

Fountain Creek Watershed

Flood Control & Greenway District

FACT SHEET

Wildfires' Impact to Our Watershed



ABOUT THE FOUNTAIN CREEK WATERSHED

A watershed is a region that drains into a river, river system or other common body of water. The Fountain Creek Watershed is located along the central front range of Colorado. It is a 927-square-mile area of land and water that drains to the Arkansas River at Pueblo and, ultimately, to the Gulf of Mexico. The watershed's boundaries are defined by the shape of the land – Palmer Divide to the north, Pikes Peak to the west, and a minor divide 20 miles east of Colorado Springs. Why is watershed protection important? Improving our waterways helps with water quality, stormwater management, flood prevention, creating recreational opportunities and nature habitat for wildlife.

HOW DO WILDFIRES IMPACT OUR WATERSHED?

Wildfires can be a friend or foe depending on various factors, especially fuel/vegetation conditions, weather, and topography. Under ideal conditions where weather and vegetation conditions are conducive to low-intensity fire behavior, wildfires benefit areas of a watershed by reducing surface fuels (such as dead and down trees), removing "ladder" fuels, and mitigating the spread of certain tree diseases and insects. Many forest types and tree species within the Fountain Creek Watershed evolved with frequent low-intensity fire as a natural component of the ecosystem; this maintains a healthy forest by reducing fuels and recycling nutrients into the soil. For some species, seeds require fire to open and germinate.

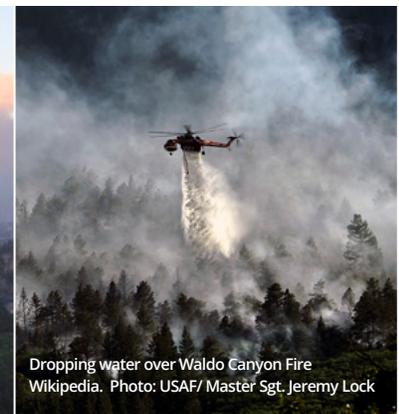
On the other hand, when wildfires occur under hot, dry and windy conditions, forests can be expected to burn under high-intensity conditions. This leaves soils vulnerable to erosion and severe post-fire flooding that can severely impact homes, water supplies, recreation areas, and community economies.

How is our watershed impacted by wildfires?

1. Less vegetation in a burn area can reduce snowpack conditions resulting in faster and earlier runoff.
2. The soil in a burn area can become hydrophobic – it actually repels water. These conditions increase surface runoff and erosion. This can lead to devastating mudslides, flash floods, and debris flows that dump soil, rocks, and trees into our streams.
3. Increased carbon, manganese, and fire retardant enter our streams, which decreases water quality.



Black Forest Fire
Wikipedia. Photo: U8oLO



Dropping water over Waldo Canyon Fire
Wikipedia. Photo: USAF/ Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock



Waldo Canyon Fire
Wikipedia. Photo: Keystoneridin

WILDFIRES IMPACT - CONTINUED

The 2012 Waldo Canyon Fire and 2013 Black Forest Fire resulted in four fatalities and widespread ecosystem impacts within the burn areas. This led to downstream instability throughout the Fountain Creek Watershed due to an increase in erosion, sediment, and debris.

The Waldo Canyon Fire scorched more than 18,000 acres and 346 structures in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas of Ute Pass and western Colorado Springs. Heavy rains coupled with unstable soil conditions resulted in devastating flash floods within days of fire containment with additional property

losses and one fatality in subsequent flooding events. The following year, the Black Forest Fire burned more than 14,000 acres and 511 structures in northern El Paso County.

The Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control & Greenway District collaborates with agencies, organizations, and citizens to promote ongoing pre- and post-fire mitigation efforts to recover burned areas and reduce the impact to our watershed.



Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFXYjVhBg9Y>

EXPECT MORE FIRES IN OUR FUTURE

According to the US Forest Service, the wild-fire-management environment has profoundly changed over the last few decades:

- The fire season lasts longer.
- Fires are larger and, on average, burn more acres each year.
- Fire behavior is more extreme.

To address these challenges, the Forest Service and its many partner organizations – including the Fountain Creek Watershed District – are collaborating to support a Wildland Fire Management Strategy in which a key component is creating “fire-adapted communities.”

In a fire-adapted community, residents are knowledgeable about the risks of wildfire and engaged in wildfire mitigation efforts. This means everyone in the community – including individual homeowners – actively participate in mitigation projects that reduce the impact of wildfire and, simultaneously, lessen the need for extensive protective action.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Wildfires are a constant threat to communities in our watershed AND to the watershed itself. When we all participate in mitigation efforts – at our homes, neighborhoods, and public lands – we can become a fire-adapted community. The many benefits include improved public safety, water quality, restored wildlife habitat, and a healthy creek system. This results in a healthier, more resilient watershed for our diverse water interests including recreation.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP!

Each of us can reduce the fire danger – and its impact on our watershed – by learning more about wildfire mitigation. Start here:

- Colorado State University Cooperative Extension’s “Fire-Resistant Landscaping”
<https://www.csu.org/CSUDocuments/neighborhoodfoothills.pdf>
- Firewise USA:
<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Preparing-homes-for-wildfire>
- Colorado Springs Fire Department Wildfire Mitigation information:
<https://coloradosprings.gov/fire-department/page/wildfire-mitigation-0?mlid=9906>



DISTRICT CONTACTS

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC): Technical experts who provide recommendations to the Board on public policy or expenditure of funds for the benefit of the watershed and to carry on other investigations. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/technical-advisory-committee).

Citizen's Advisory Group (CAG): Citizens representing various interests within the watershed who offer advice to the Board on managing the watershed. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/citizens-advisory-group).

District Board: Representatives from Pueblo County, El Paso County, City of Pueblo, City of Colorado Springs, City of Fountain, and others as defined by statute. (Learn more: www.fountain-crk.org/about/district-board).

For more information about the statutory authority and purpose of the Fountain Creek Watershed, Flood Control and Greenway District, see Colorado Revised Statute 32-11.5. You can also visit www.Fountain-Crk.org or call 719-447-5012.