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NEWS

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Montrose, Ouray Counties to Develop Wildfire Plans with Colorado State Forest Service

MONTROSE, Colo. – Emergency services and fire department officials from Montrose and Ouray counties met with Colorado State Forest Service and other government officials this week to discuss the mandatory development of county-wide wildfire protection plans.

State legislation that passed last year requires every Colorado county to identify fire hazard zones in unincorporated areas by January 1, 2011. Within six months of identifying these zones, counties also must develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) that establish guidelines for fire mitigation in each hazard zone. Currently, only 26 of Colorado's 64 counties have an approved county-wide CWPP.

Wednesday's meeting at the Montrose County Fairgrounds included representatives from the Colorado State Forest Service; Montrose County Emergency Preparedness; the Montrose and Norwood fire departments; two fire management consulting firms; and the U.S. Forest Service/ Bureau of Land Management. A Ouray County meeting is scheduled for this afternoon at the Ouray County 4-H Events Center. All area sheriff and fire departments have been encouraged to participate in the ongoing CWPP process.

"These county-wide CWPPs will bring together diverse local interests and government agencies to address fire preparedness and fuels reduction in our wildland-urban interface areas," said Jodi Rist, district forester for the CSFS Montrose District, which serves Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel counties.

Many state and federal grants designated for forest treatments require communities to have a CWPP approved by the Colorado State Forest Service to compete for funds, Rist said. Communities with approved plans also receive assistance from professional foresters to help develop and implement their plans.

This winter, open meetings will be held to obtain public input on the direction and scope of the CWPPs. At that time, citizens will have the opportunity to identify the values at risk in their communities, help define the local wildland-urban interface boundary, prioritize fuels treatment goals and establish wildfire preparedness objectives.

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“Community involvement is critical to the development of these plans,” Rist said. “And having the plans in place is paramount to the safety of those who live and work in fire-adapted forest ecosystems.”

Montrose and Ouray counties have contracted fire management consultants from Anchor Point Group and AMEC Earth and Environmental Inc. to organize the development of their plans. The CSFS will provide input throughout the process and will be responsible for signing off on the final plans.

For more information about the development of CWPPs, contact CSFS Montrose District Forester Jodi Rist at 970-249-9051, ext. 132.

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