

Colorado Wildfire Update

Colorado Municipal League - Special Conference

September 24, 2021



How Fire Works in Colorado

Fire Protection District

Initial Attack
Exceeds Capabilities
Requests County Assistance

County Sheriff

Required to Take Fire if
Local Capability
Exceeded
Exceeds County
Capabilities
Requests State Assistance

State Responsibility

Performs Analysis to
Determine if Eligible
If Eligible, State Assumes
Cost with Ongoing
Involvement from Local
and County Partners
State pays with EFF,
Resource Mob, or
Executive Order (DEF)

DFPC Involvement on Fires

- **State Assistance Fires** - available for all fires, with emphasis on early detection and rapid Initial Attack actions
 - Includes funding for aviation resources on Day 1+ of a fire
 - Includes funding for 2 days of a 20-person handcrew during IA
 - Includes DFPC Engines, Modules, and Overhead for first 2 days of a fire
 - Required additional appropriation and/or utilizes DFPC base budgets
- **State Responsibility Fires** - based on analysis to determine if local capability to manage the fire is exceeded
 - Currently funded through EFF/County and Executive Order (Disaster Emergency) funds

History of State Responsibility Fires

Years	# of State Responsibility Fires
1967 to 1969	0
1970 to 1979	1
1980 to 1989	8
1990 to 1999	15
2000 to 2009	65
2010 to 2019	74
2020 to 2021	18
Total	181



2010 4 Mile Canyon



2018 Lake Christine



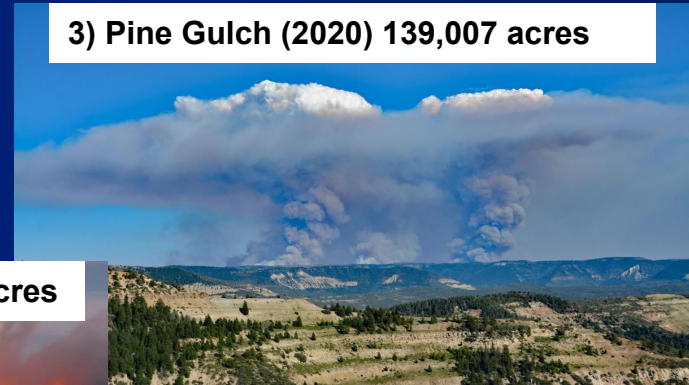
2016 Beaver Creek

Colorado's Largest Wildfires

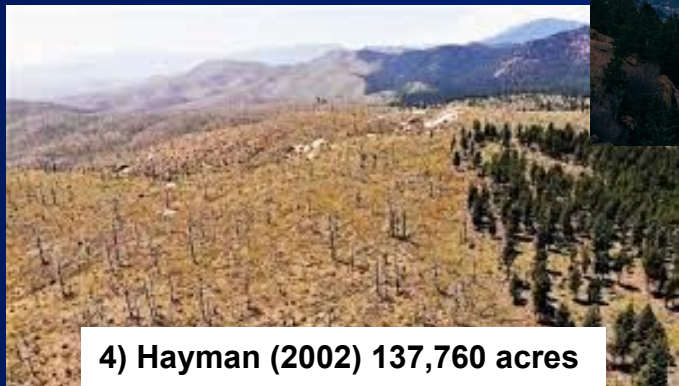
2) East Troublesome (2020) 193,812 acres



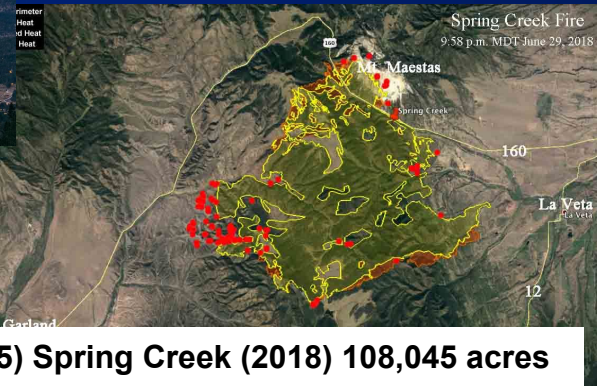
3) Pine Gulch (2020) 139,007 acres



1) Cameron Peak (2020) 208,913 acres



4) Hayman (2002) 137,760 acres



5) Spring Creek (2018) 108,045 acres

The Increasing Fire Problem

- By 2050 the area burned nationwide is expected to double to around 20M acres per year and
- Colorado is expected to experience up to a five-fold increase in acres burned
- Core wildfire seasons are 78 days longer than they were in the late 1970's
- 2.9 Million people living in Colorado's Wildland urban Interface
- Core wildfire seasons are 78 days longer than they were in the late 1970's
- State Demographers expect Colorado's population to grow from 5.5 million people to 8.5 million people by 2050



Colorado Fire Trends

- Colorado's Top 20 Largest Wildfires:
 - All 20 have occurred since 2001
 - 9 of the 20 have occurred in the last 3 years (2018 and 2020)
 - 4 of the top 5 have occurred in the last 3 years (2018 and 2020)



Traditional Colorado Model

- Wildfires only happen in the mountains between Memorial Day and Labor Day
- Being a wildland firefighter is a great summer job while you're in college
- Wait until it's over the hill, and then the State will bring the checkbook



The DFPC “Playbook”

- Winter of 2017 - 18
- Formalize and document an intentional long-term strategy for the future of DFPC’s support to fire agencies in CO
- Core working group of 43 individuals
 - Road show meetings: Fort Morgan, La Junta, Alamosa, Durango, and Steamboat
- Total of 114 meeting participants from 84 agencies

The Concept of a Fire Commission

- Several groups already working on forest health and watershed issues (the Fire Commission is not a duplicate group)
- Evaluate and make recommendations related to Colorado's fire issues (not just wildfire)
- Who are the Stakeholders?
- Geographical Representation

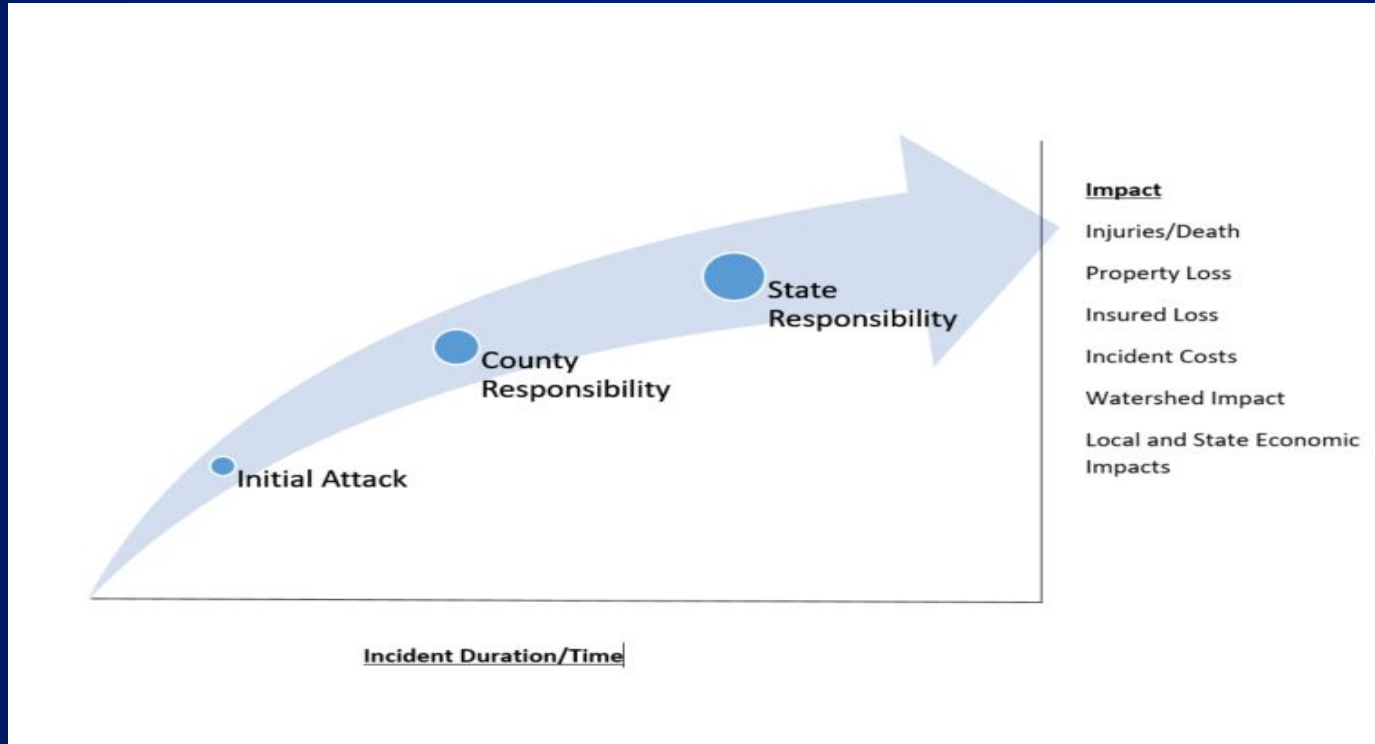
Colorado Fire Commission (SB19-040)

- 24 voting members; 7 ex-officio (non-voting) members with ability to appoint additional stakeholders or subject matter experts
- Mission Statement: Enhance public safety in Colorado through an integrated statewide process focused on the fire service's capacity to conduct fire management and use, preparedness, prevention, and response activities to safeguard lives, property, and natural resources, and increase the resiliency of local and regional communities.

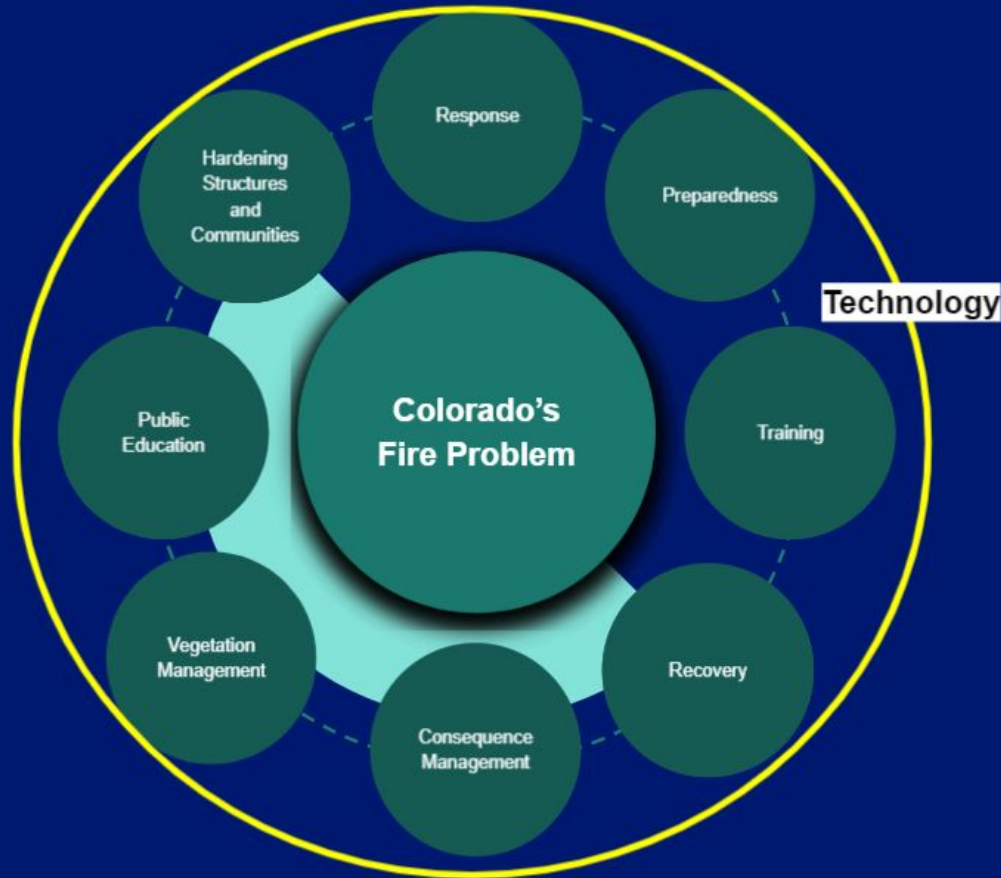


A New Concept for the State's Fire Agency

- Duration vs. Impact:



A New Approach to CO's Fire Problem



Suppression and Mitigation

- Is suppression “or” mitigation the answer to the wildfire problem?
- National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy:
 - Resilient Landscapes
 - Fire Adapted Communities
 - Safe and Effective Wildfire Response



Suppression and Mitigation

- **Defensible Space:** an area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been managed to reduce the wildfire threat and allow firefighters to safely and effectively defend the house.
- **Fuel Break:** a strip of land or block of vegetation that have been altered to slow or control a fire.
- 2018 Buffalo Mountain Fire
 - Example of an “AND” approach



Wanted Versus Unwanted Fires

- Fire is a healthy part of the ecosystem at:
 - The right time
 - The right place
 - With the right conditions
 - With the right resources

CFC Year #1 Recommendations

Enhanced State Assistance Program:

- Evaluate funding methodology to encourage all counties to participate
- Convert County EFF contributions to fund Enhanced State Assistance (ESA) - no legislation needed to implement this
- Provide \$1.8M in continuously appropriated State funds to bolster ESA capacity (**included as part of Stimulus SB21-049**)
- Expand statutory use of Wildfire Emergency Response Funds (WERF) to include expanding the use of local and state resources to strive to keep fires small (severity, prepositioning, aviation, crews, surge, etc)

Other Year #1 CFC Recommendations

- Implement a Comprehensive Fire Data Collection and Dissemination Program
- Implement the Colorado Coordinated Regional Mutual Aid System (CCRMAAS)
- Updates to Mutual Aid Statutes to Support CCRMAAS
- Establish a State Responsibility and Large Wildland Fire Fund within DFPC



DFPC's Approach to Fire Response

Threatening Fires

- Early Detection
 - MMA
 - Fireguard
- Aggressive Initial Attack
 - Enhanced State Assistance
 - Appropriate resources under Colorado Operational Control

State Assistance Funding - 2018 to 2020*

Year	# of Requests	# Agencies Requesting	Handcrew Expenses	Aviation Expenses	Total Expenses
2020	52	33	\$ 262,000	\$ 2,005,000	\$ 2,267,000
2019	32	25	\$ 165,000	\$ 927,000	\$ 1,092,000
2018	75	36	\$ 396,000	\$ 2,182,000	\$ 2,578,000
TOTAL	159	94	\$ 823,000	\$ 5,114,000	\$ 5,937,000

* Note: Does not include wildfire and all-hazard assistance provided to local agencies by DFPC MMA, Engines, Modules, and Overhead resources

2020 State Responsibility Fire Analysis

- 5 of 16 (Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, Pine Gulch, Grizzly Peak, and Mullen):
 - 594,172 acres burned
 - \$265,503,000 estimated suppression expenses
 - Federal/State Acres = 85%/15%
 - Federal/State Expenses = 90%/10%
- The Other 11 of 16:
 - 32,914 acres burned
 - \$20,686,470 estimated suppression expenses
 - Federal/State Acres = 26%/74%
 - Federal/State Expenses = 45%/55% of Fires



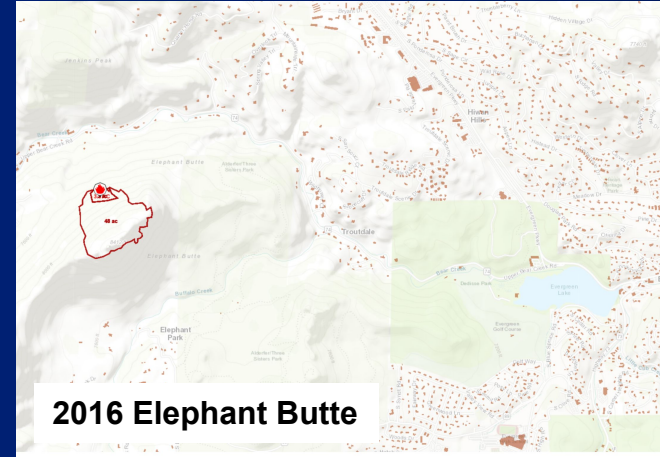
What We Did in 2020:

- Aggressive Initial Attack
- 1st ever Exclusive Use (EU) contract for a Large Air Tanker (LAT)
- One time funds to extend existing EU contracts for Helicopters and Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs)
- 1st ever pre-positioning of ground resources using State funds
- 2nd State to implement the Firewatch Program for detection and monitoring
- Use of Scoopers in 2020 (and in the future)
- COVID-19 planning with interagency partners



Examples of Success in 2020

- Chatridge 2 Fire - Douglas County (2 day event, 450 acres burned)
- Elephant Butte Fire - Jefferson County (SRF for 3 days, 52 acres)
- 84 Fire - La Plata County (2 day event, 23 acres burned)
- Green Meadows Fire - San Miguel County (SRF for 3 days, 62 acres)
- Sunday Fire - Weld County (limited to 2,003 acres and 1 structure lost)



2021 Legislative and Program Updates

Why These Stimulus Packages?

- Mitigation AND Suppression - holistic approach
- Even in coordination with significant mitigation efforts, we will still always have to respond to and suppress fires to protect life and property
- It has taken us decades to get here, it will take a comprehensive approach to get out
- The Colorado Fire Commission will continue to work with all stakeholders in a data driven manner to lessen the severity or likelihood of a fire when it does occur utilizing all facets of mitigation

Wildfire Stimulus Package and Legislation - DFPC

- **Extending Existing Aviation Contracts (SB21-049)**
 - Aviation resources to match Colorado's expanding fire "season"
 - 2 EU SEATs - 150 to 240 days each
 - 2 EU Type II Helicopters - 150 to 230 days each
- **New Aviation Resources (SB21-049 and SB21-113)**
 - LAT - 110 day EU, ongoing
 - Firehawk - year-round, State-owned, arrives 2022
 - Type 1 Helo - for 2021 only
 - Scoopers - new in 2020, CWN moving forward
 - Ag Applicator Program for Eastern Plains

Wildfire Stimulus Package and Legislation - DFPC

- **Enhanced State Assistance (SB21-049 and SB21-113)**
 - Updated WERF Statute - increased flexibility
 - Dedicated, on-going funding
 - Increased flexibility and options
- **Mutual Aid Coordination (SB21-166)**
 - Updated Statutes (Fire vs. Law Enforcement)
 - Regional Mutual Aid System (CCRMAS)
- **Large Fire Funding (SB21-227)**
 - Proposed vs. Amendments

Other Related Changes

- **24 Hour Wildfire Mutual Aid:**
 - Authorized in Master Agreement and State Operating Plan between DFPC and our Federal Partners
 - All Tools in the Toolbox
 - Impacts to DFPC (+/-)

State-Owned Firehawk Helicopter

- Increased Wildfire Capacity
 - Capability, Versatility, Flight Environment
- Current Non-Fire Missions
- Potential Future Non-Fire Missions
 - A Public Safety Investment
 - Other State of CO Depts
- Costs - Short and Long Term



Colorado State Forest Service

- Forest restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation Grants (FRWRM)
 - FRWRM can now fund projects totaling up to \$1 million
 - August 2021: \$6.4M awarded to 42 applicants in 25 counties (SB21-054 and SB21-205)
 - \$8M funding now available per year (SB21-205)
 - FRWRM projects may now include federal lands (SB21-258)
 - 25% of FRWRM funds available for Capacity Building: Equipment purchases; staff capacity; project planning; outreach and engagement (SB21-258)

Colorado State Forest Service

- CSFS Forest Business Loan Program: \$2.5M (SB21-258)
- CSFS Healthy Forests Vibrant Communities: \$5M (SB21-258)
 - CSFS can hire full-time staff to provide support for Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)
- Local government resources can leverage state resources

Department of Natural Resources

- SB21-258: Wildfire Mitigation Stimulus
 - Guided by MOU between DNR-CSFS-DPS/DFPC; 2 staff hired at DNR for implementation
 - Workforce development: ~\$7.4M for Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) & Department of Corrections SWIFT crews
 - Landscape Scale Wildfire Mitigation Projects: ~\$8.85M for “all lands” project planning & implementation
 - Funds must be obligated by June 30th, 2023; funding decision process is under development

“The Department of Natural Resources shall prioritize those projects with the greatest potential to protect life, property, and infrastructure.”

Department of Natural Resources

- Moved the Colorado Forest Health Council from CSFS to DNR (HB21-237)
- Forest Health Project Financing (HB21-1008)
 - Local governments and communities can now create special or local improvement districts for forest health
 - Colorado Water Resources Power and Development Authority can continue to issue bonds to fund watershed protection projects
- Biomass Utilization Grants (HB21-1180)
 - CSFS may grant up to \$2.5M for biomass utilization projects demonstrating wildfire risk reduction, renewable energy production, biochar production (program is currently unfunded, and at the discretion of the State Forester)

Municipal and Local Efforts

- Partnerships - Mutual/Automatic Aid, County, DFPC, State/Federal Forest Service, BLM
- Creation of Wildland Firefighting Teams and Certified Personnel
- Supportive Legislation

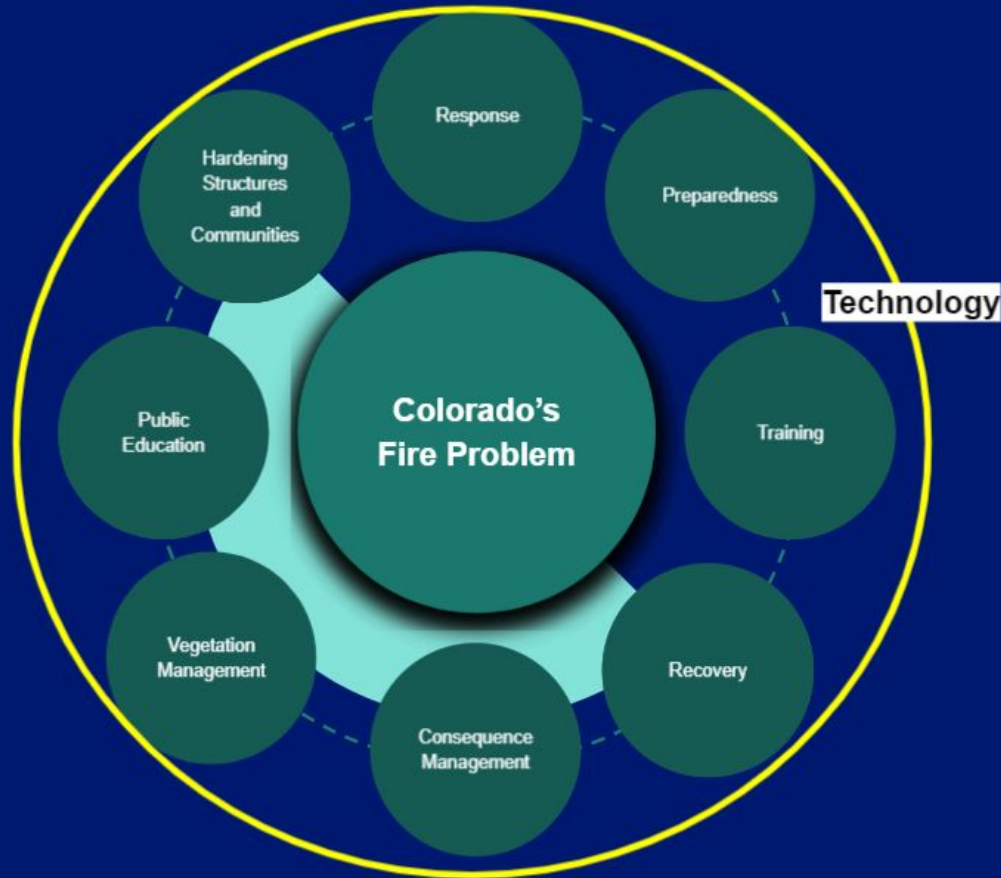


Municipal and Local Efforts

- Formation of Wildfire Coalitions
 - Community Education/Exercises
 - Community Mitigation Projects



A New Approach to CO's Fire Problem



CFC and DFPC Next Steps

- Data
- Dispatching and Mobilization of Fire Based Resources
- Training
- Technology (CoE)
- Public Education
- Messaging
- High Risk Hazards
- Wildland Urban Interface

High Risk Hazards/WUI

- High Risk Hazards
 - Energy Storage
 - CBD oil production facilities
 - Single Family Dwellings (most common place of injury or death)
- Wildland Urban Interface / Governor's request
 - Land use
 - Development
 - Building resiliency

In Closing

- 9 of the State's 20 largest fires in history occurred in 2018 and 2020, including 4 of the 5 largest fires in our history
- 2020 had the most expensive fire in Colorado's history (Cameron Peak) and 3 largest wildfires
- Fires occurred in some of the “worst” locations, yet we did have successes in the area of reducing losses and impacts
 - Aggressive initial attack
 - Enhanced State Assistance
 - An overall policy evaluation is necessary

Questions?

Wildfire in Colorado has grown beyond a natural resource problem and has become a ***PUBLIC SAFETY PROBLEM*** impacting lives, homes, watersheds, tourism, economy, and quality of life.

