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# NEWS

## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Fifteen Area Firefighters Receive Wildland Fire Certification**

**LA JUNTA, Colo.** — The Colorado State Forest Service La Junta District and U.S. Forest Service recently provided basic wildland firefighter training to 15 southeast Colorado firefighters. Participants received certificates of completion after the training at the Crowley County/Ordway Volunteer Fire Department, which included classroom and field exercises.

“The recent fire in Bent County demonstrated how vital training and experience are in fighting wildland fire. Basic wildland firefighter training gives our rural firefighters the tools they need to assess changing fire conditions, allowing each to make safe situational decisions in the extremely hazardous wildfire environment,” said Donna Davis, CSFS La Junta District forester and lead instructor for the recent wildfire training. Tom Eikenberry, fire management officer for Comanche Cimarron National Grasslands, also instructed.

Much of the basic wildland firefighter training focuses on firefighter safety – recognizing situations to watch out for, knowing the Standard Firefighting Orders and being aware of basic fire behavior and how it affects those on the fireline. Wildland fire training includes scenarios that apply to rural southeast Colorado landscapes, such as the community interface, riparian areas, piñon-juniper canyons, sage and fast-moving grass fires.

“It is notable to mention that three of the four common denominators of fatal or near-tragedy fires are applicable to our plains,” Davis said. “These include relatively small fires or deceptively quiet areas of large fires, fires in relatively light fuels, such as grass, herbs and light brush, and situations when unexpected shifts in wind direction or wind speed occur.”

Davis and Crowley County Fire Chief Reed Chapman, whose department hosted the training, said one of their goals was to make the training available to as many firefighters as possible.

“We wanted to open the course up to other firefighters in southeast Colorado,” said Chapman. “Working together is what it’s all about.”

Volunteers who completed the recent 36-hour training include:

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- **Crowley County/Ordway Volunteer Fire Department (VFD):** Chief Reed Chapman, Mario Rodriguez, John Morgan, Ty Erickson
- **La Junta Rural Fire Protection District (FPD):** Andy Hartless, Randy Rhamy, Matthew Johnson, Charlyn Gasser, Jeremiah Stoker, Mark Montano
- **Olney Springs VFD:** John Dietz, Shari Dietz, Robert San Juan
- **Wiley Rural FPD:** Dustin Owen, Kyle Woodard

“We sincerely thank the Crowley County/Ordway Volunteer Fire Department for hosting the course. Their facility and hospitality were outstanding,” said Davis.

As the lead state agency for wildland fire, the CSFS provides many wildland fire resources. For example, the CSFS manages the state’s Wildfire Emergency Response Fund (WERF), which reimburses fire departments or counties for the first aerial retardant drop on initial attack fires at the request of the county sheriff or fire protection district. The fund also offers reimbursement for two days of hand crew use, with the goal of reducing suppression costs by attacking fires quickly to keep them small. WERF funds were used to pay for aerial and crew support during the Fort Lyon wildfire in April.

The CSFS also maintains more than 140 wildland fire engines under agreements with various counties in Colorado; six are located in the CSFS La Junta District service area at the Sugar City VFD, Hasty-McClave FPD, Wiley Rural FPD, Kiowa County FPD, Walsh VFD and Campo VFD. All engines are maintained by the CSFS and staffed by local cooperating fire departments.

The CSFS La Junta District serves Otero, Crowley, Bent, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Prowers and Baca counties.

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