

HPF Metro District 2014-15 Fire Mitigation Update

It is clear from comments, questions and communications from homeowners in the District that they are unaware of what the Board has done in the past and is currently doing to mitigate the fire risks within the District. Since the Metro District was first formed in 1986 the District has recognized the unique and exceptional asset of the forested properties within the District. As managers for this special “environmental jewel” the Directors for the District have consistently allocated a portion of the budget to protect the trees that make this area beautiful and special. To protect and preserve the forest requires a program of tree care that includes spraying for beetles, tree trimming and the removal of dead or diseased trees. A program of tree care to promote tree health can help reduce the risk of wildfire. Diseased and stressed trees, overcrowding and downed tree limbs increase the risk. Healthy, well-trimmed trees are less susceptible to fire. For many years the District has mitigated the risk by spraying trees, removing dead trees, trimming dead branches, spraying for noxious weeds and mowing in the many open space areas. All of these maintenance efforts help control the accumulation of fuel that increase the fire risk and could contribute to the spread of wildfires.

In 2011 the Board worked with Einar Jensen, Life Safety Educator, South Metro Fire Rescue Authority, Einar.Jensen@southmetro.org, Kristin Garrison, Colorado State Forest Service, and Jill Alexander, Douglas County Wildfire Mitigation, to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). As indicated by its title the concept requires community involvement. The District held a public meeting to discuss the plan and involve the community. According to the Forest Service, there was insufficient community interest to finalize the plan. Nonetheless the District and representatives of these agencies compiled a draft plan of wildfire priorities within the District. The draft of the plan has been used by the District to determine the areas of greatest risk and to guide its own efforts to mitigate and protect the community. It is clear, there is only so much the District can do. The District can mitigate the open space, but homeowners need to get involved and mitigate their own property for the District mitigation to be effective. In 2013, the District issued a letter to all homeowners urging them to mitigate their property (see www.hpfmd.org).

As part of the process the District designated an area close to the Timbers Sales Office to help estimate the cost per acre for mitigation and to provide the community with an actual example of what mitigation looks like. Estimates to implement the plan have ranged from \$2M to \$5 million dollars. The District understands and shares the concerns of the homeowners that the trees within the District, are a valuable asset for property values. For the most part the District has been able to mitigate by removing trees and native brush and shrubs as necessary to provide effective wildfire protection while maintaining the inherent beauty of the forest and to preserve wildlife habitat.

With the guidance of forestry and wildfire experts, the District has continued to conduct routine maintenance as well as fund wildfire mitigation efforts. Over the course of the past three years the District has spent over \$246,007 on mitigation and plans to spend an additional \$125,000 in 2014-15. During that same period, the District also spent over \$200,000 on tree spraying and

weed management. Please go to the High Prairie Farms Metropolitan District website for additional information- <http://www.hpfmt.org>.

Maintaining the health of our forest and open space using proven wildfire mitigation techniques has not been without controversy. Both wildfire mitigation and tree spraying has created some concern among a few residents. In a few instances, local mitigation and pesticide application has been modified to better accommodate specific health concerns. Overall, the District continues to follow guidelines, practices and policies established by local fire officials as well as County, State, Federal agencies.

The District encourages local residents to become more involved in implementing the District's wildfire protection plan by becoming better informed. A good place to start is with Douglas County and their Community Wildfire Protection Plan discussion at: <http://www.douglas.co.us/cwpp/> Residents are also encouraged to contact Einar Jensen at SMFRA (fire department) for conducting individual home assessments as well as discuss local fire mitigation efforts: <http://www.southmetro.org/311/Wildfire-Mitigation>. Small neighborhood groups can also be formed to conduct yard-specific cleanup projects that can be effective in preventing wildfires.