

Grants available to help communities reduce wildfire risk

The Colorado Department of Natural Resources is accepting applications for a second round of awards under the Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program. This phase will provide \$5.2 million in grants to reduce the risk of wildfire in areas where human development and forested lands overlap, areas often called the wildland-urban interface.

The program, created under Senate Bill 13-269 and passed last year by the Colorado General Assembly, is focused on projects that reduce the risk for damage to property, infrastructure, and water supplies, and those that limit the likelihood of wildfires spreading into populated areas. Funds will be directed to non-federal lands within Colorado.

The first round of grants, totaling just over \$4 million, was awarded to 25 recipients in 16 counties in August.

Eligible applicants include community groups, local governments, utilities, state agencies and non-profit groups. Applicants must contribute 100 percent matching funds, which can include in-kind resources, for a 50-50 grant-to-match ratio. Applicants must also identify plans to make use of the woody material resulting from the projects. Those plans can include using the materials for biomass energy and/or traditional forest products.

Examples of projects considered for funding include:

- Creation of defensible space around homes and structures, based on Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) guidelines.
- Construction of fuel breaks, based on CSFS guidelines.
- Fuels reduction beyond defensible space, designed to protect water supplies and/or reduce fire intensity.

Up to 25 percent of total grant funds are available to pay for the purchase of equipment that will increase current and future capacity for hazardous fuels reduction. Applicants interested in using funds for these purposes can use a specific application form for capacity building.

All applicants must coordinate proposed projects with appropriate county officials to ensure consistency with county-level wildfire risk reduction planning. The deadline to receive proposals is March 13 and awards are anticipated in early May.

A more detailed overview of the grant program and its requirements and limitations, as well as the grant applications, instructions and other materials, is available through this link of the Department of Natural Resources Website: <http://dnr.state.co.us/WRRG>

Earlier grant recipients have been working with Colorado Forest Restoration Institute to measure conditions before they begin treatment; this is part of a significant monitoring effort that will help forestry officials understand the impact of grant funds when the projects have been completed.

Awardees have also been working with the Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing Program (CoWood) to maximize opportunities for woody material that is removed from sites. Additionally, awardees have been working with Colorado Youth Corps to identify opportunities for youth to get involved as a labor force on the ground.

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