



**Presentation Title:** Falls Creek Firewise USA® Site Implementation

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## I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

Falls Creek located in Durango, Colorado is a nationally recognized Firewise USA® site since 2011. The initial project goals were to 1. identify project work through risk assessment, and then 2. prioritize the work in an agreed upon action plan, called a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that would be managed by an organized group of leaders (their Firewise USA® site board.)

The risk assessment was the result of a collaborative effort with the community residents, the Colorado Fire Adapted Communities Network, the Colorado State Forest Service, and their local fire district. The CWPP included looking at vulnerabilities of the homes, called by research scientists the, “Home Ignition Zone (HIZ)”. It also evaluated weaknesses and risks in the 840 acres of common property surrounding homes and developed a prioritized action plan for those areas beyond the HIZ

Actionable goals included:

1. Host the Local FireWise Council and regional practitioners for tours/site visits to look at the plan and mitigation work to date. They showed several fire breaks and a white fir stand where trees were harvested annually as Christmas Trees to reduce fuel loading and create revenue for other projects.
2. Significantly reduce the amount of pine needles and other flammable materials around the homes.
3. Practice a first-ever mock evacuation drill down the fire emergency two-track road.
4. Educate residents on the need for individual action with at least a 50% participation rate.

## II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

The process used to assess risks was identified by leading researchers from the Institute for Business and Home Safety and the US Forest Service to the NFPA® which lists targeted areas of vulnerabilities in the “Home Ignition Zones, 1 through 3” Residents created the assessment looking at the home itself and the area in the first 5 feet surrounding the home and then working outward into common property. Interior roads were improved, trees trimmed up, and brush removed to increase safety for residents needing to evacuate and for first responders to reach residents and/or fire.

The risks identified were prioritized according to the amount of risk they reduced to the structures and community at large. The were compiled into a written document that was shared with all residents in the community. All residents received information on proper building materials to use and best practices for living in the WUI and Firewise USA and CSFS recommendations to maintain the safe HIZ Zone 1.

The Falls Creek Firewise committee implemented the program by encouraging volunteer grass roots engagement by members of the community. The success of the program is ultimately driven by the number of households in the community who participate. In November of 2019, 45 volunteers from about 40 year-

round residences participated. Their highest number of volunteers in the summer for a workday was 80 from a potential of 93 residents in 2017, an almost 90% participation rate. In 2018, the exceptional drought brought County Fire Restrictions that limited and then ended mitigation work prior to and after the 416 Fire.

The community developed collaborative partnerships to help them plan and implement project work. Inspections and wildfire safety projects were completed each year for over nine years. The community is continuing formal assessments on mitigation work done before and after small and larger grant-funded projects with input by Wildfire Adapted Partnership and supervision of two resident foresters.

An article was published in the The Durango Herald, "Residents Work to Create Fire-Adapted Community," which reported on the community's Wildfire Preparedness Day activities. Circulation is approximately 5000.

An after-action report was shared with residents about their success prior to 2018 and the need to make improvements was shared with residents at an annual Firewise meeting a month before the fire occurred.

### **III. Impact Evaluation – Short-Term Results**

The collaborative partnerships in the community identified the risk and engaged 90% of neighborhood residents to participate in home assessments and complete wildfire safety project work.

A value of \$404,052.46 volunteer hours were contributed by 93 volunteers in a five-year period.

A plan to get residents out of their community in the event of a wildfire or other disaster was established and 60% of the community actively participated in a mock evacuation drill.

An estimated \$102,300 in the past five years in value of materials, funds, and services was donated by partnering agencies, increasing the amount of project work completed to lessen risk of loss due to wildfire.

### **IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long-Term Results**

All 97 structures in the community, valued at almost \$48,500,000, survived the 416 Fire. An after fire mitigation and monitoring strategy to protect homes from the rains and potential landslides that could impacted the community after the fire was implemented.

No residents or emergency responders were injured in the fire. The story as told by the residents and collaborating agencies can be viewed in a video available on a success story page;

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA/Firewise-USA-success>.

### **V. Recommendations**

Identify a mitigation champion who will share the vision and the passion to motivate others. Use educational RSG & Firewise USA materials, including videos. Train your people on equipment and provide what they need. Make mitigation work fun! The potlucks after workdays build community and add energy to volunteer efforts.

The incident report recorded by the US Forest Service Incident Commander credited the project which included the assessment of community risk and the successful implementation of the action plan with the positive outcome for this community as seen here; <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/article/5822/43185/>.