

Boulder County's Wildfire Mitigation Tax 2024: Year Two Annual Report

Executive Summary

Boulder County passed a 0.1% Wildfire Mitigation Sales and Use Tax—one penny on \$10—in November of 2022, with 72% of voters supporting the ballot measure. Tax funding is for increasing the pace and scale of wildfire mitigation efforts¹ across the county. Wildfire Partners is Boulder County's wildfire mitigation program — located in the county's Community Planning and Permitting Department (CPP). CPP and Wildfire Partners staff are responsible for managing the Wildfire Mitigation Tax.

The tax went into effect on January 1, 2023, and a total of \$9,031,401² was collected in 2023, and \$8,022,749 was collected in 2024. The 2024 funding table lists nine program areas ranked by the amount of tax funding that was committed to the program area.

2024 Wildfire Mitigation Tax Funding		
Wildfire Mitigation Program Areas	Spending and Commitments	Percentage
1. Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grant Program	\$ 1,585,042	28%
2. Individual Home Assessment and Certification Programs*	\$ 818,139	14%
3. Community Chipping Program	\$ 764,608	13%
4. Organizational Support for Partners	\$ 642,815	11%
5. Rebate Program	\$ 515,812	9%
6. Community Mitigation Programs*	\$ 415,645	7%
7. Education and Public Awareness Campaign*	\$ 412,817	7%
8. Other Fuels Mitigation Programs*	\$ 378,501	7%
9. Youth Services Program*	\$ 220,999	4%
TOTAL	\$ 5,754,378	100%

*These programs are also funded by grants and other sources.

The Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grant (SFMG) Program (1) funds landscape-scale forest and grassland management projects. **The Individual Home Assessment and Certification Programs (2)** includes both voluntary and regulatory programs (new homes, additions and short-term rentals). **The Community Chipping Program (3)** offers free chipping of slash to all county residents at both roadside and drop-off events. Funding staff positions for local non-profit and local conservation district partners is part of the county's **Organizational**

¹ Wildfire mitigation is action taken before a wildfire ignites to reduce its severity and negative impacts such as the destruction of homes. Forest management, home hardening, and defensible space are common wildfire mitigation strategies. Action taken after a wildfire ignites— emergency notification, fire suppression, and recovery programs—are not included in the definition of wildfire mitigation.

² This number has been updated since the 2023 report.

Support for Partners (4). In 2024, Wildfire Partners launched a **Rebate Program (5)** for county residents who participate in four “Calls to Action:” Junk your Junipers, the First Five Feet, Fences are Fuses, and Vents for Defense. **Community Mitigation Programs (6)** include the Community Mitigation Planning program, our training programs, and the Boulder County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP update). **Education and the Public Awareness Campaign (7),** Wildfire Happens Here, includes Wildfire Partners outreach and marketing efforts in the community. **Other Fuels Mitigation Programs (8)** are costs associated with the Boulder County Community Forest Sort Yards, Boulder County Parks and Open Space Forest Management and Ditch Mitigation efforts, and the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office mitigation work. Wildfire Partners **Youth Service Program (9)** provides free mitigation work for vulnerable Individuals and communities.

The above table lists Wildfire Mitigation Tax funding amounts. However, to support wildfire mitigation programs, the county also obtains grants and draws upon other funding sources. Grant funding comes from the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (for forest management), the Colorado State Forest Service (for home assessments and certificates, youth services, and the CWPP update), FEMA (for education and the public awareness campaign), and the Fire Adapted Learning Network (for youth services). County general fund revenue and other sales taxes also contribute to these programs. This report, however, is limited to Wildfire Mitigation Tax funding.

The above table with funding amounts includes both operational costs and salaries. In 2024, the Wildfire Mitigation Tax provided \$1,691,642 for Boulder County staff salaries to design and implement the nine program areas listed in the above table. These expenses for county staff equaled 29% of total commitments.

The following table includes information for the first two years of the Wildfire Mitigation Tax (2023 and 2024):

Wildfire Mitigation Tax Program Areas	2023		2024		2023-24	
	Commitments	Percent	Commitments	Percent	Commitments	Percent
Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grant Program	\$ 1,610,159	50%	\$ 1,585,042	28%	\$ 3,195,201	36%
Organizational Support for Partners	\$ 550,000	17%	\$ 642,815	11%	\$ 1,192,815	13%
Individual Home Assessment Programs	\$ 254,732	8%	\$ 818,139	14%	\$ 1,072,870	12%
Community Chipping Program	\$ 283,058	9%	\$ 764,608	13%	\$ 1,047,666	12%
Other Fuels Mitigation Programs	\$ 233,153	7%	\$ 378,501	7%	\$ 611,654	7%
Other Community Mitigation Programs	\$ 189,989	6%	\$ 415,645	7%	\$ 605,634	7%
Education and Public Awareness Campaign	\$ 124,903	4%	\$ 412,817	7%	\$ 537,720	6%
Rebate Program	\$ -	0%	\$ 515,812	9%	\$ 515,812	6%
Youth Program	\$ -	0%	\$ 220,999	4%	\$ 220,999	2%
Total	\$ 3,245,993	100%	\$ 5,754,378	100%	\$ 9,000,372	100%

Program Details

1. Strategic Fuels Mitigation Grants (SFMG)

Nine strategic forest and grasslands management projects were approved in 2024, totaling \$1,473,415.ⁱ This funding is expected to leverage another \$1,493,221.00 of “matching” contributions for total project costs of \$2,968,660.00. The nine projects plan to treat 752 acres. The awards were recommended by the SFMG Selection Committee — five members with fuels mitigation, planning, and wildland fire expertise. Grant awards include:

- Boulder Valley Longmont Conservation District—\$184,647 for the Roaring Fork Forest Restoration Project

- The Boulder Watershed Collective – (1) \$513,000 for the Porter Ranch Fuels Mitigation Project; (2) \$43,000 for the Arapaho Ranch Project
- Cal-Wood Education Center – \$132,251 for the Cal-Wood Forest Fuels Reduction Project
- Four Mile Fire Protection District – \$9,800 for the Eagles Drive Phase 2 Project
- Kenosha Farms HOA – \$17,500 for Grasslands Fuels Mitigation
- Town of Superior – \$142,954 for Cool Season Grazing on Grasslands Open Space.
- The Watershed Center – \$204,784 for the Meadow Mountain Forest Management Project.

2. Individual Home Assessment and Certification Programs

Using both Wildfire Mitigation Tax and grant funds from the Colorado State Forest Service, Wildfire Partners' home assessment and certification programs had our most productive year ever in 2024. Wildfire Partners conducts several different types of assessments. When issuing certificates, our wildfire mitigation specialists also complete final inspections. In 2024, metrics for some of our site visits included 401 initial assessments, 121 re-certification assessments, and 300 certificates. In addition to recruiting new participants and conducting assessments and inspections in the field, staff provide ongoing support to the 4,000 participants in the program. Wildfire Partners sends a monthly newsletter and regular updates and communications to over 2,000 partners via email and social media postings. Staff developed new technological tools and administrative systems to increase data accuracy, decrease response time, and increase staff productivity. Implementation of these automation activities will reduce the staff time needed to assist participants by approximately 55%.

3. Community Chipping Program

Wildfire Partners' community chipping program helps residents dispose of the slash generated from their efforts to maintain defensible space around their homes. 2024 was the program's biggest year ever (Boulder County has had a chipping program since 1993). With funding from the Wildfire Mitigation Tax, we expanded the program and now offer free chipping service to all residents in Boulder County (incorporated and unincorporated areas) for roadside and drop-off events. In 2024, we supported 94 community roadside events and 13 special events (typically with residents dropping off slash at a central collection location) with a total of 1,416 households participating. The total volume of slash chipped in 2024 was 4,842 cubic yards.

4. Organizational Support for Non-profits and Conservation Districts

In 2024, Boulder County provided \$200,000 each to three partner organizations—the most funding we have ever provided for this partnership initiative.

Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts (BVLCD): BVLCD was accepted into the federal Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), giving BVLCD \$800,000/year for the next five years to use for implementation. In 2024, BVLCD completed the Ski Road (120 acres) and Camp St Malo (103 acres) projects; worked on the Gold Hill Rd West-Tones and Tolland Ranch projects (in progress), and planned/developed the McKenna Ranch, Button Rock, Roaring Fork, Gunung Mas, and Sugarloaf Road-Weinstock projects. In 2024, BVLCD secured eight grants for \$400,000 from federal, state, and county funding sources.

Boulder Watershed Collective (BWC): In 2024, BWC worked on 14 grants, spending a total of \$694,000 for wildfire mitigation projects. A total of 1,997 participants took part in BWC’s community engagement, outreach, and student collaborations. BWC active project sites included: Gold Hill, Arapaho Ranch, Arkansas Mountain, Los Lagos, County Road 99, Pinecliffe, Copperdale, Porter Ranch, Miramonte, and City of Boulder Open Space. Most of these projects are “in progress.” In 2024, the Arapaho Ranch Project, at 28 acres, was completed. In 2024, a number of additional projects were in the planning and development stage.

The Watershed Center (TWC): TWC received three grants for \$466,500 for two projects; Raymond-Riverside and Meeker Park Phase 1 (11.76 acres treated in 2024). Additional projects in the planning and development stage included; Meadow Mountain, Meeker Park Phase 2, Conifer Hill 1 and 2, and the Girl Scout Camp. TWC continued to lead the Saint Vrain Forest Health Partnership and provided critical support for the Boulder County Fireshed Grasslands Work Group.

5. Wildfire Partners Rebate Program

Wildfire Partners launched its rebate program in 2024. The rebate program is an innovative and effective way for residents to start wildfire mitigation work. All homeowners throughout the county are eligible — no home assessment is required for participation. In 2024, we issued 754 rebates totaling \$327,583. The total value of mitigation work completed by the 754 participating households was \$1,168,282 (\$989,829 was cash, and \$178,453 was the value of participant labor). The average time participants spent performing mitigation was 7.7 hours. Rebates were available for four specific “Calls to Action.” Participation rates by Calls to Action were:

Junk Your Junipers	58%
The First Five Feet	29%
Fences Are Fuses	8%
Vents for Defense	5%

Wildfire Partners staff oversee and support the rebate program that is administered by a third-party contractor, The Advertising Checking Bureau, Inc.

6. Community Mitigation

Wildfire Partners encourages community mitigation. Residents, working with neighbors in addition to working on their own properties, will create community resiliency and enhance the effectiveness of individual efforts. In 2024, the mitigation tax supported; 1) the Boulder County Community Forestry Sort Yards, 2) Community Advising Services, 3) Community Mitigation Planning Services, and 4) updates of the Boulder County and local Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs).

Boulder County Community Forestry Sort Yards (CFSYs): 2024 was a record-setting year for the CFSYs, collecting more than double the amount of material from 2023. In 2024, the yards also surpassed 100,000 vehicle loads of material collected in the seventeenth year of CFSY operations! On July 6, 2024, one day alone, the yards received 213 vehicle loads of material. The yards are open from May to November. In 2024, the two yards were open a total of 213 operational days compared to 179 days in 2022. In total, individuals from 2,310 different property addresses used the yards, delivering a total of 10,958 vehicle loads with an average of 4.7 loads per property. In 2024, individuals from 410 new addresses used the yards for the first time. In 2024, the

total material processed (wood, slash, chips, and yard debris) was 3,367 tons compared to 1,524 tons in 2023. The collection of yard debris (pine needles, grasses, and noxious weeds) is very popular and an essential service for supporting Wildfire Partners' wildfire mitigation efforts with homeowners.

Community Advising and Planning Services: Wildfire Partners staff provided technical assistance to 16 communities in 2024 as part of our community mitigation planning and advising services. All of these communities are unique and received a variety of support, including; community assessments, site visits, presentations at community meetings, mapping, coaching and mentoring, assistance with Firewise USA applications, and assistance connecting with other Wildfire Partners and county programs.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP): The Boulder County CWPP was completed in August 2024. While most of the effort was supported by grants from the Colorado State Forest Service, the wildfire mitigation tax also provided some funding for this plan update. County staff also helped support the development and implementation of local CWPPs.

7. Education and Public Awareness Campaign

Education, outreach, and public awareness are key components of mitigation efforts and include the website, fact sheets, videos, advertising, social media and other printed materials. Wildfire Partners staff participated in 10 community events, 16 in-person presentations, 6 virtual presentations, and 27 tabling events. Our public awareness campaign — Wildfire Happens Here — served 15 million impressions across all activations — traditional, digital, and experiential. This number equates to each person in Boulder County seeing our message an average of 46 times! Website traffic increased over five times compared to the same time in 2023. The rebate page was the most visited page on WildfirePartners.org with over 24,000 visits. Google searches for "Wildfire Partners" increased 51% after ads went live. Roughly 140,000 postcards were designed, printed, and mailed to households across Boulder County, highlighting the \$500 rebate program in English on one side and Spanish on the other. Wildfire Partners bus ads with both educational messages and targeted calls to action were featured on routes in Boulder, Longmont, Lafayette, and Louisville. Four vibrant, Wildfire Partners-branded hotline pedestals were custom-built to feature rotary phones that played wildfire facts and mitigation tips to the listener. These pedestals were installed at strategic locations around Boulder County. The public awareness campaign was implemented by third-party marketing contractor, Vermillion.

8. Other Fuels Mitigation Programs

Boulder County Parks and Open Space and Boulder County Sheriff's Office conduct fuels mitigation work in forests, grasslands, and ditches.

Boulder County Parks and Open Space Forest Management

In 2024, Boulder County Parks and Open Space (POS) foresters worked on a wide range of projects. Below are some highlights:

- Completed the Hansen/Riverside Ranch/Hall Ranch (HHR) project:
 - ✓ 193 acres of hand-cut and pile on Hansen/Riverside
 - ✓ 159 acres of hand-cut and pile on Hall Ranch
- Completed pre-treatment inventories on the Tucker Ranch and Elk Draw properties just west of Nederland (41 plots)

- Conducted post-treatment inventories at Hansen/Riverside Ranch and Hall Ranch (73 plots)
- Completed small diameter plots at Hansen/Riverside Ranch, Hall Ranch and Wallace (80 plots)
- Pre-cruised Fabel, McCaslin-Peppers, Rogers, and Hall Ranch properties
- Marked 352 acres at Hanson/Riverside and Hall Ranch
- Completed post-treatment reports for Hansen/Riverside Ranch and Hall Ranch.

POS staff also kicked off the Middle Boulder Creek Fuels Reduction Partnership Project:

- \$1 million grant funding secured (COSWAP-LRI)
- Involved multi-agency coordination and collaboration with Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Boulder Watershed Collective, City of Boulder, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Town of Nederland, and private landowners.

Boulder County Parks and Open Space Ditch Management

With funding from the wildfire mitigation tax, Boulder County created a new position to implement a ditch mitigation program. The new staff member started work in December 2024 and began the process of meeting partners and establishing the program.

Boulder County Sheriff's Office Mitigation Program

Similar to ditch management, this initiative did not start until December 2024. The Wildfire Mitigation Tax is helping to fund mitigation efforts performed by the Sheriff's Office wildland fire crew. These projects will begin in 2025.

9. Youth Services

With funding from Boulder County's Wildfire Mitigation Tax and a grant from The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FACNet), Wildfire Partners launched a new initiative focused on providing free services to improve wildfire resiliency in historically underrepresented and financially disadvantaged communities. The program, Youth Helping Vulnerable People and Communities, is led by Wildfire Partners and employs youth conservation crews from the Mile High Youth Corps and TEENS Inc., a Nederland-based non-profit organization. The pilot program was a resounding success. In only 20 weeks, the youth crews accomplished critical mitigation projects for 17 homes, four mobile home parks, and four Community Wildfire Protection Plan initiatives. The teams removed 774 cubic yards of inorganic and 399 cubic yards of organic household debris, enhancing safety and living conditions for hundreds of community members. Due to the resounding community support and excitement around the program, the county converted the Youth Program Specialist staff position from a grant-funded, 10-month term position into a full-time, mitigation-tax-funded position.

ⁱ The county approved funding for two additional projects to The Watershed Center totaling \$1 million, but no grant agreement was signed because The Watershed Center did not obtain the necessary match funding.