Model Performance in Community Risk Reduction

Falls Creek Firewise® USA
Site Implementation

Paulette Church
Firewise Ambassador, NFPA
Falls Creek Ranch 1999

- Residents **not allowed** to cut down dead trees and oak brush
- **Wood could not** be removed from Ranch
- **One workday per year** to trim back brush for visibility at road intersections
- **Annual huge slash pile** was burned when snow on the ground – 2 years ≈ 84 tons
Falls Creek Ranch 2018

“Best mitigated development in our jurisdiction,” Durango Chief Hal Doughty

“Falls Creek mitigation work allowed firefighters to turn the fire to the west into the high country and keep it out of Durango.” Rob Powell, Operations Section Chief, Type 1 Incident Team

• Awarded a 2019 Wildfire Mitigation Award by IAFC, NFPA, State Foresters, and USFS!
2002 Missionary Ridge and Valley Fire: The Wake-up Call

- 71,730 acres burned
- 46 homes/cabins destroyed
- **Falls Creek lost 4 homes and 6 below us**
- 1 firefighter killed by widow-maker
- Homes marked with green or red ribbon
- At Durango Fire after-event meeting in 2003 —
  - “If your home was unsafe for firefighters, we couldn’t risk lives to protect it,” Durango Fire Chief Dan Noonan
Key people developed a Falls Creek Community Wildfire Protection Plan August 2011
CWPP Initial Partners:

Durango Fire
Colorado State Forest Service
LPC Emergency Management
FireWise of SW CO
Annual Firewise Education Meeting
Families, Neighbors, and Partners
Training and Safety Equipment
Volunteers gathering slash from firebreaks and from trimming along roads
Giant burn pile – old way
Dump trailer & air curtain burner – New tools
Workday in the slash/sort yard with new air curtain burner
BBQ potluck after the meeting
Build following Firewise standards
Remodel using Firewise standards

• Cedar siding replaced with Hardiplank.
• Junipers replaced with rock garden.
• Metal roof over shingles.
Residents responsible to mitigate HIZ 1 and HIZ 2
Too many small trees? Think Christmas!
Sharing Our Story and Work
Exceptional Drought Map 5-22-18

Intensity:
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

Author:
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U.S. Department of Agriculture
May 2018
Wildfire Preparedness Day Meeting
Scene as we evacuated on June 12
416 Fire on 6-12 above FCR
Home of Mary Ellen and Chris Gans…

Backfires began here to eliminate fuels as fire backed down and wind shifted.
Singing in the rain FCR style!
Falls Creek Ranch 416 Fire

A Firewise USA® NFPA Success Video
Recovery…
Small rains brought major mud flows that took out Falls Creek Main and side roads.
This was after ½” rain. LPEA had to dig up the electrical cable and string it between two trees and install 2 new junction boxes before we could work to restore the crossing.
Restoration on Hillsides
Had meadows mowed in 2019 due to abundant rains and hazardous tall grasses.
In 2019, logged 2000+ trees
Recorded 3,800+ volunteer hours!
Some of the volunteers and partners that helped Falls Creek Ranch mitigate and protect Durango!
Questions, Comments?

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