

2015 Wildland Fire Forum Presentations

Jefferson County Sheriff Jeff Schrader:

Sheriff Schrader introduced himself and his staff members Mark Gutke (Director Critical Incident Response), Captain Del Kleinschmidt (North and Mountain Precincts), **Clint Fey** (Director of Office of Emergency Management and West Metro Division Chief), and Travis Griffin (Jefferson County Fire Manager). The Sheriff's office acts as fire warden by state statute for unincorporated areas of the county. Jefferson County has an Incident Management Team with participants from sheriff and fire departments. This team is available for assistance with all kinds of emergencies in the county and the state. They can assist with the coordination of resources and capabilities. He encouraged people to volunteer for their community with the fire departments or as a reserve deputy with the sheriff's office.

Evergreen Fire Chief Mike Weege: (presentation "2015 State of Evergreen Fire Rescue")

Chief Weege reported that the National Weather Service has declared South Platte Basin is currently at 114% of snowpack and the moisture levels are good. The foothills are in a "No Drought" status at present. Evergreen Fire Rescue has 75 active firefighters at present. That is ahead of the trend for volunteering. Many departments are struggling to maintain an adequate number of firefighters. We have 14 students in our academy that will graduate soon. 2014 was a relatively quiet year with good rainfall. The down side of the rain is a higher fuel load. In previous forums we have talked about how the fire department operates, how we attack fire, and about some of the larger incidents we have had. This forum we want to concentrate on what resources are available to you to mitigate and to get your properties cleaned up. We can't do that for you. We need your help. We need you to get together as a group, as a neighborhood, as a subdivision and start getting rid of the downed timber that is in the forest. Rake away from your houses to give us the opportunity to get in there to do some good and try to save lives. Properties that aren't mitigated the reality is that we can't do it for you during a fire. We are going to look at it and make a decision if we can defend it or have to move on to where we can mount a defense.

We went on 11 forest or brush fires last year which is actually a big number when you think about how much it rained last summer. So there were still a lot of fires happening around. A lot of them happened in November. It got really dry in the early winter and in February. We like that we ran on a 145 smoke checks. We need the public calling 911 if something doesn't seem right. Our best chance to get ahead of a fire is to get at it quickly and while it's still small. We need you to call 911. The guys love to drive the trucks and come out there to check it out. If it's a hot day and maybe you think it's a chimney start up we'll come and check. We have to stay ahead of these fires. Travis will talk to you about slash collection and how that process has changed. Our Fire Marshall will talk to you about an initiative we have going that has carried over from Clear Creek County. And Kathleen Krebs for the Clear Creek OEM is here with a table in the other room. Clear Creek started a great program for Community Wildfire Protection and Implementation Plans based off of our community wildfire protection plan from 2007. This gets communities together to work on cleaning up their properties and neighborhoods, setting them up so the fire department can succeed if something happens. Our communications supervisor Christy McCormick is here to talk about Code Red and getting signed up.

A report comes out every year from a group called Core Logic. This is a company that does a study for residential properties. Their study this year is centered on 3 major metropolitan areas, Denver, Aurora, and Lakewood. (Refer to the slides in the presentation linked to the website "2015 State of Evergreen Fire Rescue".) They rated from good to very bad in terms of fire danger for individual homes and from 0-100 for neighborhoods. So if you have mitigated really well but your neighbor is really bad they consider that the embers from the neighbors' fire will blow into your house and property setting yours on fire too. The foothills are rated from 81-100 in this rating system. We are by no means out of the wildland urban interface from Hiwan to Brook Forest we are right in the middle of it. If you remember the Waldo Canyon fire that was Hiwan, fire jumped from house to house. That could easily happen here. Evergreen is at the top of the list for replacement value of properties at almost 3 billion dollars at risk. We really need the community to help us get this turned around and try to get the neighborhoods cleaned up.

I want to talk about what the fire department wants to see from your mitigation efforts. You'll have to speak to your insurance companies for their expectations because there is no standard. The insurance companies have set their own standards of what they would like to see but from the Colorado State Forest service getting together with CSU, and Firewise this is what we are looking for when we come in to triage those homes in front of a fire. Zone 1 the first 10 - 30 feet around your home you don't want to have anything flammable there. That is hard. Some people just put a rock bed around; keep your grass really low; don't have shrubs up against your house or small trees close to the house. If we go in there and you have a nice little garden we don't have time to cut or rip that out so we may have to move on to the next house. That first 10 - 30 feet is really important. Zone 2 is 30 – 100 feet. This is the area where you want to thin your trees out and limb them up. We want to keep fire on the ground. Keep the grasses low there so we can keep fire out of the trees. This is called ladder fuel and when they take over then we have a big problem. If the trees are too close together then the fire can go from treetop to treetop as a crown fire we can't do much other than get out of there and wait for the fire to get back down on the ground. Zone three is greater than 100 feet from the house. Some properties are big enough for this zone and the goal here is to be thinning the trees and reducing the slash piles on the ground or combining them in open areas, limb up the trees. Keep the fire on the ground. The ladder fuel photo (see presentation) shows a shrub during the Blue Bell fire where the flames were high enough to catch the tree on fire.

Situational awareness is important so please don't hesitate to call 911. We don't mind coming out to check. If you want us to come to your house to talk about it that is fine or if you want to remain anonymous we will still come to be sure there isn't something going on. Especially during weather situations where we have a lightning storm going on and there are hundreds of strikes we need you to pay attention to what is going on around your house or neighborhood. Those strikes can cause problems for us because they can smolder for days before they blow up into something bigger. Know your evacuation route. Have a secondary way out if your primary route is blocked. Law enforcement will help us make sure people are getting evacuated so they will direct you which way to go but it helps if you know ahead. If something doesn't seem right grab your stuff and start going. Don't question the reverse 911 calls. The system gets flooded with calls from people asking what's happening or if they have to go. Follow the directions, get out, and go somewhere you can watch the news. We need people moving earlier at that Level One phone call and not later when the roads are clogged.

Pay attention to burn bans and red flag days. These are posted on our website and the county sheriff sites. Red flag days are our worst days when we will man stations and have trucks driving around making sure there aren't any quick start ups. Fires are most often started by weather events or people. Somebody decides to have a campfire and it gets away from them because of high wind. Weather events can be high wind knocks down the power lines or puts trees into the power lines. Lightning strikes can start a fire that will burn along slow and low under the duff on the ground or creep along in the root system until it finds some oxygen for several weeks. If you smell smoke even a couple of weeks after a lightning strike call 911. Improper ash disposal is something we deal with a lot. People take their ashes and dump it in the back yard when they are cleaning out their fireplace. The next day high winds pick up, the ashes are still hot and we get a lot of house fires that start the way. Please put some water on it, stir it up, keep it in the garage for a day to let it cool down, dump it in the snow. We get so many small fires that start from that. We consider every structure fire as a wild land fire. On dry days any kind of structure that's burning can easily spread to the urban interface. We attack every structure fire thinking it can turn in to a big wild land fire. Resource sites you can use: our twitter feed [@efr_co](#) www.colorado.wildfirerisk.com and www.firewise.org

Christy McCormick, EFR Communications Supervisor:

Code Red is Clear Creek and Jefferson Counties reverse 911 system is called CodeRed. We strongly urge everyone to get registered. You can do this on the website for your county or you can link to this on our website. CodeRed is utilized by fire and law enforcement agencies to send you evacuation notices, missing children, and severe weather. You can register your home phone, cell phone, nanny or pet sitter phone to your specific address. You can register as many phones to one address as you need. When a reverse 911 call is

launched the communications center records the message and puts a radius for the notification into a mapping system. The calls are then initiated to all registered land and cell phones within that area. With today's technology CodeRed is able to send email and text message blasts to cell phones at a high rate of call volume reaching more people faster than land line calls.

Since its implementation we have used it several times in Evergreen. You can register your email, numerous phones. VoIP phones registered in CodeRed go to the address where your billing goes. Three years ago EFR 911 and JeffCo 65 Wildland Fire received 220 911 class within the first hour of an incident. Many of these were people providing us with good information but a lot were people asking questions about the sirens and smoke they were witnessing. Certainly pay attention to what is around you. As the Chief and Sheriff said we will send someone to check it out and keep us ahead of the game. But we also want to caution people that we can get inundated with calls. There are usually multiple emergencies at the same time. We have to filter those quickly to be sure we don't have multiple fires in different parts of Evergreen at the same time. Sometimes it sounds like we are just rushing you to get information in a short time frame and what we are really doing is filtering to check if it's the same information we are already working from or if it is new information that we need to get out to the responders. Media these days have better information now and our PIOs are responding quickly to the scene getting information to the incident commander and disseminating that information back to the media and the public. Check trusted websites for information, such as news agencies or the twitter feed for the fire department. Some sites may be questionable information or hearsay. If you need assistance with evacuation, call 911, this is an appropriate place to call for help getting someone out of a house when assistance is needed. If you have a separate emergency, call 911. We also ask that you call us when you have a camp fire. Often we have someone see a campfire a mile away and think it is a brand new fire and we send someone out to check. If you give us a call that you are having a campfire at a specific address then it is safer for our responders. Questions we may ask you when you call in a fire are what direction are you looking? What is visible? Are you seeing flames? Do you smell it also? What color is the smoke? These are questions that help us give our responders better information. How long have you been watching it? How big is it? How far away is it? Where are you? The reason we ask that is we may send a firefighter to where you are so they can put eyes on what you are seeing. Then we can calculate with our mapping system to pinpoint where that fire might be. We ask that you help us help the community.

Frank Dearborn, EFR Fire Marshal:

In 2007 we received a grant to study wildfire hazards in Evergreen and found 5 extreme and 21 high and four as moderate danger subdivisions. This helped us to develop the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). This study assessed homes, roads, evacuation routes, closeness to the forest and combustible roofs. Since then John Chapman has been working through Evergreen with several neighborhoods via grants and private donations to develop Wildfire Implementation Plans. He works with homeowners and their associations to develop a plan to make their subdivisions safer with mitigation and evacuation routes. He has two subdivisions he is working with currently. Evergreen Fire Rescue is paying him to provide his services to your homeowners associations to help you out. (His contact information is provided in "Fire Prevention Presentation 2015" attached to this website.)

Slash collection in Clear Creek County from April through September for Clear Creek County residents is free. Jefferson County has contracted with Bret Roller to provide mobile slash collection at locations in Jefferson County. They hope to set up 20-30 sites starting the end of May. There is a fee to drop off your slash to be ground up. The dates and locations for Jefferson County will be posted as soon as they are finalized on EFR and JeffCo's websites. Mr. Roller will work with home owners associations and neighbors to find a location and date for them. He can be contacted at bretroller@aol.com or 303.589.4698.

Burn Permits are authorized in Jefferson and Clear Creek County. The procedure and applications are posted on www.evergreenfirerescue.com/safety/fire-prevention. You can burn through the end of March. The applications are county specific and the permits from the health departments are issued dependent on which county the permit is for. The Clear Creek permit is free. The Jefferson County permit costs \$80 and involves an on-site inspection by the Health department.

Residential properties for our communications and our volunteers need your address posted where it is visible. The address should be posted where we can reply quickly. If you have a shared driveway you should have your address posted. We have mutual aid partners that come in to help us if we have multiple emergency calls at the same time and they won't be familiar with our streets. If your address engraved on a sign attached to a rock and is covered with snow we can't see it. If you have a gate make sure we have the code. Seconds count especially on a medical call so if we need through a gate we will take it down if we don't have the code. Make sure your driveway is wide enough for emergency vehicles. Our vehicles are 8'6" wide and county standards require the driveway be 10 feet wide minimum with a two foot shoulder on each side. We ask that you give us 14 feet of clear width to go up your driveway. Are there trees hanging over your driveway? Our trucks are 11'6" tall so we ask that you give us 14 feet of overhead clearance to go through. Trees can damage the roof and light bars on top of the fire trucks. Arches over your driveway have to be cut down if they are too short for our truck to go under. Do you have a bridge to your property? There are some bridges that cannot take the weight of our trucks fully loaded with water and equipment. If you have a question about the capacity of your bridge contact the Fire Marshal for him to come out to talk to you. Bridges that were washed out by the flood in 2013 were replaced with a gross vehicle weight of 80,000 pounds load design. Help us out by making sure we have access to your property for all of the emergency vehicles.

Evergreen Fire Rescue does not do mitigation inspections around your home. There are people who are certified to do this. In Clear Creek County, Trent Hyatt (303-679-2421) will conduct a free mitigation inspection for property owners. In Jefferson County if you are building a new home or adding more than 400 square feet as an addition you are required to obtain a defensible space inspection. They maintain a list of names on the Jefferson County website for companies that are certified to perform the inspections. The list is also available at <http://evergreenfirerescue.com/safety/fire-prevention/> in the document titled "Defensible Space Inspections". Most insurance companies that require a defensible space letter for your homeowners insurance will accept a letter from these companies. They mark the trees for you that need to be removed and then you hire someone to do the tree removal for you or do it yourself. Check with your insurance company before you have any work done to make sure they will accept a letter from the company doing the work and make sure the mitigation company is certified.

Travis Griffin, Jefferson County Sheriff's Fire Management Officer:

Travis is honored to work with Evergreen and law enforcement and to host a fuels management program. A man of many bandanas, Scott Halliday is the field crew supervisor and an integral part of large animal evacuations such as horses through HEAT. He is a valuable resource. The Sheriff's office used to host 7 slash collection weekends. As costs increased this was scaled down to three weekends with a company providing grinding and hauling the slash out. There are some other processes in place and now there will be more slash collection again. Mark Danner is heading this up and working with Bret Roller on the contract to provide more collection dates and sites and those will be released soon. Mark can be reached at mdanner@jeffco.us or 303-271-5008 for more information.

www.jeffco.us/public-information/news/2015/slash-collection-program-expanding-in-2015

The fire manager program is a multifaceted fully integrated fire program with suppression, and planning like the CWPP, the core team is looking at the county level plans for fire, the fire district level plans, and the community wildfire implementation plans which are very community specific. John Chapman is working on these to focus your planning efforts into that shovel ready project that you guys are saying here is our number one priority, we want to do a fuel break or a phased defensible space along this side of the road or so on. John is very integral in getting that collaboration going on the community level for when you guys are at that point and ready to get those trees out of there and remove the fuels or do the prescriptions that are necessary to keep the fire behavior intensities and severities down to a manageable level for the fire departments responding or law enforcement evacuating to keep that scene suppressed to a level that is manageable.

Sometimes, I won't beat around the bush, the weather and fuel conditions like in 2012, 1996, and 2002 those fire weather conditions can be so extreme that it becomes a matter of life safety and there will be

no person that can stop that fire. Basically what we are trying to get you to understand is that all of these things help but in a true wildfire scenario where the condition is so extreme we need to go to a defensive strategy. Keep it in mind that those are the 97th percentile conditions. The majority of what you are trying to accomplish here is super beneficial for the majority of the wildfire scenarios and situations. Generally when you are getting to the point of coming together Scott and I are available to come out and talk at your community or HOA meetings. We don't do individual home site visits. As you saw from Chief Weege's presentation and the Core Logic map there are way too many homeowners out there and the insurance companies have caught on to the community wildfire protection plans. There are a lot of challenges that you face as homeowners and we don't have the resources to do individual site visits and assessments. But when you have that collaborative bigger approach with projects that are effective on a larger scale wildfire that is where I will be trying to provide you guys with technical assistance and give you the different options for grabbing some of the grant money that is available out there, walking you through the processes of reimbursement because a lot of those grants are reimbursable dollars.

So as you guys are coming together maybe work on a fund because the work has to get done before you can seek reimbursement. It can be tricky for community groups so that is where the fuels program has been pretty successful because we're paid for by taxes as sheriff's office employees. We can get some good solid projects going with you guys that match up extreme risk community and operable good access areas and everybody is on board it's a slam dunk, that will get our attention and we will work with you to make sure that project gets going. There is a mountain literally of work out there to get done for your communities. There is so much work to go around and we are just one resource for you to go after, there is also the private sector, and lot of other options for you to get the work done yourselves. I applaud those of you who are chipping, dragging and doing it all that effort yourselves so continue it.

There are other programs that we are part of that fall into this. Prescribed fire is one of them and is a politically sensitive program. However, we are in an ecosystem that has seen fire exclusion for a long time. To properly utilize prescribed fire as a management tool is vital in the success of life safety and that is just a fact. There are baby steps that we have to get through in order to get those prescribed fire programs corralled on a very streamlined effort. They are being prioritized on a regional scale up and down the front-range. A lot of efforts are going on. Boulder County was successful in doing a prescribed burn on open space. One of the things that I am working towards is working with Denver Mountain Parks very heavily on their lands. There might be a handful of you guys that live adjacent to Denver Mountain Parks and a lot of those lands are very overgrown and neglected and are outside of their fire regime condition classes. Basically it's ripe for a large fire. They need substantial entry and removal of biomass. With that a lot of our efforts have been to go in there and focus on those areas adjacent to the communities where aviation resources, dozers, hand crews and specialized fire equipment can be more effective. We try to bring all of this together to keep costs down, to keep fires from being very damaging and destructive. Life safety first, property conservation is our second objective and then stabilizing the incident is third. What we have heard here tonight is all fires start small so if we can do incident stabilization right off the get go then we are ahead of the curve and those other two fall out of the picture. We are available and want to give you guys the best current researched based information that is available that will give you guys the tools to be successful. Then get you guys the money rolling in to get the work done and continue the grant process because we saw on the maps the target is there. We are at the epicenter of the wildland urban interface. It's not a hard sell to see the needs within the community. It's all of us. It's a giant effort. Who has lived here since the Hayman Fire? Who has met the defensible space requirements for their property? Who thinks it's never ending?

Doug Saba, EFR Fire and Life Safety Educator:

EFR has a new webpage www.efr411.com which will redirect you to our website where you can read the presentations from tonight. You can also visit our tweeter feed which we use to keep you up to date on what is happening with a fire or an evacuation. It's wonderful to have so many people here interested in mitigation. The Ready Set Go program has been adopted by the fire chiefs in Colorado. You can look at this for a checklist of things you can do to your property to develop an action plan, things to do to get ready to leave

your house and what to take with you when you evacuate. Defensible space shows the zones around your home. The State Forest Service has adopted FireWise which is updated every few years for information to help you decide what to do with your property in preparing for a fire. Find out what your insurance company will accept before you start cutting down trees or mitigating. What is the radius of trees around the house and the density or separation of the trees from each other? As the chief said, you don't want to have fire jumping from tree to tree and right to the top of your house. There are some displays in the other room from the Forest Service of a house that was and wasn't properly mitigated. There used to be tax benefits if you mitigated your property.

Mitigating is important but equally important is getting yourself ready to evacuate. We talk with the kids at schools and with the HOA's about having a bag packed and ready to go by the door. It's a pretty simple thing but very important when you have to leave in a hurry. In Florida they keep a bag by the door because you know a hurricane is going to hit eventually. Evergreen wild fire is going to hit eventually. We don't have flooding very often, same thing we prepare for that as well. We just did an emergency evacuation drill at the Outdoor Lab School with the kids. It went really well. We simulated a fire in the forest. It was really good for us to work with Clear Creek County Sheriff and with JeffCo schools. We are all working together. All the mountain area fire department chiefs are talking and that wasn't happening 10 years ago. We are working together with the Sheriff's department. We sit down and talk about scenarios so we are able to work together on incidents and communicate better. This is my 28th year in the fire service and I have not seen chiefs talk to each other like this. We are working on automatic aid and mutual aid with the fire departments around us. This didn't happen in the past but it's happening now.

Fill out your personal wildfire action plan. Think about the things you need in that to go bag and who you need to notify. When I was down at the Waldo Canyon joint information center I got calls from New York from people trying to locate their family members. Share your plan with your family members. If there is that large of a fire and you are evacuated then check in with the Red Cross at the evacuation location so your name is on the list or online and your family can find you. Visit the other room tonight so you can pick up additional information to help you and there are a few insurance companies and OEM from the counties to answer your questions.

Questions from the audience:

1. What is the hottest burning and most dangerous ladder fuel?

Doug and Stacey: Junipers are little fuel cans, they get big and they go up fast.

Travis: Juniper trees but the fine fuels like grasses are going to burn the fastest. On the hot dry windy days those are the things that carry the fire and then when it gets up into the crowns then basically you have 40-60 foot tall torches.

2. Define the level 1, 2, and 3 evacuation calls?

Chief Weege: Level one is a notification that there is an incident in your area and we want you to consider that as the notice to start getting ready to get out. Level 2 is get out. Pack up your car and go. Level 3 is get out immediately because the fire is coming quickly. All 3 are important. If you get a level one notice and it tells you the location of the fire and its somewhere near where you live don't wait for the level 2 or 3 call. Pack up and start driving out. If everyone waits until level 2 or 3 to go out then we have traffic problems. Getting an early start will help the sheriff's office with the traffic problems and keeping the traffic moving. Take the level one seriously and get your things together and be ready to get out. If in doubt or concerned go ahead and leave on a level one call.