

WESTERN SLOPE

West Region Wildfire Council recaps 2014 and plans for 2015

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Success and progress accurately describe last year's work by the West Region Wildfire Council. Having been productive in its efforts in 2014, the multi-agency organization is pressing forward and shows no signs of slowing down.

During its first meeting of the year, the WRWC reviewed last year's accomplishments and provided an outline of goals for the upcoming season. Some year-end highlights included: completion of mitigation projects, community education and outreach, research collaboration and wildfire planning.

"As the WRWC continues to promote wildfire education, mitigation and preparedness on a regional level, it is both encouraging and rewarding to see where our collaborative efforts are making a difference in our regional communities," Director Lilia Falk said in a statement from the group.

Notably, 2014 was WRWC's most productive year with regard to wildfire mitigation acres treated, said Colorado State Forest Service Forester and WRWC Steering Committee member Austin Shelby.

In the Log Hill Mesa Fire Protection District, the WRWC secured funding from the state's Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program from the Department of Natural Resources and treated over 210 acres in

the area. Additionally, the group completed a number of fuels reduction projects – including defensible space projects – for private landowners with funding assistance from the Community Assistance grant.

Closer to Ouray, the organization provided similar assistance to homeowners in the Panoramic Heights subdivision and assisted with creating defensible space around homes.

In 2014, a total of 282 acres were treated as a result of the group's Wildfire Mitigation Grant Program. Of the lands treated, about 152 acres were treated by mastication, 76 acres by hand cutting and chipping, and 54 acres through a community chipping program. The average treatment per acre total cost \$842, with a typical project sizing in at 3.3 acres.

The organization ended its financial year in the black, with a difference of \$51,753 in income and expenditures. A majority of the funding for WRWC comes from U.S. Forest Service Title III funds (40 percent) and the Bureau of Land Management's Community Assistance Program (37 percent). Additional funding sources include state contributions (12 percent), county contributions (2 percent) and other, in kind contributions (9 percent).

WRWC plans to carry its successes into the new year through similar efforts. The group plans to promote new initiatives and outreach in its education to regional communities as well as continue working

with existing partners in wildfire research. Additionally, WRWC aims to further planning by promoting Colorado Wildfire Protection Plans and risk assessments in Gunnison and San Miguel counties. The group would also like to treat at least 300 acres in the region in 2015.

"I expect to see continued collaboration and program accomplishments in

our efforts to promote wildfire preparedness, prevention and mitigation education in 2015," said Falk. "It is imperative that the West Region Wildfire Council continues to provide the platform and resources for engaging communities across western Colorado with reducing wildfire risk."

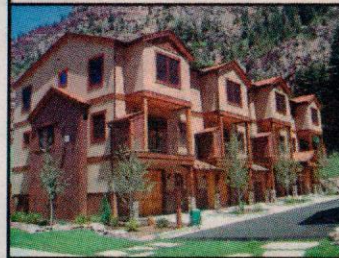


Michael Underwood

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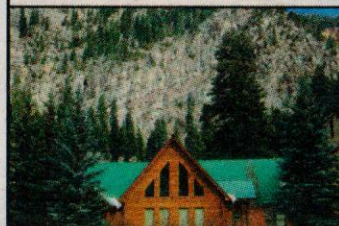
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