# COLORADO WILDFIRE PLANNING AND RECOVERY PLAYBOOK

## GUIDANCE FOR COUNTIES, TRIBES, MUNICIPALITIES, AND WATER PROVIDERS

MAY 2025

# HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

**This actionable Playbook identifies critical and specific steps to take before, during, and immediately following a wildfire to facilitate the recovery process.** No single federal, state or local agency has the sole responsibility to complete wildfire planning and recovery actions across all lands. The most robust efforts involve collaboration with multiple entities, including non-governmental partners. **Counties, tribes, municipalities, and drinking water providers should review this Playbook before a wildfire** to ensure connections and partnerships have been established and pre-fire steps have been completed.

## ACRONYMS USED IN THIS PLAYBOOK

**BAER** - Burned Area Emergency Response

**BIA** - Bureau of Indian Affairs

**BLM** - Bureau of Land Management

**CDOT** - Colorado Department of Transportation

**CDPHE** - Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

**CSFS** - Colorado State Forest Service

**CWCB** - Colorado Water Conservation Board

**DHSEM** - Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

**DOLA** - Department of Local Affairs

**FEMA** - Federal Emergency Management Agency

**LRG** - Local Recovery Group

**NRCS** - Natural Resources Conservation Service

**NWS** - National Weather Service

**OEM** - Office of Emergency Management

**RRG** - Regional Recovery Group

**USDA** - U.S. Department of Agriculture

**USFS** - U.S. Forest Service

# 1    PRE-FIRE ACTIONS

## 1.1  Form your Local Recovery Group and identify partner contact details

**Before the wildfire, identify your entity's point(s) of contact and fill in your partner contact information in the tables on the following two pages.** As a county, tribe, municipality or drinking water provider, you will be a key member of a Local Recovery Group (LRG). LRGs allow for early and often information and resource sharing, collaboration, and feeding of information to the Regional Recovery Group (RRG) comprised of representatives from state and federal partners (**Figure 1**). The RRGs share resources and technical information during wildfire response and recovery and their efforts are informed by the LRG. A summary of roles and responsibilities during and after a wildfire is provided in Appendix A.

**Figure 1. Figure depicting the primary entities involved in Local and Regional Recovery Groups.**
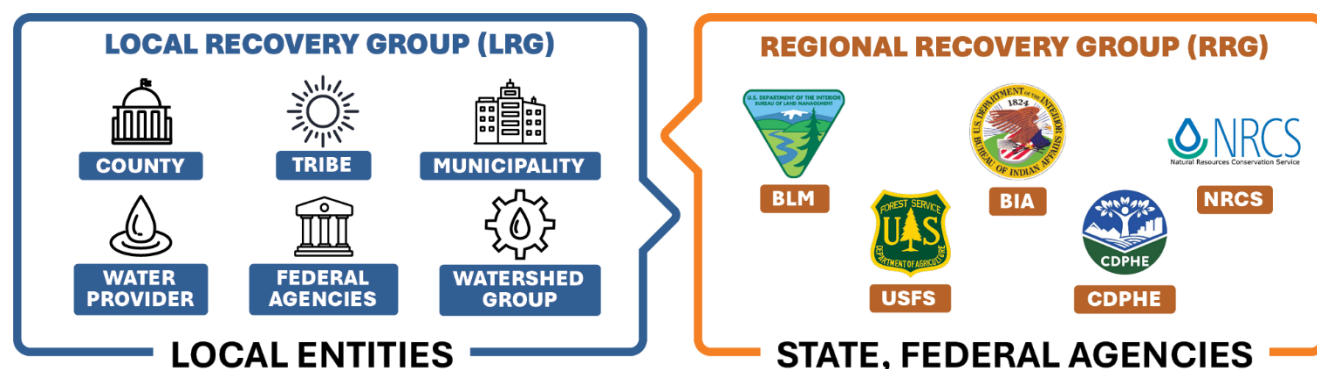
## Critical Contacts – Fill in Details

Each of these contacts below will play a role before, during and after wildfires. Reach out to these contacts before a wildfire to establish a relationship and implement pre-fire projects to protect values at risk and facilitate recovery and response. Blue hyperlinks direct users to contact information. Provide these filled-in tables to your local Office of Emergency Management (OEM) contact to facilitate and expedite LRG and RRG coordination.

⌖ = owner of land and/or infrastructure; ⓘ = shares information and/or resources; ⚙ = coordination role.

| LRG Representative | Role | Fill In Contact Information/Details |
|---|---|---|
| Your entity's post-fire point-of-contact | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| **County or Tribal Contact** | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| Municipality Contact(s) | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| **Watershed Group or Equivalent Contact** | ⓘ, ⚙ | |
| **Water Provider Contact(s)** | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| **Local OEM Contact** | ⚙ | |
| **Electrical Utility Contact** | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| **National Weather Service (NWS) Warning Coordination Meteorologist or Hydrologist** | ⓘ | |
| **Conservation District Contact** | ⚙ | |
| **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Service Center** | ⓘ | |
| **U.S. Forest Service (USFS) District Ranger** | ⌖, ⓘ | |
| **Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) Contact** | ⌖, ⓘ, ⚙ | |
| Local (County/Tribe) Transportation Contact | ⌖ | |

⌖ = owner of land and/or infrastructure; ⓘ = shares information and/or resources; ⚖ = coordination role.

| RRG Representative | Role | Fill In Contact Information/Details |
|---|---|---|
| **USFS Forest Supervisor** | ⌖, ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| USFS Region 2 BAER Coordinator (303-275-5350) | ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **USDA NRCS District Conservationist** | ⓘ | |
| **USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Coordinator** | ⓘ | |
| **USDA State Conservationist** | ⓘ | |
| **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Contact** | ⌖, ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **Bureau of Land Management (BLM) District Office Contact** | ⌖, ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Colorado Watershed Program Director** | ⓘ | |
| **Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) State Recovery Officer** | ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **DHSEM District Field Manager** | ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **DHSEM Regional Mitigation Specialist** | ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Source Water Contact** | ⓘ, ⚖ | |
| **Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Regional Manager and Regional Assistant** | ⓘ | |
| **Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Contact** | ⌖ | |

## 1.2  Identify your values at risk

**Advanced planning with your LRG and RRG partners is essential to mitigating impacts to your community and values at risk (Figure 2).** Wildfires, post-fire erosion, debris flows, and flooding can all damage infrastructure and limit your ability to maintain critical functions, such as providing clean drinking water or electricity. Prioritize working with your local OEM, CDPHE, and CWCB contacts (Section 1.1) to identify your values-at risk, prepare evacuation and access routes, and identify pre-fire projects. These efforts can be streamlined via a Wildfire Ready Action Plan, which provides a template scope of work for identifying goals, conducting stakeholder outreach, collecting data, performing post-fire hazard analyses, and identifying pre- and post-fire mitigation activities.

**Figure 2. Examples of values and critical infrastructure at risk from fire and post-fire erosion.**



| HOMES, SCHOOLS, BUSINESSES | WATER, SEWER, ELECTRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE | ROADS, ACCESS POINTS | NATURAL, CULTURAL RESOURCES |
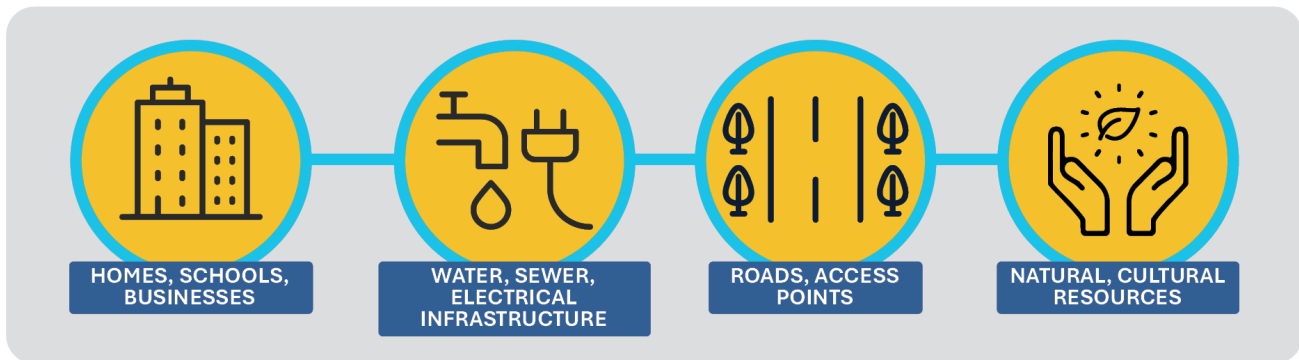
## 1.3  Prioritize and implement pre-fire projects

**Take action by implementing projects before a fire to build resilience in your infrastructure and services.** Partner with your LRG and RRG contacts to identify and implement pre-fire projects to protect your values at risk (Section 1.2). These projects will also be identified in a Wildfire Ready Action Plan, if one has been completed for your area of interest. Some opportunities to fund pre-fire work are identified in Appendix B. Projects may include tree removal in target areas, upgrading undersized culverts, purchasing personal protective gear to protect workers against hazards, installing back up power generators at water and wastewater treatment plants, developing a plan to isolate sections of your drinking water distribution system, implementing an early flood warning system, and rehabilitating streams and riparian corridors to withstand higher post-fire flow conditions. Resilient systems can resist, absorb, and recover from wildfire impacts. Refer to the Colorado Forest Resilience Planning Guide to establish a holistic approach to collaborating and building the necessary partnerships to protect values at risk.

## 1.4  Confirm flood insurance eligibility

**Ensure your community is eligible for flood insurance, to better recover from higher post-fire stream flows and runoff.** Flood insurance is available to anyone living in a participating National Flood Insurance Program community. Confirm that your entity 1) has a Floodplain Manager, and 2) has completed the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map. Without Flood Insurance Rate mapping, municipalities are not eligible for flood insurance. To search by a specific address, visit the FEMA Flood Map Service Center.

# 2   DURING THE FIRE

## 2.1   Engage in fire-related updates and the local emergency warning system

**Staying up-to-date on the fire status will allow you to effectively communicate your concerns to the LRG and RRG during the event.** [Watch Duty](), [National Interagency Fire Center](), and [InciWeb]() provide information on wildfire perimeters, containment, weather and fire behavior, evacuations, and road or area closures. Contact [Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control](), your USFS District Ranger, and/or BLM Field Office Manager to join the daily Incident Management Team or Cooperator meetings. A key person on the Incident Management Team to coordinate with is the Liaison Officer, who is the point of contact for LRG and RRG representatives.

Drinking water providers should also coordinate with CDPHE's acute drinking water team (in addition to the Incident Management Team). Urban or suburban wildfires can mean high water use to support firefighting activities, ongoing water loss when structures burn, and the need for safe drinking water while avoiding system contamination and depressurization (see lessons from the [Marshall Fire]()).

## 2.2   Engage in the watershed assessment efforts

**Engage with RRG contacts to ensure values at risk and other local information is considered during the watershed assessment process.** Post-fire watershed assessments evaluate conditions to predict erosion, flooding, and debris flow risk and document findings and recommendations for lands within their responsibility. Assessments are typically conducted through the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) process. Depending on safety, assessments are usually completed prior to the fire being contained or declared out.

Representatives from the LRG should reach out to the RRG contacts ([Section 1.1]()) to coordinate assessment needs, share specific local information on values at risk ([Section 1.2]()), and share assessment findings. In cases where the fire perimeter covers mostly state-owned land, tribal land, and/or private property, the LRG may need to initiate forming a BAER team – see example at Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network for how this has been done with a federal disaster declaration. Other state led examples include the [California Watershed Emergency Response teams]() and [Washington State Wildfire-Associated Landslide Emergency Response Team]().

## 2.3   Engage with the National Weather Service to inform flood warnings

**Increase your awareness of local weather alerts that may affect your values at risk and to inform public communication about flash floods.** NWS hydrologists work with assessment teams to determine areas prone to burn scar runoff, and use this data to set rainfall rate thresholds for use in issuing flash flood warnings. NWS communicates the thresholds to OEM and to the public. Reach out to your local OEM staff and local NWS hydrologist ([Section 1.1]()) to coordinate on public messaging and warning systems for weather events. Discuss communication methods for areas with limited cellular and internet coverage.

## 2.4   If warranted, declare a Federal Disaster

If local and state resources are overwhelmed, consider the options for pursuing a [local disaster, a state or tribal disaster, or a federal (Presidential) disaster]() to open up funding opportunities, such as the Disaster Relief Fund. Any declaration must be performed in partnership with the county, tribe, municipality, and OEM, at a minimum.

# 3    INITIAL RECOVERY - FIRST 30 DAYS AFTER FIRE

## 3.1    Request the BAER report and burn severity map

**Review post-fire assessment maps and reports to estimate immediate and long-term impacts to your values at risk.** If not automatically provided to the LRG, request the federal BAER team's technical report, any applicable specialist reports, the soil burn severity map, and **debris flow hazard map** (example shown in **Figure 3**). The technical report specifies which actions should be taken immediately to protect life, safety and other values at risk on federal lands. BAER documents and maps, as well as U.S. Geological Survey's debris flow hazard map (which includes federal and non-federal lands), can be used to help inform risks on non-federal lands. Staff from the agencies can assist with map interpretation. As a member of the LRG, use this information, combined with your pre-fire efforts (**Sections 1.2** and **1.3**) to prioritize projects for emergency implementation.

**Figure 3. Example USGS post-wildfire debris flow hazard map.**
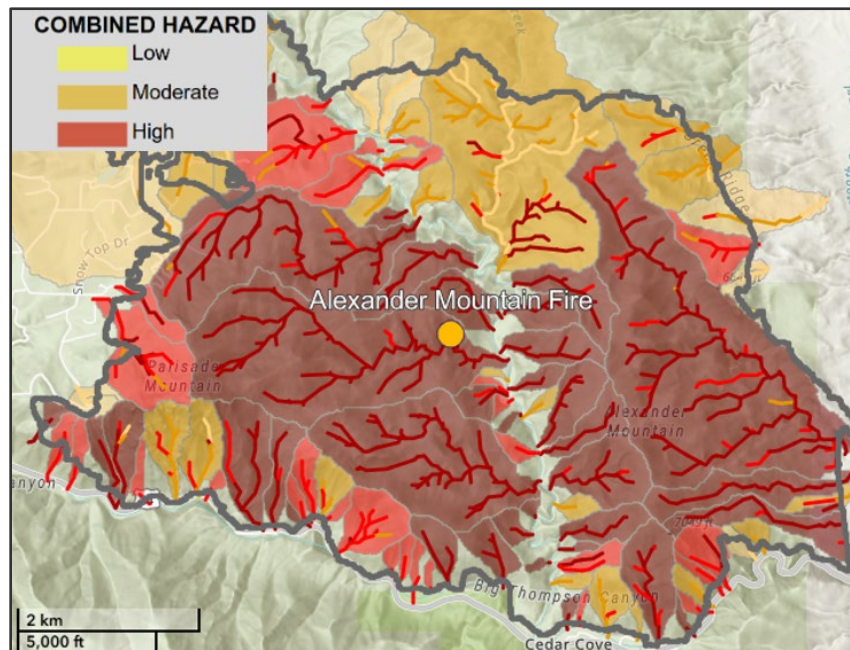


Darker red areas indicate higher post-fire debris flow potential. Projects should be prioritized within or downstream from these red areas to protect values at risk. Source: modified from **USGS' Post-Fire Debris Flow Hazard Assessment Dashboard**.

## 3.2    Request technical and funding assistance

**Post-fire rehabilitation projects are costly, but funding opportunities are available and should be sought in coordination with the LRG.** Appendix B identifies key funding sources and applicable timelines for applying. Coordinating with governmental and non-governmental entities in the LRG may increase your likelihood of securing funding, as each opportunity may have limitations in terms of who is eligible to apply, and grant opportunities often require cash or in-kind matching. At a minimum, contact the CWCB, DOLA, NRCS, and CDPHE for funding and support (see contacts in **Section 1.1**).

## 3.3    Begin recovery efforts

Key partners are identified in **Section 1.1**, but most critically include a local community organizer group, local OEM, DHSEM, and CWCB. Together these entities can engage the community in recovery efforts, secure technical expertise, implement post-fire hillslope stabilization projects, procure funding, and conduct water quality monitoring. To perform assessments and implement work on private property, you will need landowner permission (see this online example agreement form). During the wildfire and after, efforts are prioritized around protecting life and safety.

**Post fire recovery is a multiyear effort. Resources to support recovery are provided below.**

# APPENDIX A – KEY PHASES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This Appendix provides a generalized overview of key landowners/ partners and their roles through different phases of a wildfire. Note that not all entities are involved in every wildfire, and actual responsibilities and actions may vary.

**PRE-FIRE**

Fill out your critical contacts list (**Section 1.1**)

Start forming relationships with members of the LRG

Identify and prioritize your values at risk

Prioritize and implement pre-fire projects

Confirm flood insurance eligibility

**DURING THE FIRE - MONTH 1**

LRG and RRG begin coordinating, focusing on life and safety protection as priorities

BAER assessments, mapping (USFS or DOI if overlapping federal land)

NRCS damage assessments, damage survey report

CWCB stakeholder coordination, hazard modeling and susceptibility analysis, project identification

CDPHE technical assistance and coordination for drinking water providers

DOLA provides support for LRG

CSFS conducts technical assessment of tree survival, reforestation needs, timber salvage

**EMERGENCY STABILIZATION - YEAR 1**

LRG representatives coordinate with RRG, serve as sponsors for funding sources, partner with RRG to implement projects

USFS or DOI implements BAER projects on federal land

NRCS assists the Emergency Watershed Protection program sponsor in implementing projects

CWCB assists with project engineering, design, and implementation

CDPHE assists drinking water providers in recovery efforts

DOLA supports LRG through recovery efforts

CSFS supplies trees and shrubs (for a fee) and provides technical assistance for hazard tree removal and mitigation techniques

**RECOVERY - YEAR 2+**

LRG and RRG contacts continue project identification, prioritization and implementation to protect values at risk **Post Wildfire Recovery Programs**

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Arkansas River Watershed Coalition** – Wildfire recovery resources for landowners.

**BAER Resources** – Access an interactive viewer and download burn severity data for the fire of interest.

**Coalitions and Collaboratives** – Links to **After the Flames** toolkit and additional wildfire-related resources.

**Colorado Flood Threat Bulletin** - Flood threat with wildfire-specific products.

**Colorado Forest Resilience Planning Guide** – a guide to collaborating and partnering to protect values at risk.

**CSFS Colorado Forest Atlas** – An interactive mapping tool providing information about Colorado's forests.

**Energy Release Component** – Helps to inform burn severity potential.

**NASA Recovery Program** – Open-source burn data, particularly for large fires not on federal land.

**National Interagency Fire Center** – Geospatial data on wildfires and related information.

**Urban Fire Recovery** – Lessons learned and recommendations from the Marshall Fire.

**Watch Duty** – Mobile application that provides information on real-time wildfire and firefighting efforts.

**Wildfire Ready Watersheds** - Resource for an action plan, technical guidance, and hazard mitigation information.

**Wildfire Watershed Protection Group** – Connect with others in Colorado aimed at promoting watershed health.

# APPENDIX B – FUNDING SOURCES

Primary funding options are highlighted below. Also contact your county government for additional opportunities.



## Pre-Fire Planning Project Funding

- **CWCB Colorado Water Plan Grants, Watershed Category** – Funding to develop a Wildfire Ready Action Plan and implement identified projects to mitigate post-wildfire hazards.
- **CDPHE Source Water Protection grant** – Water providers can work with CDPHE to develop a Source Water Protection Plan, identify projects, and receive up to $10,000 in grants for project implementation.
- **DNR's Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program** – Assistance in the way of crew time (no match required) or financial assistance (25% match; Tribal entities exempt from match requirements).
- **CSFS Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grant** – Financial assistance for implementing projects that reduce the risk of wildfire to people, property, and infrastructure. 25-50% match required.

## During/After a Wildfire Rehabilitation Funding

- **USDA-NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program** – Funding for immediate, emergency use. **Within 60 days of the fire**, request assistance via letter to the State Conservationist. Sponsor pays 100% upfront costs; reimbursement up to 75%. Contact the **Program Manager** to guide you through the process.
- **Colorado Department of Local Affairs** – Technical and financial assistance may be available from DOLA. Reach out to your DOLA Regional Manager to assess options.
- **CWCB Water Supply Reserve Fund grants** – Grant funding available for water activities including permitting, feasibility studies, design of structural projects, infrastructure replacement, etc. Rolling application process.
- **Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund** – Partner with a local community-based organization to apply. Funding for project planning and/or implementation (up to $20,000 each) to restore or protect water, lands, and natural resources.
- **USDA Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant** – Rural communities, tribes, and some nonprofit organizations are eligible for funding to assist communities in preparing for or recovering from an emergency that threatens the availability of safe and reliable drinking water.

## Disaster Declaration Funding

The following funding options are available only following a tribal, state, or federal disaster declaration.

- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant** – Tribes and states may apply; private nonprofit organizations may act as sub-applicants. Applicants must have a FEMA-approved mitigation plan. Select "Fire Management Assistance" as the declaration type on the **Disaster Declarations webpage**.
- **FEMA Public Assistance Program** – Funding for government and private nonprofit entities to allow communities to quickly respond to and recover from disasters and emergencies.
- **FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grant** – Assistance during the fire. A cost-share grant program whereby FEMA aids in reimbursement for equipment, supplies, and personnel to any tribal, state, or local government for wildfire mitigation, management and control of fires.
- **Community Development Block Grant** – Funding for wildfire recovery, via DOLA and the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

# AUTHORS AND PLAYBOOK DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers from more than a dozen municipalities, state and federal agencies, water providers, watershed organizations, and consultants from across the state set out to develop this Playbook in 2019, updated in 2021, and again in 2025. The Playbook is designed to achieve the following:

**Target audience**
Counties, tribes, municipalities, and water providers.

**Useable**
Provide an easy-to-use worksheet that allows users to identify specific contacts and understand roles and responsibilities and primary funding sources.

**Concise**
Communicate only the critical steps to take before and during a fire to facilitate recovery.

**Accessible**
A combination of text and infographics.

The authors bring a variety of perspectives to the table – ranging from entities that have experienced wildfire first-hand, to watershed groups and consulting companies that have assisted communities secure funding and implement post-fire projects, to federal and state agencies leading BAER teams, to municipalities seeking guidance to plan for a wildfire. The group frequently sought outside input to ensure Playbook accuracy and completeness. This Playbook is not formally endorsed by any agency or authority and does not reflect official recommendations or policy of the agencies and organizations whose staff participated in the Playbook development. The Playbook is available online at **After the Flames** and **CDPHE**'s websites. Please contact **Kate Dunlap** with questions. While feedback and input were solicited from dozens of entities, primary Playbook contributors are listed below:

- **Kate Dunlap**, City of Boulder
- Stephanie Crabtree, City of Golden
- Matt Ashley, Aurora Water
- Theresa Springer, Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc
- Jonathan Bruno, Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc
- **John Duggan**, CDPHE
- **Robert Murphy**, CDPHE
- Kristen Hughes, CDPHE
- Weston Toll, CSFS

- Eric Howell, Colorado Springs Utilities
- **Chris Sturm**, CWCB
- Madelene McDonald, Denver Water
- **Vicky Amato**, SWCA
- Brad Piehl, JW Associates
- Eric Schroder, USFS
- Cara Sponaugle, USFS
- Thomas Timberlake, USFS