



## Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

# Memorandum

September 25, 2024

**TO:** Wildfire Matters Review Committee  
**FROM:** Samantha Falco, Research Analyst, 303-866-4794  
**SUBJECT:** Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation

### Summary

This memorandum provides a brief overview of wildfire-related spending by the state of Colorado; wildfire preparedness and mitigation; and the impacts of investing in preparedness and mitigation. Wildfire size relates to a wildfire's potential to harm communities, including economic damage and loss of life. Investing in preparedness and mitigation before wildfires occur reduces their scale, and thus reduces potential negative impacts.

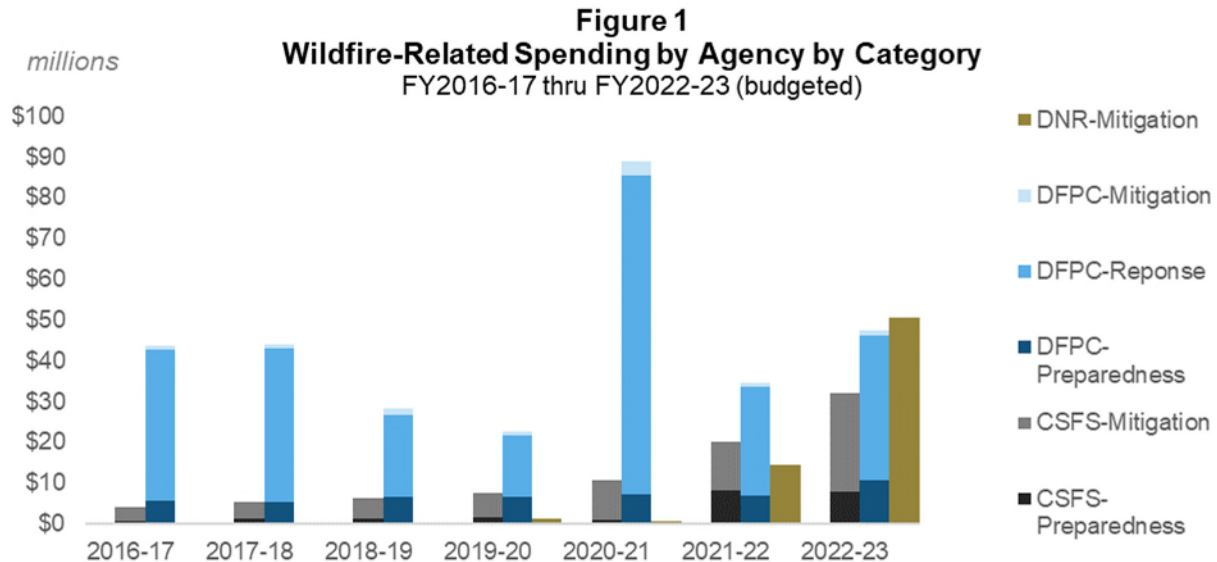
### Wildfire Spending in Colorado

In 2022, Legislative Council Staff published a detailed [memorandum](#) on wildfire-related spending in Colorado from FY 2026-17 through FY 2022-23. Figure 1 shows wildfire-related funding for the three major agencies that are allocated wildfire-related funds; the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) within Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Funding is broken down by the following categories:

- *Preparedness*: a range of activities that lead to safe, efficient, and cost-effective fire prevention and management including wildfire protection planning, interagency coordination, training and qualifications, dispatch and mobilization system management, equipment and supplies, as well as community planning, prioritization, and education.
- *Mitigation*: on-the-ground activities intended to reduce the potential for unwanted impacts caused by wildfires, including traditional vegetation management activities such as prescribed fires, hazardous fuels treatments, and mechanical fuels treatments, as well as forest management activities and post-fire watershed recovery.
- *Response*: resources and actions or support by emergency personnel responding to a wildfire incident.



Overall, the CSFS is the primary agency for wildfire mitigation spending. The DFPC is responsible for wildfire preparedness and response and the DNR is largely responsible for flood mitigation spending as a part of post-fire recovery efforts (classified as mitigation).

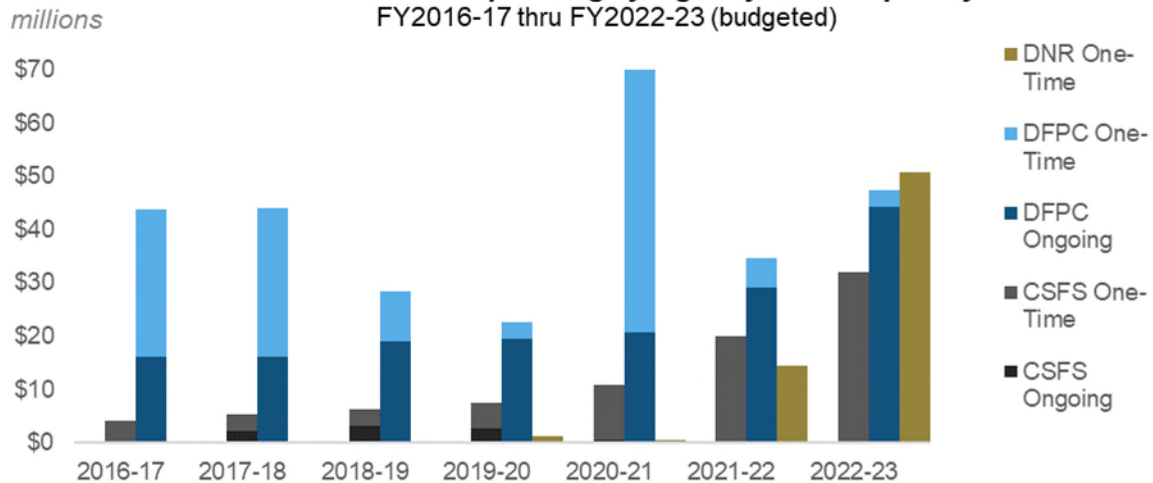


**Wildfire spending by agency and frequency.** Figure 2 contrasts on-going expenditures for operational expenses with one-time expenditures, which may be federal grants, specific funding from legislation, or executive order. A significant portion of one-time spending, mainly allocated to the DFPC, is for response. However, in FY 2021-22, both the DNR and the CSFS received substantial one-time investments for mitigation and recovery.

The CSFS's two primary fund sources for mitigation (the Healthy Forests/Vibrant Communities Fund and the Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation Grant Program) received significant one-time transfers in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 to support landowners, communities, and partners to address forest health and mitigation. These funds historically received severance tax revenue, but have been allocated General Fund in recent years due to limited severance tax revenue. Legislation passed in 2021 also allocated one-time funds to DNR's Watershed Restoration Grant Program to support watershed restoration and flood mitigation activities, as well as the newly-created Wildfire Mitigation Capacity Development Fund for mitigation projects. [House Bill 22-1379](#) allocated \$15.5 million in federal one-time ARPA funds for mitigation and restoration to the CSFS and the DNR in FY 2022-23.



**Figure 2**  
**Wildfire-Related Spending by Agency and Frequency**  
FY2016-17 thru FY2022-23 (budgeted)



Additionally, Legislative Council Staff created a [memorandum](#) that provides an overview of wildfire-related legislation, broken down into the same three categories.

## Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation

The CSFS provides educational information on wildfire preparedness and mitigation. Mitigation and preparedness are essential for reducing the negative impacts of wildfires and protecting the environment. Both the state and federal government fund these efforts, but local government, communities, and property owners may engage in preparedness and mitigation. The [CSFS Publications](#) page has an extensive list of documents to provide stakeholders with information on forest management and stewardship; forests, diseases and disorders; tree selection, planting, and care; wildfire mitigation; post-fire rehabilitation; and involving educators and youth in these activities.

**Wildfire preparedness.** Preparedness covers a range of activities that lead to safe, efficient, and cost-effective fire prevention and management. Evacuation routes, public outreach campaigns, and a reverse 911 system are effective tools in wildfire preparedness. For example, the City of



Boulder has launched “Zonehaven” which is a web-based mapping tool that provides real-time information to assist community members with natural disaster evacuation planning.<sup>1</sup>

**Wildfire mitigation.** Mitigation refers to on-the-ground activities intended to reduce the potential for unwanted impacts caused by wildfires. The following are some examples of wildfire mitigation:

- *controlled burns*: a planned fire used to manage land and meet specific objectives, done by a professional;
- *vegetation management*: reducing plants that are high in oil or resin content, have a low moisture content, open growth form, and have a high water need, which are more flammable and can accelerate the spread of a wildfire;<sup>2</sup>
- *home hardening*: choosing building materials, design and construction that are ignition resistant; and
- *workforce development*: investing in workforce development programs to ensure enough qualified people are available to help mitigate and respond to wildfires and protect communities.

## Impacts of Investing in Preparedness and Mitigation

In October 2023, the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee published a [report](#) stating wildfires cost the United States up to \$893 billion annually, accounting for up to four percent of the nation’s GDP. The report accounts for diminished real estate value, exposure to wildfire smoke, income loss from wildfires, watershed costs, insurance payouts, time loss, property damage, electricity costs, and other costs.

The Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration (FEMA) stated that for every \$1 spent on natural hazard mitigation, \$6 is saved.<sup>3</sup> Natural hazard mitigation is the effort and planning that prepares communities and the land in the event of a natural disaster. The report goes on to state that the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) alone contributes to nearly 100,000 fires annually, burning 7 million out of 200 million acres, and about \$5 billion is spent on firefighting efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Boulder, <https://bouldercolorado.gov/news/city-boulder-launches-new-emergency-mapping-tool>

<sup>2</sup> Colorado State University Extension factsheet, [https://csfs.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CSFS\\_CSU-Ext\\_Fact-Sheets\\_LFLP\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://csfs.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CSFS_CSU-Ext_Fact-Sheets_LFLP_FINAL_web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> FEMA factsheet, [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema\\_mitsaves-factsheet\\_2018.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_mitsaves-factsheet_2018.pdf)