

September 23, 2009

Dear Grant Review Board:

I am writing to express the support of the Gilpin County Citizens Initiative (GCCCI) for the CWPP Implementation grant application submitted by Boulder County, Clear Creek County, Gilpin County, Larimer County, and the City of Boulder.

The Gilpin County Citizens Initiative is a small civics organization composed of property owners in Gilpin County who have common concerns about wildfires and forest health. Many forested subdivisions in Gilpin County are in designated Wildlands Urban Interface (WUI) areas and subject to the constant threat of uncontrolled wildfires. Residents in these communities need to be able to safely leave a subdivision that is being threatened by a wildfire and reduce the risk of larger wildfires with effective fire mitigation within and around their subdivisions.

GCCI supports the application request for this CWPP Implementation grant because it is an opportunity to implement and activate the most important part of the Gilpin County CWPP which is preparing for an orderly emergency evacuation in the event of an uncontrolled wildfire. Human safety has been determined to be the highest priority in the CWPP and being able to safely evacuate all residents and tourists is the most important objective of the CWPP. While there are many worthwhile projects associated with the Gilpin County CWPP, building alternate evacuation routes and organizing neighborhoods to manage an orderly emergency evacuation deserve the highest priority and initial funding.

Gilpin County has multiple subdivisions that have only one or very few exit routes. In some cases there is only one road leading out of the subdivision to the major evacuation route of Highway 119. The Gilpin County CWPP has identified alternate evacuation routes for these subdivisions but the routes either cross private land or lead to unimproved forest access that are unsuitable for most vehicles. The CWPP Implementation grant would allow the county to negotiate right of way royalties with property owners so that these CWPP alternate evacuation routes could have gates built in front of them that could be unlocked and accessible for use during an emergency evacuation. The resulting infrastructure improvements to alternate evacuation routes and forest access would result in better access for fire suppression and fire mitigation equipment. These infrastructure improvements can also be used for management of the forests and reduce the cost and scars of future fire mitigation work.

Emergency evacuations involve mobilizing a large number of people in a short amount of time under stressful conditions. Since human safety requires a coordinated response from the entire population, GCCCI supports using the CWPP Implementation grant to help create citizen networks that can coordinate with each other and emergency service professionals to help facilitate an orderly evacuation. Right now there are no Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs in Gilpin County. These programs which teach emergency preparedness could be used to train residents in our subdivisions how to help with an orderly emergency evacuation. Residents with CERT training could be used by the Sheriffs Department to knock on doors and open alternate evacuation routes after a Reverse 911 call has gone out. Gilpin County has an excellent multi-agency professional emergency services organization but has yet to develop any kind of educational or outreach program for emergency preparedness for residents. GCCCI supports using the CWPP Implementation grant funds to expand the Gilpin Extension Service to put together and deliver CERT training to every neighborhood in the county. We should not wait until the flames can be seen at the edge of the subdivision to begin thinking about emergency preparedness.

Since this CWPP Implementation grant comes from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) and is directed towards job creation, GCCCI supports using local vendors whenever possible to perform large scale fire mitigation and alternate route construction. The county has many residents who work in the construction industry, own heavy equipment and have knowledge of and experience with managing construction projects. GCCCI supports letting local vendors bid on the large scale fire mitigation projects to help stimulate the local economy and create a long term forest industry of sustainable logging practices.

We are pleased to support this grant request.

Sincerely,

Wesley Isenhardt
President, Gilpin County Citizens Initiative