

Colorado Fire Commission (CFC)
Prescribed (Rx) Fire Subcommittee
September 20, 2024
Meeting Summary

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Daniel Godwin, Jennah Kitchell, Katie Lobodzinski, Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally, Rocco Snart, Parker Titus, Kevin Whelan, Brendan Witt, and Courtney Young

Facilitation team: Dominique Ashe and Heather Bergman

ACTION ITEMS

Courtney Young	Add the Rx Fire Subcommittee to the Colorado Forest Health Council (CFHC) agenda on October 30.
Katie McGrath-Novak	Schedule a Branching Out session for further input on the Rx fire strategic plan.
Rocco Snart	Send the 2012 Certified Burner Program slide deck to the Rx Fire Subcommittee.
Peak Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Follow up with Courtney Young on who will present about the Rx fire statewide plan to the CFHC.Work with Katie McGrath-Novak to host a Branching Out session with her stakeholders to get additional feedback to inform the strategic plan.

OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY WORKSHOP FORMAT AND KEY THEMES

The facilitator provided meeting participants with an overview of the first three Rx fire strategic plan workshop results. The highlights from her overview are summarized below.

- All three workshops followed the same format: individual activities in which participants prioritized two discussion topics, provided details on their pile tracking effort and public messaging approaches, and shared case studies showcasing successes, challenges, and opportunities for the strategic plan.
- Participants discussed establishing a claims fund, training reciprocity, and pile targets for non-federal lands. They reviewed barriers and solutions in small groups and reported them in full-group discussions. Two rounds focused on key themes identified from the workshop registration form. Those key themes included liability, local restrictions, permitting, treatment coordination, training and certifications, funding, and public and political outreach.

Discussion of Preliminary Workshop Format and Key Themes

Claims Fund

- The Wildfire Matters Review Committee (WMRC) is developing legislation to create a claims fund covering certain burners and landowners. The draft would address whether a private landowner working with a covered contractor would be liable in case of an accident. If certain conditions are met, the claims fund could define coverage for landowners in these situations.
- The total fund is set at \$1 million, with each claim being allowed up to 10% of the total. The bill suggests the Colorado General Fund as the funding source for the claims fund, but with a \$900 million deficit, these funds are unlikely to be available this year. The total fund amount is insufficient for the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) to meet the requirements for private land burns, but the fund is expected to grow over time.
- The bill's reference to the General Fund is a placeholder, while the WMRC explores other funding sources. The current draft text is a placeholder and will evolve. To view the draft bill, [click here](#).

- Liability concerns seem to dissuade more burners from conducting Rx fires than fears of fire escapes. The State can emphasize the importance of both a claims fund and liability coverage. The claims fund can be framed as a last-resort protection, used to help demonstrate safe Rx fire practices and attract private insurers.
- The claims fund would cover damage from escaped Rx fires, but there is a need to clarify what constitutes an "escaped fire" or a "wildfire" and what types of damages can be claimed (e.g., smoke).

Training and Certification Reciprocity

- The claims fund should be tied to certification, ensuring that only certified individuals can access it. An alternative path to becoming a state-certified burn manager should also be provided.
- Although training and certification reciprocity might not significantly impact overcoming existing barriers, enabling reciprocity could still benefit workforce capacity and is a strategy that DFPC can institute without legislative direction.
- The Rx Fire Subcommittee could further explore national state-certified burner programs that address similar barriers identified in the strategic plan workshops.

Pile Burning Targets

- Although workshop participants generally did not support setting pile-burning targets, they expressed interest and support in tracking progress. Tracking would help demonstrate the effectiveness of efforts to legislators and other funders.
- The Rx Fire Subcommittee could clarify through a strategy what tracking burn piles would involve and how a state-wide tracking effort would be implemented.
- Workshop participants identified GIS as their primary method of mapping burn piles. The Rx Fire Subcommittee could recommend tracking Rx fire progress with GIS based on landownership types, aiming to eventually set targets, once the State has a baseline understanding of the backlog.
- An accurate understanding of unburned pile accumulation could help the State improve insurance policies for burners, funders, and landowners.

Proposed Changes to the Workshop Format

Meeting participants did not propose any changes to the workshop format.

DISCUSSION ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT BEYOND WORKSHOPS

Meeting participants discussed engagement opportunities in addition to the five workshops. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Rx Fire Subcommittee could engage the Colorado Forest Health Council (CFHC) by presenting its recommendations at an upcoming meeting on October 30. Courtney Young will add the Rx Fire Subcommittee to the CFHC agenda. Peak will follow up on who will present to the CFHC.
- The Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network hosts group discussions called Branching Out sessions, which could be an additional opportunity for soliciting input from collaborative groups. Katie McGrath-Novak and Peak Facilitation will schedule one of these Branching Out sessions for further input on the Rx fire strategic plan.
- The Rx Fire Subcommittee could distribute a draft of the Rx fire strategic plan online or send a draft to additional stakeholders using a QR code at upcoming events.

DISCUSSION ON TIMELINE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL FOR FINAL PLAN

Meeting participants discussed the timeline for finishing the Rx fire strategic plan and the level of detail to include. Their comments are summarized below.

- The strategy brought to the Colorado Fire Commission (CFC) should provide enough information to convey the intent but not be so specific that the commission can only accept or reject it outright.
- The Rx Fire Subcommittee should avoid making overly broad statements in the plan.
- There is a need to analyze what works in areas where fire management strategies are successful and amplify those efforts.
- The Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Subcommittee is exploring a recommendation for public outreach aimed at fire service personnel and organizations. The Rx fire strategic plan could integrate that recommendation as well as establish consistent messaging documents for individual entities to use to increase public and political support.
- The Rx Fire Subcommittee could also recommend that the CFC direct DFPC to fund Rx fire-related initiatives.
- The documentary "Fire Forest" showcases pre- and post-fire conditions and is an example of useful public messaging. To view the documentary, [click here](#).
- Rocco Snart will send the 2012 certified burner program slide deck to the Rx Fire Subcommittee.

NEXT STEPS

- The next Rx Fire Subcommittee meeting is Friday, October 18, from 9 am to 12 pm.
- Peak Facilitation will develop initial strategies for the Rx fire strategic plan based on the workshop results between now and the upcoming Rx Fire Subcommittee meeting. Rx Fire Subcommittee members will share their feedback on the strategies and prepare to provide the CFC with an update on the following Monday.