

## East Canyon Community Wildfire Protection Plan

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan is the documentary conclusion of an important planning process. In this process, concerned volunteers from East Canyon worked together to assess the current wildfire vulnerability of East Canyon residents and to identify how the community can enhance protection of people, property and the environment in East Canyon.

Philip Walters prepared the first CWPP for Elk Stream Ranch in 2008. This document, and the community actions that it prompted and guided, are given credit for making East Canyon homes defensible during the Weber Fire of 2012. Our community has grown considerably and conditions have changed since 2008, and we recognized the need to review the community situation and update the Plan. We also recognized that an effective Plan includes all residents of East Canyon, including Elk Stream Ranch, Elk Springs Ranch, and adjacent neighbors.

The East Canyon community includes 50 properties (13 in Elk Springs, 35 in Elk Stream, and 2 adjacent neighbors), and 24 houses (11 primary residences and 13 second or vacation homes). The core planning committee included Philip and Linda Walters, Gem Boone, Jeff Schaffer, and Rebecca Samulski, representing Firewise of SW Colorado. Odin Christensen acted as scribe, recording proceedings of the meetings to create the document. Partner participants included the Mancos Fire Protection District, Fort Lewis Mesa Fire District, US Forest Service, US Bureau of Land Management, Montezuma County Office of Emergency Planning, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Firewise of SW Colorado.

The plan highlights 5 key **VULNERABILITIES** of the East Canyon community:

- ACCESS to the community is by one road only, with several potential choke points with heavy fuel adjacent to the road;
- FUEL: Lion's Head Ridge has a long unbroken extent of heavy fuel on rugged topography with limited access;
- WATER for fire suppression is limited in East Canyon;
- Some EXISTING HOMES in East Canyon present significant ignition hazards, inadequate defensible space, and restricted access;
- COMMUNITY RESOURCES have been stretched by the 2012 Weber Fire and subsequent floods.

The Plan outlines quite a number of recommended actions, which may be grouped in 5 categories:

- ACCESS: work to develop well-maintained, well-signed community access roads, emphasizing fuel treatments along all access roads, accessible driveways, and improved driveway signage;
- DEFENSIBLE SPACE & STRUCTURES: Make all homes fire resistant and defensible. Strengthen Association design guidelines, improve the fire-resistance of existing structures, create and

maintain defensible space around all structures, and encourage greater non-resident involvement in responsible property maintenance;

- **COMMUNITY FUEL BREAKS & SAFE AREAS:** To limit the size and intensity of wildfire on the east side of the canyon and strengthen the central meadow area as a fuel-break and potential shelter area, the Plan recommends creation of community-scale fire breaks and sustained POA-funded fuel treatments in priority areas;
- **EVACUATION & EMERGENCY RESPONSE:** All residents should be prepared for emergencies, with developed evacuation and communication plans. Community response plans should be coordinated with Montezuma County and Mancos Fire Protection District.
- **FIREWISE EDUCATION & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** We envision having all property owners engaged in securing the collective safety of our community. We now have a number of Firewise Ambassadors in both Elk Springs and Elk Stream Ranch who are committed to this goal.

Status: The core planning committee completed their work in February, 2014. A public meeting involving many East Canyon residents and our Firewise partners was conducted in April 2014. A draft CWPP document is currently with representatives of Firewise and the Colorado State Forest Service for final review. Once approved, it will be posted on the website.

The East Canyon Community Wildfire Protection Plan was prepared by concerned community volunteers. Having this Plan in place opens opportunities for cost-sharing grants both from the State of Colorado and the United States, and places a priority for fire-hazard-reduction work on Federal and State lands which abut our community. The Plan, however, simply makes recommendations: responsibility and authority for action remains with individual property owners and with our community Associations.