



# Final Report to the General Assembly

*Wildfire Matters Review Committee*  
*December 2024 | Research Publication 823*





## Wildfire Matters Review Committee

### Members of the Committee

Senator Lisa Cutter, Chair

Representative Elizabeth Velasco, Vice Chair

Senator Mark Baisley

Representative Andrew Boesenecker

Senator Tony Exum

Representative Mike Lynch

Senator Janice Marchman

Representative Tisha Mauro

Senator Perry Will

Representative Ron Weinberg

### Legislative Council Staff

Samantha Falco, Research Analyst

Amanda King, Senior Research Analyst

Clayton Mayfield, Fiscal Analyst

Matthu Beck, Research Analyst

### Office of Legislative Legal Services

Alison Killen, Lead Staff Attorney

Rebecca Bayetti, Staff Attorney

Caroline Martin, Staff Attorney

December | 2024





## COLORADO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Rep. Julie McCluskie, Chair  
Sen. Stephen Fenberg, Vice Chair  
Rep. Monica Duran  
Sen. Robert Rodriguez  
Rep. Rose Pugliese  
Sen. Paul Lundeen

### STAFF

Natalie Castle, Director  
Elizabeth Burger, Deputy Director  
Manish Jani, Deputy Director



### COMMITTEE

Rep. Judy Amabile  
Rep. Ryan Armagost  
Sen. James Coleman  
Rep. Chris deGruy-Kennedy  
Sen. Bob Gardner  
Sen. Chris Hansen  
Rep. Anthony Hartsook  
Rep. Iman Jodeh  
Rep. Meghan Lukens  
Sen. Cleave Simpson  
Sen. Jim Smallwood  
Sen. Faith Winter

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ROOM 029 STATE CAPITOL

DENVER, COLORADO 80203-1784

E-mail: [lcs.ga@state.co.us](mailto:lcs.ga@state.co.us)

303-866-3521 FAX: 303-866-3855 TDD: 303-866-3472

December 2024

To Members of the Seventy-fourth General Assembly:

Submitted herewith is the final report of the Wildfire Matters Review Committee. This committee was created pursuant to Part 16 of Article 3 of Title 2, Colorado Revised Statutes. The purpose of this committee is to oversee and review prevention, mitigation, public safety, and forest health in regards to wildfire matters in Colorado.

At its meeting on October 15, 2024, the Legislative Council reviewed the report of this committee. A motion to forward this report and the bills therein for consideration in the 2025 session was approved.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rep. Julie McCluskie  
Chair



## Table of Contents

Committee Charge .....	2
Committee Activities.....	2
Statewide Mitigation Efforts .....	3
Wildfire Response .....	3
Workforce Issues .....	4
Field Trip Activities.....	5
Summary of Recommendations.....	6
Resource Materials .....	7
Meetings and Topics Discussed .....	7

**This report is also available online at:**

**<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/wildfire-matters-review-committee/2024-regular-session>**

## 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 committee and [Senate Bill 18-039](#) extended the repeal date of the committee to September 1, 2025. [Senate Bill 21-012](#) added a requirement for the committee to review policy changes to maximize the utilization of wildland fire services through the inmate disaster relief program.

## Committee Activities

The committee held five meetings during the 2024 interim and took one field trip. Briefings and presentations were made by state agencies, special interest groups, and members of the public on a wide range of subjects, including statewide mitigation efforts, wildfire response, and workforce issues. The following organizations gave briefings and presentations to the committee:

- Black Hills Energy, Holy Cross Energy, and Xcel Energy;
- Boulder County Emergency Management;
- Center for Improving Value in Health Care;
- Colorado Center of Excellence;
- Colorado Counties, Inc.;
- Colorado Division of Insurance;
- Colorado Firefighter Benefits Trust;
- Colorado Fire Commission;
- Colorado State Forest Service;
- Colorado Tourism Board;
- Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Public Health and Environment;
- Department of Public Safety, Division of Fire Prevention and Control;
- Fire Adapted Colorado;
- Forest Health Council Legislative Committee;
- Garfield County Emergency Communications Authority;
- Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety;
- Jefferson County Emergency Management;
- Lockheed Martin
- Milliman (an actuarial and consulting firm);
- Rocky Mountain Insurance Association;
- The Nature Conservancy;
- United States Representative Brittany Pettersen; and
- Western Resources Advocates;



The following sections discuss the committee’s activities during the 2024 interim.

## Statewide Mitigation Efforts

**State agency efforts.** The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) presented on mitigation programs they administer, including the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Plan (COSWAP); the use of the Department of Corrections (DOC) State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT) crews; and projects initiated through the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) as part of the Wildfire Ready Action Plan. The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) also presented on forest management activities and mitigation programs it administers, including the Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) program and the operation of the CSFS tree nursery. Both the CSFS and the Colorado Tourism Board presented on wildfire public outreach efforts.

**Forest health.** A variety of state agencies and special interest groups presented on forest health, highlighting the impact wildfires have on forests and the many forest types in the state. Difficulties in managing forests that span multiple land ownership categories were addressed. Strategies, methods, and technologies for forest health management and cross-jurisdictional collaboration were also discussed. A common theme was investment in mitigation activities as an effective method to reduce the overall impact of wildfires.

**Prescribed fires.** The use of prescribed fires as a mitigation tool was discussed by stakeholders. These groups highlighted challenges and barriers to the effective use of prescribed fires as a mitigation tool. State agencies also presented on prescribed fires, including the Colorado Fire Commission.

**Committee recommendations.** As a result of its discussions, the committee recommends Bill E, which concerns prescribed fires. The committee also recommended that a bill on modifying the natural disaster mitigation enterprise be drafted, but the draft bill was not approved by the committee.

## Wildfire Response

**Local government efforts.** Several local government entities presented on emergency response to wildfires. Methods for effective emergency communications to residents were highlighted, as well as issues with safe evacuation of areas impacted by wildfires. Language access issues regarding emergency communications were also discussed.

**State agency efforts.** The Department of Public Safety (CDPS) and its Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) presented on wildfire response by the state. The availability of additional state-owned aviation resources was highlighted as having a positive impact on wildfire response in the current wildfire season. The increasing use of sophisticated technology to predict and respond to wildfires was also discussed.

**Impacts to the public.** Both state agencies and special interest groups presented on how wildfire impacts the public. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Center for Improving Value in Healthcare (CIVHC) presented on public health impacts of wildfires, including smoke pollution and ground-level ozone generated by wildfires.

The Colorado Division of Insurance and other insurance industry stakeholders presented on the persistence of availability and affordability challenges for home insurance coverage.

**Committee Recommendations.** As a result of its discussions, the committee recommends Bill A, which concerns the use of artificial intelligence in wildfire response, Bill B, which concerns access of private land during wildfire evacuations, and Bill D, which concerns the creation of a statewide wildfire information and resource website. The committee also recommended bills on emergency power shutoff guidelines and mobile home park preparedness, but these bill drafts were not approved by the committee.

## Workforce Issues

**Firefighting workforce.** The committee heard about how firefighting workforce challenges impact wildfire management. The Colorado Fire Commission indicated a need for additional firefighting staff across the state to meet a growing service demand, including both full-time and volunteer firefighters. Recruitment and retention for these positions is especially difficult in rural areas. Additionally, a need for expanded training and certification opportunities for current firefighters to allow for career development was expressed.

**Wildfire management workforce.** Both the CSFS and the Colorado Fire Commission mentioned challenges with the workforce that supports wildfire management other than direct response. Mitigation activities on publicly owned land are hindered by a lack of forestry workforce. Prescribed fires on privately owned land are underutilized due to a similar lack of workforce that specializes in these activities.

**Federal wildfire management.** U.S. Representative Brittany Pettersen presented on federal wildfire management. As wildfire frequency increases not only in Colorado but also other states, federal wildfire resources are stretched thin. Although federal resources are still available for wildfire management, this dynamic means that the state may need to rely more heavily on its own resources in the future. A representative from the federal Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission presented a summary of recommendations from the commission's most recent report.

**Committee recommendations.** As a result of its discussions, the committee recommends Bill C, which concerns workforce development in firefighting and other wildfire management professions.

## Field Trip Activities

The committee took a field trip to Jefferson and Grand Counties. The trip included:

- a presentation of a sand-table simulator for wildfire response by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office;
- a round table discussion with Jefferson County officials and community stakeholders on mitigation efforts;
- tour of the Alderfer/Three Sisters Park area highlighting recent mitigation projects;
- a presentation by Grand Fire Protection District on the response and recovery to the East Troublesome Fire in 2022; and
- a tour of sites near Grand Lake that were affected by the East Troublesome Fire.

## Summary of Recommendations

As a result of the committee's activities, the committee recommended five bills to the Legislative Council for consideration in the 2025 session. At its meeting on October 15, 2024 the Legislative Council approved the recommended bills for introduction. The approved bills are described below.

### ***Bill A — Applying Artificial Intelligence to Fight Wildfire***

The bill requires the General Assembly to appropriate \$7.5 million in FY 2025-26 to the Division of Fire Prevention and Control in the Department of Public Safety. This appropriation is to study, develop, or contract for applications of artificial intelligence to assist in fighting wildfires. This appropriation may be spent through FY 2026-27.

### ***Bill B — Landowner Immunity for Emergency Access to Property***

The bill provides immunity from civil liability for damage or injury to persons or property that to landowners that allow access through their property during emergencies. Immunity is not granted when damage or injury arises from gross negligence or willful misconduct caused by the landowner.

### ***Bill C — Forestry & Firefighter Workforce & Education***

The bill authorizes the creation or expansion of certain forestry and firefighter workforce and education programs administered by Colorado State University and the Department of Public Safety.

### ***Bill D — Wildfire Information & Resource Center Website***

The bill requires the Department of Public Safety to include on its wildfire status website emergency information and wildfire updates for each county. The division must coordinate with county governments to gather the necessary information.

### ***Bill E — Concerning Support to Increase Prescribed Burns***

The bill creates the Prescribed Fire Claims Cash Fund with a \$1.0 million General Fund transfer. The Department of Public Safety administers the fund to pay damage claims resulting from pre-registered prescribed fire projects. The bill also allows reciprocity eligibility for certified burner status which is granted to individuals that conduct prescribed fires by the Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

## Resource Materials

Meeting summaries are prepared for each meeting of the committee and contain all handouts provided to the committee. The summaries of meetings and attachments are available at the Division of Archives, 1313 Sherman Street, Denver (303-866-2055). The listing below contains the dates of committee meetings and the topics discussed at those meetings. Meeting summaries are also available on our website at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/wildfire-matters-review-committee/2024-regular-session>

## Meetings and Topics Discussed

June 12, 2024

- Department of Natural Resources and Colorado State Forest Service presentations
- Department of Public Health and Environment presentation
- Colorado Fire Commission presentation
- Forest Health Council Legislative Committee presentation
- Department of Public Safety and Division of Fire Prevention and Control presentations

July 18, 2024

- Colorado Division of Insurance presentation
- Rocky Mountain Insurance Association and Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety presentations
- Milliman (an actuarial and consulting firm) presentation
- Colorado State Forest Service presentation
- Black Hills Energy, Holy Cross Energy, and Xcel Energy presentations
- Boulder and Jefferson County Emergency Management presentations
- Colorado Counties, Inc. presentation

July 30, 2024

- Colorado Firefighter Benefits Trust presentation
- Garfield County Emergency Communications Authority presentation
- Colorado Tourism Board presentation
- Colorado State Forest Service presentation
- The Nature Conservancy presentation
- Western Resources Advocates presentation
- Colorado Center of Excellence presentation
- Center for Improving Value in Health Care presentation
- Fire Adapted Colorado presentation

August 13, 2024

- Presentation from United States Representative Brittany Pettersen
- Lockheed Martin presentation
- Public testimony
- Draft bill requests

September 26, 2024

- Public testimony
- Final action on bill draft requests

October 3, 2024

- Field Trip Day #1
- Jefferson County presentation and site tour

October 4, 2024

- Field Trip Day #2
- Grand County presentation and site tour