

County residents urged to 'defend' homes from fires

By GARY GOODELL

During the next decade, millions of acres of Colorado forests will burn. Thousands of homes will be destroyed and many lives will be lost. Is this an alarmist view? Or is it a practical reality?

Historically, forests have been subject to recurring natural or human-caused fires. Evidence exists that Native Americans set fires in order to increase grasslands and improve their hunting prospects. These fires "cleaned up" the forests by thinning trees, eliminating weaker plants, and reducing the "ladder fuels" and overall fuel densities that create the conditions leading to devastating wildfires.

After more than 100 years of fire suppression and control of free diseases, Colorado's forests are at unhealthy and dangerous densities ranging from 10 to 100 times their "natural" state.

Homes in the forests have contributed to this problem and at the same time are at serious risk for wildfire.

The solutions are not simple. Imagine an intermix of forest and homes; private and public lands; ownership patterns of overlapping mining claims that appear like pick-up-sticks on maps; three different federal management agencies, each with its own extensive regulations; 25 fire protection agencies, mostly staffed by volunteer residents; state agencies; local agencies; citizens' groups; homeowners associations. All of these entities have varying — and sometimes conflicting — responsibilities, concerns and opinions.

Short of moving all those homes and people out of the forest — not a viable solution — options become sharply limited.

There aren't enough resources that can arrive on the scene quickly enough to protect every home. This was illustrated painfully last October in the aftermath of the Oakland Hills fire in California. Literally hundreds of fire engines responded to the fire but by the time all of this equipment was in place, 3,354 homes burned.

After the Black Tiger Fire destroyed 44 homes in Boulder County on July 9, 1989, several groups were formed and have been working together on solutions. They are the Boulder County Fire Fighters Association Wildland/Urban Interface Committee, the Boulder County Wildfire Mitigation Group, and the Colorado Natural Hazards Mitigation Council Wildlife Subcommittee.

The best answer appears to be: "defensible space." Implementation will more than likely be primarily through the dedicated efforts of volunteers and a combination of

public education and awareness programs and regulations. Residents who live in the wildland/urban interface must be motivated to change their lifestyle to adapt to the threat of wildfire.

By creating *defensible space* around their homes, homeowners will greatly increase the chances that their home can either be defended or maybe even survive without being heavily defended.

What are some of the components of defensible space?

- **Vegetation.** Create an area at least 30 feet around the home in which the amount of combustible vegetation is reduced — a place for the intensity of the fire to be slowed so that the home can be defended. Sloped lots or lots with other adverse conditions will require more than 30 feet.

Note that this does not mean clear cutting all vegetation around the home. Decisions to leave trees standing at close proximity to one another or to the home may be balanced by other protective measures. Lower vegetation serves as a ladder for a fire to jump to the tops of trees. These "crown fires" spread quickly and are the most difficult to control. Thus, ladder fuels, such as tall grasses, brush and low limbs, should be eliminated near the home.

- **Roofing Material.** Another component of defensible space is a roof that will not burn easily and spread the fire to other homes. Untreated wood shakes are a poor choice. Clay tiles, concrete tiles, slate, steel or plain old three-tab composition shingles are much better choices.

- **Driveway.** Access can be improved so that fire engines can enter and leave the property easily.

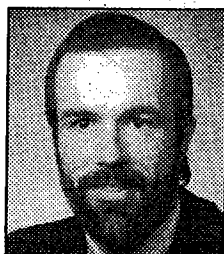
- **Water Supply.** Local fire departments have information about how homeowners can provide an adequate firefighting water supply on site.

- **Wood Storage.** Firewood should never be stacked near the home, especially not on the downslope side.

- **Overhanging Decks.** Unenclosed overhanging porches or decks should be avoided.

If you're interested in more information on how to increase the odds that your home might survive a wildfire, contact the Colorado State Forest Service at 442-0428; the Boulder County Land Use Department, 441-3925; the Boulder County Sheriff's Department Emergency Services Group, 441-3647; or the City of Boulder Wildland Fire Coordinator, 441-3350.

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asked for (and reported on) some real specifics. Restoring fish-habitat is certainly a laudable goal, but is the welfare of native fish considered in this plan? (Is the creation of non-native trout habitat "restoring the creek to its natural condition"?)

Just what are the other improvements being made to the riparian habitat (besides the concrete trail)? Is the Greenways Project planting native species of plants? Is it removing non-natives? Which particular species of wildlife are actually attracted to these improvements? Is the result greater diversity of native species, or does it simply trade those that require a relatively low human presence for those that can tolerate crowds?

And finally, how environmentally beneficial is any person's "awareness" if they remain unaware that such questions must be asked of people who claim that they are improving wildlife habitat while increasing its human use? The Boulder Creek Trail has been a wonderful improvement for the human community, but I suspect that it has made the undeveloped riparian areas of Boulder all that much more valuable to the remaining native wildlife.

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Commentary on therapist unfair

Editor:

I am writing in response to the guest opinion by Greg Zimmerman (April 22). I have been employed by Helice Fox for four years and am outraged the Daily Camera has provided a forum for Mr. Zimmerman's knowing misrepresentation of the truth.

In our numerous personal conversations regarding his therapy, Mr. Zimmerman described himself at the commencement of therapy as "totally dysfunctional." When he terminated therapy he was employed, functioning and had set goals for his future both personally and professionally. I don't see this as "abusive therapy."

To address his specific points:

Ms. Fox provided a disclosure

Readers' views w

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