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U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, Golden, Colorado
U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fort Collins, Colorado

Federal, State and County Land Management Agencies Joined Sen. Udall to Announce Findings from Fourmile Canyon Fire Preliminary Assessment

BOULDER, Colo., Oct. 14, 2011 – Preliminary results from a scientific assessment of the Fourmile Canyon Fire were announced today by Sen. Mark Udall and representatives from federal, state and county land management agencies. The Fourmile Canyon Fire burned more than 6,000 acres over six days in September 2010, and is considered the most destructive fire in Colorado recorded history.

“This preliminary assessment provides a foundation for thoughtful discussion among agencies dedicated to protecting life and property from wildfire, and with those who live or recreate in Colorado’s wildland areas,” said Rich Homann, Fire Division Supervisor for the Colorado State Forest Service.

Some of the nation’s leading experts in fire behavior, structural defense, socio-economic impacts of the fire and fire weather assembled in Colorado to conduct this study over the past year. During a press conference and public open house hosted in Boulder today, representatives from the Colorado State Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Boulder County gathered to share and discuss the findings.

Following are some of the findings identified in the preliminary assessment:

- Wildland fires are a common occurrence on the Front Range of Colorado. Fires, like the Fourmile Canyon Fire, occur about every two years, and are associated with high winds and low humidity.
- Boulder County’s emergency response system provides an excellent infrastructure for dealing with these types of emergencies and is credited with the safety of all emergency responders and residents in the area.
- Narrow-width fuel treatments were valued as safe routes for evacuating the fire area and as strategic sites for fire suppression activities; however, they were not effective in changing the behavior of the Fourmile Canyon Fire during the extreme burning conditions on September 6th.
- Of the 168 homes destroyed, 83 percent were ignited by surface fire. Reducing fuels around the “Home Ignition Zone” can decrease the risk of property loss during a wildfire.

“The study, while still in its draft form, offers some excellent considerations for how we work with landowners in Boulder County to better mitigate, respond to, suppress, and recover from wildland fires,” Boulder County Commissioner Ben Pearlman said. “The fire was devastating to our community, but this report will help us make sense of some of the contributing factors to the fire and provide information to focus our efforts in the future.”

“We have a shared responsibility to reduce wildfire risk,” said Glenn Casamassa, Acting Deputy Regional Forester, U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region. “The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and state and county land management agencies will continue to work with private landowners to address wildfire risk across ownership boundaries.”

“At this time, it is too early to speculate how this report will change our current management practices,” said Helen Hankins, Colorado Director, Bureau of Land Management. “However, I can say we take the findings of this report very seriously. We look forward to working with federal, state and local agencies, as well as local homeowners, to find ways to reduce the risk for these events in the future.”

Just days after the fire destroyed or damaged 168 homes, Sen. Udall requested that then Gov. Bill Ritter and U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack conduct a comprehensive assessment of the fire. Gov. Ritter appointed the Colorado State Forest Service as the lead state agency for the assessment in concert with the U.S. Forest Service. The U.S. Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station was chartered to produce an assessment that could be used to inform decision-makers, land management agencies, homeowners and other interested stakeholders about lessons learned from the fire.

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Media Contact Information

- The Fourmile Canyon Fire Preliminary Assessment is now available to the public on the US Forest Service, **Rocky Mountain Research Station** website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/rmrs/>
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