

**West Region Wildfire Council
Meeting Minutes
10/9/14**

Meeting Attendance

	Last Name	First	Affiliation
1	Angell	Don	Montrose County
2	Austin	Tom	Log Hill Fire
3	Barth	Chris	BLM
4	Bennett	John	Telluride Fire
5	Brack	Ben	WRWC
14	Champ	Patty	USFS-RMRS
6	Chappell	Randy	BLM
7	Conway	Bill	Arrowhead Fire
8	Fiedler	Rob	Delta County
9	Gelsomini	Jim	Arrowhead Fire
15	Gomez	Jamie	WRWC
10	Homstad	Kelly	BLM
11	Oxford	Ross	NPS
12	Shelby	Austin	CSFS
13	Staehle	Alan	OFPD

Objective/Purpose

The Council gathered to discuss the following:

Introductions

Jamie Gomez facilitated this meeting and initiated a round of introductions.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes approved without corrections.

Presentation

“Social Science Research and Wildfire Mitigation in Western Colorado” a presentation by Patty Champ and Chris Barth with Hannah Brenkert-Smith, Lilia Falk, James Meldrum and Travis Warziniack.

To view the PowerPoint associated with this presentation, click or copy and paste the following link:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8bKGw1Sz9qXb3F0eFpmUFRoUnM/view?usp=sharing>

Wire – WildfireResearch group: This collaborative research project, involving representatives from US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, University of Colorado, the Bureau of Land Management and the West Region Wildfire Council has developed a website to host its research findings. WiRe – short of Wildfire Research, can be accessed using the following link:

<http://wildfireresearch.wordpress.com/>

Chris Barth started the presentation by tackling the question: why research wildfire risks? While the answers are numerous, Chris pointed towards the ever growing costs associated with wildfire suppression, the unusually high number of high wildfire risk homes in Colorado as well as the predicted increase in the number of homes to be built in the WUI in to the future.

Patty and Chris then discussed the unique composition and approach of the interdisciplinary team responsible for this research. Patty noted that risk is usually understood as a function of probability *and* consequence. To understand how people perceive and interact with wildfire risk, Patty explained, they could have relied on focus groups. However, there are numerous issues related to focus group research. Instead, they have chosen to collect a high volume of “paired data”. Professional risk assessment data is collected, in the field by West Region Wildfire Council technicians. The risk assessments look at 11 factors that influence wildfire risk including address visibility, access, driveway clearance, proximity to topography that would adversely affect wildfire behavior, slope, background fuels, defensible space, siding, roofing and decking/ fencing materials and composition. In addition, the research group surveyed (via mail) residents within the study area, asking them a series a questions related to the same 11 factors previously assessed, as well as a number additional questions to better understand their thoughts and perceptions related to wildfire risk. In western Colorado, this paired data research approach has been performed in Log Hill Mesa and in four fire protection district’s within Delta County (Cedaredge, Hotchkiss, Paonia and Crawford) and is currently on-going in Telluride FPD.

It was explained that the rapid risk assessment, which is intended to take roughly 60 seconds, is intended to give a very quick understanding of a home’s overall wildfire risk. A second assessment, involving a full ‘walk-around’ with the homeowner, may take approximately 60 minutes and would include a significantly more detailed analysis of wildfire risk factors. Combined, these two types of risk assessments are referred to as the 60-60 approach (aka The Barth 60-60).

Patty then explained that through her twenty years of doing research projects, this is one of her favorites. She explained that, as a social science researcher and economist, she is interested in “economic spatial spillover effects”. As an example, we can look at how a neighbor’s actions (or lack thereof) can influence our own property. Our reaction to our neighbor’s behavior can be characterized as being a compliment or can be characterized as being a substitute. In other words, do we choose to undertake (or not undertake) positive wildfire mitigation activities because our neighbor’s are doing it (or not doing it) as well. Or, do we undertake positive wildfire mitigation activities as a result of our neighbor’s unwillingness to do the same, or vice versa. The former would be considered a complimentary behavior while the latter would be considered a substituting behavior. Through the paired data research, we are seeing both complimentary and substitute behaviors.

A question was asked about vacant lots or vacation homeowners, and how these situations influence the spatial spillover effect concept. Patty noted that we do ask a lot of questions to better

understand demographics, such as secondary homeowners. This study, however, did not specifically target vacant lot owners.

Patty continued by explaining that another finding is related to how people view themselves in relation to their neighbors. Professional risk ratings demonstrate that groups of neighbors have similar risk ratings. Interestingly, neighbors tend to exhibit complimentary behavior in these situations, where one neighbor's (in)action encourages another neighbor's corresponding (in)action. However, when assessing their own risk rating, people tend to think of their property in relation to the actions of their neighbors, suggesting a substituting behavior.

Patty then showed graphs from Log Hill Mesa and Delta County which demonstrate that the majority of respondents assessed their overall risk to be lower than what the professional technician assessed their risk to be. She went on to describe that residents 'weight' the various attributes that contribute to overall risk differently than the professionals. For example, residents generally consider the overall background vegetation to be a lot more important to their overall risk. On the other hand, residents tend to perceive topography, home building materials and the extent of defensible space around their homes to be less important to their overall risk.

With regards to the costs associated with wildfire mitigation, the results of the Log Hill Mesa study influenced how the WRWC managed its cost-share grant program. Based on the results, which showed that a great deal of people would be willing to pay between 60-80% of the total cost, the WRWC decided to decrease its cost share to match funds ratio from 90/10 to 75/25. Additionally, and as expected, people are generally willing to pay more per acre if they are wealthier and/or older and they are also willing to pay less per acre if they have more acres. Generally speaking, people's willingness to participate is higher if they are currently seeking more information about reducing wildfire risk and if they perceive their own risk to be higher. People are less willing to participate when their own perception of the risk is lower than the professional assessment.

Patty then provide the group with some detailed information about the respondents from Delta County. This data can be viewed as response from Delta County residents as a whole, or split between the four fire protection districts. While the data can be analyzed to understand specific trends, one notable data point was related to where residents gain information related to wildfire hazards. In Hotchkiss FPD, over 60 percent of residents get this information from their local fire department. This is a substantially greater percentage than any other single source in Delta County (though less than Log Hill). Rob Fieldler commented on Hotchkiss FPD's stellar reputation for wildfire education and outreach as potential explanation for this data point.

Patty and Chris then addressed the issue of homeowner insurance, noting that while there is always concern regarding insurance, their findings demonstrate that insurance is not a significant part of the overall story.

A question was asked about how agriculture burning might play a role in people's attitudes towards wildfire. Chris responded by stating that people are generally more familiar with using fire as a tool in western Colorado.

A question was asked about whether the survey included any questions about building codes. Chris responded by transitioning in to the "Next Steps" part of the presentation. In short, a new rendition

of the study will be looking at community “fire-adaptedness”. Community characteristics and how they influence and are influenced by individual actions, will be an emphasis of the study. Such community characteristics might include building codes, HOA’s, and program’s such as Ready-Set-Go and Firewise Communities / USA. This work will be done in coordination with FireWise of Southwest Colorado, the cousin organization of WRWC. Chris noted that they are planning to take a modified version of this presentation to the 2015 Backyards and Beyond conference.

Round Robin & Incident Updates

- Tom Austin noted that a Fire Protection District on the Front Range is planning to use the Log Hill CWPP as model for their own CWPP.
- John Bennett noted that Allstate has hired a third party company to assess wildfire risk of their insurance customers. So far, the results of these risk assessments has resulted in 48 people being dropped from Allstate coverage. John noted that, at least in once instance, it appears that a resident’s coverage was dropped due to a single tree in yard, surrounded by meadows and a lake in all directions.
- Rob Fiedler noted that county officials are currently concerned about flooding in Delta County.
- A comment was made that we should invite someone, potentially Carol Walker, who can speak on behalf of the insurance industry as a whole, related to how Colorado insurance companies understand wildfire risk amongst their customers.
- Jamie noted that the 2014 Schedule of Events calls for the next meeting to be held on November 13th, 2014 and was slated to be about “Wildfire and Insurance?”. Given the recent issues in San Miguel County and perpetual interest in how insurance companies deal with wildfire risk, he noted that he would attempt to coordinate just such meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 pm.