



NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Air Force Academy Becomes Firewise Community/USA®

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Feb. 8, 2016 – The U.S. Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs has received recognition as a Firewise Community/USA® after completing the criteria required of the national program.

James Donahey, forester with U.S. Air Force Academy Natural Resources, and Diane Strohm, a natural resources manager with Academy Natural Resources, spearheaded the local Firewise effort. The Natural Resources department at the U.S. Air Force Academy has been strategically reducing fuels for over a decade. Donahey and Strohm, both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees, work closely with Academy Fire Chief Ken Helgerson and his staff in planning fuels management activities.

“Creating a fire-resilient Academy is one of our foremost objectives, so to be recognized as a Firewise Community is a great acknowledgement of all of our ongoing efforts to reduce fuels and educate our residents and cadets,” said Donahey. “The more communities along the Rampart Range that take the initiative to develop Fire Safe Councils and implement Community Wildfire Protection Plans, the more prepared we will be for events like the Waldo Canyon Fire and the Black Forest Fire.”

Much of the Academy's focus has been on establishing fuelbreaks along roads, ridges and installation boundaries, to increase the chance of halting a fast-spreading wildfire and enhance firefighter access and safety.

Woody fuels also have been cleared in close proximity to numerous structures. Creating such defensible space is critical in defending these values at risk. The Academy has thinned forests and cleared fuels in proximity to its housing areas, and plans to begin clearing around individual residences this year. Recent projects have addressed defensible space around the historic Cadet Lodge, a favorite meeting place for cadets and other Academy staff, and the historic Scout Huts. The latter are still utilized by Boy Scout troops, who volunteered their time to clear brush and other woody debris in proximity to each structure.

Firewise Communities/USA is a program of the National Fire Protection Association. Five steps are necessary for a community to receive the Firewise Communities/USA designation:

1. Obtain a wildfire risk assessment from the state forestry agency or fire department
2. Form a Firewise board
3. Create an action plan based on the wildfire risk assessment
4. Conduct a “Firewise Day” event
5. Invest a minimum of \$2 per capita in local Firewise actions for the year.

Dave Root, assistant district forester with the Colorado State Forest Service Woodland Park District, has been working with the Air Force Academy to achieve their Firewise Community recognition. He says that the Academy provides a highly visible example that others can follow.

“A Firewise Community can be as structured as the Academy, or as informal as a cul-de-sac,” he said. “What makes a Firewise Community is when neighbors understand wildfire as a common threat, best addressed by working together. Any group of neighbors taking action can be recognized.”

The Academy will host a Firewise event and recognition ceremony this spring related to National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day on May 7. More details will be available in the near future.

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.

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