



National Fire Plan

Winiger Ridge Project Colorado 2004

From its distinctive eastern boundary, where the Rocky Mountains meet the Great Plains, elevations in the Winiger Ridge area range from 5,500 to 8,500 feet. The topography varies from relatively flat meadows to steep, rocky terrain – including spectacular river canyons and three different creeks. No less diverse is the property ownership in the Winiger Ridge project area. Four public land managers – city, county, state and federal – account for 63 percent of the area, with recreation as the principal land use.

Private land ownership includes mountain subdivisions, 60-acre ranchettes, and patented mining claims for a community of about 2,500 people. Using National Fire Plan funds, the Winiger Ridge Ecosystem Management Pilot Project in Boulder County, Colorado, emphasizes cooperation between landowners and public land management agencies in working collaboratively to reduce the potential for catastrophic events caused by insect infestations, diseases, and wildfire. One of 28 national pilot projects funded by an Act of Congress, Winiger Ridge focuses on improving overall ecosystem conditions with an "ecosystem-without-boundaries" approach to natural resources management.



Densely packed stands of lodgepole pine are prone to intense wildfire

Landscape, Wildfire and Human Interaction: The landscape of the Winiger Ridge project is dominated by rich ecosystems of ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, mixed conifer, aspen, mountain meadows, wetlands, and riparian areas. These ecosystems are widely dispersed across the landscape and support a variety of wildlife. Before fire suppression activities in the early 1900s, forest fires occurred in the project area at approximately 5-year to 35-year intervals. The frequently returning fires produced a changing mosaic of diverse ecosystems across the landscape, including patches of aspen, mountain meadows, young forests, and open-canopied forests.

Forest insects – mountain pine beetle and Western spruce budworm – helped cull weak trees and thin the forests. However, 100 years of fire suppression has left a more dense

and connected forested area. Older trees and a heavy load of dead vegetative material have left the area prone to larger and more intense fires, compared to the natural historic fires. In addition, there has been an increasing trend for regional outbreaks of insect infestation, which leaves a large number of trees as fuel for intense fires.

Collaborative Success: Three components make the Winiger Ridge site especially suitable for inclusion in the pilot reinvention project: the high fuel level for forest fires, the interaction of wildlands with a large and growing human population, and the similarity of the relatively low-level mountainous area to a large portion of Colorado's "Red Zone" – the area in which fire danger is judged to be the most dangerous.

It has been estimated that a large-scale fire – similar to any number of those that burned during the especially volatile 2000 fire season – could threaten as many as 100 mountain homes.

But project results have been encouraging. Citizen participation during formative stages of the program was extremely high and spirited, assisted by existing homeowner associations, concerned stakeholders, and interested citizens. An intense forest fire burned in the area during the 2000 fire season; fortunately, firefighters were able to limit the scope of the fire, and no homes were lost. A major factor in their success was the opportunity to establish a fireline in an area that has been managed and thinned.

Holistic Approach Knows No Bounds: The Winiger Ridge project remains focused on reducing wildfire danger through a variety of forestry applications, including thinning and prescribed burns, while maintaining a holistic and ecosystem-based approach to the overall forest health of the area – called Stewardship Across Boundaries.

The Winiger Ridge Ecosystem Management project relies upon a partnered approach between land management agencies and private landowners. Through this, partnership treatments can be conducted over landscape areas without stopping at property lines – an ecosystem approach without boundaries.

For more information, contact: Colorado State Forest Service at (303)823-5774. <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~csfsbo/winiger/>



Shanahan Ridge: An 85-acre burn on City of Boulder property improved wildlife habitat by promoting mountain mahogany and bitterbrush, both important food sources for mule deer.

