



Community Planning & Permitting

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February 13, 2024

To: Boulder County Board of County Commissioners

From: Meg Halford, Forest and Grasslands Projects Coordinator, Wildfire Partners,
Community Planning & Permitting

RE: Funding Recommendations for Strategic Forest and Grassland Fuels Mitigation for
Fall Cycle 2023

We are seeking approval from the Boulder County Commissioners to fund organizations that have been recommended to receive funds as part of the new Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grant (SFMG) Program.

Background:

The SFMG program is funded by the county's voter-approved wildfire mitigation sales and use tax, which went into effect in 2023. This program provides cost-share funding through competitive grants to leverage other federal, state, and local funding sources for the following specific purposes:

- Help reduce the risk of wildfire to people, property, and infrastructure.
- Promote forest, grassland, and watershed health through restoration projects.
- Encourage large, landscape, or community-level, cross-boundary projects.
- Target strategic areas identified within or adjacent to one or more of the following: the Boulder County Fireshed Focus Area Maps, potential operational delineation areas (PODS), a pre-determined project footprint (e.g., The St. Vrain Forest Health Project footprint) or a Wildfire Ready Watershed Plan.
- Support projects identified and prioritized in a local or county Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), local hazard mitigation plan, or forest management plan.

Introduction:

The Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grant Program (SFMG) launched its first cycle on Nov. 1, 2023. The cycle closed on Dec. 5th, 2023. A total of fifteen grants were submitted. The SFMG grant staff reviewed and vetted all grants to ensure that they met the minimum requirements to be moved to the review, scoring and selection stage. Two categories can be applied for:

- Fuels Mitigation (Forest and Grasslands)
- Planning-updates or development of new Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)

Total grant applications submitted:

- 15 total grants-11 fuels mitigation grants (10 forest mitigation and 1 grasslands mitigation grant)

- 4 planning grants

Initial Review and Vetting Process via CPP Wildfire Grant Team:

- 2 grants were not moved to the selection process:
 - **City of Boulder-Planning Grant for COB CWPP update.** CWPP process already in progress for the past year. Monies requested were to replace their own CWPP budget already allocated for their CWPP. The COB CWPP is already fully funded, therefore we decided that this grant application didn't qualify to move to selection process.
 - **Linden Park HOA-Grasslands Fuels mitigation project.** The applicant did not meet several of the minimum requirements and eligibility criteria. The grant application was incomplete. We reached out to the lead and suggested that they schedule an on-site visit with the SFMG project lead (forest and grasslands project coordinator) to help guide them and develop a project that would meet the SFMG criteria to apply in future cycles.

- **1 grant moved to selection process with red flags:**

- Boulder Valley Longmont Conservation District (BVLCD): Eagles Ridge Fuels Mitigation Project: Although the application scored well (Average score of 88.5) among the selection team, the project has been completed since early fall 2023. The grant request funding is to meet a budget shortfall for hauling of logs and slash from the project site. The original contractor pulled out of the project in the middle of the project and the project managers had to find several different contractors to haul the logs and woody biomass resulting in an unanticipated higher cost for that process (\$135,000).

The selection committee discussed at length and feel that funding a project that has been completed would set a precedent "to allow to fund projects or activities already completed" (which all other like grants state, federal and local do not allow). The selection committee lead reached out to the applicant to discuss.

Selection Review, Scoring and Recommendation Process:

- **Selection committee team made up of five individuals from various entities:**
 - **The Nature Conservancy:** -Rob Addington, Director of Forest and Fire Program/Staff Ecologist
 - **Colorado State Forest Service:**-Collin Wassink, Forester/Fuels Mitigation Project Manager/Wildland Fire
 - **City of Boulder:** Paul Dennison, Senior Wildfire Specialist
 - **Boulder County Parks and Open Space:** Joe Swanson, Senior Range Management and Weed Specialist (Grasslands, Open Space and Rangelands)
 - **Boulder County CP&P Wildfire Team:** Meg Halford, Forest and Grasslands Project Coordinator/Forester/Fuels Mitigation project manager/wildfire/ecology
 - **Boulder County CP&P Wildfire Team:** Vicky Reinold, Grant administrator, assisting with facilitation.
- **SFMG grant staff:**

- Held a selection committee calibration training before grant application packets were sent for all reviewers to begin reviewing and scoring.
- Developed a grant application score spreadsheet and scoring rubric.
- **Selection committee:**
 - Reviewed, scored, and provided comments for each grant application.
 - Selection Committee met and discussed each grant application and discussed any scoring gaps between each scorer.
 - A master scoring spreadsheet was generated and is provide as an attachment to this memo.

**Brief summaries of SFMG grant applications recommended for funding (Fall Cycle 2023)
Fuels Mitigation Grants (in rank order):**

- **Gold Hill Wildfire Resilience Project (1)** The Boulder Valley Longmont Conservation District (BVLCD) is requesting \$153,800 SFMG matching funds to improve forest health; reduce wildfire risk; protect local communities and watersheds; and improve wildlife habitat. The project covers 130 acres in the Gold Hill Fire Protection District (120 forest mitigation acres and 10 acres of grasslands mitigation) and expands on past treatments on USFS and of private lands.

This project will achieve multiple goals: ecological restoration of mixed conifer and ponderosa forest; phased grassland mitigation; and wildfire protection for the historic town of Gold Hill (GH). The goals will be met through targeted forest thinning to reduce bulk forest density while enhancing structural and species diversity at a landscape scale.

The project additionally proposes a phased pilot treatment for grassland fuel mitigation utilizing seasonally timed grazing within a 10-acre grassland meadow that abuts the town on the southside. The proposed fuel break will expand on defensible space work completed by residents through the Wildfire Partners program and provide protection for GH. The pilot grazing program results will inform phased grazing expansion throughout the region.

Partners include The Boulder Watershed Collective (BWC), and the Gold Hill Town Meeting (GHTM) and Gold Hill Fire Protection District (GHFPD).

Contributing Match funds: EQIP (\$169,300), CSFS FRWRM (\$66,500), Landowner Match (\$20,000), **Total Match (\$255,800).**

- **Ski Road Forest Restoration Project (2):** The Boulder Valley Longmont Conservation District (BVLCD) is requesting \$60,913 SFMG matching funds to reduce forest density on 110 acres across three private properties for the purposes of forest health, wildlife habitat enhancement, and wildfire protection.

The project goals will be achieved primarily using forest thinning techniques to alter the forest's structure to historical values, and to enhance the structural and species diversity on a landscape scale. The proximity of this project to neighboring communities provides

invaluable protection from the threat of wildfire. This project will also protect Rock Creek and St. Vrain Watersheds by reducing potential wildfire intensity.

This area has been identified as having a high wildfire risk potential and falls within the BOCO Fireshed Priority Focus Area Map.

Partners include Colorado State Forest Service, St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership and Boulder County Wildfire Team project coordinator.

Contributing Match funds: EQIP (\$254,587), CSFS FRWRM (\$157,000), Landowner Match (\$6,000), **Total Match (\$417,587).**

- **Dry Gulch South Fuels Reduction Project (3)** The Sunshine Fire Protection District (SFPD) is requesting \$169,880 SFMG matching funds to mitigate a densely forested area located between the eastern edge of the 2010 Fourmile Canyon Fire perimeter and the city of Boulder. The project will complete fuels reduction on 70 acres to the east and west of Sunshine Canyon Dr.

The objective is to provide protection to the homes within the treatment area, protect the Poorman neighborhood by connecting to an in-progress treatment area west of that area and protect the densely populated areas of South Pine Brook Hills and the western edge of Boulder. The Dry Gulch South project area is identified as a high wildfire risk potential and falls within the BOCO Fireshed Priority Focus Area Map.

Partners include Four Mile, Sunshine, Sugarloaf and Gold Hill Fire Protection Districts, and Colorado State Forest Service.

Contributing Match: CSFS ILG (\$124,600), Sunshine FPD (\$87,750), Landowner Match (\$47,270), **Total Match (\$254,820).**

- **Devils Thumb HOA grasslands mitigation project (4):** The Devil's Thumb Homeowners Association (DTHA) is requesting \$50,000 SFMG matching funds to perform strategic fuels reduction and mitigation on 15 acres of natural and non-irrigated commonly owned grassland which is interspersed among 264 homes in the DTHA. The DTHA borders City of Boulder Open Space Mountain Parks (OSMP) land to the west. The 15 acres is also adjacent to other neighborhoods and an elementary school in SW Boulder. The area is designated as a moderate to high wildfire risk potential.

This project's main objectives are to complete grassland fuels reduction on currently unmitigated land and perform ongoing mitigation on previously mitigated land. Work includes strategic grazing and mowing, juniper and ladder fuel removal and continued community engagement.

This project is a continuation of past mitigation efforts completed in 2022 and 2023 for the DTHA community.

Partners include Boulder Fire Rural FPD, Colorado State Forest Service, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), Boulder County Wildfire Partners and Boulder Watershed Collective.

Contributing Match: Devils Thumb HOA as landowner match/**Total Match (\$50,000).**

- **Boulder Mountain Fuels Reduction Project (5):** The Boulder Mountain Fire Protection District (BMFPD) is requesting \$410,812 to complete 235 acres of forest fuels mitigation treatment. There are approximately 1600 residents that this project would directly benefit with an additional 2100 residents surrounding the immediate proposed project areas. The project area and adjacent areas are identified as having a high-risk wildfire potential.

The main objectives of this project are to reduce the wildfire risk to the life-safety of residents and first responders, help protect vital human infrastructure during wildfire events, and restore ecosystems to their natural state for essential wildlife habitat.

The areas in and around the project locations are steep, heavily forested, and directly adjacent to densely populated communities. District demographics include a large component of aging individuals, at high risk of exposure during a wildfire event. Neighborhood emergency evacuation routes are frequently narrow, dirt roads with a high likelihood of vehicle congestion. The communities' these fuel treatments would help protect have narrowly escaped the catastrophic effects from recent significant wildland fires.

Partners include Colorado State Forest Service, USFS-Boulder Ranger District, City of Boulder, and neighboring fire protection districts.

Contributing Match: CSFS FRWRM (\$410,812.50), USFS SFA (\$410,812.50), Landowner Match (\$176,062.50), **Total Match (\$997,687.50).**

- **Eagles Drive/ Canyonside Fuel Break (6)** The Four Mile Fire Protection District (FMFPD) is requesting \$32,868 SFMG matching funds for fuels mitigation on 35-acre forest thinning unit that is directly adjacent to an uphill of the Seven Hills HOA Community. This large block will have direct beneficial impacts on fire risk to the Seven Hills community and the City of Boulder.

On a broader scale, this work fits into the larger landscape goals of the City of Boulder and surrounding communities. It adds to the over 2000 acres of thinning in Boulder-area forests and helps further the goals of decreasing the risks of catastrophic wildfire to Boulder and surrounding communities and ecosystems, increasing forest resilience to climate change and declining watershed health and air quality. This area is identified as having a high wildfire risk potential.

Partners include City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), Boulder Rural Fire Protection District (BRFPD), and the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS).

Contributing Match: Four Mile Fire Protection District /**Total Match (\$32,868).**

- **Upper St. Ceran St. Vrain Fuels Mitigation Project (7):** The Lefthand Fire Protection District (LHFPD) is requesting \$287,550 SFMG matching funds to treat 132 acres on four individual private properties within the headwaters of the Upper Ceran St. Vrain Watershed. Of the 132 acres, 100 acres will be completed on the Sawtooth Springs Ranch, 11 acres on the Borland property, 21 acres on the Hutchins property, and 10 acres on the Barrow property.

The goals are to implement understory fuels mitigation treatments with the LHFPD mitigation crew. The hand crew will perform forest thinning to remove ladder fuels and create tree crown spacing on 32 acres on private property. Mechanical and hand treatments will be used to mitigate the remaining 100 acres of private property lands. This area has been identified as a high-extreme wildfire risk potential.

Partners include the Colorado State Forest Service, The USFS Boulder Ranger District, and Boulder County Wildfire Team project coordinator and private landowners.

Contributing Match: CSFS FRWRM (\$319,500), (Landowner Match (\$31,975), **Total Match (\$351,450).**

- **Arkansas Mountain Fuels Reduction Project (8)** the Sugarloaf Fire Protection District (SLFPD) and the Boulder Watershed Collective is requesting \$139,899 SFMG matching funds to complete a 114-acre forest fuels mitigation project (92 acres previously laid out for implementation with an additional 22 acres), in a dense mountain neighborhood west of the city of Boulder. The area is two miles west of the City of Boulder water treatment plant at Betasso Preserve. The project area is within the lower Middle Boulder Creek watershed, a drinking watershed for the Towns of Erie and Lafayette.

Goals for this project include 1) Reduce high severity wildfire behavior, 2) Provide strategic ridgeline fuel break for fire suppression, 3) provide safer evacuation routes for property owners, 4) Improve watershed and forest health and post fire resiliency, 5) Promote healthy regeneration of shade intolerant tree species, 6) Improve wildlife habitat and species diversity. This area has been identified as having a high wildfire risk potential.

Partners include Four Mile and Sugarloaf Fire Protection Districts, Boulder Watershed Collective and 12 private landowners and the Colorado State Forest Service.

Contributing Match: CSFS FRWRM (\$75,792), USFS SFA (\$151,800), Bonneville Foundation (\$85,000), Four Mile and Sugarloaf FPD (\$26,405), Landowner Match (\$15,000), **Total Match (\$353,997).**

- **Longmont Spillway Mitigation Project (9)** The City of Longmont is requesting \$100,000 SFMG matching funds to complete 22-acres of forest thinning in Button Rock Preserve between the crest and spillway of Button Rock Dam on a forested slope draining into Longmont Reservoir. The site is directly adjacent to Ralph Price Reservoir, which is the primary drinking water source for 1/3 of Boulder County's population. The project area is within the greater St. Vrain Creek Watershed and is identified as having a high-very high wildfire risk potential.

The objective of the Spillway Knoll Project is to reduce the risk of wildfire impacts on drinking water by thinning overly dense stands of Ponderosa Pine Forest and tying together nearby forest health treatments to create a landscape-scale fuel break. This project focuses specifically on protecting slopes draining into Longmont Reservoir, which is at acute risk of post-fire sedimentation due to its shallow depth and important role in Longmont's raw water system.

The project would build upon Longmont's 20 years of forest health and fuels reduction work in the St. Vrain Creek Watershed and complement recent and planned forest health treatments on bordering county, city, and private property. The project would additionally incorporate work by Larimer County Conservation Corps through a conditionally awarded COSWAP Workforce Development Grant.

Partners include Boulder County Parks and Open Space (POS), The Watershed Center, The Boulder Valley, and Longmont Conservation District (BVLCD) and the Colorado State Forest Service.

Contributing Match: CO DNR COSWAP-WDG (\$174,975), City of Longmont/Landowner (\$18,339.24), **Total Match (\$193,314) *****. *Note City of Longmont did not show this in the grant application but they have earmarked to match further with COL funds up to \$100,000.*

- **Copperdale Community Mitigation Project (10)** The Boulder Watershed Collective is requesting \$21,956 SFMG matching funds for a pilot project to mitigate approximately 26.5 acres. Forest thinning will be completed on approximately 16.5 acres. This includes 7 acres of mitigation on Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) lands. The remaining 10 acres will include completing defensible space mitigation on 10-15 individual private properties. The goal of the project is to implement multi-parcel mitigation, thus creating connected fuel breaks in dense mountain communities that tie into larger adjacent treatments. The project includes intensive collaboration with the community to build and sustain momentum for continued work on private lands and to build support for larger scale work on public lands.

The project area falls within the critical Coal Creek Canyon Watershed and is identified as having a high wildfire risk potential.

Partners include Boulder Valley Longmont Conservation District (BVLCD), Colorado State Forest Service, Team Rubicon, Saws and Slaws, Coal Creek Canyon Fire Protection District, and the Boulder Valley School District.

Contributing Match: CSFS FRWRM (\$22,794), Team Rubicon (\$10,000), **Total Match (\$32,794).**

Planning Grants:

- **Boulder Mountain FPD Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP) Update (1):** Boulder Mountain Fire (BMF) is requesting \$50,000 to complete an update to its 2006 CWPP. The CWPP update will be completed using core team expertise including contributions from experienced wildland firefighters, CSFS foresters, fire chiefs, community members, and long-time USFS professionals. The CWPP update process began in 2023 with the creation of a core team and preliminary plan. BMF is requesting funds to assist with the continuation and completion of the project.

BMF's district is generally located directly adjacent to the northwest edge of the City of Boulder, south of Lefthand Canyon, and north of Sunshine Canyon. It consists of dense wild land urban interface on steep topography with an abundance of wild land fire fuels. The main neighborhoods include Boulder Heights, Carriage Hills, and Pinebrook Hills but numerous smaller communities also exist within the fire district boundaries.

The goal of the BMF CWPP is to assess the wildfire situation of the district including, but not limited to, emergency response capabilities, wildfire risk, vegetation component, evacuation routes, and public education. Once this data has been collected, the aim is to evaluate what progress has been completed since the previous CWPP and make targeted recommendations to build upon past successes and continue to improve the district's wildfire preparedness.

Partners include, but not limited to, Colorado State Forest Service, USFS Boulder Ranger District, Boulder County CP&P Wildfire Team, Lefthand and Sunshine Fire Protection Districts, and local community and HOA leads.

Contributing Match: Boulder Mountain FPD/**Total Match (\$50,000).**

- **Allenspark CWPP Update (2):** The Allenspark Fire Protection District (AFPD) is requesting \$50,000 in SFMG matching funds to update the AFPD 2009 CWPP. Since then, several wildfires have occurred within and adjacent to the AFPD (Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, Kruger Rock and Calwood). The AFPD CWPP update will include a new wildfire hazard assessment, mapping, and prioritization process to help identify action items, needs and projects to help with fire response and fuels mitigation across the landscape and community-wide within the district.

The AFPD CWPP footprint encompasses a challenging mosaic of lower montane, upper montane, and subalpine forest types. The intersection of these forest types in combination with complex topography creates challenging conditions for fire management and community protection. The CWPP will identify and address these complex challenges to help make forest management recommendations that are implementable and relevant.

Partners include, but not limited to, Colorado State Forest Service, USFS Boulder Ranger District, Boulder County CP&P Wildfire Team, Lyons and Allenspark Fire Protection Districts, local community and HOA leads, The Watershed Center, the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative and the Boulder County Fireshed.

Contributing Match: USFS CWDG (\$100,000), Allenspark FPD/Landowners (\$10,000), **Total Match (\$110,000).**

- **Town of Lyons/ Lyons Fire Protection District CWPP Update (3):** The Town of Lyons and Lyons Fire Protection District (LFPD) are cooperatively requesting \$50,000 in SFMG matching funds to update the 2011 CWPP. The updated CWPP will help identify and prioritize future mitigation efforts, leverage future grant funding, improve community awareness and education on wildfire risks and protection, make recommendations on ways to reduce structural ignitability, protect water supplies, and to disseminate information to the community on actions to take in the event of an imminent wildfire threat or incident.

Partners include, but not limited to, Colorado State Forest Service, USFS Boulder Ranger District, Boulder County CP&P Wildfire Team, Lyons Fire Protection District, local community and HOA leads, the Watershed Center, City of Longmont Water and City of Longmont Open Space.

Contributing Match: Lyons FPD (\$25,000), Town of Lyons (\$25,000), **Total Match (\$50,000).**

BOCC Signature if Approved:

Signature

Date