



## RIDING AT DAYTONA

PAGE A5

*Once Upon A Wedding*  
A Formal Affair

**Montrose Pavilion**  
Sunday March 15, 2015  
10am-4pm

Photo

**FRIDAY**

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# Factoring wildfire risk

CoreLogic explains scoring  
system to regional council

BY KATHARYNN HEIDELBERG  
DAILY PRESS SENIOR WRITER

No one who has lived in the West for long is unaware that it can be a risky business: Dry conditions spark wildfires that destroy property, even take lives.

CoreLogic, a Washington, D.C.-based company, has devised a scientific strategy to assess wildfire risk to homes and property, and the regional consortium that tackles wildfire issues heard more about the process Thursday from Tom Jeffrey, chief hazard scientist for CoreLogic.

"CoreLogic is new. We want to know how they are coming up with those scores," Lilia Falk, direc-

## Top honors for wildfire council

Regional wildfire mitigation efforts received quite a nod Thursday, when the West Region Wildfire Council received one of the Inaugural Wildfire Mitigation Awards from the National Association of State Foresters and other associations.

The WRWC won one of the associations' Wildfire Mitigation Innovation Awards.

"The key word is innovation. West Region embodies that notion," said Chris Barth, a wildfire mitigation specialist for the Bureau of Land Management, in unveiling the award to the council's steering committee.

The award recognizes on-the-ground mitigation programs that have directly

SEE WILDFIRE, PAGE A7

SEE AWARDS, PAGE A3

# TAKING F

Sandhill cranes are making their way as part of their regular migration. They are traveling though. The group that has caught the interest of



BY GHLOE JOHNSON  
FOR THE DAILY PRESS

**B**ird watchers are preparing for a massive gathering of up to 2,000 sandhill cranes at Fruitgrower Reservoir outside Eckert later this

The Black Canyon Audubon Society has put on Eckert Crane Days for the past few years, Society president Jon Horn said, but crane watching at the reservoir

lift-off is the most in sight for many bird and the BCAS has viewing scopes so enthusiasts can see up close. Otherwis



# WILDFIRE: Mitigation remains the word of the day

FROM PAGE A1

tor of the West Region Wildfire Council, told the Daily Press after the company released a data brief in late February.

"In terms of looking at fire risk, we do a similar thing as part of an educational tool. One of my main questions is what CoreLogic is looking at compared with what we are looking at. Our risk assessments are to bring homeowners awareness about their vulnerabilities and have that awareness lead to action," Falk said.

The WRWC caught wind of CoreLogic in November, when insurance brokers told members they use the wildfire scoring systems developed by the company.

According to CoreLogic's data, 900,000 single-family homes in 13 western states chart out at "high" or "very high" risk for wildfire damage, with a combined reconstruction value placed in the billions.

Specific numbers from CoreLogic's Core Based Statistical Area assessments for Montrose County showed 138 properties as "very high risk," with nearly \$27 million in reconstruction costs for that category.

CoreLogic also assigned score segments to properties, with 1-50 being the low end of the scale and 81-100 being the highest risk segment.

Among Montrose County properties that CoreLogic assessed, more than 1,000 scored between 81-100.

Jeffrey, CoreLogic's scientist, cautioned West Regional Wildfire Council members that no model is 100 percent ac-

curate, but said that, due to constantly improving its model, CoreLogic can now boast an accuracy rate of about 96 percent.

While there appears to be a downward trend in the number of wildfires, the fires seem to be consuming more — however, the available data do not stretch over a long enough period to prove that scientifically, Jeffrey said.

"The bottom line is, how does it affect your property, your structures and your homes?" he said.

CoreLogic looks at the wildfire risks both on the property and near it.

"I saw homes destroyed that didn't have fire on or around them. It may be equally important, or more important, to look at risk, not only on the property, but around the property," Jeffrey said. "Firebrands," or flying embers, can land on homes and torch them when the fire itself might not have traveled across the land to the homes, he said.

For its risk model, CoreLogic creates 30-meter grids, with four basic layers: aspect, slope, surface composition (a "proxy" layer), and vegetation/fuel.

Each layer is separately evaluated.

Slope and aspect both relate to elevation. The steeper the slope, the higher the risk for rapid fire movement. Terrain affects how hot a fire will burn, too. "A fire that burns hotter is going to do much greater damage," Jeffrey said.

A southerly aspect will be exposed to more sun and hence, tend to be drier, with greater potential for ignition.

CoreLogic uses satellite imagery, as well as

infrared data to assess vegetation type, biomass, fuel load potential, density and species type.

Risk numbers are assigned to each layer, scored, then adjusted for the likely influence of fuel types and given a weighting factor.

CoreLogic does not yet use home characteristics/construction types as part of its risk assessment data, Jeffrey said in response to questions, though the company has acquired a business that examines such factors.

Mitigation efforts, including "defensible space" around homes, are a hot topic, Jeffrey acknowledged.

The WRWC is heavily devoted to such efforts and recently won a national award for its innovation in mitigation. (See related). Thursday's meeting was packed with people who focus on mitigation and who are experts in the fire management field.

"Mitigation is kind of the answer to the (general) questions being asked now," Jeffrey said. Those efforts can "blossom" into the creation of zones where wildfire risk is reduced overall, he said.

Falk asked whether CoreLogic would adjust risk ratings where wildfire mitigation is done.

CoreLogic has been discussing that internally for about a year; it needs to be able to determine what mitigation work has been done, Jeffrey said.

But most questions from insurance companies have to do with individual properties, where homeowners have already done everything right, and it falls to the brokers to adjust for the mitigation, he said.

Rodgers, Loncarich and others, including Loncarich's daughters, Caitlin and Andie, and assistant guide Marvin Ellis, located the cats prior to clients showing up. To make it easier for the clients — some of whom paid up to \$7,500 per hunt — the group would trap and hold the

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# AWARDS: Barth also honored individually

FROM PAGE A1

reduced wildfire hazards.

The Wildlife Mitigation Awards offer the highest honors an organization can receive for programs that reduce wildfire hazards, Barth said.

"This award is really for all of you, for continued innovation. I appreciate all of your efforts. This award is something you should all be proud of," WRWC director Lilia Falk told representatives of the many regional agencies that make up the council.

The vast partnership seen in the council impressed State Forester Mike Lester, who praised the group for its informed decisions and leveraging of funding for



A plume of smoke from a wildfire ignited by a lightning strike rises above the mountains southeast of Montrose in 2013, as pictured from Buckhorn Road.

risk reduction.

"I can't think of an outfit that deserves it more. It's a relationship for the rest of Colorado to emulate," he said.

The award is sponsored by the National Associations

of State Foresters, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Fire Protection Association and the U.S. Forest Service.

The awards were established just last year

to recognize mitigation efforts across the nation, and to honor outstanding service by individuals and organizations.

Barth was also honored individually. The Wildfire Mitigation Awards Committee chose him for one of eight Fire Adapted Communities Fire Service Leadership Awards given out nationwide.

Other western Colorado honorees included Firewise of Southwest Colorado, which also received a Wildfire Mitigation Innovation Award, and Judy Winzell of Falls Creek Ranch Homeowners Association in Durango, who received a Community Wildfire Preparedness Pioneer Award.

# WRECK: Imprisoned driver wants sentence converted

FROM PAGE A1

Tabitha Horlacher and Andrew Martinez were

from the warehouse of prison and put it to good use."

Smith would live with his grandparents and

Smith enough introspection, Overturf's sister, Samantha, earlier told the court.

She said she doesn't

are some factors that support probation for Smith, granting it to him would unduly depreciate the severity of

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