

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Reducing wildland fire risk in Summit County

Mountain areas throughout Colorado face increased risk of fire following massive tree die-off from a pine beetle epidemic. Extension is helping residents reduce risk through education and outreach.

Situation

Summit County's mountainous community is surrounded by forest. This means that homes, schools, businesses, utilities and public and emergency services are continually at risk of fire. Communities throughout the West are more vulnerable than ever to the threat of fire following the mountain pine beetle (MPB) epidemic.

Extension's Response

In January 2010, Colorado State University Extension in Summit County hired Dan Schroder as director and natural resources agent. One of Schroder's primary tasks is representing CSU Extension on the Summit County Wildfire Council (SCWC). This neutral body of 18 cooperating agencies oversees implementation of the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

The protection plan identifies private and public acreage most at risk of fire. The CWPP also sets goals for reducing fire risk in 26 designated 'areas of concern' through public education and hazardous fuels reduction projects, which involve the thinning or clearing of living or dead, flammable vegetation.

Since early 2010, Schroder, the education liaison of the council, has collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service, Friends of Dillon Ranger District, Colorado State Forest Service, Summit County, local fire protection districts, municipalities and public and private business to provide outreach and education. More than 10,000 people have received information or participated in Extension-led projects and programs developed by Schroder. These include:

- A county-wide public awareness campaign focusing on forest health, hazardous fuels reduction projects, creating defensible space, evacuation preparedness and planning, and protecting communities.
- Sharing information and resources at farmers markets, annual tree seedling sales and as a guest speaker at local meetings and events.
- Presenting a series of nine 'Forestry in the Field' workshops located on U.S. Forest Service trails throughout the county.
- Coordinating the county's first-ever hazardous fuels treatment map book.
- Creating community awareness about forest ecosystems through public art.

Schroder also supports the administration of the county-funded 50-50 grant program, which provides matching dollars to qualifying applicants conducting collaborative landscape-level, hazardous fuels treatment projects. The program was established in 2008 under county voter-approved Measure 1A. Grantees have treated a total of 873 acres with approximately \$950,000 in leveraged funds.



From the 2005 Summit County "Living with the Threat of Wildfire" brochure.

The Bottom Line

- Through partnership with the Summit County Wildfire Council, Summit County Extension has become a local leader in organizing and implementing public education initiatives about wildfire mitigation and forest ecology.

By the Numbers

- Percent of lodgepole mortality in northern Summit County: 95
- Summit County land area, in approximate square miles: 600,000
- Percent of private/public land in Summit County: 20/80
- Estimated year round population: 30,000
- Estimated total population during peak seasons: 100,000
- Percent of unoccupied vacation homes: Over 60

Results

Summit County Extension has become a local leader in building community awareness about wildfire mitigation and forest ecology. Through collaborative partnership with Summit County Wildfire Council member organizations, Extension has contributed to the following:

- Since 2009, 41 community partners have completed \$1.3 million in hazardous fuels reduction projects on more than 600 acres through the county's 50-50 matching grant program.

Year	\$	Acres
2009	\$671,408	327.53
2010	\$339,786	105.6
2011	\$337,604	181.6

Divide \$ total in half for county contribution. Average price per acre: \$2,194.

- Heightened community awareness about forest ecosystems and land management through interactive, field-based workshops and community outreach to diverse audiences via farmers' markets, community presentations, public service announcements (broadcast on local cable and radio channels), interpretive signs, and the Summit County wildfire mitigation website: <http://summit.co.us/wildfiremitigation/>.
- The development and production of Summit County's first-ever hazardous fuels treatment map book, a 26-page visual aid and decision-making tool that provides geographical and topographical data relative to fuel treatment location, ownership and acreage size.
 - This resource could help residents in critical treatment areas understand the need to manage their land to create fuel break linkages that can reduce the risk of fire.
- Public art as education
 - Schroder developed and organized a public art project to raise awareness about the mountain pine beetle and its impact on forest ecology. Local and national artists, selected by Facebook vote, decorated carry-on suitcase-sized beetles that were mounted on wooden platforms and displayed with SCWC educational messages throughout Summit County public spaces during Summer 2011.
 - Beetles were auctioned off at the Town of Frisco's 2011 Beetlefest. Proceeds were dedicated to support forest stewardship efforts.
 - The event was a community partnership between Summit County Wildfire Council, Town of Frisco, Town of Breckenridge, Breckenridge Arts District, Summit County Arts Council, Beetle Blockers, and CSU Extension in Summit County.

In 2011, Schroder's efforts in furthering public education and outreach received commendation by Summit County Extension partner Friends of the Dillon Ranger District. The nonprofit awarded Schroder Outreach Educator of the Year. "Friends of Dillon Ranger District couldn't have made the impact we did—212.5 volunteer hours in education alone—without Dan Schroder," says Sarah Slaton, FDRD program manager.

"I'm working on a perception campaign. I'm trying to get people to start thinking about the future forest. I'm empowering people to do what they can do in the places they have the ability, on their own private property in their neighborhoods."

– Dan Schroder
Summit County Extension director
and natural resource agent

"We just keep messaging the fact that the more trees that come down, the safer you are, the safer our community is, and as a side benefit—more stunning views open up."

– Eileen Davis
Council Member – Town of Frisco and SCWC

"Dan is so full of information and is so passionate about helping others truly understand what's going with our forests."

– Sarah Slaton, Program Manager
Friends of Dillon Ranger District

Contact Information

Dan Schroder
CSU Extension, Summit County
Director and natural resources agent
(970) 668-4140
dan.schroder@colostate.edu
www.extension.colostate.edu/summit