

Wildfire in the Estes Valley

David Wolf, Ph.D., Fire Chief

Newcomers Group

September 2021



Cameron Peak Fire, Glen Haven, Burn Out Operation, October 17, 2020

Outline

- **Estes Valley Fire – who are we?**
- **Fire History of the Estes Valley (abridged)**
- **Resources for Residents and Guests**



ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Serving the Residents and Visitors of the Estes Valley with Superior Fire and Safety Services

901 N. SAINT VRAIN AVE. ESTES PARK CO 80517 970-577-0900 FAX 970-577-0923

What Do We Do?

- Fulfill the mission of the organization

Provide the residents and guests of the Estes Valley with superior Fire Prevention, Fire Protection, and Emergency Medical Services in a safe and efficient manner

- Direct seven full time employees and 40 volunteers to achieve the mission



ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

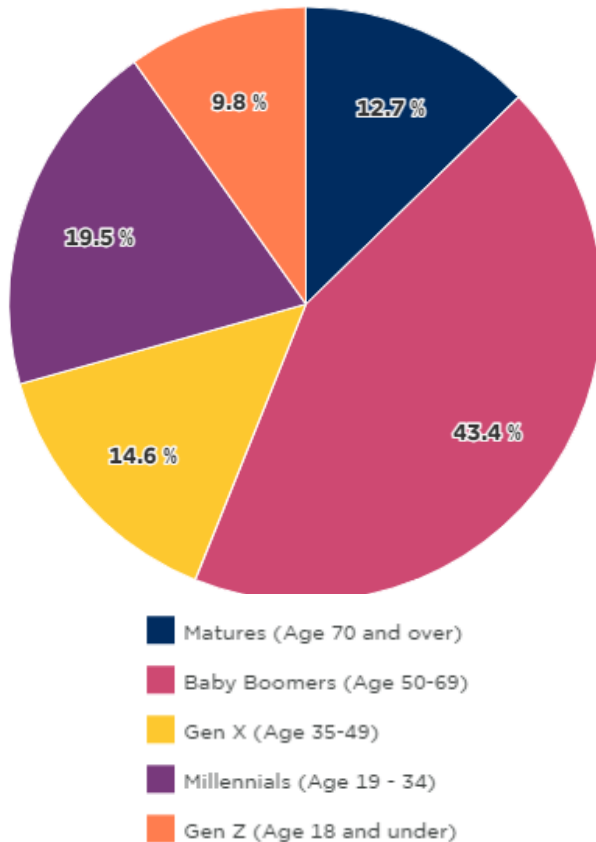
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Who Do We Serve?

Data from: CRAIG NFPA Dashboard

Generations



Current Population

10,304

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

6,377

Estes Park, CO

344,786

Larimer County, CO

Sources: US Census 2010; US Census ACS 5-year 2015-2019

Median Age

58

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

61

Estes Park, CO

36

Larimer County, CO

37

Colorado

Sources: US Census ACS 5-year 2015-2019

Age Dependency Ratio

80%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

82%

Estes Park, CO

54%

Larimer County, CO

57%

Colorado

Age dependency ratio is a comparison of the number of dependents (people younger than 18 or older than 64) to the working age population (age 18 to 64).



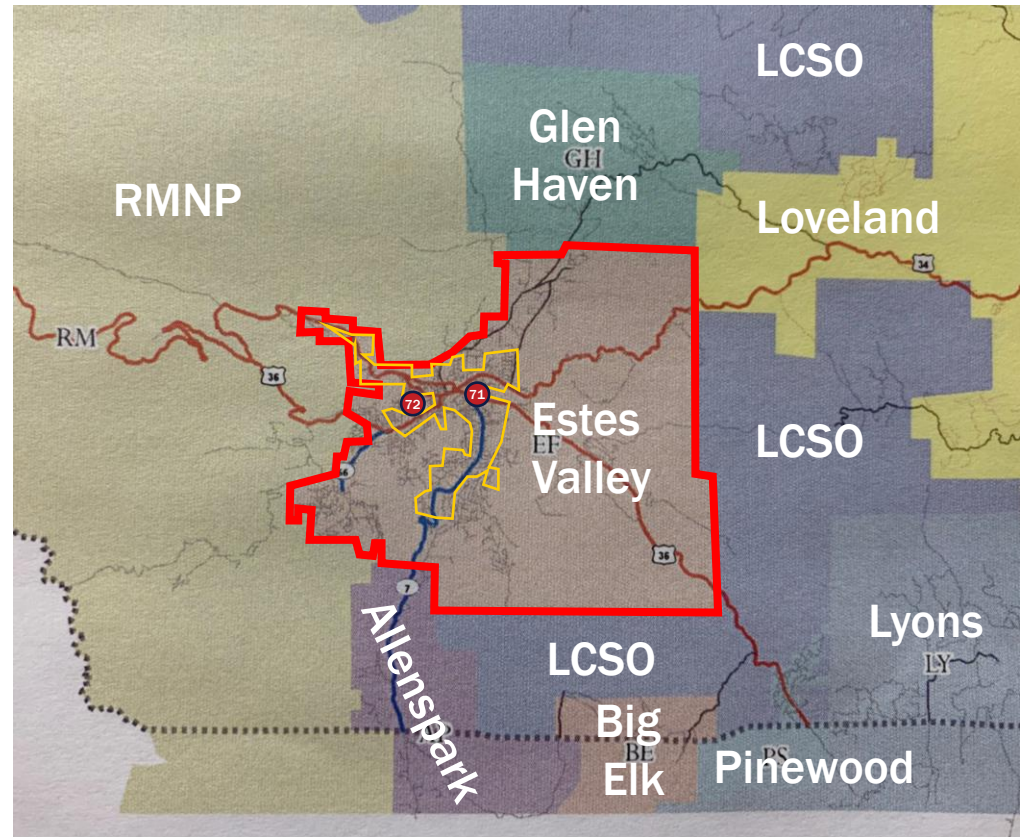
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District Origins

- **Estes Park Volunteer Fire Department**
 - All volunteer, founded in 1907
- **Formation of Estes Valley Fire District**
 - Passed in 2010
 - Cover nearly 70 sq mi, including Estes Park and unincorporated Larimer County
 - Mutual aid agreements with adjacent jurisdictions



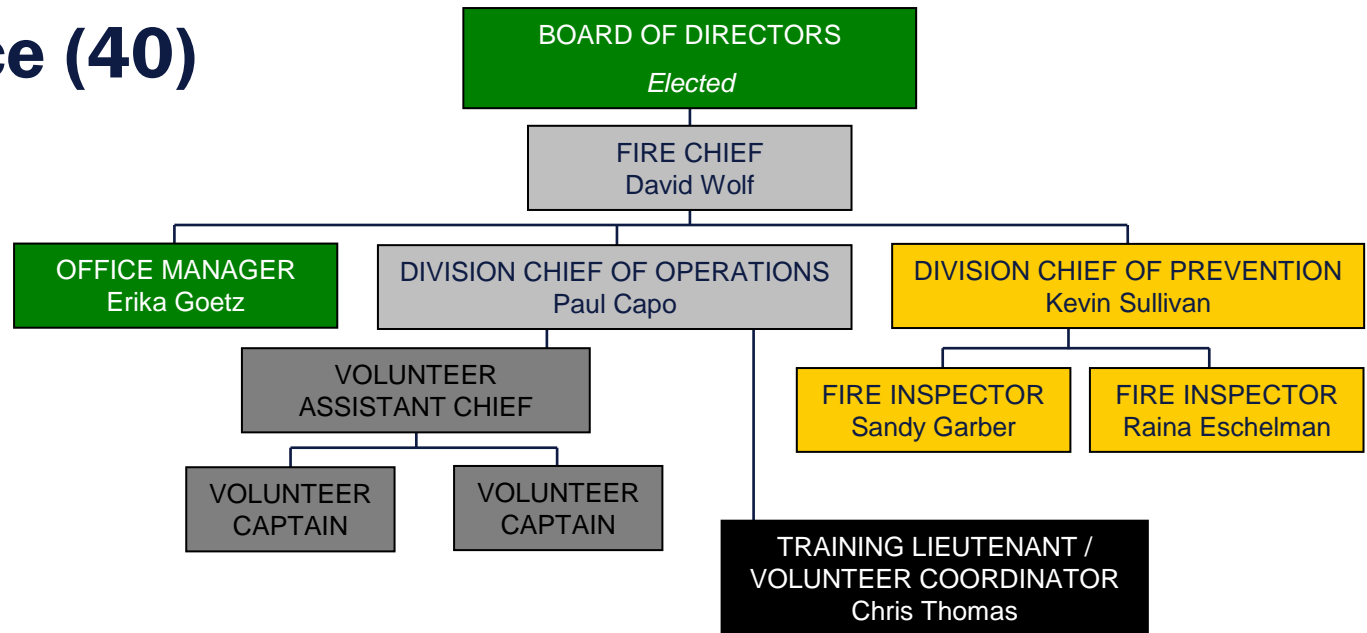
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Organization

- Elected Board of Directors
- Three Divisions: Admin, Operations, Prevention
- Mostly volunteer workforce (40)



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Administration Division



- **Finances**

- **\$1.9 million annual budget**
- **Revenues from sales and property taxes**
- **Contracts, procurement, billing**

- **Human Resources**

- **Responsible for all staff and volunteers**
- **Agency compliance, policies**

- **Public Information Officer**



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Prevention Division

- Safety of existing occupancies (commercial)
- Safety of new construction
 - Plan Review
 - Site inspections
- Education
 - Wildfire
 - Public Life Safety
- Arson investigations



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Operations Division



- **Emergency response**
 - Structure fires
 - Wildland fires
 - Emergency Medical
 - Motor Vehicle Crashes
 - Search & Rescue / Technical Rope Rescue
 - Water Rescue (swiftwater & ice)
 - Hazardous Materials
- **Training**
 - Weekly Training
 - Fire Academies
 - Specialty training



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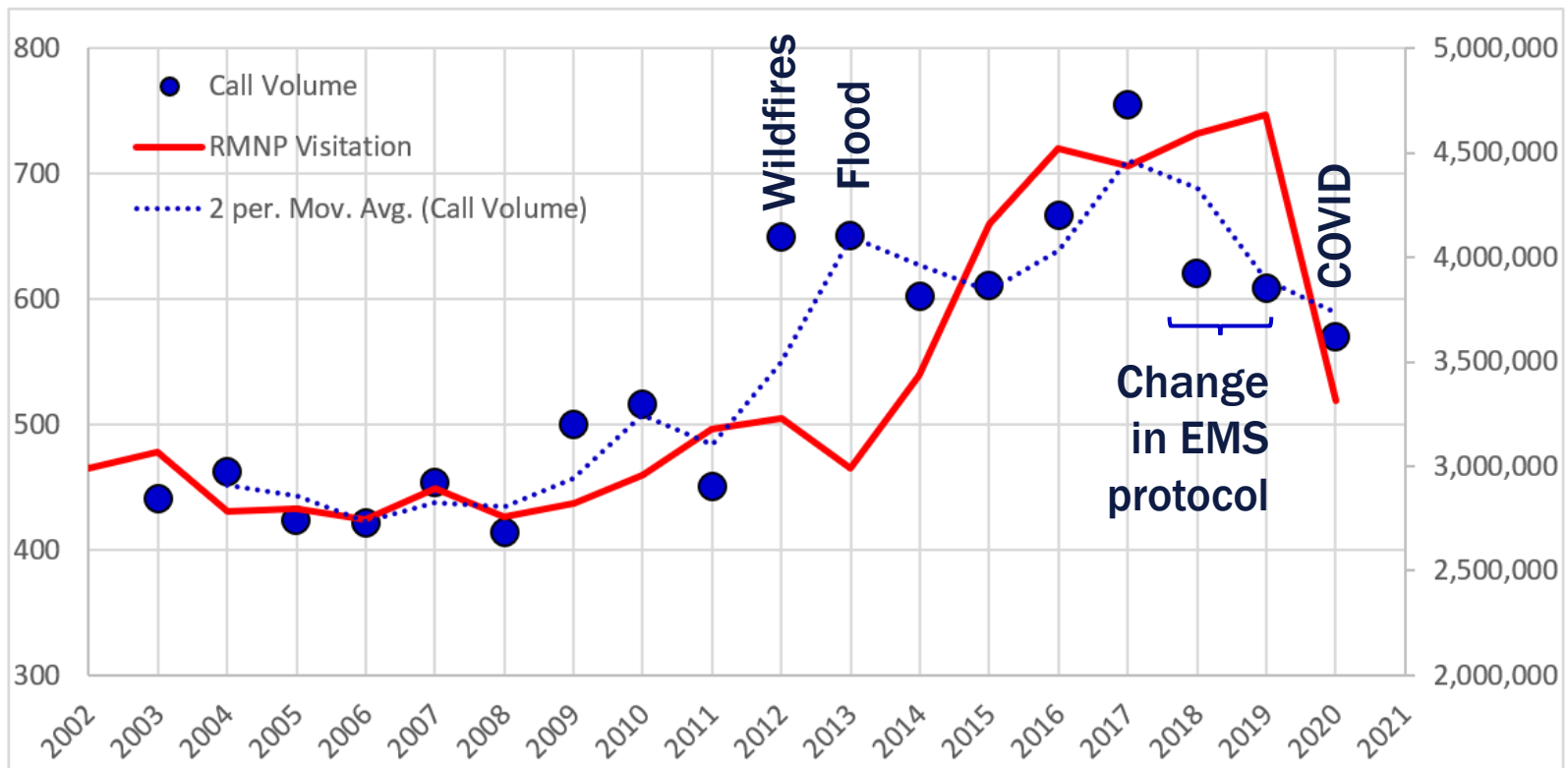
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Impacts On Our Call Response

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	516	451	649	651	602	611	667	755	621	609	570



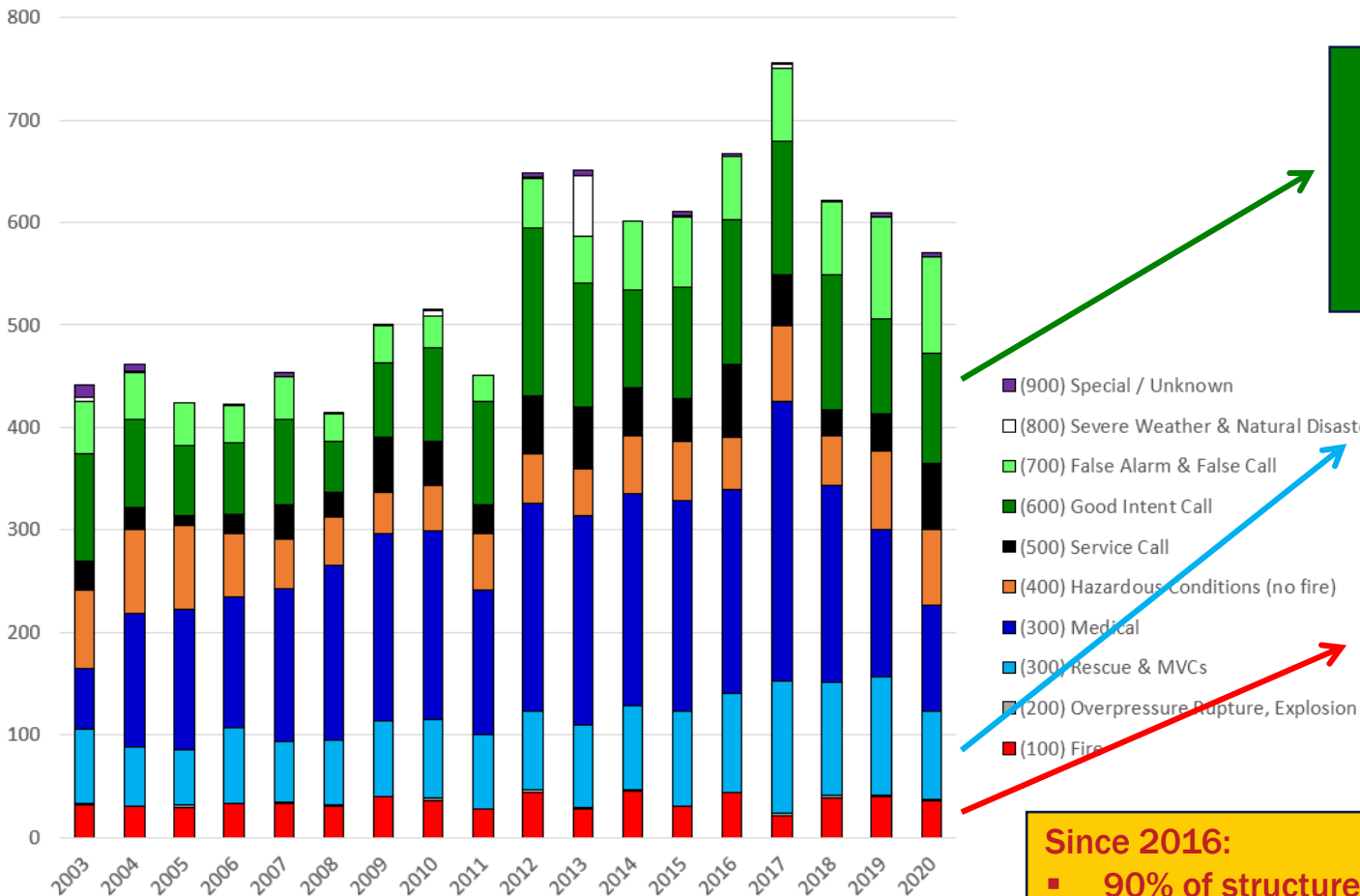
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Call Type Breakdown



SERVICE/INTENT

Smoke Invest. – 77
Smoke/CO Alarm – 93
Cancelled Enroute – 30
No Incident Found – 18

RESCUES

MVCs – 64 (91)
Tech Rescue – 16
Water Rescue – 1

FIRES

Structure Fires – 14
Vegetation Fires – 18
Trash Fires – 4

Since 2016:

- 90% of structure fires in residential structures
- 60% of structure fires in short-term rentals
- $880 / 7,390 = 12\%$ of occupancies



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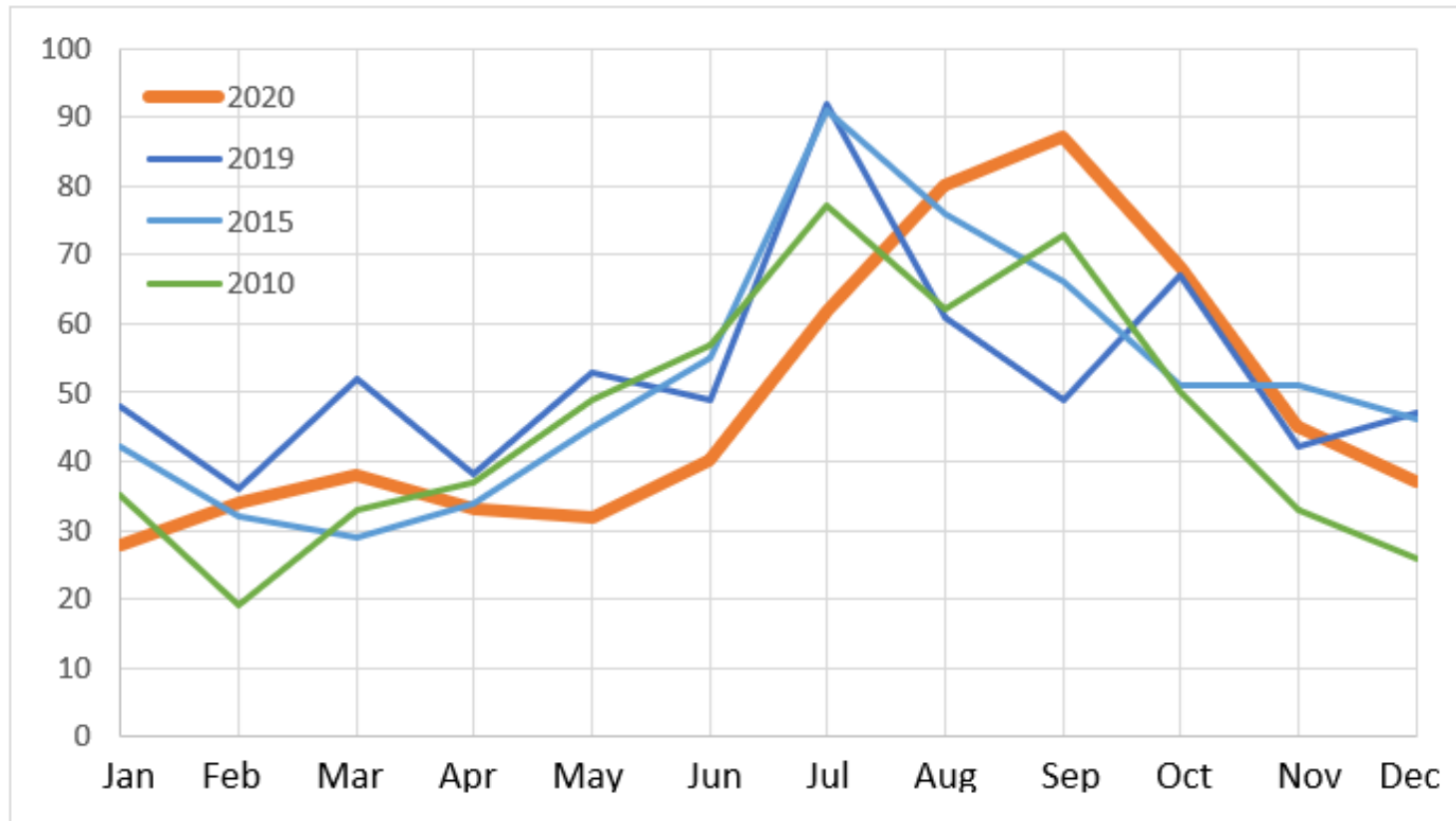
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Call Seasonality

- Strongly driven by tourism



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Other Challenges

Data from: CRAIG NFPA Dashboard



Median Household Income

\$66,260

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

\$55,000

Estes Park, CO

\$71,881

Larimer County, CO

\$72,331

Colorado

Poverty Rate

9%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

8%

Estes Park, CO

11%

Larimer County, CO

10%

Colorado



Owner Occupied Housing Units

65%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

55%

Estes Park, CO

65%

Larimer County, CO

65%

Colorado



Renter Occupied Housing Units

34%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

45%

Estes Park, CO

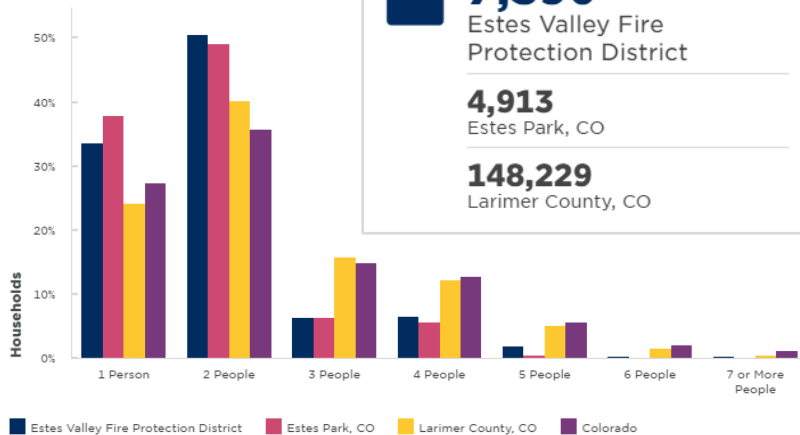
35%

Larimer County, CO

35%

Colorado

Household Size



Current Housing Units

7,390

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

4,913

Estes Park, CO

148,229

Larimer County, CO

Overcrowded Housing Units

0%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

0%

Estes Park, CO

1%

Larimer County, CO

3%

Colorado

Vacant Housing Units

32%

Estes Valley Fire Protection District

30%

Estes Park, CO

8%

Larimer County, CO

10%

Colorado



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Long History

- **2020**
 1. Cameron Peak 208,663
 2. East Troublesome 192,560
 3. Calwood 10,106
 4. Lefthand Canyon 460
 5. Lewstone 165

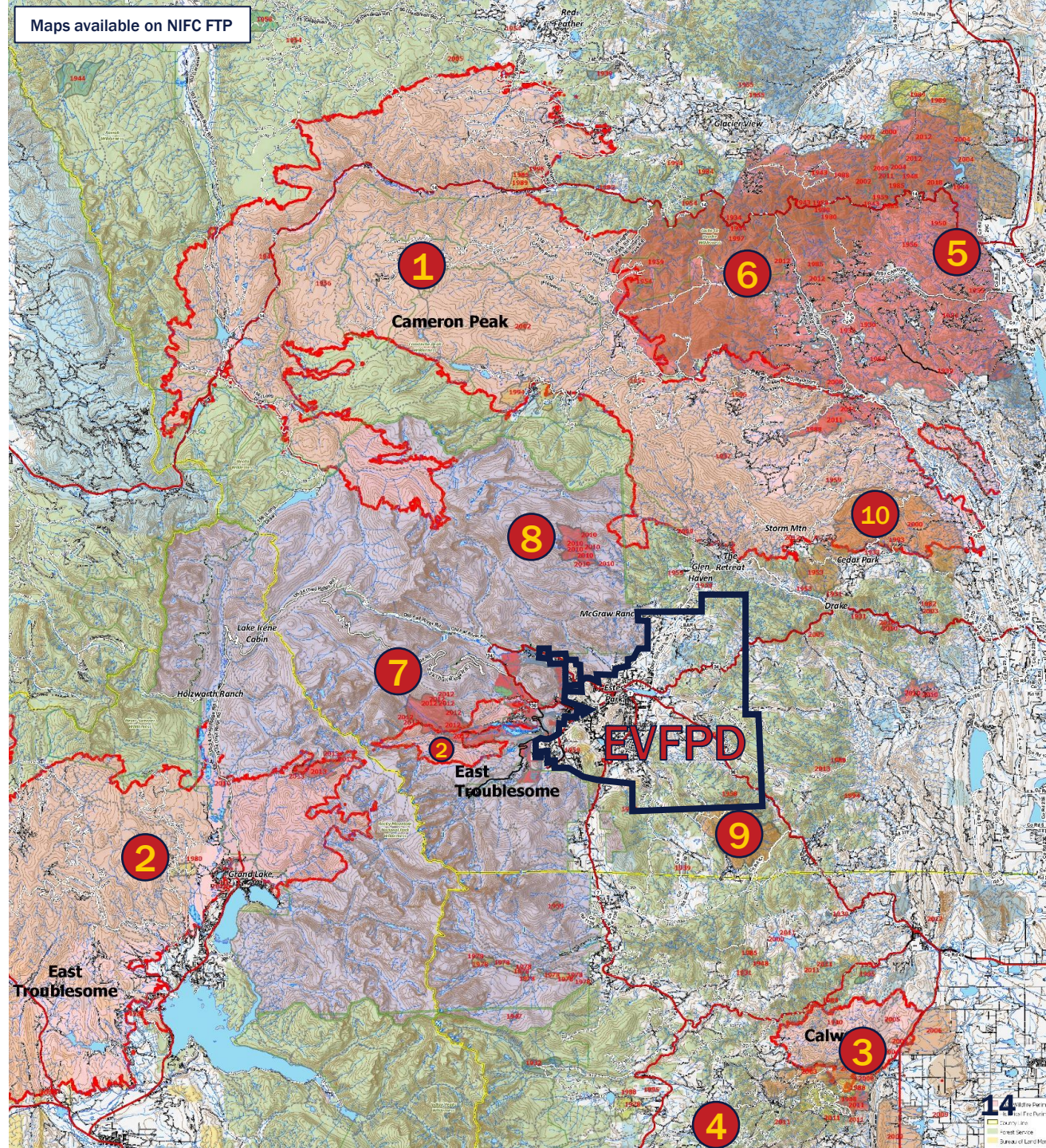
- **2012**
 6. High Park 87,284
 7. Fern Lake 3,500

- **2010**
 8. Cow Creek 1,500

- **2002**
 9. Big Elk 4,800

- **2000**
 10. Bobcat Ridge 10,599

(EVFPD ≈ 45,000 acres)



Was there any precedent?

- Chimney Tops 2 Fire burns out of Smokey Mountain National Park into communities of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
- November 2016
- 17,900 acres
- Could that happen here?
- Spoilers: YES



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April 2017

“Preparing for What We Have Never Seen Before”

An Interagency Emergency Responder Workshop

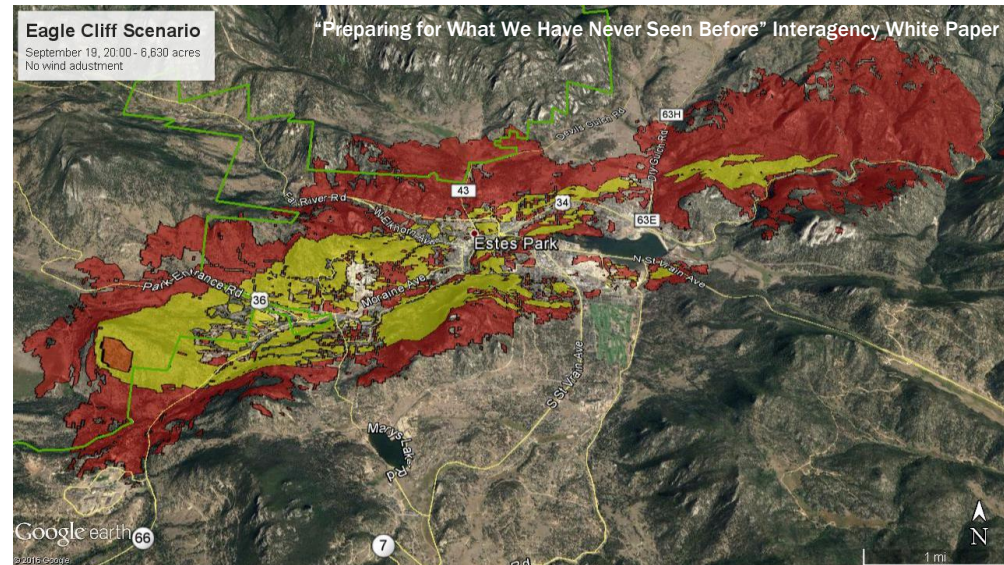


ESTES PARK
HEALTH



2017 Workshop

- Built a scenario for the Estes Valley
- Focused on our response to catastrophic fire
- What could we expect?
- What were our priorities?
 - Manage evacuation
 - Protect radios
 - Protect hospital
- What prep did we need to do?



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2019 Workshop (Update)

- Focus on Prevention, Resiliency, & Recovery
- Progress on 2017 items?
 - Who is responsible?
 - Identify barriers to success
- Any changes to the plan?



Photo: David Wolf



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Colorado's largest wildfires since 2000

The 60 fires that have burned more than 10,000 acres in Colorado in the last two decades

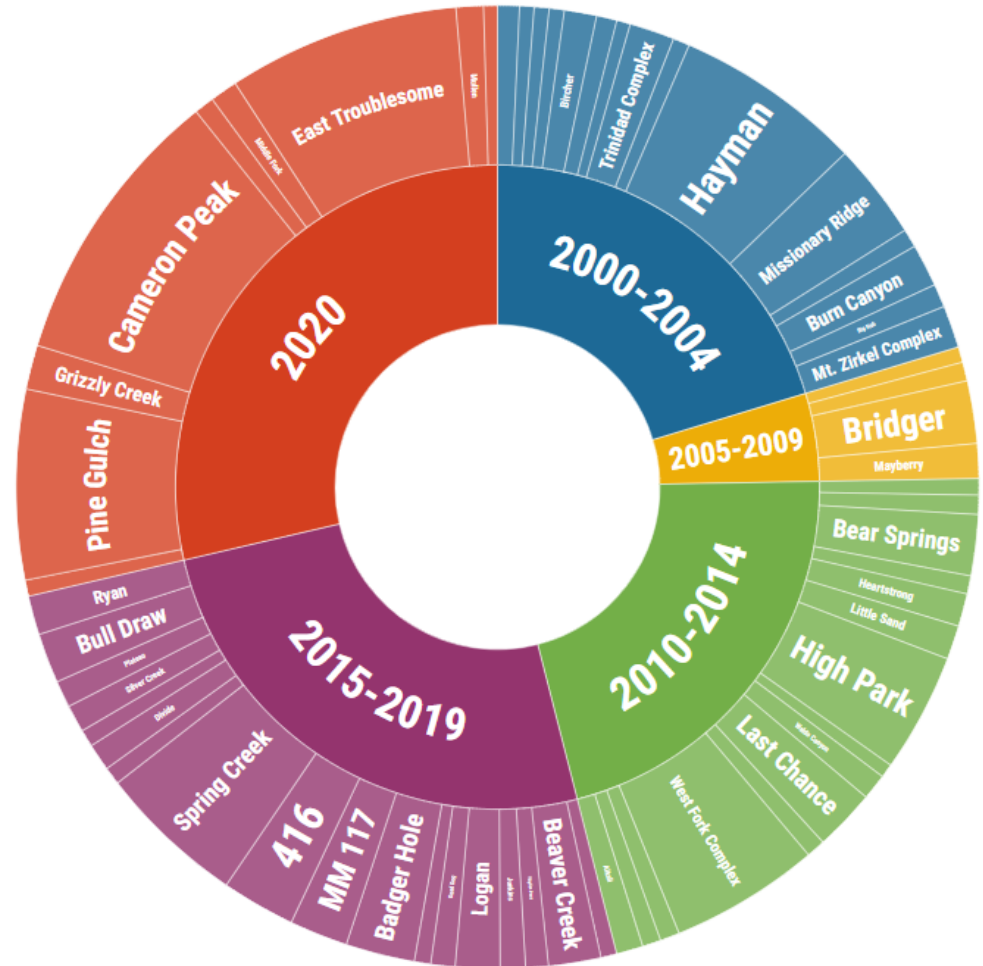
2000 – 2020

The problem is NOT going away...

Of the 20 largest fires in Colorado state history:

- 20 (100%) in last 20 yrs
- 15 (75%) in last 10 yrs
- 11 (55%) in last 5 yrs
- 4 (20%) last year

(plus 2020 Mullen Fire that burned in from WY)



Source: [Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center](#)

Acreage totals for 2020 fires are current as of Oct. 19. This chart includes the more than 20,000 acres that the Mullen Fire, which started in Wyoming, has burned so far in Colorado.



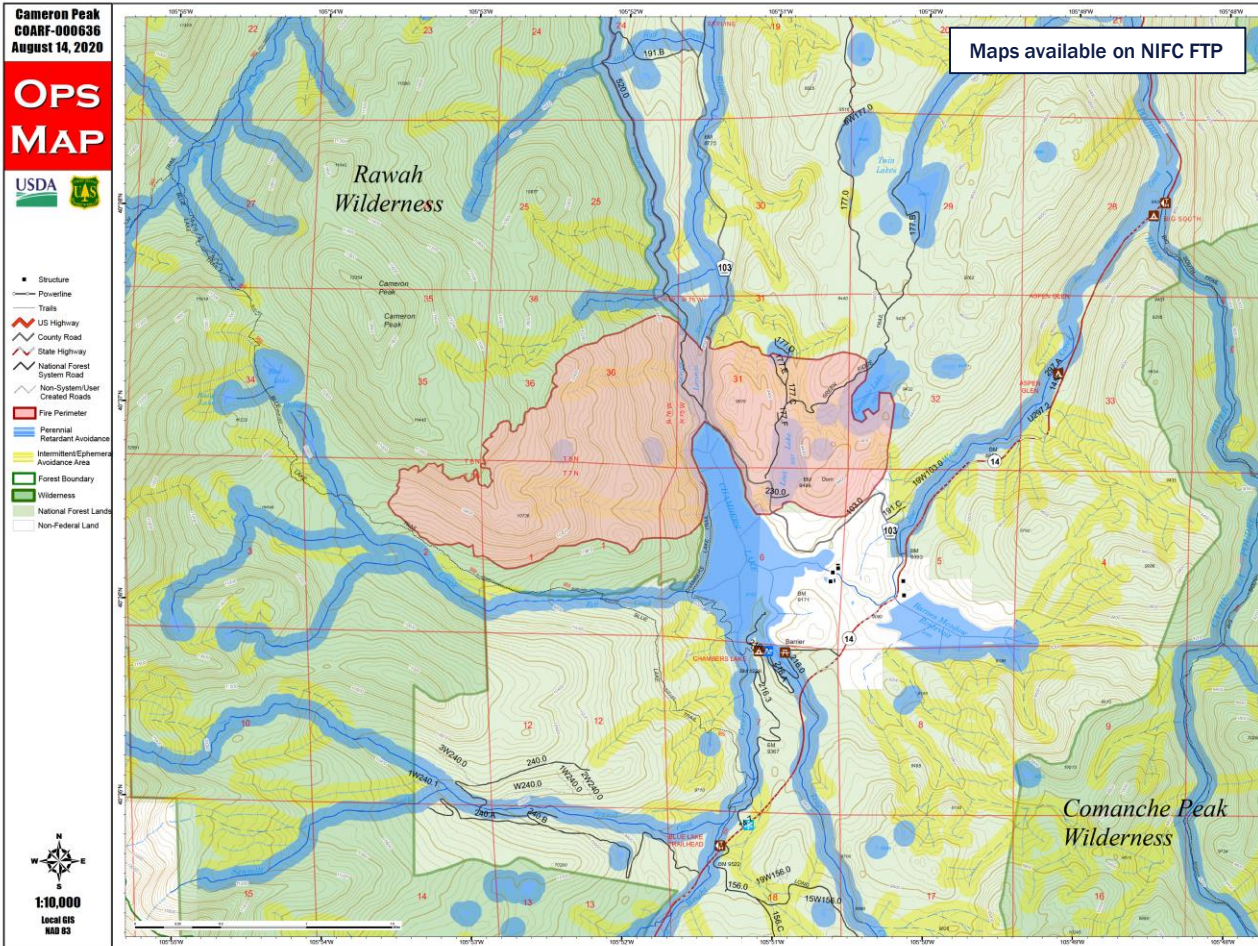
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August 13, 2020 – Cameron Peak Fire

- Started in Rawah Wilderness
- Quickly grows to 500 acres
- 25 miles from Estes Park



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Operations

09/05/2020 Day

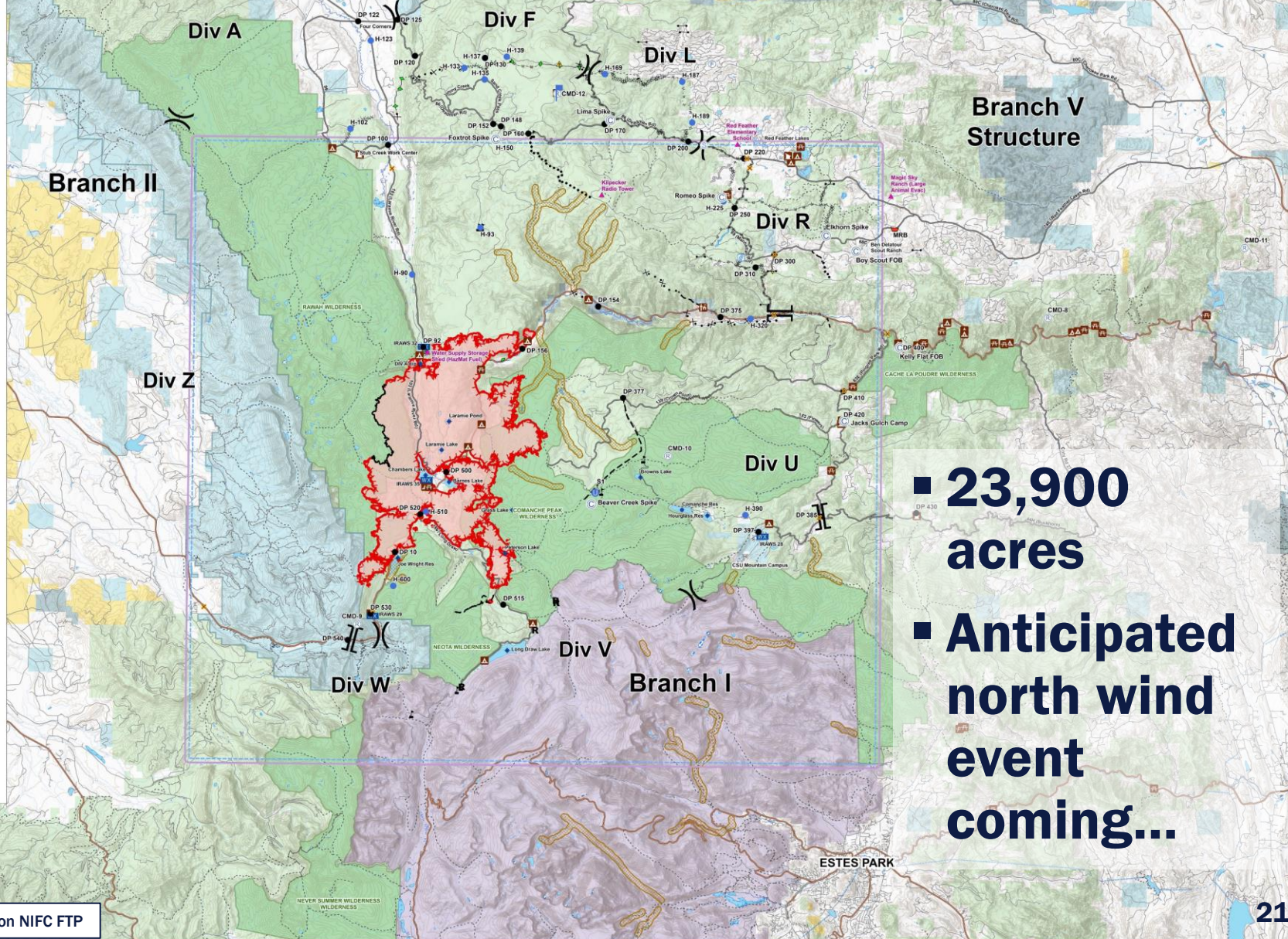
Cameron Peak
CO-ARF 000636
23,903 Acres
as of 0002 on 9/4



0 1 2 4
Miles

- ▲ Critical Assets
- ▲ Campground
- ▲ Picnic Site
- ▲ Visitor Center
- ▲ Observation Site
- ▲ Work Center
- ▲ Bridge
- ▲ Camp
- ▲ Closure
- ▲ Day Site
- ▲ Drop Point
- ▲ Fire Station
- ▲ Gate
- ▲ Hazard
- ▲ Unimproved Landing Area
- ▲ Helipad
- ▲ Lockout
- ▲ Mobile Weather Unit
- ▲ Repetitor
- ▲ Resource Location
- ▲ Resource/Trail Pt
- ▲ Safety Zone
- ▲ Staging Area
- ▲ Staging Area
- ▲ Stream Crossing
- ▲ Value at Risk
- ▲ Vehicle CDR
- ▲ Division Break
- ▲ TFR
- ▲ 6000' Elevation
- ▲ Uncontrolled Fire Edge
- ▲ Contained Line
- ▲ Completed Dozer Line
- ▲ Completed Hand Line
- ▲ Road as Completed Line
- ▲ Access or Improved Road
- ▲ Completed Flow Line
- ▲ Proposed Dozer Line
- ▲ Fire Break Planned or Incomplete
- ▲ Planned Fire Line
- ▲ Planned Secondary Line
- ▲ Primary Routes
- ▲ Highway or ramp
- ▲ Local connector
- ▲ Local or 4WD road
- ▲ Trail
- ▲ Forest Service
- ▲ Bureau of Land Management
- ▲ Private
- ▲ State, County, City, Areas
- ▲ State
- ▲ National Park Service (Rocky Mtn National Park)
- ▲ US Fish and Wildlife Service
- ▲ Other Federal
- ▲ State Forest
- ▲ USFS Wilderness
- ▲ Wildlife Daily Fire Perimeter

September 4, 2020



Operations
09/07/2020 Day

Cameron Peak
CO-ARF 000636
55,579 Acres
as of 1953 on 9/6



September 7, 2020

Branch II

Div A

Div F

Div L

Branch V
Structure

Div R

Div Z

Div U

Div W

Branch I

Div V

■ 55,579
acres

■ In the
National
Park

■ No holding
features
before Town

View from Estes Park



Photo: David Wolf



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View from Marmot Point, RMNP



Timelapse from Medicine Bow Curve, RMNP



Video: David Wolf



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September 8, 2020

- 7" of snow in Estes Park



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October, 2020

09/07 - 41,739 acres
09/06 - 24,687 acres

10/16 - 38,720 acres

10/17 - 14,966 acres

10/18 - 15,699 acres

Fire & EMS
crews engaged
in Glen Haven

Maps available on NIFC FTP

Cameron Peak Fire Progression

2020-08-13	1,457 growth ac	1,457 total ac
2020-08-14	2,898 growth ac	4,355 total ac
2020-08-15	1,397 growth ac	5,751 total ac
2020-08-16	5,584 growth ac	11,335 total ac
2020-08-17	2,691 growth ac	14,026 total ac
2020-08-19	2,423 growth ac	16,449 total ac
2020-08-20	140 growth ac	16,590 total ac
2020-08-21	642 growth ac	17,231 total ac
2020-08-22	1,040 growth ac	18,271 total ac
2020-08-23	1,835 growth ac	20,107 total ac
2020-08-24	895 growth ac	21,002 total ac
2020-08-25	1,622 growth ac	22,623 total ac
2020-08-26	202 growth ac	22,826 total ac
2020-08-27	124 growth ac	22,950 total ac
2020-08-28	56 growth ac	23,006 total ac
2020-08-29	6 growth ac	23,012 total ac
2020-08-30	9 growth ac	23,021 total ac
2020-09-01	14 growth ac	23,036 total ac
2020-09-02	100 growth ac	23,135 total ac
2020-09-03	767 growth ac	23,903 total ac
2020-09-04	572 growth ac	24,475 total ac
2020-09-05	9,813 growth ac	34,288 total ac
2020-09-06	24,687 growth ac	58,975 total ac
2020-09-07	41,739 growth ac	100,714 total ac
2020-09-12	110 growth ac	100,824 total ac
2020-09-16	572 growth ac	101,396 total ac
2020-09-20	1,439 growth ac	102,835 total ac
2020-09-21	373 growth ac	103,208 total ac
2020-09-22	122 growth ac	103,329 total ac
2020-09-24	379 growth ac	103,708 total ac
2020-09-25	6,232 growth ac	109,940 total ac
2020-09-26	11,649 growth ac	121,589 total ac
2020-09-28	1,764 growth ac	123,354 total ac
2020-09-29	407 growth ac	123,760 total ac
2020-09-30	339 growth ac	124,099 total ac
2020-10-01	327 growth ac	124,426 total ac
2020-10-02	539 growth ac	124,965 total ac
2020-10-03	121 growth ac	125,086 total ac
2020-10-04	324 growth ac	125,410 total ac
2020-10-05	1,579 growth ac	126,989 total ac
2020-10-06	915 growth ac	127,904 total ac
2020-10-07	2,177 growth ac	130,081 total ac
2020-10-08	1,415 growth ac	131,495 total ac
2020-10-10	1,913 growth ac	133,409 total ac
2020-10-12	405 growth ac	133,813 total ac
2020-10-13	558 growth ac	134,371 total ac
2020-10-16	38720 growth ac	172,612 total ac
2020-10-17	14966 growth ac	187,578 total ac
2020-10-18	15699 growth ac	203,277 total ac
2020-10-19	353 growth ac	203,630 total ac
2020-10-20	1441 growth ac	205,071 total ac
2020-10-21	1008 growth ac	206,079 total ac
2020-10-22	966 growth ac	207,045 total ac
2020-10-24	1175 growth ac	208,220 total ac
2020-10-25	443 growth ac	208,663 total ac
2020-11-01	250 growth ac	208,913 total ac

⊗ Cameron Peak Fire Origin

Thompson Zone Fire Progression

2020-10-22	1555 growth ac	1555 total ac
2020-10-24	2189 growth ac	3744 total ac
2020-10-25	602 growth ac	4,346 total ac
2020-11-01	543 growth ac	4,889 total ac

World Hillshade

Fire Progression

12/4/2020

Cameron Peak
CO-ARF-000636

Thompson Zone
WY-MRF-000408

208,913 acres from MMA Perimeter 11/06/2020 @ 1348
4,897 acres from MMA Perimeter 11/06/2020 @ 1408

0 2.5 5 7.5 10 Miles



SA Gold
12/3/2020 1828
North American 1983 Datum, LatLong Grid



27



Photo: David Wolf



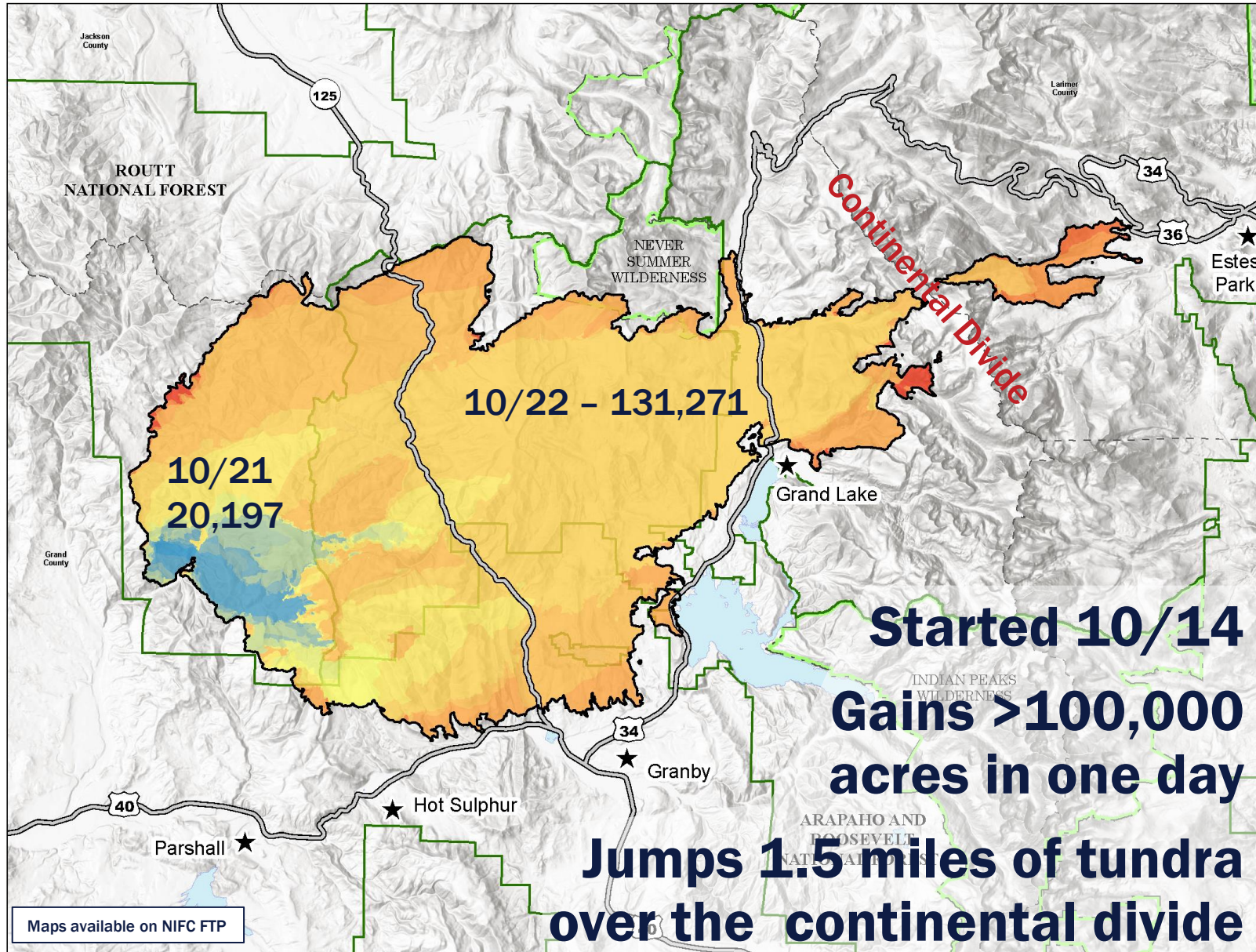
Photo: David Wolf

What we didn't see coming...

East Troublesome WY-MRF-000408 PROGRESSION MAP

11/30/2020

Final Perimeter
193,812 Total Acres



A topographic map of the Estes Park area showing the progression of a fire over time. The fire is represented by colored regions: purple (10/22), green (10/24), yellow (10/25), red (10/26), and orange (10/17, 10/18, 10/25). The fire starts in the northwest and moves southeast. Key roads shown include Trail Ridge Road (labeled 34), Highway 36, and Highway 7. A red-shaded area labeled 'Zone 1' is located near the center. Text labels indicate road closures: 'Trail Ridge Road closed due to fire', 'C.R. 43 closed due to fire', and 'Highway 7 partially closed due to fire'. The map includes a coordinate grid at the bottom with longitude markings from -106°40' to -106°25' and an elevation marker of 3200 feet.

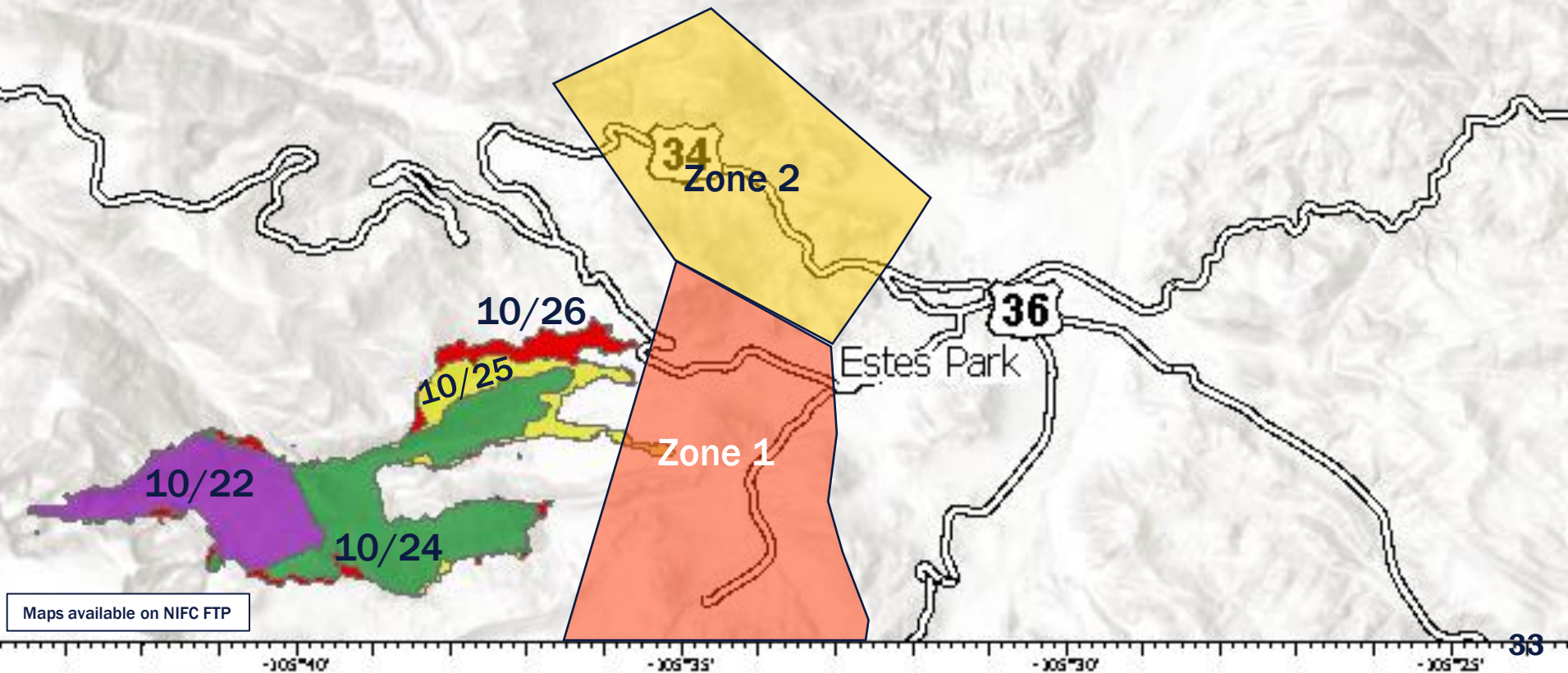
■ 10/22

- First report via satellite, 07:00
- Confirmed fire at 11:00
 - Trigger voluntary evacuations of Zone 1
 - Closed inbound traffic at mouth of canyons

09/07

■ **10/22**

- **Fire growth continues to be rapid at 12:30**
 - **Zone 1 and 2 mandatory, rest of valley voluntary**
 - **Bringing resources in from Cameron Peak and mutual aid up canyons**



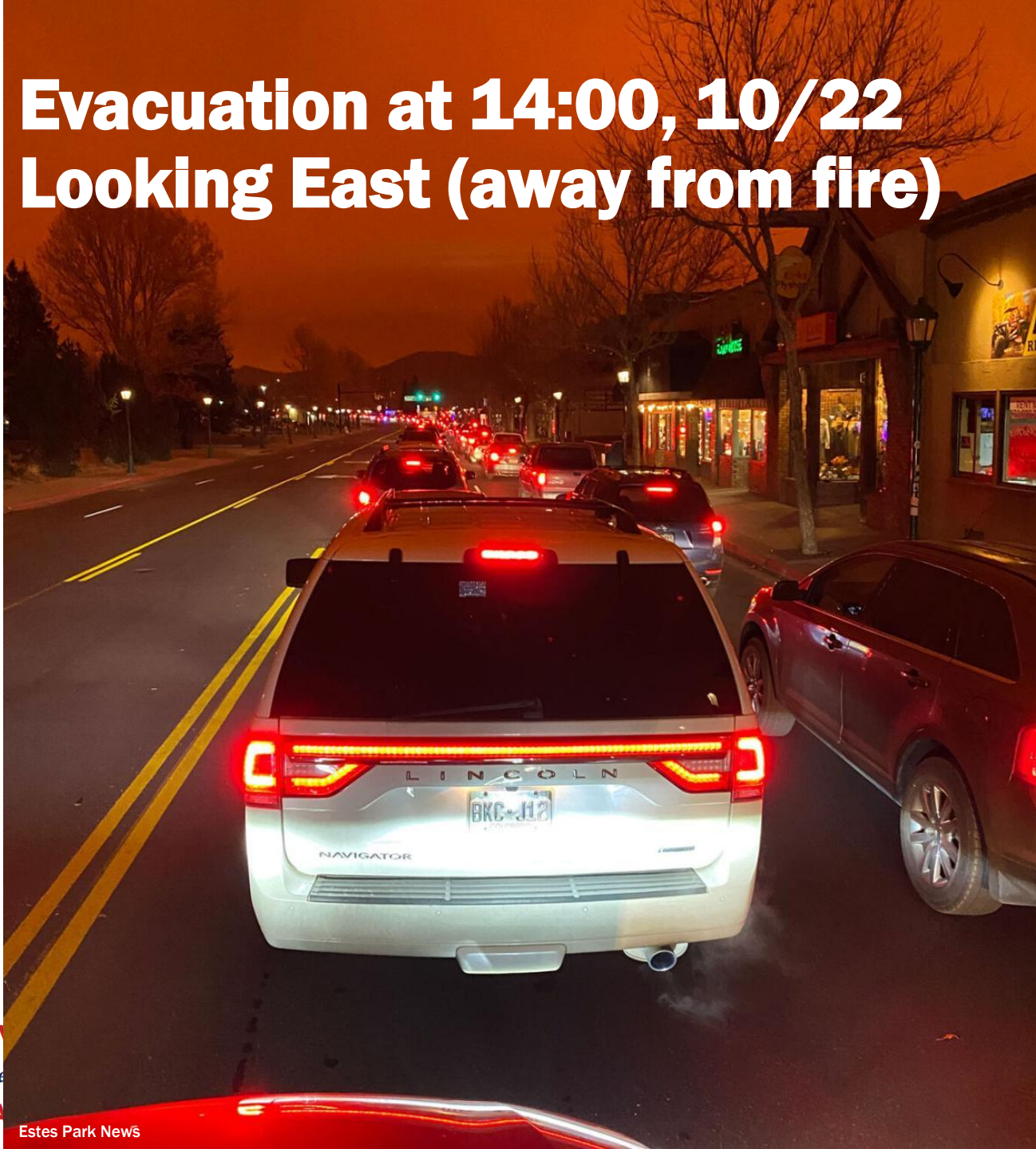


The map shows a topographic representation of a mountainous area. Several fire zones are delineated by colored polygons: a green zone in the top left labeled '09/07', a red zone in the top right labeled '10/26', an orange zone further right labeled '10/17', and a large orange area on the right side labeled '10/18'. In the lower left, there are green zones labeled '10/24' and '10/22', and a yellow-green zone labeled '10/25'. A grey polygon in the center represents a specific area of interest. Two highways are shown: Highway 34, which runs north-south through the center, and Highway 36, which runs east-west near the bottom right. The town of 'Estes Park' is labeled near Highway 36. The bottom of the map features a coordinate scale with labels: -106°40', -106°35', -106°30', and -106°25'. A small box in the bottom left corner contains the text 'Maps available on NIFC FTP'.

▪ 10/22

- Trigger points met for whole valley at 14:45
- Highway 34 – contra flow down canyon
- Highway 36 – two-way traffic (emergency vehicles only inbound)

Evacuation at 14:00, 10/22 Looking East (away from fire)



ESTES
Serving the
901 N. SA

Estes Park News

0923

35

Actions Being Taken – 10/23

- Another wind event ahead of snow
- Ordered surge resources
- Structure prep



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October 26
10-15" of snow



Estes Park News



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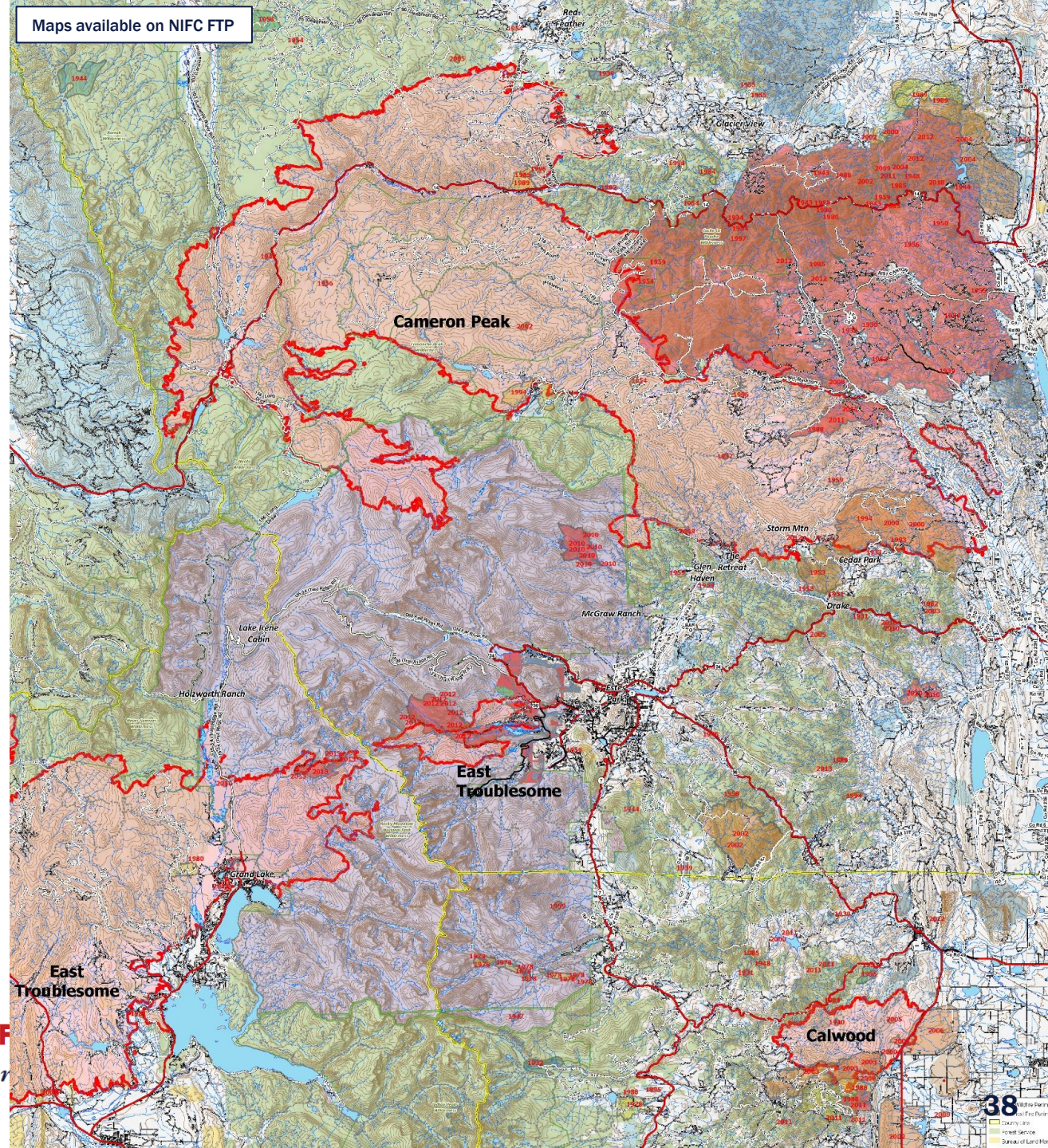
Cameron Peak

- 8/13 - 12/2
- 208,913 acres
- Destroyed 472 structures, including 231 residences

East Troublesome

- 10/14 - 11/30
- 193,812 acres
- Destroyed 550 structures, including 336 residences

Maps available on NIFC FTP



ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
Serving the Residents and Visitors
901 N. SAINT VRAIN AVE.

Communication to Community

- If you're fortunate to live in or visit the Estes Valley, you're within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) with elevated risk of wildfire
- Property owners must take responsibility, ideally following FireWise principles
- Visitors and Guests should be educated about the risk and how they can help be safe with fire



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So What Can We Do About It?

- **Goal 1: Keep Fire Out**
 - Fuel treatments
 - Large-scale partnerships
 - Community responsibility

- **Goal 2: Be Ready When Fires Occur**
 - Ready, Set, Go! Program
 - Resources available
 - Personal responsibility
 - Fire response (reactionary)



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Fuel Treatments

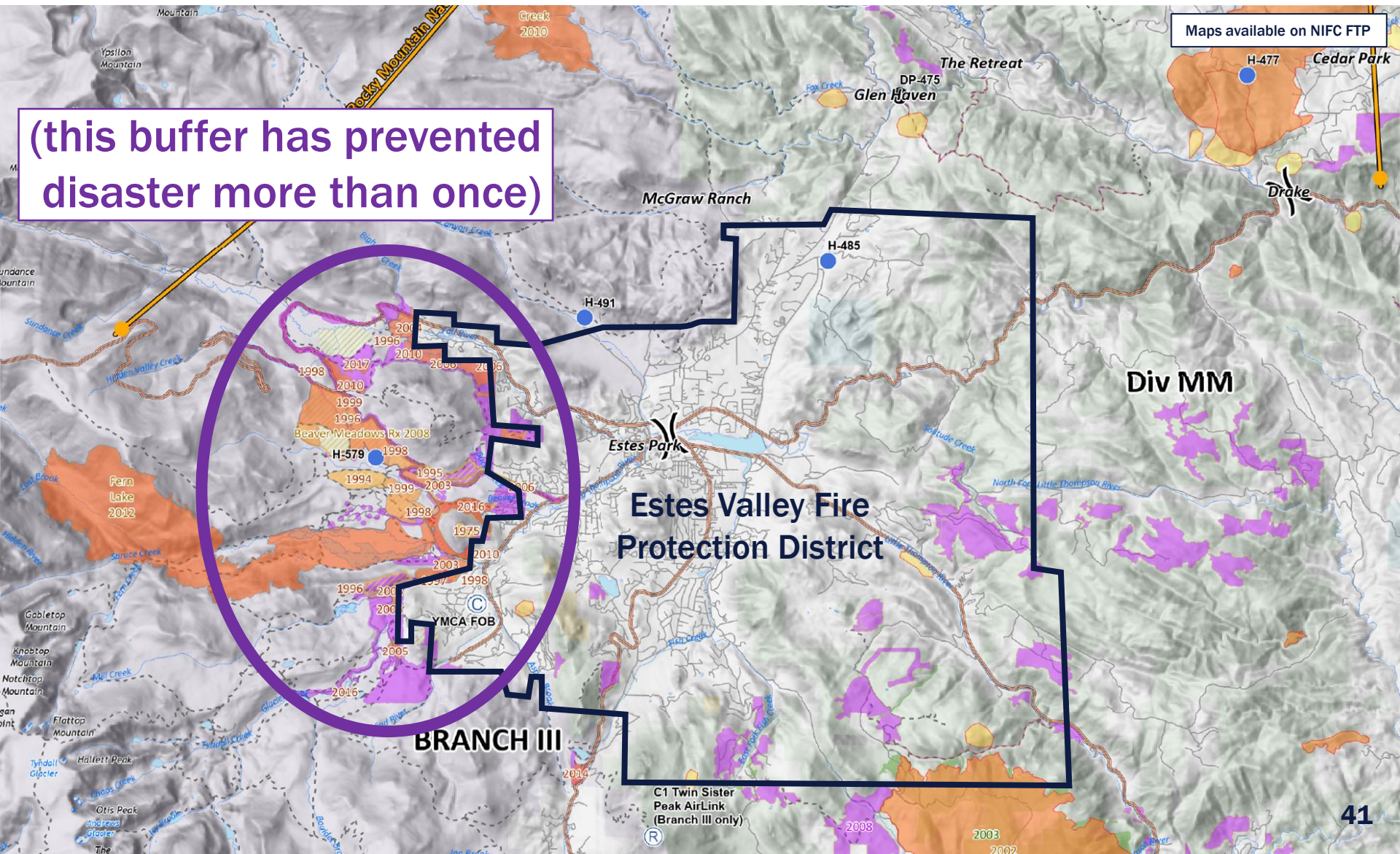
Fuels Treatment History (labels represent year of treatment)

■ Mechanical Fuel Treatment

▨ Other Fuel Treatment

▨ Prescribed Burning

(this buffer has prevented disaster more than once)




Not Starting Fires

■ Fire Restrictions & Fire Bans

- Some restrictions year round

■ Even without restrictions, is this a good idea?

■ www.estesvalleyfire.org



Burning Season Slash Burning & Recreational Fires 2021 What You Need To Know


WHAT TO KNOW

Active permits only apply from October 1 to May 1
Criteria to be met:


- Each pile is no larger than 8 ft wide and 6 ft high
- Minimum 3 inches of snow cover around piles
- Current or expected winds are less than 10 mph
- Fire must be constantly attended
- Have water, rake, and a shovel available
- Must be extinguished by nightfall

Category I (Allowable)
Category II (Illegal)

MORE INFO



For more information visit us at:
estesvalleyfire.org/fire-restrictions-bans



Estes Valley Fire Protection District

Prevention Division
Kevin Sullivan
Fire Marshal
P 970-577-3689
E ksullivan@estesvalleyfire.org

Nate Mutzl
Fire Inspector
P 970-577-3682
E nmutzl@estesvalleyfire.org

Protecting the Estes Valley since 1907

Illegal Burning Flow Chart

Is there a current burn permit from Larimer County and approved by the Fire District?

Yes: Active permits only apply from October 1 to May 1. Criteria to be met: Each pile is no larger than 8 ft wide and 6 ft high, Minimum 3 inches of snow cover around piles, Current or expected winds are less than 10 mph, Fire must be constantly attended, Have water, rake, and a shovel available, Must be extinguished by nightfall. Category I (Allowable).

No: Is the fire burning "slash," including: leaves, pine cones, pine needles, trash, or anything besides "firewood"?
Yes: This fire violates the International Fire Code (IFC) Section 307.2 and must be extinguished.
No: Is there a current fire restriction or fire ban in place?
No: Is the fuel load greater than 3 ft wide and 2 ft tall?
No: Is the fire in a container (fire ring, fire pit, chiminea, etc.) that adequately contains the fire for current and expected weather conditions? Officer discretion.
Yes: Per IFC 307.4: The fire must be at least 15 ft from a structure, The fire must be constantly attended until completely out, The attendant must have water and a tool available.
No: Per IFC 307.4: The fire must be at least 25 ft from a structure, The fire must be constantly attended until completely out, The attendant must have water and a tool available.

Yes: Refer to current fire restrictions or fire bans for guidelines. Even if permitted, recreational burning is strongly discouraged under these conditions.
Yes: This fire violates the International Fire Code (IFC) Section 307.4 and must be extinguished.



ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Serving the Residents and Visitors of the Estes Valley with Superior Fire and Safety Services

901 N. SAINT VRAIN AVE. ESTES PARK CO 80517 970-577-0900 FAX 970-577-0923

PREPARE FOR WILDFIRE



Are You Ready...

- Home hardening (FireWise)
- Fuels thinning
- Is my home easy for a firefighter to defend?

Are You Set...

- Gathered important information
- Signed up for alerts
- Assemble emergency supply kit

Can You Go...

- Prepared to evacuate
- Following pertinent news and information
- Consider multiple routes



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FireWise / WUI

Ready,
Set,
Go!

- www.estesvalleyfire.org
- www.FireWise.org



- **Self** assessments
- **Free** assessments

- **Contact us!**
(Especially HOAs)

(970) 577-3682
prevention@estesvalleyfire.org



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Ready,

Set,

Go!

Visitor & Guest Education

- Not everyone understands wildfire risk
- How can we communicate the need to protect our beautiful community?
 - Safety with campfires
 - Safety with smoking materials (place to discard)
 - Ability to get emergency alerts
- ***Unaware, Unable, Unwilling – DC Frank Viscuso***



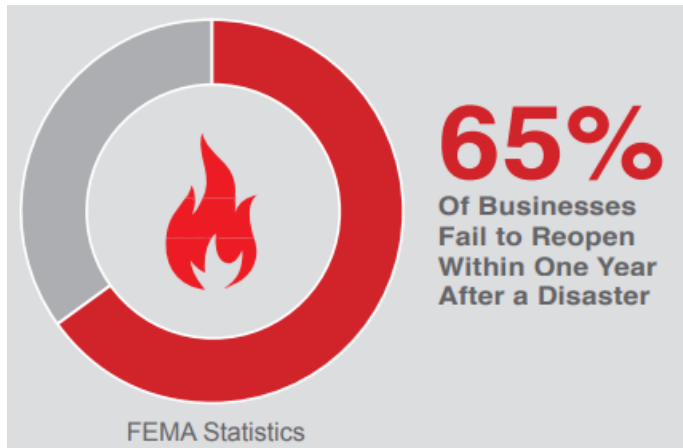
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Communication – Businesses

- Education first – want buy in to process
- Developing resources to help show what right looks like



A Fire Safety Business Resource Spring Cleaning & Maintenance

Fire Safety Resources

WHAT TO KNOW

Our community and the local economy rely on your businesses, and the Estes Valley Fire Protection District wants to keep you informed about the resources we offer to help protect your business from the threat of fire and other hazards.

We encourage you to act now before peak tourist season!

Business Self-Assessment Safety Form-

A checklist highlighting best practices for all businesses
Can be completed at your convenience
Outlines common hazards for all business types

Business-Specific Guides- *Currently in development

Educational guides which outline approaches for specialized businesses such as restaurants, hotels and lodging facilities, and vacation rental properties, etc.

On-Site Assessments-

A certified fire inspector can assist in determining what can be done to reduce hazards specific to your business

An educational approach to assist you in making short- and long-term plans to prevent or reduce the impact of fires and other hazards

Real Community Risk Reduction (CRR) is a partnership approach to prevent an incident from occurring, or to reduce the impact for those events that we cannot control.

MORE INFO



For more information
visit us at:
estesvalleyfire.org/prevention

A COMMUNITY INFORMATION GUIDE



ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

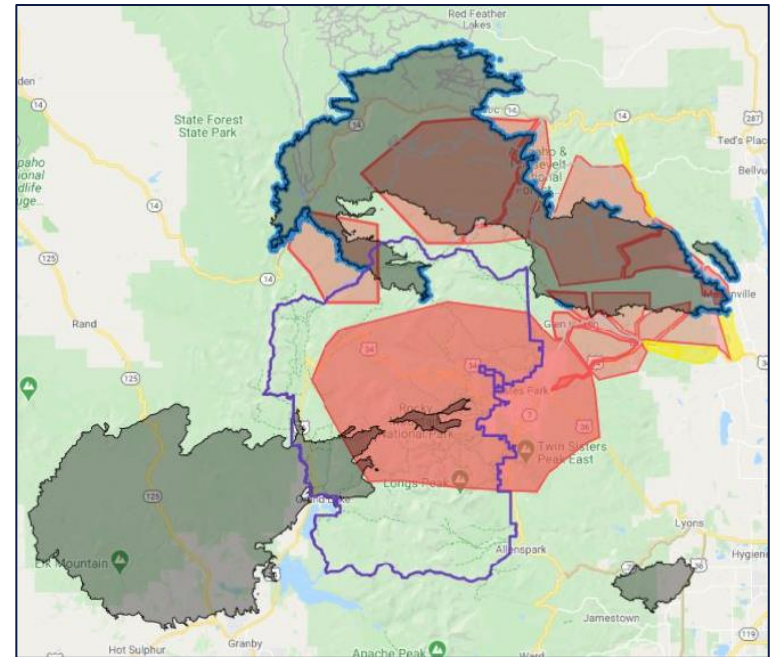
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Emergency Notification - Locals

Ready,
Set,
Go!

- Receive emergency alerts for fires, floods, or police activity
- If you live in the area, go to **NoCoAlert.org** to set up your account, locations, and contact info



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Emergency Notification - Visitors

Ready,
Set,
Go!

- Can text GO EPALERTS to 888777 to opt in for two weeks, which will then automatically clear
- Please share with any of your guests who visit our wonderful community



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Summary

- Fire is a natural process
- It's up to us to reduce the possibility of fire
- It's up to us to be prepared when fire occurs
- Ready, Set, Go!
 - Prepare your home
 - Prepare yourself
 - Prepare those you care about



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Questions?

David Wolf

Chief@EstesValleyFire.org

(970) 616 - 2165



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