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Stimulus Funds Helping Local Communities

Lake George, CO, April 21, 2010—The Coalition for the Upper South Platte is helping area communities reduce their wildfire risk with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). In November 2009, the Coalition was awarded ARRA grant funds through the Colorado State Forest Service to develop and implement community wildfire protection plans in Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Park, and Teller counties.

Since that time, the organization has completed the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the North West Fire Protection District that encompasses the towns of Alma and Fairplay, reduced the amount of live and dead organic material available to fire on 35 acres and established a core team to review and prioritize potential fuels reduction projects in or around communities.

The core team, with representatives from each county and the Colorado State Forest Service, met April 14 to review first-round applications submitted by communities that have an approved Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Three applications, Happy Canyon in Douglas County, Elk Valley Estates in Teller County, and Colorado Springs Utilities' land in El Paso County, were selected. Implementation will begin by early summer.

In Douglas County, the 191 property owners of the Happy Canyon community will receive slash reduction assistance in the form of roadside chipping provided by CUSP. In addition, three to four home sites will serve as examples of defensible space/fuel mitigation so other residents have a better visual sense of what defensible space means.

CUSP will administer a 200-foot wide fuel break project along the ingress/egress road to Elk Valley Estates in Teller County. The fuel break will reduce the wildfire risk to the 21 homes in the Estates. The project will also help protect an important wildlife area where elk annually calve.

In El Paso County, Colorado Springs Utilities is preparing a 160 acre project to protect the Pikes Peak watershed which serves Colorado Springs, and the Manitou Springs water supply facilities. The project will also act as a fuel break on Ute Pass to potentially decrease the impacts of a wildfire to the communities of Cascade and Green Mountain Falls.

“We are coming up on the eighth anniversary of the Hayman fire, but our area is still at risk for other larger fires,” said Carol Ekarius, Executive Director of the Coalition. “These projects are the first of many to come that will help reduce that risk. We’ll continue to accept proposals from communities within Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Park and Teller counties with a Colorado State Forest Service approved CWPP.”

Proposals for the next review must be received by noon, June 29, 2010, to be considered for funding. For more information, contact Marti Campbell, CWPP Facilitator at the Coalition. Call 719-748-2225, or email her at marti@uppersouthplatte.org.

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