

# Neighborhood Fire Mitigation Project

## Project Description

This project creates a unified, countywide system that empowers property owners to reduce wildfire risk through consistent, science-based assessments, defensible-space creation, home hardening, and ongoing education.

Working across all 117 subdivisions and HOAs—with support from OEM, Road & Bridge, BOCC, WMVO, FACO, Firewise, NRCS and a paid mitigation crew—the project establishes a formal process to assess properties, verify completed work, and measure deliverables through standardized checklists and ASIP tools. Key components include Neighborhood Ambassadors, resident training in mitigation skills, two dedicated mitigation specialists, connections to CSFS and county resources, Firewise neighborhood development, clear-cutting evacuation rights-of-way, mapping treatments for insurance benefits, and targeted outreach to seasonal residents.

The initiative also identifies cross-boundary priority projects, posts high-risk areas for public awareness, strengthens evacuation planning, and prepares a Round 4 Community Wildfire Defense Grant, collectively advancing Custer County toward safer, more fire-adapted neighborhoods.

## Strategic Alignment with Community Vision

The Neighborhood Fire Mitigation Project directly advances the community vision by protecting the natural landscapes, rural character, and quality of life that define Custer County. By reducing wildfire risk across neighborhoods, private lands, and key evacuation corridors, the project helps preserve the county's scenic beauty, agricultural lands, and water resources from catastrophic fire impacts. Its science-based approach to defensible space, home hardening, and cross boundary mitigation strengthens the resilience of forests, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation areas—ensuring they remain healthy and accessible for generations. At the same time, the project supports the county's rural heritage and community livelihood by safeguarding homes, ranching operations, and local infrastructure, while empowering property owners to take stewardship roles in maintaining the safety and vitality of their neighborhoods.

## Community Support

77% of survey respondents rate this project Important or Very Important.

### Actions

1. Establish Project Team leadership and partners group
  - a. Convene Probable Collaboration Partners
2. Confirm shared goals, expectations, and roles.
  - a. Identify a project lead organization and project management structure.
3. Review and adapt the Spanish Peaks Fire Mitigation Plan
  - a. Extract applicable templates, processes, timelines, and mitigation standards.
4. Incorporate lessons learned, scientific best practices, and risk-based prioritization.

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- a. Translate into Custer County's landscape, culture, and HOA structure.
5. Draft the countywide implementation plan
  - a. Define the Neighborhood Ambassador Program as the foundational pillar.
6. Outline the assessment process, documentation standards, and defensible-space criteria.
  - a. Include templates: ASIP(Assessing Structure Ignition Potential) checklist, defensible-space checklist, homeowner instructions.
7. Map required resources (contractors, crews, neighborhood volunteers).
  - a. Develop the formal property-assessment and verification system
8. Define required vs. recommended actions based on proven science.
  - a. Establish how work will be documented, verified, and tracked.
9. Create digital and paper versions of assessment tools.
  - a. Build an initial countywide communication plan
10. Develop messaging on why mitigation matters, how the process works, and what homeowners can expect.
  - a. Include targeted strategies for seasonal residents.
11. Create and train the core basic assessment crew
  - a. Recruit county staff, volunteers, or hybrid teams.
12. Train them in ASIP, fire behavior, defensible space, and documentation standards.
  - a. Provide equipment (measuring tools, tablets/forms, PPE).
13. Establish a vetted roster of contractors and resources
  - a. Identify sawyers, chippers, mitigation contractors, and pile-burn specialists.
14. Develop a "County-Approved Contractor List" available to all HOAs.
  - a. Coordinate with chipping crews and Road & Bridge where appropriate
15. Develop a countywide slash management strategy
  - a. Identify or designate slash-drop sites.
  - b. Create a chip in place policy
16. Establish chipping days, hauling schedules, or pile-burn locations.
  - a. Communicate clearly to HOAs and homeowners how slash will be handled.
17. Build the annual maintenance framework
  - a. Set a standard for annual review of defensible space.
18. Create homeowner guidance for ongoing vegetation and home-hardening upkeep.
  - a. Develop a process to share information with new residents.
19. Finalize Ambassador training curriculum
  - a. Topics: fire science, risk communication, assessments, homeowner coaching, evacuation preparation basics.
20. Develop a certification process to maintain quality and consistency.
  - a. Launch Neighborhood Ambassador Program 2.0
21. Recruit ambassadors in each of the 117 subdivisions and HOAs.
  - a. Conduct training sessions and distribute toolkits.
22. Establish a communication channel between ambassadors and county partners.
  - a. Begin property assessments in priority neighborhoods

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23. Start with high-risk subdivisions (based on risk maps and fire history).
  - a. Use the standardized assessment and checklists to evaluate homes.
24. Provide homeowners with written reports, timelines, and mitigation recommendations.
  - a. Connect landowners to contractors and county/CSFS resources
25. Ensure assessments translate into actual treatments.
  - a. Provide guidance on working with contractors, DIY, or neighborhood volunteers.
26. Offer technical support via the two new mitigation specialists.
  - a. Coordinate HOA-scale mitigation efforts
27. Organize chipping days, slash pickups, and contractor work windows.
  - a. Support neighborhoods aiming for Firewise recognition.
28. Track homes reaching HIZ standards.
  - a. Begin mapping Firewise progress and insurance-benefit-eligible treatments
29. Document treatment types and locations.
  - a. Use mapping and documentation to support homeowners seeking insurance credits.'
30. Post and regularly update high-risk areas on public maps
  - a. Communicate risk to full-time and seasonal residents.
31. Integrate with education campaigns and neighborhood meetings.
  - a. Develop detailed evacuation-route mitigation plans
32. Identify clearance needs, rights-of-way, choke points, and signage.
  - a. Conduct road-edge mitigation and free up escape routes.
  - b. Document which neighborhoods are affected by each route.
  - c. Note: This Action is being done under a county contract with Ladris managed by the Sheriff's office.
33. Work with Federal and State partners to prioritize public/private interface needs
  - a. Develop project descriptions, cost estimates, and treatment plans.
34. Adapt implementation annually based on results.

## Metrics for Success (KPI's)

- o Number of homes brought to HIZ (Home Ignition Zone) standards each year
- o Number of Firewise homes and Firewise recognized neighborhoods (at least eight homes mitigated annually per neighborhood)
- o Improved insurability metrics (e.g., documented insurance credits, reduced policy cancellations, homeowner reports of improved coverage options)
- o Reduction of egress/ingress risk (e.g., miles of evacuation routes cleared, rights-of-way treated, hotspots eliminated)
- o Number of property assessments completed using the standardized ASIP and defensible-space checklists
- o Percentage of assessed properties that complete required mitigation actions within a defined timeframe
- o Number of educational events held and total attendance/participation levels

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- o Number of Neighborhood Ambassadors recruited, trained, and active across subdivisions and HOAs
- o Number of homeowners participating in mitigation skill-training (pile burning, sawyer skills, etc.)
- o Number of seasonal residents reached through targeted Fire Safe Campaigns
- o Number of landowners successfully connected to NRCS, CSFS/county resources and completing follow-up mitigation
- o Number of cross-boundary projects (federal–private) initiated or completed
- o Acres of hazardous fuels reduced on private and adjacent lands
- o Reductions in identified high-risk areas as shown on annual community risk maps
- o Response capacity metrics (e.g., work completed by the paid mitigation crew, utilization of the two mitigation specialists)

## Probable Collaboration Partners

- Custer County Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
- Custer County Road & Bridge
- Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) - Canon City Office
- Wet Mountain Valley Fire Protection District
- Rye Fire Protection District
- Wetmore Fire Department
- Fire Adapted Colorado (FACO)
- Firewise USA
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Mustang Medicine LLC
- Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative (ARWC)

## Community Signup List

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS	Include me on the communication list for this project.	I would like to be part of project development work
Sally Strom	WMVO	sally.b.strom@gmail.com	1	
Robert Gaarder		rgaarder@verizon.net	1	
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Rob Bidner		bidner1rjj@gmail.com	1	
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Destiny Chapman	USFS	destiny.chapman@usda.gov	1	
<b>Kathy Lutz</b>	Wetmore	kathylutz93@gmail.com	1	1

# Neighborhood Fire Mitigation Project

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<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>