Jefferson County), Lewstone (Larimer County), and Green Meadows (San Miguel County).

State Responsibility Fires

If the Sheriff believes a County Responsibility fire has exceeded their capacity to manage, they request assistance from DFPC. DFPC field staff and the Sheriff conduct an assessment to evaluate if County capacity to manage the current and projected incident complexity has been exceeded. The DFPC Director approves the incident for State Responsibility based on assessment of the County's capacity and the availability of State funds. If the incident is approved for State Responsibility, DFPC assumes cost and management responsibility, along with ongoing involvement from local and County partners.

Funding for State Responsibility fires comes from two sources: the Emergency Fire Fund (EFF) or Governor's Executive Order (EO) utilizing Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF) or other State Funds. Key elements of the EFF program include:

- Created in 1967, with no significant updates other than slight increases in funding levels
- Counties participate on a voluntary basis, and not all Counties are part of the program
- Participating Counties contribute an annual amount based on assessed valuation and forested acres. The current formula does not support inclusion of eastern plains Counties.
- DFPC is the steward of the EFF funds, which are utilized for fires in contributing Counties that qualify for State Responsibility.
- Annual assessments currently equal \$1 million per year, which is typically depleted within a few days of a large fire. This often occurs by late spring or early summer, requiring EO requests and approvals for every individual State Responsibility fire that occurs for the remainder of the calendar year.

The number of State Responsibility fires has continually increased since the creation of the Emergency Fire Fund (EFF) in 1967. Between 1967 and 1979 there was a total of 1 fire that became a State Responsibility Fire, from 1980 to 1989 there were 8, from 1990 to 1999 there were 15, and from 2001 to 2009 that number exploded to 65 qualifying events. During the period from 2010 through 2019, even with the single qualifying fire in 2014 and no qualifying fires in 2015 or 2019, there were 74 state responsibility fires costing an estimated \$168,000,000.00 in EFF and State suppression costs alone. It is estimated that \$95,000,000 of

these State costs are eligible for reimbursements through FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG).

In 2020, there were 16 state responsibility fires with estimated suppression expenses of \$38,000,000 in State funds and another \$248,000,000 in Federal funds. These numbers do not include local agency suppression costs, property losses, insured losses, recovery costs, secondary impact (flooding, re-seeding), watershed impacts, water system infrastructure costs, or economic losses that resulted from those fires. These numbers also do not include local, County, State, and Federal expenses on the other wildfires in Colorado that were not State Responsibility incidents. The Colorado Fire Commission recommended the State establish a large fire fund with an annual appropriation calculated on a five-year rolling average of state responsibility fire costs. More information on this recommendation can be found below in the section titled Colorado Fire Commission and 2021 Legislation.

Years	# of State Responsibility Fires (SRF)
1967 to 1969	0
1970 to 1979	1
1980 to 1989	8
1990 to 1999	15
2000 to 2009	65
2010 to 2019	74
2020	16
Total	179

Year	Number of State Responsibility Fires (SRF)	Estimated State Suppression Costs (EFF and EO)
2010	3	\$11,150,000
2011	11	\$11,281,000
2012	16	\$47,537,000
2013	9	\$36,891,000
2014	1	\$244,000
2015	0	\$0
2016	6	\$15,025,000
2017	10	\$6,453,000
2018	18	\$40,079,000
2019	0	\$0
2020	16	\$38,179,000
Total	90	\$206,839,000

2021 WILDFIRE OUTLOOK

In the spring of every year, scientists and land managers produce coordinated outlooks for upcoming fire potential and activity across the western United States to better plan and prioritize resources. While it is too early to forecast with accuracy what the 2021 fire season will bring, the current Rocky Mountain Area Predictive Services models indicate above average large fire potential this spring and into the summer.

Drought conditions continued to develop across Colorado throughout 2020, and have remained in place through the spring of 2021. Significant precipitation in March did result in improved drought levels east of the continental divide, but below average precipitation and Extreme to Exceptional drought levels persist on the western slope.

Snowpack levels across the Colorado mountains have recovered somewhat in February and March from earlier winter deficits. Western Colorado has experienced reduced precipitation levels and drier than normal conditions over the last 90 days. Currently, the statewide Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) is slightly below average, which is less than at this time in both 2020 (110%) and 2019 (140%), but more than in 2018 (70%).

Current temperature and precipitation outlooks call for above average temperatures and below average precipitation from April into August.

Warm and dry long-range forecasts in a La-Nina pattern point towards the emergence of above normal significant fire potential over the southeast portions of Colorado from March through April. Additionally, the long range warm and dry projections suggest an earlier than normal start to the core fire season during the second half of May across southern Colorado. Expectations for above average temperatures and below average precipitation through July are expected to result in drought intensification and earlier than average spring snowpack runoff, leading to above normal large fire potential across southern Colorado starting in the second half of May, expanding northward through the month of June, and affecting the majority of the western slope by July.

In addition to weather and other environmental factors, overall forest health and fuels conditions remain a concern for fire impacts and risk in the higher elevations of Colorado.

At this time, there is limited data and confidence to project large fire potential beyond July. Consideration should be given to the 2020 spring outlook from 1 year ago that was very similar to this year's current outlook - an early onset of the core fire season in southern Colorado, above average large fire potential into mid-summer, and limited confidence and data for the late summer and fall.

It is important to note that even in an average fire season in Colorado, there will be approximately 5,359 fires burning an average of 233,728 total acres, with large State Responsibility Fires likely occurring. The 2016 and 2017 calendar years were both considered below average from a statistical standpoint, however there were a combined total of 16 State Responsibility Fires in those years, with a total cost of over \$21 million in State funds for suppression alone.

2021 DFPC WILDFIRE RESPONSE STRATEGY AND RESOURCES

Overview of DFPC Strategy

Planning Assumptions

- Public and firefighter safety is the priority.
- Wildfires that exceed the capabilities of local and county resources will occur.
- Wildfires will threaten lives, property, and natural resources.
- Wildfires will threaten water supplies for Colorado residents and non-residents.
- Wildfires have significant potential to threaten local and State economies.

- No single entity or jurisdiction alone can manage every wildfire.
- Successful suppression and extinguishment of catastrophic wildfires requires organized interagency cooperation at all levels of government.

Ensuring that state wildfire resources are identified, staffed, and positioned to respond will prevent some wildfires from becoming large catastrophic events, and will assist in the containment and suppression of those wildfires that do escape initial attack, thereby mitigating the far reaching impacts of these large incidents.

Leader's Intent on Incident Priorities

The following list, in order of numerical importance, shall be considered when developing incident strategies, tactics, and plan implementation:

- 1) Public and Firefighter Safety
- 2) Incident Stabilization
- 3) Property Conservation
- 4) Endangered Species, Environmental, and Economic Impacts
- 5) Resource Benefit

Early Detection

The early detection of new fires is a critical component of the DFPC wildfire management strategy. These efforts are focused on the identification of a fire and providing information to the jurisdictionally responsible agency on the fire's location, activity and behavior, potential, and proximity to values at risk. Notifying those agencies about new fires and providing associated information, allows them to take early action and make informed decisions. In areas where fire is unwanted and full suppression is the appropriate management response, early detection allows for initial attack actions while the fire is small, which increases the probability of success, reduces exposure to firefighters and the public, and minimizes fire size, duration, costs, and impacts.

The DFPC Multi-Mission Aircraft (MMA) utilize state-of-the-art infrared and color sensors operated by firefighters to find and locate fires. Maps, images, and other details about new fires are provided to fire managers, and can be provided to ground forces in a near real time manner. Local, County, and federal agencies can request a MMA to conduct detection missions over a specified area of concern, or to assist with fire and smoke reports that cannot be verified. DFPC will proactively conduct detection missions during times of elevated fire indices, high fire activity, or following periods of high lightning activity. Since the inception of the program in 2015, the MMAs have identified over 400 previously undetected fires.

The Firefly/FireGuard program is a national capability to detect wildland fires and was first implemented in California in 2019. In 2020, Colorado became the second State to pilot this concept, through a joint partnership with the Department of Defense to provide real-time wildfire

detection and monitoring support to the State and Interagency partners. The program increases Colorado's overall detection and monitoring capacity to provide early clarity and continual updates for fires, especially at night, in remote areas, and when aircraft cannot fly. Intelligence products provide approximate acreage, location, and local weather for incidents and are disseminated via several existing common operating picture applications for use at both tactical and strategic levels. The capability does not provide a detailed (1-meter) fire perimeter like the MMA or National Infrared Operations (NIROPS), but is accurate to within a few hundred meters. During the 5-month 2020 Colorado pilot program, 860 updates and reports were developed on 107 total fires. Based on the success of the initial pilot efforts in both Colorado and California, there is an ongoing national expansion of the program in partnership with the US Forest Service called FireGuard. Currently, there are two FireGuard nodes in the US, with one in Colorado and one in California.

Aggressive Initial Attack and Enhanced State Assistance

Fast, aggressive, initial attack on new fires (for fires where full suppression is the appropriate management response) can reduce the number of large fires that impact homes, communities, and infrastructure, and result in millions of dollars in suppression costs, recovery costs, and insured losses. Limiting the number, size, and duration of large wildfires will reduce exposure to and increase our ability to provide for the top wildfire management priority of the safety of firefighters and the public.

The concept of Enhanced State Assistance (ESA) is one of the initial recommendations of the Colorado Fire Commission, and will be funded (SB21-049) and authorized (SB21-113) in 2021. ESA expands on the historical State Assistance provided by DFPC and provides additional options, tools, and flexibility to increase the effectiveness of initial attack actions. Key resources and activities included under the new ESA include (refer to the 2021 Wildland Fire Resource Funding Guidelines for additional details):

- Aviation resources utilized by local fire agencies and Counties during the initial attack and mutual aid phases of an incident. Aviation resources for additional operational periods can be approved by DFPC;
- Two days of a handcrew use by local fire agencies and Counties during the first two days of an incident;
- DFPC Engine, Module, and Overhead resources utilized by local fire agencies and Counties during the initial attack and mutual aid phases of an incident. These resources can be utilized for additional operational periods as approved by DFPC; and
- Severity assignments and pre-positioning of ground, aviation, and overhead resources based on Preparedness Levels;

Traditionally, aviation resources have not been included as part of interagency wildfire mutual aid in Colorado. Under the new Colorado Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement and the statewide Colorado Operating Plan between DFPC and the federal land management agencies, all resources including aviation, can be included under the new 24-hour mutual aid concept. This is a significant improvement for cooperative

fire management in Colorado and will further encourage the use of appropriate resources during initial attack, reduce financial barriers to taking rapid actions, and reduce time and effort spent negotiating costs in the early phases of a fire. Mutual aid details and timeframes will be identified in each individual County Operating Plan.

Preparedness Levels and Resource Availability

Wildland fire management is a collaborative, interagency effort in the western United States. No single State or agency is capable of responding to and managing all wildland fires on their own. Utilization of available resources from local, County, State and federal agencies is a necessity and standard practice on an annual basis.

Resources will be strategically located based on Rocky Mountain Area and Colorado preparedness levels, fire occurrence, weather, National Fire Danger Rating System indices, location of other resources, and other relevant factors. With the changes to WERF and the Enhanced State Assistance program, DFPC has increased ability to pre-position non-federal resources as needed within funding constraints. In an effort to leverage available resources and improve response efficiency, DFPC will coordinate with our federal partners to send the closest available resource to requests for aviation and other types of assistance.

State owned and managed aviation and other resources increases the overall capacity to respond to and manage wildfires within Colorado. They also provide a baseline level of resources under the operational control of DFPC, ensuring Colorado's needs are met regardless of movement of federal resources due to national priorities and fire needs in other States.

Dispatching and Mobilization of Resources

DFPC will also ensure the maintenance of the process for ordering and dispatching aviation, equipment, personnel, and other resources that is consistent with, and supportive of, the statewide mobilization plan prepared pursuant to Section 24-33.5-705.4, C.R.S. DFPC will: provide technical assistance and program management to identify local, county, and state resources; track and document their qualification to national standards; and list those resources in the national mobilization system via the interagency zone dispatch centers, and in the Colorado Statewide Resource Mobilization System.

DFPC Fire Management Staff

Based upon stakeholder driven strategic planning efforts, the DFPC changed its field structure in 2019 to better support local Government needs. At the request of local governments, the Division reorganized from two Area Fire Management Officers (FMOs) and ten Regional Fire Management Officers, to four District Chief (DC) and 14 Battalion Chief (BC) positions strategically positioned throughout Colorado to provide the desired level of technical assistance and support to local jurisdictions.

The BCs are the first point of contact for local jurisdictions when they need subject matter expertise in any component of wildland fire management including training and qualifications, grants, planning and preparedness, prescribed fire management, fire billing and reimbursement, etc. As requested, the BCs provide technical assistance to local agencies during wildfire incidents including: resource ordering, tactics, incident management, funding, and serving in overhead positions on the fire as needed. The BCs and the County Sheriff jointly complete the assessment to determine if County capacity has been exceeded, and the BCs become Agency Administrators on State Responsibility Fires. BCs also direct local jurisdictions to contacts who can assist with needs provided by other DFPC Sections and programs.

Ground Resources

Ground based resources in Colorado consist of a combination of local fire agency, County, State, and federal agency resources. Local fire agencies provide the large majority of total firefighters and engines in Colorado, are typically the first resource to respond to most wildfire incidents, and are the key element to both successful mutual aid response and staffing of large, extended attack incidents.

The 2021 plan for ground based resources will be based on wildfire risk, occurrence, need, and available funding, and may include a number of potential arrangements for strategic location of these resources.

Engines: The DFPC Engine Program provides assistance to local jurisdictions when local firefighting resources are overburdened due to number, complexity, or duration of fires. When areas of the state are under elevated fire conditions, DFPC engines may be pre-positioned on severity assignments for the purpose of supplementing local resources for rapid initial attack. Based on recent strategic planning efforts and feedback from local response agencies, it is a future goal that the state engines work with local partners to develop regional strike team / task force capabilities to enhance initial attack capacity. Staffed DFPC engines are located in Berthoud, Sterling, La Junta, Alamosa, and Montrose. These Type 3 and 4 engines consist of 4 DFPC personnel, and work with multiple local fire agencies to maximize response efficiency and availability, including co-location of DFPC and local fire agency resources. In addition to wildfires, the Engines augment local resources for non-wildfire and all-hazard incidents when needed.

In addition to State-staffed Engines, the CDPS Logistics Branch and DFPC assist rural fire agencies through the Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) program, by acquiring excess military equipment through the US Forest Service, retrofitting and fabricating those vehicles into fire engines, which are then loaned to those smaller fire departments. Currently there are 87 FEPP engines assigned to 74 local fire agencies, with six newly fabricated FEPP engines scheduled to replace older units by the end of 2021.

Modules: In 2020, the DFPC Module program was expanded from one to five Modules across the State. These Modules are groups of 8 to 10 firefighters and are located in Windsor, Black Hawk, Colorado Springs, Dolores, and Steamboat Springs. The Modules can respond to

wildfires as a single unit, or they can partner with local government personnel when available or other DFPC Modules to form 20 person handcrews. When not involved in wildfire response, the Modules are actively involved in providing training to local agencies, planning and implementing prescribed fire projects, and implementing fuels management projects. The Modules will also be trained and equipped in the near future to assist with non-fire incidents, such as search and rescue, when needed.

State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT) Crews: DFPC will continue to support these handcrews operated by the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide training, logistical and/or overhead support that may be needed to ensure operational readiness and hazardous fuel reduction projects, as available. SWIFT crews are located in Buena Vista, Canon City, and Rifle. Due to the COVID pandemic, SWIFT crew were unavailable for wildfire response and mitigation projects for the majority of 2020. Currently, DOC plans to have at least partial crews available in 2021.

Heavy Equipment Program: DFPC will continue to partner with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) on the availability of bulldozers, road graders, and other heavy equipment for wildfire suppression. CDOT provides the operators, heavy equipment and transports, while DFPC provides training, overhead for fireline supervision, and coordinates mobilization of resources. To date, 75 CDOT equipment operators have received basic training. These resources were utilized on several fires in 2018, including the Spring, Chateau, Lake Christine, and Weston Pass fires, and again in 2020 on the Pine Gulch and Grizzly Creek fires.

Aviation Resources

The 2021 plan for DFPC aerial firefighting resources will be based on wildfire risk, occurrence, need, and available funding, and may include any number of potential arrangements. To the degree practicable and possible, the minimum deployment of DFPC aerial firefighting resources will be:

Rotor-Wing Aircraft:

DFPC will operate a minimum of two Type 2 helicopters with DFPC helitack crews on Exclusive Use (EU) contracts of up to 230 days for each aircraft. The increase in contract periods from the historical 120 days, is a result of the approval of the Wildfire Stimulus Package (SB21-049). Adjusted start dates for both the Canon City and Montrose helicopters is April 5th, 2021, compared to previous year's start dates of April 1st and June 1st. The aircraft and crews perform a variety of tasks including recon, transport of personnel and supplies, water delivery, and non-fire missions when needed and appropriate. One helicopter is equipped with night operations capabilities making Colorado the only State fire agency in the nation providing night operations capabilities. Night operations of helicopters adds a level of risk and complexity, and therefore will only be utilized when values at risk warrant the additional risk, and when the pilot has already flown the incident during the day and is familiar with the associated hazards in the area.

For 2021, DFPC also plans to have an EU contract for a Type 1 Helicopter for 1 year, while the recently approved Firehawk helicopter is being built. The actual aircraft kind and type and contract period is to be determined, and will be based on availability of aircraft that are not already under contract with other agencies around the country.

Colorado Army National Guard (CONG) helicopter resources can be available for wildfire response and support. Current 2021 plans are to have 6 Blackhawk and 2 Chinook helicopters and pilots that are trained, approved, and available for interagency wildfire response. Activation of these resources requires approval of the Governor. The CONG and DFPC partner each year to provide classroom and field training to CONG personnel and pilots to increase their familiarity with interagency wildfire operations, increase proficiency and effectiveness, and to receive approval from the US Forest Service to fly on interagency wildland fires.

Multi-Mission Fixed-Wing Aircraft: DFPC will operate two State-owned, fixed-wing Multi-Mission Aircraft (MMA). The MMA are operated by contracted pilots and mechanics, and staffed by DFPC mission sensor operators. The home base for the MMA is in Centennial, but they can be pre-positioned in other locations as needed. These resources perform fire detection, extended attack surveillance and support, and other non-fire mission support when needed and appropriate.

Single Engine Air Tankers: DFPC will operate a minimum of two Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs) through an EU contract of up to 240 days for each aircraft. The increase in contract periods from the historical 150 days is a result of the approval of the Wildfire Stimulus Package (SB21-049). Adjusted start dates for the aircraft this year is April 1st, 2021, compared to previous year's start dates of May 15th and June 1st. DFPC will also administer a Call-When-Needed (CWN) program that makes additional SEATs available if the wildfire situation dictates the need for additional resources.

Large Air Tankers and Very Large Air Tankers: DFPC plans to operate one Large Air Tanker (LAT) through an Exclusive Use contract of approximately 110 days. In 2020, DFPC had a LAT EU contract for the first time due to one-time Executive Order funding. The 2021 contract will be available as a result of the Wildfire Stimulus Package (SB21-049). Start dates for the aircraft are being finalized due to the new Legislation and contracting changes, but DFPC anticipates the LAT to begin the contract period in mid-May to early June. DFPC will continue to evaluate and pursue other opportunities for CWN resources to enhance firefighting capabilities. In previous fire seasons, DFPC had a CWN contract for a Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) with Global Supertanker, but their aircraft does not currently meet the requirements of the interagency Air Tanker Board requirements or the CWN contract with DFPC, so we do not anticipate that resource being available in 2021.

ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Colorado Fire Commission and 2021 Legislation

In 2019, the first ever Colorado Fire Commission (CFC) was established by Senate Bill 19-040. The CFC is charged with drafting and implementing recommendations on how to collaboratively and proactively reduce the overall loss of resources as a result of fire in Colorado, including within the Wildland Urban Interface. CFC membership consists of 24 voting members and 8 Ex-Officio members, representing numerous disciplines and diverse geographic areas of the State. The CFC addressed three priority topics in its first year: wildfire funding, enhanced regional mutual aid, and fire data. The first CFC annual report to the Legislature and the Governor's Office was released in August of 2020, and contained 5 recommendations. The recommendations will be implemented as they are approved and associated resources are made available. At the time this plan was prepared, proposed legislation has been introduced to address the first 4 recommendations, which are:

- Recommendation 20-01: Implement the Colorado Coordinated Regional Mutual Aid System (CCRMAS). Developed by the Colorado State Fire Chiefs (CSFC) and refined by the CFC, CCRMAS is an effort to better coordinate initial attack response to emerging incidents. This system links existing mutual aid plans and agreements to create a web of redundancy in mutual aid. Implementing the system in a manner in which there is sufficient redundancy so that there is not a single point of failure will require dedicated personnel whose primary function is mutual aid coordination.
- Recommendation 20-02: Update Mutual Aid Statutes to Support the Colorado Coordinated Regional Mutual Aid System. In order to implement CCRMAS successfully, the subcommittee recommends updating language in Colorado Revised Statutes.
- Recommendation 20-03: Establish a State Responsibility and Large Wildland Fire Fund Within DFPC. This recommendation would create a base budget to manage wildfires that exceed county capability and qualify as a State Responsibility Fire (SRF). The budget would be based on a 5-year rolling average of the state share of fire suppression costs on SRFs. In addition, the recommendation acknowledges that mitigation is a critical piece of a comprehensive fire management program and requests an additional amount of at least 10% to fund forest management and vegetative management programs under the management of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS).
- Recommendation 20-04: Implement an Enhanced State Assistance Program. Large wildland fires will continue to occur in Colorado and the State needs the ability to detect wildland fires early and to take rapid action to limit unwanted wildfires and protect values at risk. To facilitate early detection and rapid action, this recommendation proposes to convert the EFF from a large fire fund into a fund to support a new Enhanced State Assistance (ESA) program.

The CFC report noted that the above issues are all interrelated in the overall goal of addressing fire in Colorado and its consequences. As a result, overlaps exist between the recommendations. Mutual aid is critical during initial attack when state assistance is utilized, so Recommendations 20-01 and 20-04 complement each other. Recommendations 20-03 and 20-

04 look at the two sides of a wildfire incident, the initial attack phase when the fire is small and the State Responsibility phase when a large fire has exceeded local capabilities. Although we anticipate that these recommendations will be evaluated individually, moving forward on the entire package of recommendations will have the greatest positive impact on Colorado.

DFPC will continue proactive engagement with these stakeholders and partners at the community, local, state, and federal level in our continued efforts to proactively address the growing fire problem within Colorado. We are all confident that continual evaluation of capacity and resource availability to support initial attack from a local, regional, statewide, and national basis for rapidly growing fires threatening citizens, visitors, natural resources, and economies, through on-going post incident analysis and collaborative strategic planning efforts and activities will reduce our overall risk profiles. The Division will continue to remain focused on the diverse needs of all areas of the state as it relates to coordination and response to fire incidents and reduction of the likelihood or severity of an event when it does occur.

SB21-049 (Department of Public Safety Supplemental): extending existing contracts of DFPC SEATs (2) and Type 2 Helicopters (2); funding for Enhanced State Assistance, funding for an Exclusive Use (EU) Large Air Tanker (LAT), and one-time purchases of equipment to increase mitigation and response capacity. This bill was signed by the Governor on 3/21/2021.

SB21-113 (Firefighting Aircraft Wildfire Mgmt and Response): one-time purchase of a multi-mission, high performance Type 1 Helicopter; one-time contracting of a Type 1 Helicopter or other aviation resource for 2021; and modifications to WERF to allow increase activities and support under the Enhanced State Assistance program. This bill was signed by the Governor on 3/21/2021.

SB21-166: (Colorado Fire Commission Recommendations): would update statutes affecting the responsibilities of agencies requesting and providing mutual aid resources; would create a State Responsibility and large wildland fire fund; and would create the CCRMAS to better coordinate fire service resources during initial response. At the time this plan was prepared, this bill had been introduced in the Senate.

COVID-19

The development and escalation of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 had significant impacts on planning and preparation for the upcoming core fire season. Traditional meetings and trainings were cancelled, and substantial time and effort was required to develop new plans and processes to address the challenges and concerns of wildfire response in a COVID environment. Primary concerns were the health and safety of firefighters in fireline and fire camp environments, additional impacts from large wildfires to already stressed communities, and a reduction in resources available to respond outside of their home jurisdictions.

Given the level and duration of fire activity in Colorado and other parts of western United States, the relatively low levels of COVID cases and outbreaks on large fires is a testament to the work and efforts of agency leadership, fire managers, firefighters, and local communities. The current plan and approach for 2021 is that it will be another COVID year, and fire response will occur

under the same plans, processes, and protocols as last year. Existing plans and processes are in place and are being updated based on experiences from last year. Several lessons learned from last year forced change and new and more efficient ways of doing business, and several of these will be utilized as standard practices into the future.

CONCLUSION

2020 was an extremely challenging fire season for all of Colorado's fire agencies. The duration, complexity, impacts, and the overall values at risk within the multiple wildland urban interface incidents that firefighters were called to respond to stretched our resource capacity. However, even with the added complexities of the global pandemic, the firefighters and partner agencies rose to the challenge. These men and women worked hard to minimize the overall impacts of this record breaking year. And while these challenges were significant, the State of Colorado experienced notable successes through continued collaboration with partner agencies to implement a more aggressive initial attack model in order to extinguish multiple fires before they were able to become larger, longer duration, and higher impact incidents.

The Division, along with its fire service partners and stakeholders, greatly appreciate the leadership from the Governor and the Legislature for their willingness to be proactive in the providing of additional suppression resources through the Wildfire Stimulus Package to continue this aggressive initial attack response model. This commitment will help in saving lives, property, and the overall impacts of wildfire in Colorado. We are also appreciative of the commitment to maintain a balanced approach in funding both mitigation and suppression programs as well as the commitment to a more holistic approach to the overall fire problem in Colorado. As a result of this support, the Division does not currently anticipate any additional needs for the 2021 fire season. The Division will continue to monitor fire activity, resource availability, drought conditions, and extended weather forecasts to inform the appropriate individuals of any additional necessary requests for wildland fire support.

CONCURRENCE

This 2021 Wildfire Preparedness Plan was prepared by DFPC Director Mike Morgan. The following organizations and individuals concur with the recommendations contained therein:

For the County Sheriffs of Colorado

CSOC Printed Name

CSOC Signature

For the Colorado State Fire Chiefs

CSFC Printed Name

CSFC Signature

For the Director of the Office of Emergency Management

OEM Printed Name

OEM Signature

For the Adjutant General

AG Printed Name

AG Signature