



# **Final Report**

**August 14, 2000**

## **Fire Prevention and Education Team**

San Juan Public Lands Center  
15 Burnett Court  
Durango, CO 81301

### **A B S T R A C T**

In July 2000, the Unified Command Group in southwestern Colorado, made up of representatives from the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, requested an interagency prevention and education team be assigned to the area to assist with their fire prevention and education program. The team arrived on August 1, 2000, to begin a two-week assignment. The team was based at the San Juan Public Lands Center in Durango. The team met with the Group to report out the results of their assignment on August 14. This report details the activities

and accomplishments of the interagency fire prevention and education team assigned to Durango.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **Background**

The Unified Command Group in southwestern Colorado, made up of representatives from the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, requested that an interagency prevention and education team be assigned to the area to assist with their fire prevention and education program. Southwestern Colorado is experiencing extreme fire conditions, as is much of the western United States.

The Unified Command Group recognizes that Durango and surrounding areas have a growing urban/wildland interface problem. Area land managers and fire managers want to increase public awareness of what homeowners and communities can do to protect themselves and their property from wildfire. The recent Bircher Fire and Pony Fire, which burned portions of Mesa Verde National Park and the Ute Mountain Ute tribal lands, captured public attention. Agency representatives believe fire prevention messages may be more effective and better received while the fire issue is in the press and in front of people.

The team arrived on August 1, 2000, to begin a two-week assignment. The team was based at the San Juan Public Lands Center in Durango. The team first met with the Unified Command Group on August 2 to discuss the team's objectives, areas of emphasis, and key contacts. The team had ongoing coordination with members of the Unified Command Group during their assignment and met with the Group to report the results of their assignment on August 14. (See appendix for details on daily activities.)

Fire prevention and education teams have been dispatched nationally since 1996. This is the first team to be assigned to southwestern Colorado. A team was

assembled in Denver's Front Range in June 2000, concurrent with two large human-caused Front Range fires that destroyed about 80 urban/wildland homes. The Denver team had developed a newspaper insert called "Living with Fire," which was very useful and widely distributed in Durango and the surrounding area.

## Report Contents

This report contains the following major sections:

**Communication Plan:** This plan describes the principal communication objectives, key messages, target audiences, and methods and products used to accomplish the objectives.

**Objectives and Accomplishments:** This section discusses the objectives agreed to by the Unified Command Group and lists the major accomplishments completed for each objective.

**Recommendations:** The team identified several actions that should be considered to further the fire prevention and education program.

**Appendix:** The appendix contains business and communication products and supporting material.

## Team Members

Team members included:

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Left to Right: Art Hutchinson, Kristin Garrison, Pam Gardner, Dave Merrifield

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## **2. Communication Plan**

### **Communication Objectives**

The following are key communication objectives to assist in accomplishing the fire prevention and education team objectives:

- Use current public attention of the large fires in the area to promote education and awareness of current and future wildland fire management programs.
- Increase property owner awareness of fire protection measures and encourage property owners to take responsibility for reducing fire risks on their property.
- Deliver FireWise programs to organizations and communities.
- Inform wildland visitors of fire dangers and fire prevention measures.
- Develop key fire prevention messages for use by fire and information personnel.

### **Key Messages**

The team developed key messages to raise public awareness of fire prevention and encourage fire preparedness.

- Dense forests and growing populations in once-rural areas are putting more homes in jeopardy of wildfires. The complexity of fire suppression is growing, and, in some cases, is exceeding the capability of firefighting resources.
- The natural settings people live and play in have inherent risks; wildfire is one of those risks. Fire is a natural part of the forests and grasslands, and fire risk can only be reduced with pro-active and cooperative vegetation management.
- People who live in these urban/wildland interface areas should take actions to reduce their risk from wildland fire.
- People can affect wildfire risks by reducing the source of ignitions, such as sparks from engines or campfires.

- People can reduce their risks from wildfire by creating defensible space around their homes, neighborhoods, and communities.
- Defensible space includes modifying the vegetation surrounding your homes and neighborhoods. Other fire-prevention methods include:
  - ✓ using fire-resistant construction materials,
  - ✓ ensuring addresses are well marked,
  - ✓ providing adequate community water sources,
  - ✓ completing community emergency response plans.

## Target Audiences

Principal audiences for fire prevention education messages and materials include:

- Urban/wildland interface residents and homeowner associations in southwest Colorado
- Visitors to southwest Colorado
- Local area media outlets
- Local fire department personnel
- Agency employees

## Methods and Products

Methods and products used to help convey fire prevention education messages include:

**“Living with Fire: A Guide for Homeowners” newspaper inserts:** These inserts were prepared by a Fire Prevention Team in June 2000, and printed by the *Denver Post*. They contain information about fire behavior and actions homeowners can take to reduce their risks from wildfire. About 40,000 of these flyers were distributed to local contacts and visitor information sites and inserted into area newspapers.

**News Releases:** Releases were sent to area media and key contacts to inform them of the team’s existence and objectives. Fire prevention education messages and information were included in the releases. These releases were also used to generate media interest and feature stories on fire prevention.

**Personal Contacts and Coordination:** Contacts were made with local government offices and fire departments, agency personnel, media, and incident

information teams working in the area. Objectives for these contacts included: information gathering, information sharing, and coordination.

**Information/Education Briefings:** Prevention team members attended an area fire personnel coordination meeting to update them on prevention materials and FireWise programs and assist them in their community outreach.

**Key Messages and Prevention Tips:** These were prepared for use by the prevention team and agency personnel. The prevention tips were also distributed in communities and to fire departments.

**FireWise Notebooks:** These notebooks were prepared by the Colorado State Forest Service to be used with homeowners, communities, fire departments and other agencies. Prevention team members introduced the FireWise materials and encouraged their use.

**Videos:** Several videos exist that discuss defensible space guidelines to reduce risks to homes from wildfire. These videos can be used with homeowner associations and fire departments and agency personnel. A video prepared by the San Juan Public Lands Center is currently running on the local government access cable channel.

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### 3. Objectives and Accomplishments

The Unified Command Group agreed to the following objectives. Actions to achieve the objectives are identified in detail under each objective.

**Objective 1:** Work with all agencies, including the Ute Mountain Ute, and Southern Ute tribes. Identify any special prevention activities that may be needed.

**Accomplishments:**

Worked with the following agencies and organizations:

- Colorado State Forest Service
- US Forest Service
- LaPlata County Emergency Service, Planning, and Fire Chiefs Association
- Local fire departments (Archuleta, Pagosa Springs, Bayfield, Dolores, Durango City, Animas, Hermosa Hills, Upper Pine, Mancos, Silverton, Cortez)
- Type I and II incident management teams
- National Park Service-Mesa Verde National Park
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management.

Other activities:

- Promoted use of FireWise program.
- Offered basic train-the-trainer FireWise program.
- Provided Living with Fire inserts, FireWise tip sheets, defensible space signs.
- Assisted in preparing public information on fire situation and prevention messages. Acquired 60,000 Living with Fire inserts and distributed 40,000.

**Objective 2:** Work with the Unified Command Group; identify high risk subdivisions in southwestern Colorado including the Bayfield, Cortez, Dolores, Durango, Ignacio, Mancos, Pagosa Springs, Silverton, Telluride, and Towaoc areas. With assistance of local government, identify key contacts and deliver FireWise programs to these organizations and communities.

**Accomplishments:**

- Met with Unified Command Group members regularly and updated them on team progress.
- Toured high risk and high hazard subdivisions in Durango, Pagosa Springs, Rico, Telluride, Dolores, Summit Lake, Mancos.
- Local fire departments listed the following as areas of concern:

<b>Fire Department</b>	<b>Fire Marshall</b>	<b>Areas of Concern</b>
Animas	Alan Clay	Durango Hills Durango West 1 and 2 Edgemont Falls Creek Rafter J Shenandoah Tic Oloede Timberline View Estates Trapers Crossing
Cortez	Frank Cavaliere	Arrowhead Subdivision Cedarwood Crestwood County Road H County Road 145
Durango City	Tom Kaufman	Falcon Heights Rock Ridge Sky Ridge Phase 1-4
Mancos	Lyle Cox	Cedar Mesa Elk Springs Elk Stream Jackson or Mancos Lake Joe Moore Lake Summit Lake
Pagosa Springs	Warren Gramms	Aspen Springs Holiday Acres

Upper Pine

Jim Picoli

Hudson  
Pagosa Lake  
Timber Ridge

Aspen Trails  
Enchanted Forest  
Forest Grove  
Forest Lake  
Lakeside Subdivision  
Tween Lakes  
Timberdale Subdivision

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- Presented introduction to FireWise program at La Plata County Fire Chief Association meeting.
- Trained Durango District of the Colorado State Forest Service on use of FireWise program.

**Objective 3:** Use current public attention of the large fires in the area to promote education and awareness of current and future wildland fire management programs.

**Accomplishments:**

- Shared fire prevention and education messages and materials with a variety of audiences using a host of mediums, such as press releases, newspaper inserts, media interviews, personal contacts, agency briefings (See appendix for more details on products and contacts.)

**Objective 4:** Work closely with local public affairs officers to promote the appropriate fire education and prevention coverage in the mass media. Make personal visits with all local federal, state, and local PAOs in the area before initiating any media campaigns.

**Accomplishments:**

- Worked with San Juan Public Lands Center public affairs officer, incident information officers, Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center information liaison, district rangers, Mesa Verde National Park personnel.
- Inserted Living with Fire flyer, completed interviews, and provided news releases to the following newspapers:

Pagosa Sun (6,100 copies on 8/10)

Cortez Journal (6,700 copies on 8/8)

Mancos Times (1,000 copies on 8/10)

Dolores Star (1,000 copies on 8/10)

Telluride Daily Planet (5,000 copies on 8/10)

Durango Herald (12,800 copies on 8/13)

- In addition, provided news releases to the following media outlets:

Denver Post

Inside Outside Magazine

Silverton Standard

Silverton Mountain Journal

Durango Magazine

Southern Ute Drum

Dove Creek Press  
Pine River Times  
Farmington Daily Times

KSUT FM  
KDUR FM  
KRTZ FM  
KOTO FM

KRWM FM

KREZ TV  
City Span 10  
KBOF TV  
KREX TV

**Objective 5:** Develop key fire prevention messages for Region 2 incident information personnel.

**Accomplishments:**

- Developed key messages and had them reviewed by the Unified Command Group and Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center (See section 2. Communication Plan for key messages).

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## 4. Recommendations

Recommendations to Unified Command Group and agency leadership:

- Establish a southwest Colorado interagency (local, state, federal) working group to work on fire prevention and education issues. Suggested activities for this group could include:
  - Identify and map high-risk subdivisions and other urban/wildland developments.
  - Work with homeowners and communities in those high-risk subdivisions using FireWise program.
  - Help homeowners and communities identify needed mitigation measures to reduce their risks from wildland fire and encourage them to take needed actions.
  - Develop pre-fire response plans.
  - Encourage planning and zoning departments to consider FireWise standards that address fire-resistant building materials, vegetation management, access and water supply.
  - Share information among members to increase effectiveness of programs.
- Request funding to meet the training needs for the FireWise program.
- Continue work with Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute tribes to determine their fire prevention and education needs. Establish liaison to work with tribes. Encourage their representation on interagency working group. If a future prevention and education team is established, encourage Bureau of Indian Affairs participation.

Recommendations to fire prevention and education teams:

- Have someone do advance research to help the team be more effective and prepared for various assignments and duties.
- Use answering machine to cover prevention office in personnel absence.

- Use prevention team detail request form to order team member to clarify uniform, technology, and travel needs and details.
- Continue to make Internet access available at site where team works.
- Continue to use pagers and cell phones to assist in reaching prevention team in field.
- Install two phone lines in prevention team office.
- Continue to have business cards for prevention team use.
- Include team member with graphic design skills.
- Have a supply of shirts with wildland fire prevention logo on them or have supplier lined up who can ship shirts within days of team's arrival.
- If newspaper inserts are reprinted, have inserts bundled in manageable quantities. (Inserts were packed on pallets containing about 20,000 copies. Prevention team members spent several hours bundling inserts in smaller quantities for distribution.)
- Maintain a sense of humor.

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## 5. Appendix

The appendix contains business and communication products and supporting material. The following items are included in this section:

- Daily Activity Reports – Chronology of daily accomplishments and planned activities.
- Key Contact Lists – List of community, organization and agency representatives the prevention team contacted.
- Financial Report – A report of major expenses incurred by the team during their assignment.
- News Releases and Clippings – Copies of news releases produced by the team and others related to fire prevention and education.
- Other Products – Copies of materials developed by the team.