



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **La Veta Firefighter Receives Colorado State Forest Service Award**

**LA VETA, Colo. – May 5, 2016** –La Veta Fire Protection District volunteer firefighter Paul Branson this week received a 2015 Colorado State Forest Service External Partner Special Recognition Award. The award is bestowed to CSFS partners for their significant contributions to the agency's efforts.

Branson serves as the district's wildfire mitigation coordinator and as a volunteer firefighter. He began researching and laying the groundwork for a dedicated hand-felling crew to perform defensible space work in 2013, and last year his crew performed defensible space and fuels reduction work on more than 30 individual properties. Following his blueprint, a similar mitigation service in Las Animas County has since been created and began work in 2015.

Branson's partnership with the CSFS also has resulted in eight recognized Firewise Communities USA within Huerfano County, and has garnered interest from several other communities to join in 2016.

"Paul and I often speak at the same community meetings. His emphasis on preparedness and evacuation planning through the Ready-Set-Go and Code Red programs fits seamlessly with the CSFS messages of proper forest management to promote hazardous fuels reduction and forest health and resiliency," said Mark Loveall, district forester for the CSFS La Veta District.

With the recent increase in wildfire hazard awareness and mitigation activities taking place locally, Branson recognized that the La Veta FPD Community Wildfire Protection Plan, approved in 2011, was in need of an update. Throughout 2015, he crafted new action items and incorporated updated, user-friendly maps into the plan, all the while soliciting input from the county, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, CSFS and community groups.

Loveall says Branson is passionate about the need for landowners to be educated as to forest health and fire hazard issues. As a firefighter on the initial attack of the 2013 East Peak Fire, Branson witnessed firsthand the absolute necessity of proper planning and defensible space work as the speed and intensity of that fire rapidly overwhelmed the suppression forces within the first few hours. Loveall says he incorporates those experiences into his public interactions, along with up-to-date research and policy direction.

"Having a partner of Paul's caliber serves as a force-multiplier for the CSFS mission within the La Veta District, and we are truly grateful and appreciative of his efforts," Loveall said.

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*The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) provides technical forestry assistance, wildfire mitigation expertise and outreach and education to help landowners and communities achieve their forest management goals. The CSFS is a service and outreach agency of the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University and provides staffing for the Division of Forestry within the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.*