

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story Update Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development and Implementation Grant

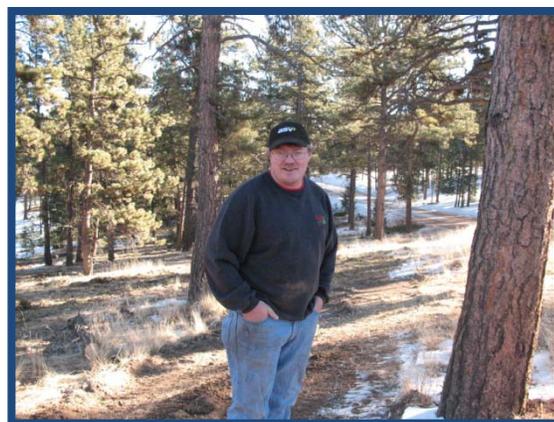


The Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) has taken giant leaps forward in their efforts to protect the Upper South Platte watershed from the potential impacts of wildfire and they haven't looked back since receiving American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in October 2009. The sub-grant allowed the non-profit organization to build capacity and work on a larger scale by partially or fully funding 15 employees. In addition, project size and total number of treated acres increased. CUSP also expanded its reach from Park and Teller counties into El Paso, Douglas and Jefferson counties.

Increased capacity also came in the form of contractors. On the ground, CUSP utilized the services of K&K Tree Services, located in Divide, Colo. Owner Korey Weaver, who employs three people, has been in business 20 years and has a good reputation in Teller County. There was no contractor bid process when Weaver implemented a CWPP project in the Elk Valley subdivision, because the subdivision wanted to work with Weaver. When The Nature Place, a national environmental study center, designed a fuels reduction project in 2010, a visual buffer was planned along the road so visitors would not see the forest management work being done. It took no time for The Nature Place director to realize the project area looked better than the buffer, so the project was extended out to the road, which increased project effectiveness.

In Douglas County, Josh Graves, co-owner of Twisted Timber, cleared oak brush in the Happy Canyon subdivision. The small masticator whirled like the brush on an upright vacuum cleaner, grinding the wood with carbide teeth. Rampart Tree and Arbor Service followed behind Graves with chainsaws when needed. Most landowners started the conversation with Graves by instructing him to do no more than the grant required. Once he made a few passes, the owners flagged him down to ask if the project area could be increased. One landowner shared his concern about losing privacy, but the openings made the property feel much larger. "I'm very excited," he said.

In April 2011, Colorado Springs-based Anderson Tree and Stump Removal, LLC, began a fire mitigation project in the Woodrock subdivision south of Divide; the project involved 16 landowners. Kyle Anderson, owner of Anderson Tree and Stump Removal, had a five-person crew. Crewmembers have varied backgrounds, but they all enjoy working outdoors. Trees were cut by hand, and wood not slated for other uses was fed into the remote-controlled chipper. Anderson's crew also worked on an El Paso County Sheriff's Office ARRA-funded fuels mitigation project.



In Jefferson County, the Sheriff's Office fuels crew thinned trees on Sampson Road, a private, dead-end road with adjoining auxiliary roads that now provides residents a safer evacuation route. With no road easement, all work required individual landowner approval. For over a year, the three full-time and two part-time crewmembers worked with chainsaws, a masticator and a chipper.



Scott Halladay, fuels crew foreman, has been on the crew since its initiation in July 2007. It doesn't take long to realize this is work he cares about, and he clearly wants the community to be successful in its efforts to reduce the risks associated with wildfire. Next in seniority is Michael Thayer. He was in the print industry for 18 years, but discovered he liked outdoor work when he volunteered to help rehab a forest trail. "I'm actually making a visible difference; what we do doesn't eventually end up in a recycle bin because it's old news."

Many residents and charities will use the cut trees as firewood. The resident who leads the fire protection cause realizes there is much more to do, and that the tasks will need to be prioritized, but for now, she is excited to see the crew's accomplishments.

In addition to the work accomplished in the field, ARRA funds were used to create two Jefferson Conservation District positions. Robin Keith, community wildfire protection forester, and Scot Fitzgerald, GIS specialist, were hired in March 2010 to produce a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the North Fork Fire Protection District. They also updated plans for the Elk Creek and Golden Gate fire protection districts, and prepared a Jefferson County CWPP to address fire hazard areas within the unincorporated portion of the county.



Landowner input is an important component of CWPPs and, as Keith commented, often is the most difficult aspect of the planning process.

"Getting citizen involvement is the biggest challenge, but once those connections are established, the challenge transforms into rewards," Keith said. She is proud of her accomplishments and said, "My greatest hope is that I have developed documents that provide information residents can easily use and put into action right away, whether on their own property or in their neighborhood."

By the end of August 2011, CUSP had played a role in the creation or update of 13 Community Wildfire Protection Plans. As a result of the ARRA funds, the CUSP crew and contractors completed implementation on 591 acres of CWPP projects. An additional 1,246 acres also were indirectly achieved as a result of the sub-grant.

