

# Colorado State Forest Service

## Fort Morgan District 2008 Annual Report



The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) mission is to provide for the stewardship of forest resources and to reduce related risks to life, property and the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Fort Morgan District of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) is one of 17 districts located throughout Colorado. We are an agency within the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.

### Greetings from the CSFS Fort Morgan District!

The Fort Morgan District office is comprised of a two-person staff. The district, located on Colorado's northeastern plains, supports others engaged with similar objectives, concerns and difficulties of living on the plains. The fragility of this semiarid region of Colorado most certainly necessitates emergency preparedness through community wildfire protection planning and other means of protection from destructive grassland fires. High winds are another great cause for concern on the plains where soil loss, as well as damages to property, can be protected with windbreaks and shelterbelts. We provide support to 33 towns, 50 fire departments and fire protection districts, numerous agencies, municipalities, counties, organizations, and individual rural residents. The Fort Morgan District's service area covers over 12,600 square miles of land with nearly 29 square miles of water.

Please enjoy just a small glimpse of our activities. We welcome you to contact us.

### Contact Us!

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### Highlights

The Fort Morgan District is involved in activities with the following groups.

#### Tree City USA Communities

Tree care and protection are important values to the Fort Morgan District. The area on our district has several Tree City USA communities. To receive this recognition, a town or community must have a tree board or department, a community tree ordinance, a forestry budget of at least two dollars per capita and an Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation. These standards were set by the National Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters. Tree City USA communities on our district include:

- Wiggins
- Fort Morgan
- Sterling
- Holyoke
- Brush

\*Currently, Merino and Haxtun have established tree boards and are being encouraged to become Tree City USA members.

## **Colorado Wildland Fire and Incident Management Academy**

Norland Hall, district forester, is commissioned as part of the Colorado Wildland Fire and Incident Management Academy staff during the week-long training regimen now held in Greeley.

## **Adams County Collaboration**

The district is involved with ongoing attempts to secure an “Agreement for Cooperative Wildfire Protection” with Adams County, the state of Colorado and the Colorado State Forest Service. The agreement includes seeking ways to: control and extinguish wildfires, assist firefighting groups, provide aid and effectiveness without duplication, and other mutually-endorsed components.

## **South Platte Focus Area Committee**

This is a partnership of wetland interests operating within the Playa Lakes Joint Venture. A group comprised of professionals, landowners and other interested parties conserving wetlands in Weld, Morgan, Logan and Sedgwick counties is spearheaded by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

## **Forest Management Partners**

A working group called the Platte Invasive Endeavor (PIE) involves all counties along the South Platte River. The team addresses eradication of tamarisk, Russian olive and other invasive plants. Partners include: Ducks Unlimited, county weed managers, conservation districts, natural resources offices, the CSFS, and other agencies, organizations and interested parties.

## **High Plains Ten**

A Division of Wildlife outreach coordinator spearheads High Plains Ten, an annual teachers’ training program that includes the CSFS, Natural Resources Conservation Service and a participating rural school, most recently, in Burlington. Recently, the CSFS provided wildland fire fighting tools in a hands-on training demonstration.

## **Belle Creek Charter School**

Secondary school-aged children are given lessons on: fire safety from Smokey Bear, tree growth characteristics, bark beetles and other pertinent topics. Firewise and Project Learning Tree information also is incorporated as additional instructional support.

## **Northeast Colorado Regional Emergency Managers**

Through the Northeast Colorado Regional Emergency Manager coordinated effort between emergency managers, sheriffs’ departments, county governments and other agencies including the CSFS, the group is charged with writing the Northeast Colorado All-Hazards Mitigation Plan. As a result of this development, Community Wildfire Protection Plans will be generated.

## **Town Tree Boards**

Fort Morgan District staff is involved as advisor/ representative with several tree boards. Tree board members are actively planting street trees to enhance street curb appeal in designated areas such as the city limits of Brush.



*The City of Brush Tree Board members and advisor.*



*City of Brush, Street Tree Planting. (Left to right) Bonnie Kuntz, CSFS representative, Bruce Bosley, CSU Cropping Systems and Natural Resources Extension Agent, Brush High School student volunteers.*

### **Insects and Disease Site Visits**

Numerous site visits and calls were received in 2008. Continual drought was the major factor in the decline of various windbreaks and landscape plantings which has opened the door for other concerns.

Concurrently, officials from the towns of Haxtun and Fort Morgan solicited the CSFS's assistance due to declining tree health in their city park and cemetery.



*A park in the town of Haxtun depicting declining tree health.*

## **Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Awards**

The demands placed on the members of small rural and remote fire departments increase each day. Rural fire, rescue and emergency medical responders are the first to arrive at any emergency. While the members are primarily all volunteers, the departments rely on the tax paying citizens for funding support and cost-share program opportunities such as the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant.

The Fort Morgan District office engages in communication with all 50 fire departments and fire protection districts within our service boundary. The VFA grant opportunity has been instrumental in providing a way to reimburse a portion of their costs to their departments.

Over the past several years, wildland fires and drought conditions have been the source of burning bans issued by local sheriff departments with caution issued to all small communities, farmers and ranchers. Red flag warnings have become a regular occurrence. To prepare for the severity of wildland fires, rural fire departments actively seek assistance to maintain healthy units. Historically, the Fort Morgan District has awarded more VFA grant money than any other CSFS district and the departments have been very appreciative of this assistance.



*Eckley Volunteer Fire Department wildland fire equipment and station.*



*Sandhills Volunteer Fire Department station and wildland fire equipment. The station is located near the Phillips and Yuma county line. The equipment is housed inside the sand hill dugout with a door front.*



*A Wauneta Volunteer Fire Department engine near the Kansas border.*



*The Fort Morgan Volunteer Fire Department is in action at a house fire near the CSFS District Office.*

## Seedling Trees for Conservation

The Colorado State Forest Service seedling tree program encourages farmers and ranchers to plant windbreaks for conservation benefits from stock grown at the CSFS Nursery in Fort Collins. These seedlings can be obtained at a nominal cost and purchased from various Fort Morgan District cooperators listed below:

### **CSU Extension, Morgan County**

914 E. Railroad Avenue, Fort Morgan (970) 542-3542

### **Morgan Conservation District**

200 W. Railroad Avenue, Fort Morgan (970) 867-9659 x 3

### **CSU Extension, Logan County**

508 S. 10th Avenue, Suite 1, Sterling (970) 522-3200 x 281

### **Washington County Conservation District**

26924 US Hwy 34, Akron (970) 345-2006 x 109

### **Yuma Conservation District**

5008 East 8th Avenue, Yuma (970) 848-5605

### **CSU Extension, Sedgwick County**

315 Cedar Suite 100, Julesburg (970) 474-3479

### **Haxtun Conservation District**

1280 SW InterOcean Drive, Holyoke (970) 854-2812 x 110

### **Yuma County Conservation District**

247 Clay Street, Suite 1, Wray (970) 332-3173 x 101

### **Burlington Conservation District**

138 South 14th Street, Burlington (719) 346-7699 x 104

### **Flagler Conservation District**

429 Main Avenue, Flagler (719) 765-4676

### **Cope Conservation District**

2862 County Road LL, Flagler (970) 345-2006 x 101



*Unloading CSFS Nursery stock at the USDA Service Center in Fort Morgan.*



*Norland Hall, Fort Morgan district forester, assists with tree delivery day at Morgan Conservation District, USDA Service Center in Fort Morgan.*

## **Fort Morgan District Renovates Office**

The Fort Morgan District recently was awarded funds to increase energy efficiency and provide a new secure area for storage items.

Insulation was installed in the office overhead area of the district facility. Many years ago, only acoustical tiles were installed below a concrete roof. The new insulation is very effective in both winter and summer! A bay door, not being utilized in the shop,

was enclosed and two new overhead insulated metal doors were installed. The shop area houses a tractor, mowers, tools and other supplies. Chain link fencing was installed adjacent to the office for secured outside storage.



*The CSFS Fort Morgan District building.*

## **Arbor Day Celebration**

In 1872, Julius Sterling Morton proposed a tree planting day at a meeting of the Nebraska Board of Agriculture. April 10, 1872, then became the first Arbor Day celebration. More than 1 million trees were estimated to have been planted on that day since 1880. The event also is recognized as a traditional school activity day.

On May 7, 2008, in Fort Morgan, Arbor Day was celebrated with 45 elementary students at the Abner Baker School. Matt Givens, city parks superintendent hosted the program that included several teachers; Fort Morgan Mayor Jack Darnell; Deanna Verhaag, city recreational director; and Bonnie Kuntz, a CSFS representative.

Preceding the celebration, Mr. Givens and his parks crew planted a Redmond Linden and placed a marker at the base of the tree in commemoration of the event. Students learned of Arbor Day founder Morton and his belief that planting trees help beautify the state, provide shade, and prevent soil erosion by creating windbreaks.

Students were quizzed on the presentation, given a seedling tree and a Smokey Bear ruler from the Colorado State Forest Service. Mayor Darnell read the proclamation for the formal action.



*Jack Darnell, mayor of the city of Fort Morgan, reads the Arbor Day proclamation to students at Abner Baker School in May 2008.*

## **“Are You Plain’s FireWise?” Workshops Spreads like Wildfire on the Eastern Plains**

On Colorado’s Eastern Plains, the blue and purple sunset contrasts the white, winter wheat fields and black cows. Plains inhabitants are settling down for the evening, except for the volunteer firefighters at the Wauneta Fire Station.

Here, cars gather around the new volunteer station, recently built with funds from a FEMA Grant. About 25 volunteer firefighters, local residents and community members gather for an “Are You Plain’s FireWise?” program. The Colorado State Forest Service worked with personnel from Yuma County Emergency Fire Management and the Wauneta Fire Department to make the workshop possible.

A palpable buzz filled the air when the presentation started and Norland Hall, CSFS Fort Morgan district forester, started showing pictures of recent fires in

the area. Those in attendance, many of whom also are volunteer firefighters, nodded their heads in agreement when they saw pictures of the fires they had fought in previous years, and as recently as a month earlier.

The March 2006 Yuma County Fire triggered the need for FireWise education. The fire burned about 15,000 acres in three hours — or 84 acres per minute. Sixteen local volunteer fire departments helped with fire suppression efforts. The intense, fast-moving fire reached the very edge of the town of Wray.

“In Yuma County, there are two fire protection districts with 11 fire departments. [The departments] are 100-percent volunteer. We need help from the citizens for fire mitigation. The firefighters will then have knowledge of areas where mitigation has been done. This can help stop the fire and help the firefighters have an advantage at the fire,” said Roger Brown, Yuma County emergency manager.

Providing knowledge about fire mitigation is precisely what the “Are You Plain’s FireWise?” workshop accomplished that evening. The presentation provided attendees with information about how to mitigate fire hazards and help protect their properties from fire.

Grasses on the plains are dry much of the year, and they ignite and burn quickly. “The rural plains are an ocean of fuel,” said Hall. “But there are many actions residents can take to protect themselves and their property from wildfire. Fuels reduction can slow the progression of a fire and give firefighters an advantage in their efforts to suppress the fire and protect structures.”

Volunteer firefighters usually are not at the fire station when a call comes in because most have jobs and often are at work. This factor, coupled with long driving distances to reach the scene of a fire, and limited access water supplies and fire equipment at the scene, means response time often can take longer in rural areas. Delayed response time emphasizes the need for residents to learn about mitigating wildfire hazards on their properties.

Successful fire mitigation efforts most often are accomplished when a community works together. “When a fire occurs, all neighboring fire departments jump in. Every department relies on mutual aid from their neighbors. When these big fires get going, no single fire department can handle it. It’s all about partners,” Hall said.

Helping each other is one of the driving factors in preparing for FireWise workshops. “No one knew about the first couple of workshops, but now people are spreading the word,” Hall said. The county emergency managers have been invaluable in setting up and advertising the workshops.

The “Are You Plains FireWise?” workshop at the Wauneta Fire Station was just one of five facilitated by the CSFS Fort Morgan District in 2008. Additional workshops were held in Wray, Wiggins, Fort Morgan and Wauneta. Nearly 90 people attended the Fort Morgan workshop, which planted the seed for the others.

Local residents worked hard to spread the word about the FireWise events. Three news releases were published in local papers in Yuma, Wray and Holyoke, and four radio stations ran public service announcements to promote the workshop at the Wauneta Fire Station. In addition, local business owners hung fliers around towns and volunteers hand-delivered additional fliers to some local residents.

The CSFS Fort Morgan District already is working with volunteer fire departments to plan additional workshops in 2009. And the district has designs on reaching a new audience this year — a Future Farmers of America class at Liberty High School. The workshop will reach out to students who eventually will be managing land in the area.

Just like a fast-moving wildfire, the Colorado State Forest Service and volunteer firefighters on Colorado’s Eastern Plain are teaching property owners the benefit of taking responsibility to mitigate wildfire hazards on their property. And working together as a community to reduce hazardous fuels will have a greater collective impact on protecting life and property on the plains.



*District Forester, Norland Hall facilitates an “Are You Plain’s FireWise?” presentation in Logan County to area residents, Sterling Fire Rescue Department, Logan County Sheriff’s Department and others.*



*An “Are You Plain’s FireWise?” presentation at the Yuma County Fire Station.*



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