

Elk Fire Community Meeting 12/5/2019

Attending:

- Mike Morgan, Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC)
 - Caley Fisher, DFPC
 - Bobbie Mooney, DFPC
 - Dan Escobedo, DFPC
 - Justin Whitesell, Larimer County Sheriff's Office (LCSO)
 - David Moore, LCSO
 - Lori Hodges, Larimer County Office of Emergency Management (LCOEM)
 - Shayle Sabo, LCOEM
 - Rob Addington, The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
 - Val Turner, Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority (LETA)
 - Daniel Bowker, Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed (CPRW)
 - Jen Kovacs, CPRW
 - James White, US Forest Service (USFS)
 - Approximately 25 community members, based on the sign-in sheet
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- Daniel Bowker (CPRW)
 - Welcome and introductions
 - Mike Morgan, Caley Fisher, Bobbie Mooney (DFPC)
 - DFPC is committed to transparency in the fire review process, and to making it clear to the community how the process is fair and unbiased.
 - DFPC had their initial meeting Oct 30 with TNC and LCSO, and walked through what happened at the incident.
 - They then solidified and began executing the process for the review.
 - DFPC wanted to have a public meeting to give the public an opportunity to ask questions about the review process.
 - As a result of population growth in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and the escape of the Lower North Fork prescribed fire in 2012, the Colorado legislature passed a law (statute 24-33.5-1217.7) that requires DFPC to conduct a review in the event of an escaped prescribed fire on private and state lands (but not federal lands).
 - The intent is to identify the factors that contributed to the escape, including compliance with prescribed fire policy and planning requirements, in an effort to reduce the occurrence of escapes and prevent future escapes.
 - The October 2019 Elkhorn incident is the first time they have had to conduct a review since this legislation was enacted.
 - DFPC recognizes that this was a traumatic event for many people, but is grateful there was limited damage to structures and no injury or loss of life.
 - Because this is the first time this has happened since the legislation, they want to be very careful that they are doing this well and setting up a good process.
 - For the review team, DFPC will bring in the right subject matter experts external to this event to remain impartial during the process.
 - Mike Morgan has appointed the Compliance and Professional Standards Office within the Department of Public Safety to complete the review, and Compliance Officer Bobbie Mooney is leading the review process itself.

- The review process will follow the facilitated learning analysis model (FLA), which is a tool developed 15 years ago that is useful for evaluating accidents or unexpected events.
- DFPC is adapting this process for this review, and believes it will be helpful for learning from the incident.
- The review will be conducted by a four-person team: Bobbie Mooney and 3 independent subject matter experts from the federal and private sectors.
- Phase 1: Assemble the review team
- Phase 2: Data collection and document review, interviews
- Phase 3: Verify and synthesize the data, and draft the report
- Phase 4: Report dissemination
 - DFPC is hoping to complete the report by late January or early February
 - *Note: According to a January 3, 2020 notice on the DFPC website, the report is now not expected to be complete until March 1, due to difficulty in scheduling interviews over the holidays.*
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dfpc/news/news-release-dfpc-update-elk-fire-review>
- The report will be a public document shared on the DFPC website and at public meetings.
- Questions and concerns from the audience
 - It might be good idea to connect with the County Commissioners as the review process is underway.
 - Who are you going to be interviewing and will you interview other people besides people on the inner circle?
 - DFPC answer: It is a statutory requirement that the review look to see what were the contributing factors to the escape, so the primary focus is the burn plan and what happened leading up to and during the burn, and then as the circle of inquiry grows, we might reach out to others and expand to more interviews as determined by the review team.
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO): This is a review solely of the prescribed fire, and not the ensuing wildfire.
 - We as a community want to really understand why this happened and want to make sure that all the right people are interviewed. It's the 11th hour, and we want to know what firefighters were there and what did they see.
 - Who was responsible for making the decisions on the fire on that day? Who made the call to go ahead? The community knows that it was a stupid day to light a fire with all the wind.
 - DFPC: Who made that call and what the weather conditions were on the ground at that time will come out during the review process.
 - Will there be another review of the wildfire portion of the response?
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO): There was an internal after-action review but we are not required to complete a full review process of the wildfire response.
 - Will the results of that internal after-action review be made public?
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO): There was not really anything significant to report out from this internal after-action review.
- Daniel Bowker (CPRW) read a statement from the Longs Peak Council of the Boy Scouts of America, owner of the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch.
- Rob Addington (TNC)

- TNC is a conservation organization, founded in 1951, and is one of the largest environmental organizations in the world.
- Prescribed fire has been a major focus for TNC since the 1960s, and we have a long history of working with fire in the context of ecological and ecosystem management.
- TNC has been working in Colorado forests for more than 15 years.
- TNC's fire program is based in Loveland, and we have been very engaged in northern Front Range forest restoration, as well as in similar systems in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.
- TNC has focused on wildfire impacts to water resources.
- Information about the Elkhorn Creek Forest Health Initiative:
 - This project began in 2015, and has treated multiple units on the Scout Ranch, including mechanical thinning, hand thinning, pile burning, and prescribed broadcast burning.
 - TNC fire program staff are highly trained and certified according to National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) standards and are very experienced, and often come from a background of fire suppression, with a desire to transition into prescribed fire forest restoration work.
 - The Elkhorn unit 4 prescribed burn planning process started a year ago.
 - The burn plan follows NWCG standards.
 - There are a series of elements and requirements that have to be met:
 - Fire behavior modeling
 - Resources (personnel, equipment) needed
 - Contingency plan
 - Permitting (state burn and smoke permits)
 - For this burn, TNC identified some potential suitable burn windows in mid-October, and was tracking weather conditions, fuel moisture, wind, etc.
 - Snow the week before the planned burn window helped to meet the burn prescription.
 - There were 11 different agencies and 50 personnel on the burn, and a variety of wildland fire engines, hoselays, etc.
 - On both mornings of ignition, there was agreement on conditions being within the burn prescription.
 - During the course of all prescribed burns, fire behavior and weather monitoring is conducted to ensure that the burn is still within prescription.
- Question from the audience: Can you show the actual escape boundary?
 - Rob Addington (TNC) showed a map of the Elkhorn units, including the prescribed fire and escaped fire perimeter.
- Question from the audience: There is a rumor that on the first day of burning, the fire got out of control, and the burn still happened the next day.
 - Rob Addington (TNC): As far as I know, there were no problems or escapes on the first day, though there were smoke complaints. The review process will document the activities of both days fully.
- Rob Addington (TNC)
 - The transition from prescribed fire to a wildfire suppression effort, led by the LCSO, happened very quickly as the LCSO was present and assisting on the prescribed fire.
 - TNC and its partners are very grateful for the effective leadership of the LCSO in suppressing the wildfire.

- The wildfire was contained within 48 hours because of those efforts.
- TNC has been fully cooperating with DFPC in the review process.
- TNC is not conducting burning in the landscape while the DFPC review process is ongoing, though other agencies such as the USFS will be continuing with their planned burns.
- The Elkhorn unit 4 prescribed fire notification process included letters mailed to approximately 1500 residents within a 10-mile radius of the planned prescribed fire.
- For insurance claims related to the wildfire, TNC's liability insurer is Federal Insurance Company, and the claims representative is Michael Rettig, who can be reached at elkfire@sgrllc.com.
- At the Oct 18 meeting, TNC collected emails to distribute information on this claims process.
- Questions and concerns from the audience
 - The USFS is still burning and pile burning is still happening, so we may see those things going on.
 - Is TNC properly insured to cover the kind of claims that may have occurred if this fire did actually cause real damage to homes? Homes in Glacier View Meadows can be quite expensive.
 - Rob Addington (TNC): TNC has organizationally built into its structure to be really well insured for this. I'm not sure what is the actual maximum is that we are insured for, but I do know that we take on insurance with the assumption of a potential for large costs.
- Val Turner (LETA)
 - LETA is a governing authority over 911, formed by intergovernmental agreement, and answers to a seven-member board.
 - LETA is funded by a 70 cent monthly surcharge on every phone line (wired, wireless, and VoIP); this funds the 911 technology.
 - There is sometimes confusion about LETA; it is not an emergency alert system, LETA funds the emergency alert system.
 - There are three ways to sign up:
 - Online at www.leta911.org
 - Call LETA at 970-962-2173
 - Sign up for text alerts by texting "LETA" to 888777
 - Emergency alerts are geographically based; during an emergency a polygon of the area, as determined by responders on scene, defines where notifications go.
 - We did not turn off landlines during this emergency.
 - Receiving notifications: give us as many contact paths as you possibly can; the more ways we can reach you the better because some paths fail during emergencies.
 - As to why some people did not receive the emergency alert: we asked at the last meeting who did not receive messages, and only three people responded, and two of those were not in the polygon. The system did not fail.
 - It used to be that once a recipient receives the message and confirms it, it does not move on to the next family member.
 - Now that has been changed so that now you will receive alerts on every single device you signed up for without the ability to confirm or stop the notifications; everyone agreed that that would be beneficial.
 - As to incident maps that are easier to read: The current map used in the emergency alert system does not give enough detail to be helpful. We are working on improving

the map, and looking at Los Angeles Fire that uses an interactive Google map. Notification polygons can be loaded into the interactive map and people can search their address for reference.

- Incident maps will be updated over the course of the event. Dispatch centers may update the polygon during the event, if necessary, and responders may update the incident maps.
- Who should I call if I see smoke but have no power?
 - David Moore (LCSO)
 - Call 911; we may not even know about the smoke yet.
 - Or call the non-emergency line at 970-416-1985.
- What is the plan to fully staff the emergency phone line (970-498-5500)?
 - David Moore (LCSO)
 - There is not a plan for that at this time.
 - That line is for the Joint Information Center (JIC) if there is no Emergency Operations Center.
 - It is an information line and only provides periodic updates.
 - If there is a JIC, you get a phone tree to find the right person, but JIC staffing depends on the size of the emergency.
- In the Elk Fire, was a JIC set up and that information pushed out on Next Door and social media?
 - David Moore (LCSO)
 - A minimal JIC was set up for 18 hours over 2.5 days, and received 27 calls.
- Why did the polygon for evacuation only encompass part of Glacier View Meadows?
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO)
 - There are many things that go into the decision for evacuations, including weather, topography, neighborhood, evacuation routes.
 - There was not a lot of information on where the fire was; the decision was based on callers; fortunately we have had a lot of experience here in Larimer County and can make those calls based on prior local knowledge.
 - Decisions are made on knowledge and experience but we will sometimes make mistakes.
- Why don't the polygons always match up with the evacuation notices and emergency alerts?
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO): There are lots of things going on, and a lot of communication going on; we're trying to make sure that the message is 100% perfect but sometimes the messages don't line up 100%.
 - David Moore (LCSO): If you don't feel comfortable, don't wait for an evacuation order. If you do not feel safe, don't wait; err on the side of caution. The crew on the ground is focusing on getting people out of the way as fast as possible.
- Would a full evacuation of Glacier View Meadows cause a dangerous backup on CR 74E?
 - Justin Whitesell (LCSO)
 - We did evacuate all of Rist Canyon during the High Park Fire and did not have a backup.
 - Is it possible that it might? Yes, there is that possibility but we will always try to keep that road open.
 - Evacuations tend to be phased; we also do not have the same kind of congestion here that occurs in places like California.
- When I don't have power, I don't have a cell signal, and your system is a push system. But the main question is who do we call to find information on an incident?

- David Moore (LCSO)
 - Call 911 or the non-emergency line, just don't call them every 30 minutes for updates.
 - Then evacuate to a place where you can get cell coverage.
 - Don't wait for someone to tell you to leave.
- Dan Escobedo (DFPC): There is a YouTube video of people during the Camp Fire who said they were waiting for notification to evacuate and they didn't make it out.
- We all live up here and know that you cannot always rely on the government or other people. Get in your car and leave if you feel like you should.
- When you receive an emergency alert, if you call it back it will repeat the information. You should program the emergency alert number (970-658-2244) as a contact in your phone.
- If you lose infrastructure in events you may want to invest in satellite technology.
- Lori Hodges (LCOEM): Since you live where you live, you know things about your neighbors, and you may want to set up a buddy system. Use your community as much as possible to solve whatever your community's needs are. Preparedness is just as important as incident response.
- The Red Feather Lakes Library is getting solar power so we should have more capabilities during emergencies.
- Val Turner (LETA): Again, you should provide as many contact pathways as possible.
- The North Forty Mountain Alliance is working on providing more information and can help identify the points of confusion.
- What is Everbridge? It is apparently the emergency alert system but no one knows what that name refers to.
 - Val Turner (LETA): Everbridge is the vendor of the emergency alert system. LETA is working on rebranding the emergency alert system (NOCO Alert) and trying to make the registration process a little clearer.
- Is it an option for LETA to use the alert system for future prescribed fires?
 - Val Turner (LETA): It is possible that we could do community alerts but citizens would have to opt in and it would have to be managed outside of the dispatch center. Further discussions would be needed.
- People in Red Feather Lakes did not get the emergency alerts.
 - Val Turner (LETA): Notifications only went out to people under immediate threats but others could get updates through social media and a keyword, if one is set up.
- It seems like sometimes during slash pile burning, the piles are abandoned after they are lit. I saw them light a bunch of piles on the Boy Scout Ranch that were not attended and there was no one around. Who do you call in this situation?
 - Call 911.
- Daniel Bowker (CPRW)
 - Discussion of best methods for community notification for future prescribed fires
 - There are many methods for notification and outreach, but we need community input on which methods are best.
 - Please fill out the survey that was distributed as you arrived tonight; that will help us gauge which ways are most effective at getting the word out about future prescribed fires
 - Possible ways we can get in touch with people:
 - Direct mail based on county assessor parcel data
 - North Forty Mountain Alliance
 - North Forty News, Coloradoan

- Email list
 - Facebook
 - Next Door
 - Website
 - Fire districts
 - Newsletters
 - TV/radio
 - Road signs
 - Flyers posted on public message boards
- Suggestions from the audience:
 - InciWeb can be really helpful.
 - We appreciate the USFS' multiple emails over the course of their burning events.
 - Community newsletters like Glacier View's are good ways to reach people.
- Daniel Bowker (CPRW)
 - What happens next
 - After the DFPC review is complete and the report is out, we will hold another community meeting to discuss the results and any changes to be made in the process of planning prescribed fires and notifying the public.
 - We will hold a public tour of the prescribed fire area on the Scout Ranch in the spring and will advertise it widely. We hope for lots of community participation in this tour. We will also hold another prescribed fire informational field day in late summer.
 - TNC, CPRW, and all their partners will continue to hold outreach and educational events and tours of prescribed fires and other management areas.
 - TNC fire staff will re-engage with the community after the review process.
 - All of us are actively listening, taking notes, and assimilating your questions and concerns. Your input will be critical as we move forward with forest restoration work in the watershed.