

# COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE

## Critical Community Watershed Wildfire Protection Plans

**POSITION:** The Colorado Forest and Water Alliance (COFWA) encourages counties, towns, and water providers to develop Critical Community Watershed Wildfire Protection Plans (CWP<sup>2</sup>) that *build on and broaden* the CWPP concept to incorporate critical watersheds and source-water supplies

**BACKGROUND:** Wildfires in Colorado are increasing in frequency, size, and intensity with attendant impacts on our communities and local watersheds. The solutions are not easy or immediate; however, the time to start is NOW!

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) were authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) passed by Congress and signed into law by President George Bush on 12-3-2003. Following the passage of SB09-001, Colorado added a requirement for Colorado counties to create countywide CWPPs, which tended to center around wildland/urban interface communities at risk, and firefighting capability. They generally failed to consider mitigation plans for other values at risk, such as critical watersheds and water supply infrastructure, roads, power corridors, or communications infrastructure. Communities and municipalities don't tend to think of these values until after a fire, when they lose services due to post-fire flooding and debris flows, or find reservoirs filled with sediment.

Critical Community Watershed Wildfire Protection Plans (CWP<sup>2</sup>), *build on and broaden* the CWPP concept to incorporate critical watersheds and source-water supplies—like catchment areas for streams, rivers and lakes—and critical infrastructure found across the landscape. CWP<sup>2</sup> provides a more thorough and comprehensive planning process in order to prioritize mitigation. It is critical that participants involved in developing a CWP<sup>2</sup> think about all the important values that overlap with their community's wildfire preparedness. Water-rights holders and other water stakeholders should be key players in CWP<sup>2</sup> planning efforts, as should other infrastructure experts. The CWP<sup>2</sup> process may evaluate and update existing County CWPPs rather than creating whole new plans, or may be part of a major update to a County CWPP.

Planning should *identify, assess, and prioritize mitigation* in areas managed by federal, state, local governments, along with land under private and other types of ownership, where forest management work is needed to reduce wildfire risks to the community as a whole, including critical water supplies and infrastructure.

NOW is the time to start working on a CWP<sup>2</sup>, especially if your county is in an area at risk for large-scale, high-severity wildfires! Considering Colorado often suffers extreme drought, and wildfires are increasing in size and severity, planning should identify and prioritize wildfire risk-reduction needs and allow flexibility for treatment mitigation across the landscape. The suggested planning and implementation horizon is 10 years, with more frequent updates to include changing forest health conditions or new values such as new developments or infrastructure.

The ultimate goal is not to complete just another plan, but to effectively identify risks, prioritize needs, and implement projects that will protect watersheds and essential infrastructure.

For additional information and assistance contact your local Colorado State Forest Service office, or visit

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wildfire-and-watershed-assessment>.

*The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.*

**Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry, Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners**

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