

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Implementation Grant



The railroad and tourism gave the Town of Winter Park its start in Grand County. A small community formed when the Moffat Tunnel was built in the 1920s. Ten years later, in what is now the heart of Winter Park, tourist cabins were rented to adventurers. Today, the eight square-mile town, with an estimated permanent population of more than 800 people, still offers tourists and residents alike year-round recreation – and freight and passenger trains still roll through town daily.

In 2007, a Community Wildfire Protection Plan was developed for the Upper Fraser Valley to identify areas with heavy concentrations of vegetation, live or dead, that would put homes and public infrastructure in jeopardy during a wildfire. The plan identified four high-priority projects in Winter Park; one of those projects was the 3.1-mile strip of railroad

easement that runs north and south through town. Although a CWPP is geared toward reducing potential fire-related hazards, mountain pine beetle-killed lodgepole pine, void of needles, would soon start falling, posing a public safety issue just as serious as wildfire.



The Town of Winter Park contacted Union Pacific Railroad and received permission to remove all the dead trees and those that would be dead before the mountain pine beetle epidemic completely subsided. Willow Creek Logging, LLC, was hired to cut 21,000 trees within the 200-foot wide, 75-acre project. The contractor was responsible for removing tree sections larger than 4 inches in diameter, and the town is responsible for burning the remainder.



The 12 Willow Creek Logging crew members operated chainsaws, shearers, skidders, loader or log truck. Some ground was very steep and in one area, cut trees were three-fourths of a mile from road access. Despite these challenges, the project produced multiple benefits. Wildfire risk was reduced and dead trees were removed, allowing more sunlight to reach the ground, thereby reducing the presence of ice in the winter and increasing overall safety in the area. The aspen already are taking advantage of the new sunlight, and 19 jobs and four small businesses were positively affected by the project.

Putting America to work.



Bruce Kohlwey, owner of Willow Creek Logging, began his logging career in 1982. In 2000, he took a hiatus to build homes. Three years later, he returned to logging and started his own business with a chainsaw and skidder. The business has grown over the past seven years, as the mountain pine beetle population consumes all but small-diameter lodgepole pine trees in Grand County. His main clientele are landowners who own between ¼-acre and 100 acres of land and want dead lodgepole pine trees removed. Willow Creek Logging completes 300-350 jobs annually.

Winter and early spring generally are slow times for the business; however, when Willow Creek was selected as the contractor for the Winter Park project, Kohlwey was able to rehire seven employees and add two new employees.



The Town of Winter Park Forestry Department played a key role in the project. Town Forester Stefan Petersen administered the project, visiting the project site often to make sure the operation was running smoothly. Two seasonal employees, Lex Kirkham and Jake Mikol, worked with Petersen to transfer branches and tree tops to the town burn site where it was disposed of using an air curtain burner. The air curtain machine produces high-velocity air directed at the top of a large open fire box to create efficient burning conditions. Kirkham and Mikol have worked for the town as seasonal timber crew employees for five and three years, respectively.



Imagine the pile of branches and tree tops that 21,000 cut trees produce. To keep up with the volume, the city hired three small, independent trucking firms to assist town employees, Enright's Express, Inc., and Welch Trucking based in Fraser, and McDonough Trucking from Hot Sulphur Springs.

In the spirit of cooperation, Union Pacific waived the charge for railroad employee time, a \$25,000 contribution.

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