

8. Wildland Fire Emergency Operations and Capabilities

Wildland fire management in Garfield County is an interagency effort because of public and private land ownership patterns. Its management is governed by a variety of federal policies, state statutes, and cooperative agreements between jurisdictional agencies. In Garfield County, the Wildfire Operating Plan (OP) allows the Sheriff to enter into cooperative agreements for fire protection with federal firefighting agencies. This is accomplished through an Interagency Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement, signed between the federal agencies and the DFPC, and an Agreement for Cooperative Wildfire Protection between the County and DFPC. Wildfire authorities in Garfield County include seven FPDs who have signed the Operation Plan, as well as the County Sheriff, DFPC, UCRIFMU, and NWIFMU.

Within the FPDs, the Fire Chief has authority for wildfire suppression on all state and private lands unless or until that authority is delegated to the County Sheriff. The County Sheriff has authority for all state and private lands outside of the FPDs. However, the County Sheriff has very little actual suppression capability. The County Sheriff relies largely on the FPDs or the County Road and Bridge Department for county resources as needed.

The seven FPDs that operate within Garfield County provide the structural and wildfire fire protection and rescue needs of the residents and business owners within their respective jurisdictions. In addition to fire suppression, the FPDs offer emergency first response medical services, initial attack WUI fire response hazardous materials response, and fire prevention advice for fire safety. Several of the FPDs have signed onto the Mountain Aid Mutual Agreement to help provide immediate fire response to other districts in Colorado to support wildland fire suppression.

The DFPCS, USFS, and BLM all have wildfire suppression responsibilities in Garfield County. DFPC provides assistance to wildfire response on private and state lands. The DFPC works closely with the FPDs and the County Sheriff in fulfillment of these responsibilities. The USFS and BLM provide responses to wildfire on federal lands. These provisions are accomplished through the following:

Emergency Fire Fund (EFF): *The State Emergency Fire Fund (EFF) is strictly a fire suppression fund, and cannot pay for rehabilitation. However repair of damage directly related to suppression (e.g., water bars on cat lines) may be authorized by a DFPC line officer if accomplished as a suppression component at the time of the fire suppression effort. Various cost-share programs for wildfire land rehabilitation are available for private land including the Emergency Watershed Stabilization Program from the U.S. Department of Interior (US DOI), NRCS.*

The EFF was established in 1967 by a few counties that recognized that some fires may exceed the capabilities of county resources and abilities. County participation is voluntary. Currently, 43 counties and the Denver Water contribute into this insurance-type fund that can pay for catastrophic wildfires on state and private land that exceed a participating county's resources. EFF funding must be requested by the county sheriff and can only be approved by the state forester.

While the Garfield County Sheriff's Office serves as a support agency rather than in direct suppression of wildfires, the district may assist with fire suppression on federal lands, provide equipment and personnel, or suppress wildfires outside of their district boundaries which allows the county to participate in the EFF.

Alternate resources can be negotiated dependent on resources appropriate for the fire. The EFF is a necessary link to FEMA funds; however, federal agencies cannot obligate EFF funds. Since its inception, Garfield County has had 19 fires declared eligible for EFF funding, including such notable fires as Battlement Mesa (1987), South Canyon (1994), Coal Seam Fire (2002), New Castle (2007), Pine Gulch (2020), and Grizzly Creek (2020). Garfield County is second only to Larimer County in total number of Colorado EFF incidents to date.

Reciprocal (Mutual Aid) Fire Assistance: *As identified in the 2022 Garfield County Wildland Fire Operating Plan mutual aid is considered county-wide. The period for mutual aid is defined as the time of initial dispatch and ends at either midnight of the first operational period or midnight of the second. All ground and aviation resources are considered mutual aid resources.*

The Mountain Area Mutual Aid establishes mutual aid between local fire and EMS agencies within Eagle, Garfield, Mesa, Grand, Lake, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit Counties.

Use and Reimbursement of Interagency Fire Resources - *Aviation resources for wildland fire should be ordered through Grand Junction Interagency Dispatch. When aircraft are ordered, the request should include the following: type and kind of aviation resource being requested; latitude/longitudinal coordinates in degrees decimal minutes; ground contact for who will work with the aircraft on the incident; and aerial hazards in the area. Air attack will be ordered automatically under certain circumstances per the Interagency Aerial Supervision Guide.*

All requests by Garfield County agencies for additional resources and assistance beyond the mutual aid period shall be through Garfield County (GARCO) 911 Dispatch Center. Requests for assistance beyond the capabilities of Garfield County shall be made through GARCO 911 Dispatch to the Grand Junction Dispatch Center or through the County Emergency Manager.

Due to new federal fire reporting requirements, the UCRIFMU and NCIFMU will require full size-up information for wildland fires originating on county lands when federal resources are requested for mutual aid. In addition, full size-up information is required when a county resource provides suppression on federal lands without federal resources on scene. Minimal required size-up information includes:

- Fire Name
- Incident Commander Name
- Location - Lat/Long and Ownership
- Estimated Size
- Fire Behavior/Threats
- Resources Needed

State and Federal Resources

DFPC Resources

Emergency Operations

The DFPC contracts single engine air tankers (SEAT) to provide wildfire suppression support. The state SEATs are pre-positioned throughout Colorado based on fire danger. Garfield County Sheriff may request a state SEAT to be stationed locally. In addition, a State Wildland Inmate Fire Team is stationed in Rifle.

U.S. Forest Service

The USFS is responsible for all fire management activities on National Forest system lands within Garfield County. These lands include parts of the Rifle, Blanco, and Aspen-Sopris Ranger Districts of the White River National Forest. Fire Management on USFS lands is governed by the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, as well as the revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the White River National Forest (2002). Included in this plan are the following standards and guidelines for fire management on USFS lands:

- Decisions made concerning vegetation management activities including “no action” will minimize exposure of firefighters and the public to fire hazards.
- All ignitions will receive an appropriate management response (suppression or fire use) according to the White River Fire Management Plan.
- Where feasible and appropriate, utilize prescribed fire to accomplish resource management goals and objectives.
- Minimize ground-disturbing activities associated with fire management actions.
- Fire management activities should be designed to sustain ecosystems including the interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.
- Ignitions in areas covered by specific fire use plans (prescriptions) should be managed to accomplish resource management objectives.
- Fire management on USFS lands in Garfield County is integrated with other federal lands (primarily the BLM) through the UCRIFMU, which are staffed by both USFS and BLM personnel and is dispatched through the Grand Junction Interagency Dispatch Center.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau BLM is responsible for all fire management activities on BLM lands in Garfield County. These lands include the Colorado River Valley, Grand Junction, and White River Field Offices. The BLM provides a portion of the staffing of the UCRIFMU and NWCIFMU, as well as the Grand Junction Air Center facility located at Walker Field in Grand Junction. The BLM hosts a fire use module for prescribed fire and wildland fire use events in the UCRIFMU. The BLM also provides a contracted helicopter that is stationed at the Garfield County Regional Airport.

Fire management on BLM lands is governed by the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, which directs federal agencies to achieve a balance between suppression to protect life, property, and resources, and fire use to regulate fuels and maintain healthy ecosystems. In addition, each BLM field office has a Fire Management Plan (FMP) that becomes the on-the-ground, operational framework that implements national direction for wildfire suppression, wildland fire use, fuels treatment, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation, and community assistance/protection programs.

Garfield County Resources

Wildfire Response Capacity

Improving FPD response time and capacity in the county is an effective way to protect economic and ecological values from wildfire. Vegetation-fuels mitigation and improving FPD response capacity go hand-in-hand. The resources and training needs were identified by each of the FPDs. Common resource needs across all FPDs include identifying and mapping water drafting sites, developing FPD specific CWPPs, public Firewise education, and FPD maintenance of wildfire training certificates. In addition, action items that apply countywide include adopting a WUI building code to promote Firewise home construction, redrawing FPD boundaries so that all areas in the county are included in FPD, and Firewise community outreach which needs to occur on a continual basis.

Table 18: Recommended Fire Protection District Resources and Training Needs

Fire Authority	Resources Needs	Training Needs
Colorado River Fire Rescue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategically locate 10,000-g buried water tanks in Elk Creek, Dry Hollow, Divide Creek, Silt Mesa Develop year around drafting sites through the FPD Map all current drafting sites Obtain fuels treatment equipment such as a hydro-axe, brush hog, and chipper Certify bridge weight limits on critical bridges such as on Elk Road, Divide Creek, and Garfield Creek Improve road and address signage as needed Develop automatic aid agreements for certain response areas for all sides of District Develop FPD specific CWPP Community Firewise training Determine the need to identify more water sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain current NWCG certifications Fire mitigation specialist certifications Community Firewise training
Carbondale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Road 112 needs 10,000 g buried water tank Develop and alternative evacuation route for West Bank Mesa Obtain a 1800-g tactical tender for Station 85 Obtain a Type 3 engine for Station 81 Firewise community outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual NWCG wildfire training Maintain current NWCG certifications Increase number of certified and trained responders
De Beque FPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cell phone tower at the end of Kimball Mountain Road Maintain good communication with oil companies Firewise public outreach Develop FPD specific CWPP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual wildfire training Maintain current NWCG certifications Encourage FFT2 to certify at FFT1
Glenwood Springs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and test water sources such as drafting sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual NWCG wildfire training

Fire Authority	Resources Needs	Training Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to participate with responsible parties to develop alternative evacuation routes for those areas with only one way in and out Firewise community outreach Collaborate with other response agencies with fuel treatments in and around our WUI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain current NWCG certifications WUI wildland firefighting and incident command training
Grand Valley FPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repair roads as needed to improve response times eastern part of district Post weight limit signs on bridges and Improve addressing to actual locations Pre-plan WUI response areas Develop automatic aid agreements for certain response areas for all sides of District –upgrading radios, working with dispatch centers to make systems work together Firewise public outreach – Have a summer mitigation program and do radio 	<p>training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require part-time (ALL members) employees to Require full and part time operational employees to Encourage volunteers to
Gypsum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategic water sources County Roads 150 and 151 Road improvements as appropriate Develop backup evacuation route for Sweetwater residents Firewise community outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual NWCG wildfire training Maintain current NWCG certifications Encourage FFT2 to certify at FFT1
Lower Valley FPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain good communication with oil companies on wildfire issues Improve State Road 139 in Douglas Firewise public outreach Develop FPD specific CWPP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual NWCG wildfire training Maintain current NWCG certifications
Countywide–All FPDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue participation in wildfire specific wildfire crews and staff them during the fire season Pursue and encourage county wide WUI building standards and adaptation of the International Wildland Urban Interface Code Encourage inclusion of all areas of the county to be within in a FPD 	Not applicable

Fire Authority	Resources Needs	Training Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a new wildland fire specialist position to handle non-wildfire firefighting projects like vegetation-fuels treatments, community outreach, mapping of high hazard home areas, coordination with all fire authorities• Community Firewise outreach and encouragement to develop defensible space	

Source: FPDs

Garfield County Wildland Fire Operating Plan

The Garfield County Wildland Fire Operating Plan sets the standards for operating procedures, agreed policies, and responsibilities to implement cooperative wildfire protection on lands within Garfield County. The plan operates hand-in-hand with the Garfield County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), last updated in 2020. The LEOP is an all-discipline, all-hazards plan that provides general guidelines and principals for managing and coordinating the overall response and recovery activities before, during and after major emergencies and disaster events that affect unincorporated areas of Garfield County. The Wildland Fire Operating Plan and EOP guidelines are consistent with the standards and principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) endorsed by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Community Access and Evacuation

Access is an important component of any community's wildfire hazard and risk profile. Community access characteristics dictate the efficiency of emergency evacuation as well as the effectiveness of emergency response. Preferably community road design provides for multiple points of ingress/egress, supports two-way traffic flow, and offers adequate emergency apparatus turnaround radius on dead end roads and cul-de-sacs.

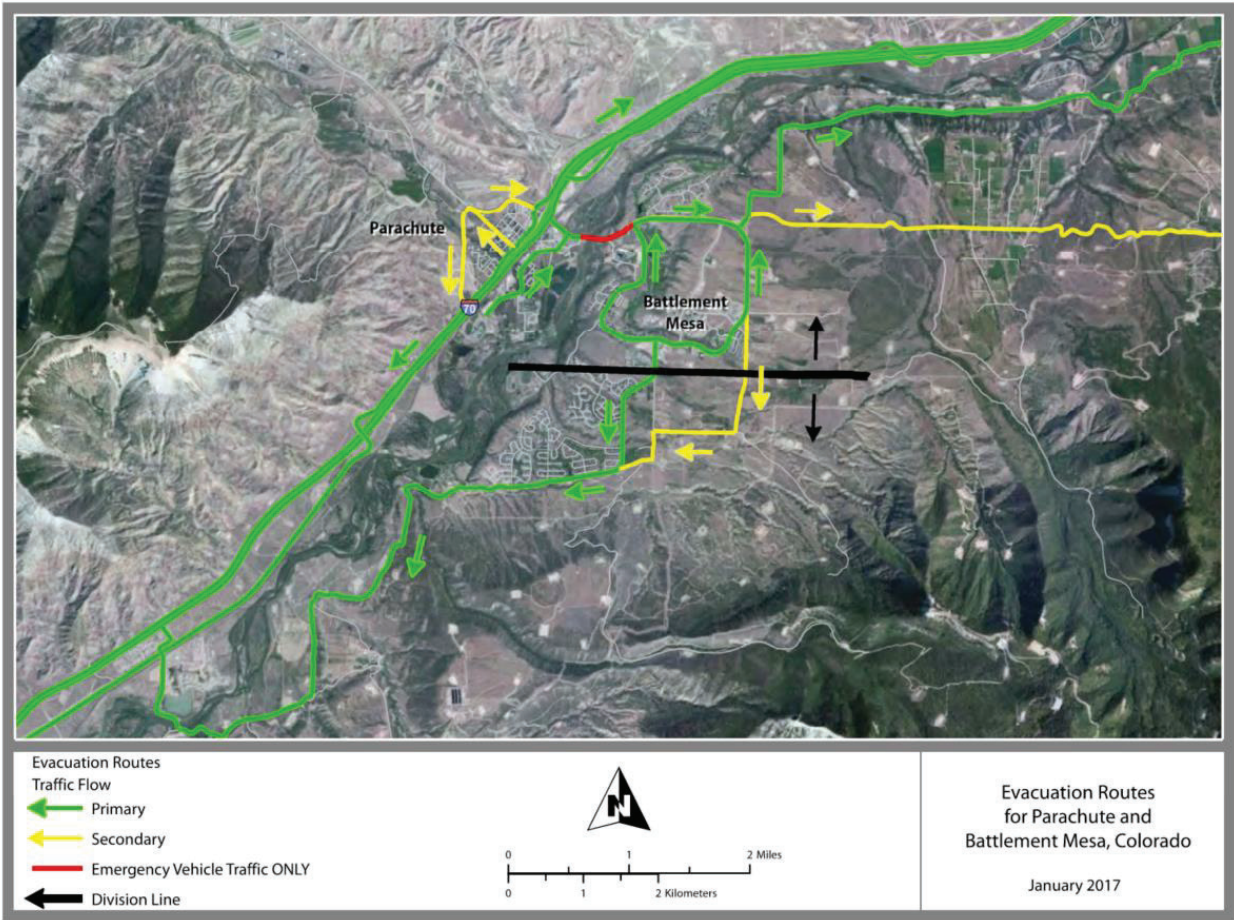
Road improvements to primary or secondary evacuation routes may be as straight forward as seasonal grading, constructing or improving turnarounds at dead ends, widening a particularly tight switchback, or improving a section of road that would not support fire access.

However, it is important to note that evacuation planning in mountainous areas has significant limitations. Often there are very few transportation corridors into or out of a community. Effective evacuation planning would require numerous avenues of egress. Therefore, Garfield County Emergency Management emphasizes the role of social media and broadcasts to notify residents how to evacuate from hazardous conditions. All FPDs within Garfield County have begun analyzing areas for opportunities to improve access within their district boundaries. Below are examples of these discussions from Carbondale & Rural FPD, Glenwood Springs FPD, and Grand Valley FPD.

Grand Valley FPD

Evacuation plans have been developed for both Parachute and Battlement Mesa through the local Parachute/Battlement Mesa Emergency Operations Plan. A division line has been established approximately along County Road 302. Primary evacuation routes are to use I-70, Stone Quarry Road, E and W Battlement Pkwy, and County Road 309.

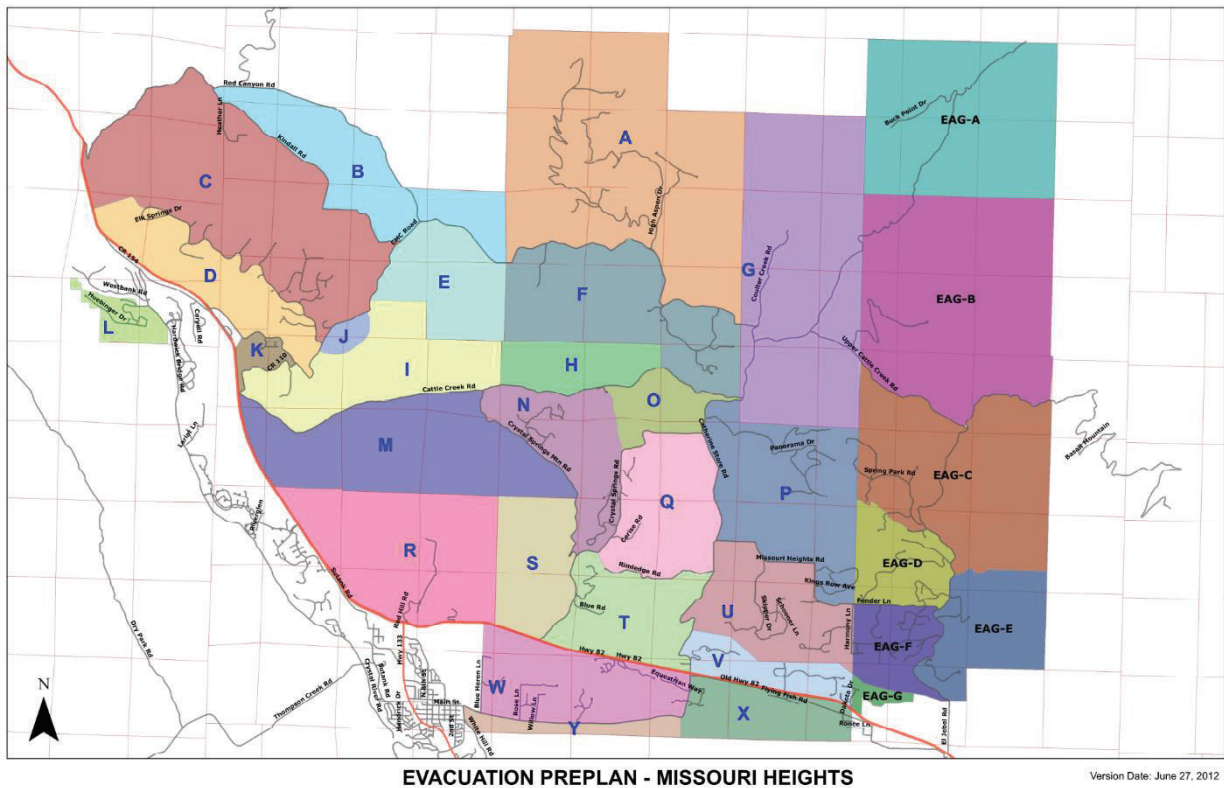
Figure 15: Parachute and Battlement Mesa Evacuation Corridors



Carbondale & Rural FPD

Evacuation planning and maps have been developed for the Missouri Heights subdivision within the Carbondale FPD. The subdivision has been broken down into specific quadrants to assist emergency responders and evacuees coordinate relocation efforts. Transportation corridors in the district can be challenging to traverse for responders unfamiliar with the area.

Figure 16: Missouri Heights Evacuation Zones



Glenwood Springs FPD

Evacuation planning is ongoing and evolving. Current efforts to establish evacuation plans/ routes in West Glenwood Springs are in process and may even include direct access to I-70 near the 114 and 116 interchanges. The ability to evacuate the southern Glenwood, Midland Ave, and Four-Mile neighborhoods is one piece of critical emphasis in the City's attempt to get a bypass built along Midland Avenue to the south and connecting with HWY 82. Other efforts specific to evacuation planning have focused on fuels reduction along access/egress routes, especially in high-risk neighborhoods with limited access roads.

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