

1. *Governor Ritter, why has Wildfire Partners been such a success? Can this success be replicated in California?*

Highlights

- Since 2014 Wildfire Partners has completed wildfire risk assessments of over 2,100 homes in Boulder County, and provided risk mitigation certificates to 904.
- The program is written into Boulder County's building code, which requires all new homes built in the wildland urban interface to take actions to mitigate wildfire risk. If similar programs are implemented in California and elsewhere, integrating risk mitigation programs into local building codes and permitting will increase participation.
- Following participation in the assessment phase, the program covers up to 50% of mitigation costs (up to \$2,000) for eligible existing homeowners. This cost-share opportunity increases participation and enhances equity in hazard mitigation.
- Individual home assessments like those completed through the Wildfire Partners Program are most effective at reducing risk in areas where homes are widely spaced; for high density housing developments, assessment and mitigation efforts should take place at the HOA or neighborhood level.
- The Wildfire Partners program is highly effective in large part because it is locally-based and participants trust the local individuals performing assessments. State- or federally-led efforts would likely be less successful, however state and federal dollars can support local efforts like Wildfire Partners across the West, including in California.

Program Overview and Potential for Replication

Wildfire Partners is a nationally recognized model for wildfire mitigation that has successfully reduced wildfire risk for hundreds of homes in Boulder County, Colorado, and could be successfully replicated in other counties and states. Since its inception in 2014, over 2,117 homes in Boulder County have participated in the program and 904 homeowners have received risk mitigation certifications. This represents a significant proportion of the more than 6,000 homes located in the Boulder County wildland urban interface¹.

The Wildfire Partners Program was recently put to the test in the Cold Springs Fire, which burned over 500 acres of forest near Nederland, Colorado in 2016. All 8 of the Wildfire Partners-mitigated homes within the burn area survived.

The program is written into Boulder County's building code, which requires all new homes built in the wildland urban interface to complete and implement a Wildfire Mitigation Plan. The Wildfire Partners Program satisfies this requirement. When a homeowner signs up, a mitigation specialist performs a comprehensive wildfire risk assessment of the home ignition zone with the

¹ Note: This estimate is based on 2010 Census data compiled by Headwaters Economics, and counts homes on forested properties within 500 m of National Forest as those in the wildland urban interface. This number likely underestimates the 2020 count. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/dataviz/wui-development-and-wildfire-costs/>

homeowner. They also discuss insurance and emergency preparedness. The assessment is scientifically based upon defensible space guidelines from the Colorado State Forest Service. Following the assessment, the specialist sends a comprehensive report to the homeowner recommending mitigation actions (e.g. removing specific trees; retrofitting homes and outbuildings with fire-safe materials; fire-resistant landscaping etc.).

While newly built homes are not eligible for mitigation assistance awards, existing homeowners can obtain up to 3 quotes for mitigation work from local contractors and Wildfire Partners will cover 50% of the total cost (not to exceed \$2000). Treating fuels in a 150-foot radius around a house typically costs less than \$2,500 in Colorado. Once the landowner completes the actions deemed necessary by the assessment specialist, they receive a certificate from Boulder County that can be used as proof of mitigation for insurance purposes. Several insurance companies are currently accepting Wildfire Partners certificates to ensure homeowners can renew and/or obtain future coverage.

The Wildfire Partners program is staffed by forestry and fire protection experts and advised by insurance companies, including Allstate, that have pledged to accept certificates earned by homeowners who complete work on their property. The program is funded by county money and about \$2.6 million in state and federal grants, including a \$1.2 million grant through FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program awarded in 2019.

Wildfire Partners' individual home certification model does not work in places where homes are packed tightly together. In those cases, it makes more sense for the entire development to implement concerted mitigation efforts. Such HOA or community-level programs may be necessary for communities in California and elsewhere with very high housing densities, and can be facilitated through the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Wildfire Partners' model is also most effective when implemented at the county or municipal level, because every community has unique conditions that would not be reflected in a state- or federal-level program (though local efforts can still be supported by state and federal funds). Local implementation also builds trust and increases public engagement.

Sources:

<https://www.wildfirepartners.org/>

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/dataviz/wui-development-and-wildfire-costs/>

<https://www.denverpost.com/2019/01/02/wildfire-risk-homeowners-insurance/>