



Wildland Fire Council Minutes  
11400 W US HWY 24  
Divide, CO 80814  
January 15, 2025, at 8:30 AM

**Call to Order:** 08:36 AM

**Attendees:** Chief Mike Ortega (VFD), Chief Joe O'Conor (CCFD), Kimberly Burleson (City of WP), Kristen Higginbotham (City of WP), Chief Chris Deisler (WPPD), Jeremy Taylor (CSU), Linda King (B Lazy M Ranch HOA), Chief Susan Bernstetter (LGFD), Betty McLain (Ridgewood CWPP), Jan Franke (CME HOA and FVFD), John Geerdes (CUSP), Chief Tyler Lambert (NETCO), Jim Street (Red Cross), Hal Moore (B Lazy M), Kae Moore (B Lazy M), Don Moore (NoFloCo), Toni Moore (NoFloCo), Mark Kohlman (CME Firewise), Mayor Todd Dixon (Green Mountain Falls), David Poletti (CSFS), Mike Till (CSFS), Chuck Todd (Ridgewood CWPP/HOA), Tim Ross (USFS), Carrie Adair (TCIT), Michelle Wolff (TCPHE), Jessica Flohrs (TCOEM), Roger Coker (TCSO Dispatch), Lt. Renee Bunting (TCSO), Commander Kevin Tedesco (TCSO), Sheriff Jason Mikesell (TCSO), Commissioner Bob Campbell, and Commissioner Williams

**Approval of Minutes:** Joe O'Conor motioned Mike Ortega 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion to approve.

**Welcome and Opening Comments from Commissioner Williams and Sheriff Mikesell:**

- **Commissioner Williams:** Thank you to the firefighters helping in CA. Encouraged awareness of the resources that are here locally. Discussed legislative developments.
- **Sheriff Mikesell:** The State is \$1 Billion in debt. Local jurisdictions may see cutbacks on state help. He has sponsored a bill to help first responders receive a reduction of property taxes.

**Old Business:**

- **CO-SWAP Project Update – Kimberly Burleson:** Team Rubicon is onboard. Planning phase is ongoing; an RFP process for a contractor is being developed.

**Recurring Business:**

- **Fire Stats/Update & Fuel Moisture/Fire Restrictions – Jessica Flohrs**
  - Fire Stats (2024): Increase in agency assists, alarms, and outside fires. Decrease in controlled burns and smoke investigations.
  - Fuel Moisture Levels: Range from low to very high across different fuel types. 2024/2025
- **Chipper Stats – Jessica Flohrs**
  - 2023 (2,225 uses); 2024 (1,985 uses). Public Works is utilizing it in 2025
- **CUSP Mitigation Projects – John Geerdes/CUSP**
  - 15 acres completed on the Stedman Property near Catamount, GMF, and Crystal Peak above Manitou. Supposed to complete 20 acres at Catamount in 2024 – contractor did not

make it before the snow. Hoping to get in there now and do the 2024 and the 2025 planned acres. Currently in the grant writing season. Have submitted two Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG) = 1 for Park for CWPP rewrite and 1 for CUSP for crews to do work, hopefully

- **2025 Slash Site Plan – John Geerde/CUSP**
  - Open 22 Saturdays in 2024. 70 more loads this year than in 2023. The slash site is cleaned up. Rocky Top ground the piles and took the chips to the City of Woodland Park Wastewater Treatment Plant and Colorado Springs. Opening back up in May.
- **CWPP Rewrite Status Update – John Geerde/CUSP**
  - 50-60% complete; awaiting GIS maps and Fire Chiefs' feedback.
- **CSU Updates – Jeremy Taylor/CSU**
  - Eric Howell retired. Jeremy is the Forest Program Manager.
  - Completed the Wildfire Ready Action Plan for North Slope and Northfield. Small grant funding to help the plan. Would love to see more partners collaborate with this plan and with CSU. Ask Jeremy if you want to see the full plan.
  - Riparian work is being done on 102 acres to restore the area and adding beavers and willows. Beaver ponds help with debris flow and sediment. Using tethered CTL logging and mastication. Able to do the work in the snow. Conducting stream monitoring and sampling with Mesa University. These riparian corridors help as a fire break.
  - Pikes Peak Highway area cleaning up the beetle kill area.
  - Completed a 78-acre ridge top fuel break with CSFS.
  - Post Fire Debris Flow Restoration, there is not the correct infrastructure currently we are replacing 3 culverts with open bottom culverts for debris flow help.
  - Looking at pile burning this 2025. Trying to update their burn plan into a 5-year plan.
  - North Slope is closed – issues with the public still recreating while logging is occurring, causing a hazard. Please pass on the word to neighbors and friends.
- **USFS Updates - Tim Ross/USFS**
  - Continuing to burn piles in the Rampart Reservoir in El Paso County. Charis area has piles to burn later this year in Teller County depending on snow amounts. Burned 600 piles yesterday. Black Forest was also doing a prescribed burn. USFS is supporting CA. Expecting changes with Administrative changes coming up. Will update as changes occur. If local firefighters want to help please reach out to Tim Ross.
- **Central Colorado Forest Collaborative Updates – Jessica Flohrs**
  - No updates. The meeting will be later today. Update at next meeting.
- **State Legislative Update – Commissioner Williams**
  - We will be sharing the information on the 3 insurance and 7 wildfire bills coming this year so far. Concerns over new WUI codes impacting rural areas. Encouraged involvement in legislative processes and grant tracking.
  - Ring of the Peak recreation topic. We will share the press statement.
  - Fire Suppression Ponds – Very few counties have even submitted their list. If the Fire Departments have ponds they want to save, please give information to Jessica Flohrs and Carrie Adair.
  - **Commissioner Campbell:** A draft bill is being considered to address statewide budget shortfalls by transitioning localized gaming in the three historical towns to a virtual platform, allowing gambling from home. This proposal could significantly impact commerce and employment in these towns. While the draft has not yet been released, the Governor referenced the concept during his State Address. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential mental health and addiction issues associated with online gaming.

- **Sheriff Mikesell:** conducted the quarterly HOA/POA and Faith-Based meetings on January 13<sup>th</sup>. Our call volume is going up, we are up to 50,000 calls for service in 2024. Due to visitors, we can go from our population of 35,000 up to 100,000 people in the county on a daily basis.

**Open Discussion:**

- **Chief Hawkins** – Noted differences between CA and Teller County WUI; highlighted insurance challenges.
- **Chief O'Conor** – Concerned about unincorporated areas not paying fire taxes and 20% of his calls in the unincorporated areas.
  - Sheriff – There is a leadership meeting set to go over other issues and he will add this to the list. May need to go to the public for this.
- **Jan with FVFD** – STRs are causing more alarm calls and medical calls due to batteries not being updated and not hydrating to handle the altitude.
- **Mark Kohlman with CME** – Advocated for self-reliance and education on home hardening. CME plans to conduct prescribed fires in 2025 instead of chipping.

**Next Meeting Date:** March 19, 2025 at 08:30 AM

**Adjournment:** 10:15 AM