

## **Wildfire Matters Review Committee**

### **Members of the Committee**

Representative Marc Snyder, Chair  
Senator Pete Lee, Vice-Chair

Senator Don Coram  
Senator Larry Crowder  
Senator Stephen Fenberg  
Senator Joann Ginal

Representative Terri Carver  
Representative Lisa Cutter  
Representative Julie McCluskie  
Representative Perry Will

### **Legislative Council Staff**

Jimmy Reed, Research Analyst  
April Bernard, Research Analyst  
Julia Jackson, Senior Research Analyst

### **Office of Legislative Legal Services**

Bob Lackner, Managing Senior Attorney  
Thomas Morris, Managing Senior Attorney  
Megan Waples, Staff Attorney

***November 2019***



# Wildfire Matters Review Committee

## Committee Charge

---

Pursuant to Section 2-3-1602, C.R.S., the Wildfire Matters Review Committee is charged with reviewing and proposing legislation or other policy changes related to wildfire prevention, mitigation, and related matters, including public safety and forest health issues. Senate Bill 13-082 created the Wildfire Matters Review Committee as an interim committee and Senate Bill 18-039 extended the repeal date of the committee to September 1, 2025.

## Committee Activities

---

The committee met three times during the 2019 interim and heard presentations from representatives of various entities involved in wildfire prevention, mitigation, and response. Entities that presented to the committee include:

- Air Pollution Control Division, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE);
- AlertWildfire;
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Fire and Aviation Program;
- Colorado Counties, Inc.;
- Colorado Municipal League;
- the Colorado Resiliency Office, Department of Local Affairs;
- Colorado Rural Electric Association;
- the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), Colorado State University;
- the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC), Colorado Department of Public Safety;
- the Division of Insurance, Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA);
- the Nature Conservancy;
- the Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association;
- RPM Agency; and
- West Region Wildfire Council.

**Aerial firefighting and wildfire response.** The committee heard from DFPC and the BLM about state and federal efforts to respond to wildfires. DFPC provided information about ongoing research projects, including how drones and unmanned aerial systems are used in firefighting and the effectiveness of using aircrafts for firefighting. The BLM explained local partnerships and the distribution of resources, including aircraft. DFPC also provided recommendations concerning employee benefits for firefighters within the division.

**Forest management and wildfire mitigation.** The committee heard from the CSFS and the West Region Wildfire Council about managing the state's forests. The Nature Conservancy, municipal and county representatives, and utilities operating in Colorado also testified to the committee about their mitigation efforts. The committee learned about ongoing efforts and challenges in preparing for and preventing wildfire damage around the state.

**Wildfire technologies.** AlertWildfire, a research consortium based in California and Nevada, informed the committee about new technologies available for early detection and wildfire growth, including high definition cameras and a microwave communications network. The Air Pollution Control Division within CDPHE updated the committee on health impacts from wildfire smoke and methods of protection from these effects. The division also discussed technologies used to detect and forecast wildfire smoke and how it disseminates air quality warnings and advisories.

**Homeowners' insurance in the wildland-urban interface.** The Division of Insurance within DORA discussed its role in assisting homeowners after wildfires. The Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association and the RPM Agency presented about insurance coverage for wildfires and post-fire floods and the benefits of improving residences to protect against wildfire. The committee also learned about insurance incentives for homeowners to mitigate wildfire risks on their property.

**Economic recovery after wildfires.** The committee heard from the Colorado Resiliency Office about its work with local entities to aid in the recovery from natural disasters. Commissioners from Eagle, Jefferson, and Summit Counties briefed the committee about the economic impact of disasters, including the Lake Christine and Buffalo wildfires, on their communities.

## Committee Recommendations

---

As a result of committee discussion and deliberation, the Wildfire Matters Review Committee recommends the following five bills for consideration in the 2020 legislative session.

***Bill A – Modify Wildfire Risk Mitigation Grant Program.*** The bill makes modifications to the Forest Restoration and Wildfire Mitigation Grant Program in the Department of Higher Education (DHE). Under current law, the grant program’s share of a project cannot exceed 50 percent of the total cost of a project. The bill allows projects to receive up to 75 percent of costs through the grant program if the project is located in an area with fewer economic resources, thereby reducing the applicant’s share to 25 percent. Additionally, the bill:

- directs the Colorado State Forest Service to establish rules to administer the grant and criteria by which a project will satisfy the requirement of being in an area with few economic resources;
- expands the list of eligible recipients to include fire protection districts and nonprofit organizations engaged in firefighting activities; and
- extends the grant program repeal date from September 1, 2022, to September 1, 2029.

***Bill B – Surplus Military Vehicles Highway Use if Firefighting.*** The bill clarifies that a surplus military vehicle is not included in the definition of an off-highway vehicle if a municipality, county, or fire protection district uses the surplus military vehicle for firefighting efforts, including mitigation.

***Bill C – Division of Fire Prevention and Control Employee Benefits.*** The bill makes benefit changes for Division of Fire Prevention and Control employees in the Department of Public Safety, including insurance for certain heart conditions and cancers, as well as pension benefits.

***Bill D – Homeless Outreach Programs to Reduce Wildfire Risk.*** The bill creates the Wildfire Risk Reduction Through Homeless Outreach Grant Program in the Department of Local Affairs. The program awards grants to conduct outreach among individuals experiencing homelessness for the purpose of reducing wildfire risks in the wildland-urban interface. The department is directed to convene a working group to identify emerging, promising, and best practices for conducting this type of outreach, and to issue grants consistent with the identified practices.

***Bill E – Landowner Assistance Wildfire Mitigation.*** The bill creates the Wildfire Mitigation Resources and Best Practices Grant Program in the Department of Local Affairs. Local governments, special districts, tribal agencies or programs, faith-based organizations, and nonprofit organizations are eligible for grant funding to be used to conduct outreach to landowners to inform them of resources available for wildfire mitigation and best practices for wildfire mitigation.