

After Action Report

El Paso County

Black Forest Fire

Administration Support

v3.0, 7 Jun 14



Reuters Photograph, 11 Jun 13, <http://www.reuters.com>



Incident Began: Tuesday, June 11, 2013
Containment Date: Thursday, June 20, 2013

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Acknowledgments

The following persons and agencies contributed to this report.

Position titles are those in effect at the time of the incident.

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District 2

Amy Lathen Vice Chair

District 3

Sallie Clark Third Member

District 4

Dennis Hisey Chair

District 5

Peggy Littleton Member

Other Elected Officials

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El Paso County Board of County Commissioners
(L-R) Dennis Hisey, Amy Lathen, Sallie Clark, Peggy Littleton, and Darryl Glenn

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AP Photograph, Bryan Oller 12 Jun 13, <http://bigstory.ap.org/photo/black-forest-fire-10>

Introduction

The Black Forest Fire in El Paso County, June 11-20, 2013, was the most destructive in Colorado history. The 14,280-acre blaze damaged and destroyed 489 homes and forced the evacuation of 41,000 residents. Two people were killed when the fire consumed their house. Approximately 966 firefighters fought the blaze in a nationally coordinated effort costing over \$9 million. While the County Sheriff's Office coordinated tactical response operations in collaboration with the Federal Type I incident command structure, they received critical support from the dedicated men and women of all County Administration, Offices, Departments, the Board of County Commissioners and county affiliated agencies. Many of these departments and offices will continue for the foreseeable future to face greatly increased demands on their manpower, financial and equipment resources through the lengthy recovery process from this fire and from other recent disasters. With these exceptional circumstances now becoming the rule, it is appropriate to examine the County's ability to meet this growing challenge.

Purpose

The purpose of this After Action Report is to assist County Administration with preparing and supporting future disaster responses. As such, this report examines support provided in response to the Black Forest Fire with particular attention to what was done well and what might have been done better. The recommendations of this report will thus inform management of measures to improve future disaster response and recovery efforts.



Photo by Bill Gabbert, <http://wildfiretoday.com/>

Executive Summary

County Administration and the Board of County Commissioners played a significant role in response and recovery of the Black Forest Fire. County Administration directly supported fire operations by evacuating parks, bulldozing fire lines, transporting water, purchasing materials and equipment, accounting for expenses, providing legal counsel, and performing other assigned Emergency Support Functions. County Administration indirectly supported fire operations by managing media and citizen inquiries at the Joint Information Center, coordinating community assistance and recovery efforts at two Disaster Assistance Centers, opening a shelter for residents and livestock at the County Fairgrounds, and providing across-the-board Information Technology support to all locations including the Emergency Operations Center and Incident Command Post. County Administration further assisted with re-entry after evacuations were lifted by replacing road signs, surveying damages, inspecting wells, certifying septic systems, removing spoiled food, and providing safe drinking water and sanitation. The Board of County Commissioners expedited recovery by streamlining building permits and providing temporary relief of zoning laws to qualified residents. The Pikes Peak Regional Building Department also assisted recovery by streamlining their own permitting processes and expanding operations to accommodate the surge in inspections. While fire response operations lasted only two weeks, increased demands created a six-month backlog for Administration services, and recovery efforts will continue to occupy the County for years to come. Without exception, every person interviewed for this report was dedicated to doing whatever it took to ensure the safety and well-being of citizens. Because of their experience with the Waldo

Canyon Fire, both County Administration and the Board of County Commissioners were better prepared to deal with the Black Forest Fire. Even so, analysis of the issues presented in this report finds a number of challenges that remain to be addressed.

1. **Finding: Emergency Activation Procedures.** Some Departments need to improve upon their procedures for transitioning to 24-hour emergency operations identifying on-call personnel, rotation schedules, or "Ready Packs" to help them quickly and smoothly start providing necessary support.
2. **Finding: Safety Equipment and Certifications.** Bulldozer operators cutting fire lines in proximity to the blaze did not have Personal Protective Equipment nor Red Card certification. The process of training and equipping operators is already in progress.
3. **Finding: Surge Capacity.** \$45 million in administrative budget reductions have left County Administration hard pressed to meet increased demands placed on their services in a disaster, resulting in a backlog of work that in some cases, cut into Departments' revenue and took another six months to clear.
4. **Finding: Commissioner Roles and Responsibilities.** As Commissioners set about their elected responsibilities trying to inform their electorate, they interacted separately with County Administration, sometimes directly or indirectly communicating instructions to County Staff that at times caused confusion.
5. **Finding: State Sunshine Law.** In complying with the State Sunshine Law, Commissioners were precluded from meeting more than two-at-a-time, impeding their ability to communicate and also placing additional burden on County Staff who briefed them separately.
6. **Finding: Recovery Management.** The Public Services Department through support from other County Administrative Departments has taken the lead on recovery efforts.

The preceding findings represent the more significant challenges faced by County Departments and the Board of County Commissioners during the Black Forest Fire. Corresponding recommendations may be found towards the end of this report. That is not to say that these are the only challenges, nor should they detract from the many strengths that are also documented. One of the recommendations is to evaluate the lessons learned and update the County Emergency Operations Plan so future disaster operations may benefit accordingly. Hopefully that won't be too soon. But when it does happen, it may be expected that County Administration and County Commissioners will face the crisis as they did during the Black Forest Fire, with competence and compassion.

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EPC Fire Protection & Response

A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire in an area of combustible vegetation that occurs in the countryside or a wilderness area. A wildfire differs from other fires by its extensive size, the speed at which it can spread out from its original source, its potential to change direction unexpectedly, and its ability to jump gaps such as roads, rivers, and fire breaks. Because of the unique attributes of wildfire, specially trained firefighters and equipment are needed to suppress them.

In general, fire protection and response authorities are invested in officials responsible to citizens within their local jurisdiction. Designated fire officials develop, maintain, and direct fire mitigation programs and firefighting response capabilities funded by taxpayers within their jurisdiction. When a fire incident exceeds the capacity of a local jurisdiction, the fire official may call upon support from a neighboring jurisdiction through a pre-arranged Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA). The MAA specifies the conditions and reimbursement for lending firefighting support. If the fire exceeds the combined resources of local jurisdictions, the lead fire official may call upon support from a higher authority, either the state or federal government, depending on circumstances. Again, these requests are governed by agreements specifying the conditions and reimbursement for lending firefighting support.

El Paso County has various distinct and overlapping fire jurisdictions within its boundaries. Approximately 496,000 acres, about 36% of the County is owned by federal and state agencies. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (USFS) manages 117,000 acres of the Pike National Forest, and the US Department of Interior (DOI) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 3,800 acres within the County. El Paso County is also home to five Department of Defense (DOD) military installations encompassing an additional 100,000 acres: 1) Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, 2) Peterson Air Force Base, 3) Schriever Air Force Base, 4) The United States Air Force Academy, and 5) Fort Carson. The State Board of Land Commissioners owns nearly 185,000 acres of State Land Trust in the eastern half of the County. The City of Colorado Springs is the largest municipal agency in the County, exercising jurisdiction over large tracts of land together with Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU). Most of the remaining unincorporated areas of El Paso County are served by 21 Fire Protection Districts (FPDs).

The Sheriff is designated by state law as the fire official for unincorporated areas of El Paso County. The Sheriff's Office maintains a Wildland Fire Crew (EPC-WFC) under the Emergency Services Division (EPC-ESD) within the Law Enforcement Bureau. The Sheriff may lend or receive firefighting support under two separate Mutual Aid Agreements: 1) the 2001 Intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Mutual Aid Between Fire Departments, and 2) the Annual Wildfire Operating Plan (EPC-AOP). The first MAA shares resources between the County and local agencies, and the second MAA shares resources between the County, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), USFS, and BLM. If locally available resources prove insufficient to the task, the Sheriff may call upon CSFS for additional State support and request Emergency Fire Funds (EFF) under the EFF agreement. The State, in turn, with concurrence of the Sheriff may request Federal support under the provisions of the Colorado Statewide Wildland Fire Management Annual Operating Plan (CO-AOP), providing access to federal resources managed by the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, ID. If the Governor makes a formal declaration of disaster, then the state may seek reimbursement of up to 75% of qualifying expenditures under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG).

The Incident Command System (ICS) is the prescribed method for coordinating the firefighting efforts of multiple agencies and jurisdictions. The Sheriff may appoint an Incident Management Team (IMT) to form the leadership core of the Incident Command (IC). The Incident Command directs firefighting operations using available resources from the Incident Command Post (ICP). The Sheriff may also direct the Emergency Services Division to activate the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EOC is staffed by representatives from County Offices and Departments. The EOC lends resource support as requested by the Incident Command. It also has delegated authority to coordinate evacuation and sheltering operations within the County.

1. Transportation	9. Urban Search & Rescue
2. Communications	10. HAZMAT Response
3. Public Works	11. Agriculture & Natural Resources
4. Firefighting	12. Energy
5. Emergency Management	13. Public Safety & Security
6. Mass Care	14. Long-Term Recovery & Mitigation
7. Logistics	15. External Affairs
8. Health & Medical	

Table 1: EPC EOP Emergency Support Functions

EOC operations are guided by the County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The EOP delegates Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) among County Offices and Departments as designated Lead Agencies (LAs). Some ESFs are assigned to agencies outside the County. Lead Agencies are responsible for preparing and executing assigned ESF tasks. Some tasks within an ESF may be assigned to different LAs. Other Departments may be tasked to support LAs in fulfilling their assigned responsibilities.

Lead Agency	Emergency Support Functions														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
EPC Assessor														X	
EPC Coroner								X							
EPC Sheriff's Office															
EPC Fire Marshal				X											
Emergency Services Div.					X				X	X		X		X	
Communications Section		X													
Patrol Div.													X		
Public Information Office															X
EPC Administrator and Administration	X														
Support Services		X													
Budget & Economic Dev.															
Finance Div.							X								
Community Services															
Environmental Div.											X				
Park Operations Div.											X				
Development Services															
Human Services															
PPR Building Dept. (Affiliated Agency to County Administration)															
Public Health (Affiliated Agency to County Administration)								X							
Public Information	X														
Public Services															
Contracts & Proc. Div.							X								
Engineering Div.			X											X	
Operations Div.	X													X	
Other Agencies															
RACES		X													
United Way 211		X													
CO State Dam Engineer			X												
Red Cross						X									
Memorial Liaison								X							
Penrose Liaison								X							
Medical Reserve Corps								X							
Farm Bureau											X				
Humane Society											X				
State Animal Rescue											X				

Table 2: EPC ESF Lead Agencies



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Administration Support to the Black Forest Fire

County Administration played an essential role in setting up and supporting the County Emergency Operations Center at 102 W. Costilla St. Support Services deployed additional computer and communications equipment, and increased Internet capacity to cope with expanded data requirements. Budget and Contracting established federally compliant accounting and purchasing procedures to expedite acquisition of urgently needed goods and services while ensuring future reimbursement of qualified expenses. Community Services, Public Services, and El Paso County Public Health staffed EOC positions and provided around-the-clock representation to execute assigned tasks under designated Emergency Support Functions. These tasks included both direct and indirect support to fire operations. The Public Services Operations Division directly supported fire operations by providing bulldozers and operators to cut fire lines. They also assisted fire suppression crews by transporting water to remote locations. Community Services evacuated County parks ahead of the blaze, and opened the County Fairgrounds to accommodate displaced residents and their animals. The Pikes Peak Regional Building Department obtained aerial photographs to help direct tactical operations and assisted the Sheriff's office with estimating damages. The County Attorney's Office provided legal advice to the Incident Commander. The El Paso County Public Information Office, Sheriff's Office Public Information team and City of Colorado Springs Public Information Officers worked together to field both media citizen inquiries to the Joint Information Center (JIC). County Administration support to the Black Forest Fire extended far beyond the operations of the EOC.

The County Administrator sought direction from the Board of County Commissioners and directed his Deputy Administrator to open a Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) and start lending immediate aid to affected residents. Less than 24-hours after the start of the blaze, the first DAC was opened at the Citizens Service Center (CSC) at 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Rd. Staffed by both public and private aid agencies, the DAC offered a "one-stop-shop" where citizens could receive needed care, temporary relief, and important recovery information. Again, Support Services provided critical computer and communications capabilities accommodating about fifty organizations supporting the DAC. Due to their large presence in the CSC, Human Services coordinated overall direction of the DAC. They also offered counseling services and initially administered relief funds donated by the El Pomar Foundation. Public Health offered tetanus shots to preclude future infections among returning residents, and also provided test kits for those with private water wells. Development Services and the Building Department both answered questions and distributed packets addressing rebuilding concerns. And Public Services provided security officers to help direct customers and maintain order within the emotionally charged environment. A second DAC was opened June 25th at The Classical Academy East Campus at 12201 Cross Peak View to assist residents closer to the disaster area. During the three weeks the DACs were active they provided service to 1,812 customers.

County Administration sustained surge operations in support of the EOC, ICP, and Disaster Assistance Centers (DAC) throughout the course of the fire response from 11-20 June. But the expanded workload continued long after the fire was contained and the centers closed as efforts continued on the tasks of recovery.

One of the first steps on the road to recovery was taken by the Board of County Commissioners when they passed a series of measures relaxing zoning laws and consolidating filing requirements to help residents quickly rebuild their damaged and destroyed homes. If these measures had not been taken, many residents would have been unable to return to their property. Of course, prompt insurance settlements were crucial to the rebuilding process and the county provided assistance and advice for survivors through a non-profit organization, United Policyholders, with expertise in working through insurance related challenges. Public Services, El Paso County Public Health, the Assessor's Office and Pikes Peak Regional Building Department assisted by providing initial damage assessments as soon as areas were cleared to be opened by the Type 1 Team. After the disaster area was declared safe, the County Assessor fielded Damage Assessment Teams (DATs). Supported by a 24-hour staff, the DATs were able to survey 2400 parcels in two weeks, and complete all their assessments within three. This feat would have been impossible without the vital assistance of Support Services who deployed mobile cellular stations that allowed DATs to communicate with staff. As the DATs were taking to the field, returning residents

were confronted with the immediate threat of health hazards posed by rotting food and a lack of sanitation. Working together with Public Health, Community Services set up collection points to dispose of spoiled food and deployed port-o-lets in proximity to affected residences. Public Health was further pressed upon to re-certify 358 septic systems, representing an 80% increase over the 450 systems they permit annually. As insurance companies began to settle damage claims, residents began making plans to rebuild. Out of consideration for their difficult circumstances, Development Services offered appointments after business hours to review residents' plans. The Pikes Peak Regional Building Department streamlined their permitting process and posted all necessary information at a single location, allowing residents to retrieve digital plans and rapidly rebuild their homes. In the first nine months after the disaster, the Building Department conducted 4400 inspections and issued 187 new home permits to Black Forest residents.

Response and recovery operations occupied a significant portion of County staff while County Administration continued to provide basic services summarized in Table 3. The Black Forest Fire engaged 25% of accountants from the Budget Department, 50% of County contracting officers, 66% of County attorneys, and nearly 100% of the County Administrator and County Administrative Executive Directors. The diversion of County resources created a backlog of tasks that in some instances weren't reduced until six months after the fire. These delays were compounded by the Manitou Springs Floods in September that again diverted attention away from the daily business of County staff. And yet, in many ways the effects of the Black Forest Fire continue to linger, and will occupy County Administration for years to come.

County Department/Office/Division	Summary Services
Assessor's Office	Assess and Adjust Property Values
County Attorney Office	Legal Review & Representation
County Administrator's Office	Management and Oversight of County Administration
Budget & Economic Development	Finance & Budget Administration
Community Services	Parks & Fairgrounds/Environmental/Vettrans Management
Development Services	Land Zoning & Development Permitting
Human Services	Public Aid & Health Administration
Pikes Peak Region Building Dept.	Building Inspections & Certifications
Public Health	Health Services, Inspections, & Certifications
Public Information Office	Public Communications
Public Services: Contracts & Procurement	County Purchasing
Public Services: Engineering	Manage County Construction & Development
Public Services: Operations	Manage County Roads, Facilities, & Vehicles
Public Services: Parking & Security	Provide Security to County Facilities & Events
Support Services	Provide County Information Technology Support

Table 3: EPC Department Services

Procurements & Contracting continues to reconcile orders while the Budget Department seeks State and Federal reimbursement. In February 2014, the Public Services Department received BoCC approval to begin removing damaged and destroyed trees that may pose a traffic hazard in the area. Development Services continues to review and approve residential building plans, while the Building Department inspects and certifies new construction. And as Black Forest residents go about the process of restoring their lives, County Departments continue to work with County Commissioners to ensure their response remains, as it was throughout the crisis, competent and compassionate.



El Paso County, Nancy Nelsen

Issues Faced and Lessons Learned

The following section provides a detailed account of Administration support to the Black Forest Fire as related by Department Staff and County Commissioners. The accounts were compiled from written reports and personal interviews conducted from 4-18 February 2014. Each account describes what was done, what was done well, what they thought might have been done better, what they viewed as significant issues plus any associated recommendations, and miscellaneous observations pertaining to other aspects of response and recovery efforts. The accounts are presented in alphabetical order by County Department, followed by the views of the Board of County Commissioners.

Assessor's Office

Developing official damage estimates is a critical first step to settling insurance claims and determining State and Federal aid. The Assessor's Office deployed seven two-man Damage Assessment Teams (DATs) to survey property damage immediately after the Sheriff declared it safe to enter a burn area. DATs conducted surveys of "parcels" from specially prepared maps. Parcel maps clearly indicated property boundaries allowing assessors to quickly and accurately identify ownership even when address identifiers were completely destroyed. The DATs would pick up their maps in the morning and conduct surveys from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Depending on the amount of damage, each survey could take from 10 minutes to an hour. In the afternoon, teams turned in their completed surveys to support staff who tabulated the results overnight, and prepared new parcel maps for the next day's survey. In this manner, the Assessor's Office was able to survey 2400 parcels in two weeks, and complete all assessments three weeks after the end of the fire. The Department's official count was 489 homes destroyed and 37 out buildings damaged for a total of 526 structures burned.

Areas of Strength

- Parcel maps helped DATs quickly and accurately identify properties even when address identifiers were completely destroyed.
- The institution of a 24-hour operation cycle helped the Assessor's Office complete assessments in record time compared to the Waldo Canyon Fire.
- No Department personnel were injured while conducting damage surveys (one person was injured during the Waldo Canyon Fire survey).
- Recommendation. Address markers that are more resilient than mail boxes.

Issues & Recommendations

1. **Tree Damage & Soil Erosion.** The Black Forest Fire presented a unique challenge in assessing financial loss by having to account for tree damage. From historical data, the Department knew that the forest added 30% to property value. The problem was that tree damage wouldn't fully manifest itself until the following spring. Because of this dilemma, the Department only deducted 15% from property values where trees appeared scorched. The full amount of damages would be accurately determined when the Department conducted its future periodic assessment. Similarly, the extent of the fire's impact on area erosion would also have to wait.

2. **Unofficial Damage Estimate.** While the Assessor's Office had to wait until it was safe to enter the burn area to conduct its official damage assessment, the Sheriff's Office tabulated an unofficial damage assessment and publicly released its estimates as the fire still burned. The unofficial estimate raised concern as some residents were told their properties were destroyed only to be told later they weren't. The Assessor's Office later determined that the Sheriff's estimate was very close, within 15-20 properties (3%-4%), and despite some confusion, provided a greater service by keeping the public informed.

Recommendation. Continue to release unofficial damage estimates to help alleviate public concerns.

Attorney's Office

The County Attorney's office provided liaison to the Incident Command Post and supported the Type 1 Incident Management Team. Department staff provided continuous representation from just before the 1st briefing until just after the 2nd briefing each day. County Attorneys assisted legal requirements with respect to firefighting operations and re-entry procedures. With exception of the transfer of authority to the State, County Attorneys were asked to review all documents related to the Black Forest Fire. Additionally, two attorneys provided free legal advice to residents for the first two days of DAC operations. About 75% of all recovery documents were also reviewed by the Attorney's Office.

Areas of Strength

- The County Attorney provided onsite support to the Federal Incident Management Team (IMT) helping eliminate any delays due to interpretation of State law.
- The Attorney's Office continued to sustain County services while dedicating 66% of their staff to fire response operations.

Areas for Improvement

- While the Attorney's Office was better prepared because of its experience with the Waldo Canyon Fire, it would still benefit from more disaster training.
- Communication processes should be streamlined between the County Commissioners, County Administrator and the Attorney's Office.
- Review Board Rules to ensure Commissioners' roles and responsibilities during a disaster are up to date.

Issues & Recommendations

3. **Surge Requirements.** The Office dedicated four of its six attorneys to providing legal services for three weeks during the Black Forest Fire. The significant allocation of staff (66%) created a backlog of work that wasn't completed until six months after the fire.

Recommendation: Three additional attorneys would have been extremely helpful during this event. Determine a solution to adding additional staff during major emergent events.

4. **State Sunshine Law.** The State Sunshine Law precludes a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners without a 24-hour public notice. Accordingly, the County Administrator and Administrative Executive Directors briefed Commissioners individually or no more than two at a time to provide updates during fire response operations. Understandably, the process was considered cumbersome and inefficient by both the Commissioners and County Administration to the extent they are considering working with the State in modifying the law during emergent events. This may not be necessary as the County Attorney believes current law relaxes restrictions during an emergency.

Recommendation. Review Sunshine Law to ensure it does not unnecessarily impede a swift County response during a disaster.

5. **Transfer of Authority.** Firefighting authority was transferred to the State at approximately 5:08 PM on the first day of the fire, Tuesday, June 11th. The State subsequently transferred responsibility to the Federal Incident Management Team which assumed control 6:00 AM Thursday, June 13th. The County Attorney was not asked to review the legal document transferring authority from the County to the State. This documentation was similar to the Waldo Canyon fire response.

Recommendation. Develop a process whereby the Department can review all legal documents without impeding firefighting response. Since the documentation is fairly standardized with minor adjustments required based on the County's need, a legal review can occur prior to an event.

Budget & Economic Development

The Budget Department staffed the Finance Section of the County EOC. Based on their experience in the Waldo Canyon Fire, they quickly established accounting and tracking procedures to ensure prompt reimbursement of qualified expenses from the State and FEMA. In addition to providing budgetary oversight, they were pro-active in securing essential food, water, and ice for the first four days of incident. Months after the EOC was closed, the Budget Department continues to reconcile accounts and seek authorized reimbursement.

Areas of Strength

- Based on their experience with the Waldo Canyon Fire, the Department had requisite accounting forms ready and available from the start of the Black Forest Fire. Responders were asked to complete these forms on a daily basis to account for expenses as they occurred.
- The Director convened a financial working group between County, State, and Federal officials at outset of the emergency to de-conflict and clarify guidance, significantly reducing the amount of paperwork needing re-accomplishment when the Department later sought reimbursement.
- As Damage Assessment Teams deployed to the burn area, the Department provided “runners” to relay communications until Support Services could set up mobile cellular stations.

Areas for Improvement

- Disaster Preparation
 - Ensure that on-call procedures are sufficiently flexible and meet the needs of all emergency responses.
 - Work closely with the Office of Emergency Management to ensure critical contact information of key personnel is available.
 - Meet more frequently with the County Contracting Office to ensure the emergency vendor list is complete.
 - Identify employees that have a purchase card with the highest purchasing threshold to be able to purchase items during the first operational period (12 hours) of the disaster.

- Disaster Response
 - Be prepared to service all food and drinks to First Responders in the first few days until the next jurisdiction takes over.
 - Have proper logistics in place to receive donated food and drinks, and distribute them as necessary.
 - Contract food/beverage vendors to provide the amount of food necessary for First Responders.
 - Provide County vehicles or magnetic signs for personal vehicles so they are easily identifiable and able to pass through security points.
- EOC & ICP Support
 - Should have employees that are familiar with the emergency situation. These individuals need to have good organization, need to do well in stressful situations, and should know the county, community individuals that are in upper level positions.
 - Prepare the same employees with Incident Command System training ICS100 & ICSE200 from FEMA website.
<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/ICSResource/TrainingMaterials.htm>
 - Scheduled shifts are very important. These shifts should have a 1-hour overlap to bring the oncoming person up-to-speed as to what has been done, what needs to be done, together with a specific list of action items for ongoing tasks.
 - Have an information sharing plan in place.
 - Establish a need to know list (e.g., location of important officials).
 - Have a laptop pool available for employees on the emergency on-call list to be immediately ready to perform required tasks; the ability to login to the county system is essential to this capability.

Issues & Recommendations

6. **Guidance Consistency.** Accounting and finance requirements are dictated by FEMA Federal Coordinating Officers (FCOs). Guidance changes as FCOs are rotated, resulting in significant overhead to re-accomplish previous paperwork.
7. **Expense Accounting.** FEMA has very strict accounting and filing requirements for reimbursement of expenses. These require specific cross-tracking information on responders, vehicles, equipment, and consumables. Many responders submitted forms with incomplete information, placing a greater burden on the Department and making it more difficult to recoup covered expenses.

Recommendations:

- Establish an electronic sign-in to capture all data and cross-reference coding for overtime, vehicles, and tasks.
- Change the county's overtime policy to include exempt employees during emergency. Must state specific language for reimbursement (per FEMA).
- Consider developing education materials/training for department contacts about what is reimbursable by FEMA/State and what format it needs to be in. (Why it's important that we collect this information up front during the disaster.)

8. **Automation Support.** Much of the accounting data had to be collected and tracked manually. Twenty-five percent of the Department's accounting staff was dedicated to the task.

Recommendation. Research availability and acquire systems to automate accounting and finance tasks to reduce administrative workload and costs.

9. **Adequate Representation.** The Department was challenged with sending knowledgeable representatives to all the different meetings that were convened by the Emergency Operations Center, Incident Command Post, Board of County Commissioners, and others.

Recommendation. Event synchronization would reduce requirements and facilitate planning to ensure adequate representation at important meetings.

10. **Capturing Lessons Learned.** Because of previous experience with the Waldo Canyon Fire, the Department felt it was better prepared to respond to the Black Forest Fire. Working with the Office of Emergency Management the Department plans to develop more formal training requirements to sustain insights and indoctrinate new personnel.

Recommendations:

- Document lessons learned from Waldo Canyon and Black Forest Fires.
- Develop shift-change turnover procedures for EOC.
- Create emergency on-call list for rapid response to emergencies.
- Maintain core of no more than six people to staff EOC.

11. Surge Capacity. The Department was hard pressed to maintain daily operations while supporting a disaster. The situation was complicated by the fact that accounting and finance tasks continued long after the immediate disaster.

Recommendation. Hire additional personnel to cope with surge requirements and accommodate the increased workload after a disaster.

Observations

- The Sign Shop quickly produced and distributed placards authorizing ICP access to County personnel driving their personal vehicles.
- Cell phone service was limited at the ICP because nearby cell towers were burned in the fire.

Community Services

Community services staffed both the EOC and DAC during Black Forest Fire response operations. They evacuated County parks in advance of the fire and opened the El Paso County Fairgrounds to shelter displaced residents and their animals with the support of the County Animal Response Team (CART). After the fire was contained, they assisted with recovery operations by collecting 122,400 lbs. of spoiled food at eight collection events, deployed portable toilets and hand washing stations, held two household hazardous waste collection events, provided certificates from the Colorado State Forest Service for private property tree evaluations, assisted veterans affected by the fire, and completed a damage assessment of Black Forest County Park facilities.

Areas of Strength

- The El Paso County Fairgrounds sheltered about 8-10 families (approximately 30 people) during the disaster.
- The County Animal Response Team provided support for about approximately 200 large and small animals.
- Free animal feed was provided by the Colorado Feed Bank.
- The Department worked with Public Health to deploy portable toilets within the burn area and collect spoiled food from residents.

Issues & Recommendations

12. **Surge Capacity.** Disaster response and recovery places a burden on the Department's small staff to sustain daily services while addressing increased task and paperwork requirements. Response tasks include evacuating park users from endangered areas, issuing refunds and rescheduling events. Recovery tasks include long-term management and rehabilitation of burn areas.

Recommendation. Recruit retired department members to provide a ready pool of trained volunteers for additional support during disasters.

13. **Shelter Activation.** Some families arrived before the shelter opened due to a delay in communication regarding activation approval.

Recommendation. Establish guidelines for quicker shelter activation.

14. **Sanitation Policy.** There are no established guidelines for sanitation requirements following a disaster.

Recommendation. Research and develop guidelines for sanitation services commensurate with the size of the disaster.

Observations

- Work with the Office of Emergency Management and the Public Information Office to establish a public information campaign encouraging residents to plan and prepare for evacuating themselves and their animals.



El Paso County, Nancy Nelsen

EPC Emergency Operations Center

Development Services

Development Services provided representation to the DAC during fire response operations to distribute information and answer citizens' concerns about rebuilding. After the fire was contained, they assisted with re-entry into the burn area and lent support to Damage Assessment Teams from the Assessor's Office. They also assisted the Board of County Commissioners with modifying zoning laws and established a consolidated permitting process to help expedite rebuilding. They further assisted affected property owners by offering appointments outside regular business hours to evaluate their building allowances. In the six months following the disaster, Development Services processed 140 single-family dwelling Site Plans and issued 546 permits for residences in the burn area.

Areas of Strength

- Department Staff were able to expediently develop and present in a work session and public hearing process a temporary suspension of specific zoning and development standards which could have resulted in an impediment to rebuilding:
 - 5.2.1 (F) – Suspended to allow accessory buildings to be constructed concurrently with principal structures.
 - 5.2.1 (K) – Suspended to remove size restrictions on accessory buildings.
 - 5.2.49 – Suspended to allow temporary use of mobile homes (12 months) without prior plan approval.
 - 5.6.2 – Time period reset until one year after code suspension for nonconforming structures.
 - 5.6.3 – Nonconforming structures with more than 50% damage may be rebuilt in previous size and dimensions in same location; Expanded or relocated structures must conform to standing codes.
 - Temporary mobile homes allowed in RR-2.5 and RS-20,0000. Residents must secure permit for permanent structure within one year.
- A bundled permit with one fee was made available for rebuilding damaged or destroyed property. The permit only required a single site plan fee for multiple buildings.
- Guidance was developed regarding demolition debris and ash disposal in a short period of time in coordination with multiple agencies.

Areas for Improvement

- Without specific knowledge of damage, it was not possible to answer resident's questions regarding rebuilding.
- Certain DSD records and information are not available in electronic format or connected to the parcel numbers, making them inaccessible from the DACs.
- Damage estimates were not formally reported to the DAC; Department Staff relied on other informational sources to garner their information.

Issues & Recommendations

15. **Meeting Notifications.** Improved coordination of EOC committee meetings so Department staff can respond accordingly and provide the required assistance.

16. **DAC Support.** The Department was hard-pressed to staff two separate DACs. Dedicating scarce resources to the DACs was strenuous and difficult until official damage assessments became available.

17. **Digital Records.** Department support to the DACs was further inhibited by the inability to access many records which have not been digitally reproduced.

Recommendation. Convert older Department records into digital format and match up to current parcel numbers and tracking system.

18. **Centralized Information Source.** Information necessary for recovery comes from many Local, County, and State agencies, some with overlapping jurisdictions. There was no declared central location for all the recovery information and guidance documents. Some information was on individual departments web pages. Regional Building Department (RBD) did a good job of trying to link to all departments, which essentially provided a central location.

Recommendation. Develop a permanent centralized source for related recovery information to facilitate more rapid response.

19. Emergency Authority. Temporary suspension of zoning laws to facilitate rapid rebuilding of destroyed homes required a special meeting and resolution on the part of the Board of County Commissioners.

Recommendation. Consider whether it is appropriate to add specific provisions in the Land Development Code such as regulation suspension or use allowances to accommodate emergency disaster situations.

Observations

- No representation was available from utility departments at the DAC to advise residents when power might be restored.
- Public Health and Community Services might have been afforded advance planning for solid waste disposal had utilities informed them of the location and duration of power outages. It is understood that this would have been difficult to estimate due to the extensive damage to the infrastructure.

Human Services

Human Services provided 24-hour support to the County EOC and was responsible for establishing and operating the Disaster Assistance Center at the Citizens Service Center, 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Rd. In addition to accommodating over fifty different agencies, the Department dedicated eighty staff members who administered nearly 2,000 hours of counseling to some of the 1,654 customers who utilized the CSC-DAC's services.

Areas of Strength

- The Department facilitated rapid DAC activation and accommodated over fifty aid organizations in less than 24-hours.
- The Department provided a "one-stop-shop" for emergency aid from a safe and secure location.
- Rapid customer service was facilitated by Greeters who directed people to available Intake stations to quickly assess their needs.
- Department Staff provided invaluable assistance to traumatized residents.
- The CSC afforded spacious accommodations facilitating private mental health counseling and separate child care support.
- The availability of other County Departments within the same facility afforded more streamlined services than could be achieved from the second DAC.

Areas for Improvement

- Recommendations are addressed in detail by the Deputy County Administrator who was directed to establish both DACs.

Pikes Peak Regional Building Department

The Pikes Peak Regional Building Department provided both response and recovery support to the Black Forest Fire. Department personnel assisted the Sheriff's Office with estimating property damage during fire response operations. The Department further assisted fire response operations by obtaining aerial photographs to help direct tactical operations. Department personnel staffed the Disaster Assistance Center and provided important information to help affected residents with their rebuilding plans. Of course the Department played a critical role during recovery by conducting nearly 4400 inspections and issuing 187 new home permits in the nine months following the disaster.

Areas of Strength

- The unofficial damage estimates were lauded for their high degree of accuracy and credited by the County Assessor with alleviating their workload compared to the aftermath of the Waldo Canyon Fire.
- The Department streamlined their permitting process and posted all necessary information at a single location, www.pprbd.org, allowing residents to retrieve digital plans and rapidly rebuild their homes.
- Department personnel absorbed the increased demand for services without creating a backlog or significantly affecting their daily operations.
- The Department's superlative performance may be gauged by the absence of any complaints from Black Forest residents since the fire.

Public Health

El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) provided representation to the EOC and DACs during fire response operations. From the DACs, EPCPH personnel distributed 560 well water test kits to affected homeowners, administered 770 Tetanus vaccinations to preclude future infections, and handed out information on food safety and water and air pollution. As evacuations began to be lifted, EPCPH personnel deployed to the field to distribute over 20,000 N95 masks to returning residents and volunteer workers. After the burn area was declared safe, Health Department officials assisted recovery efforts by capping 101 open well heads and providing a safe source of drinking water to area residents. EPCPH further assisted recovery by testing and certifying 358 septic systems.

Areas of Strength

- EPCPH assigned a “Disaster Lead” as a single point of contact facilitating rapid action and continuity of operations throughout fire response and recovery operations.
- EPCPH understood its role and reacted very quickly to Black Forest fire response. EPCPH has been actively involved in creating strong partnerships within the community. The response efforts put forth by EPCPH and in conjunction with, EPC Office of Emergency Management, Medical Response Corps (MRC), Red Cross, American Medical Response (AMR) and EPC Household Hazardous Waste showed that the collaborative trainings, exercises, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's), and the lessons that were learned from the Waldo Canyon Fire were of great benefit to the response.
- EPCPH actively participated and staffed the setup of both Disaster Assistance Centers. The DAC provided a centralized location for survivors of the disaster to receive information, services, or referrals to services such as air quality, water and smoke mitigation of homes and vaccinations for tetanus. The various agencies were able to identify public health, medical and mental health needs of survivors and coordinate assistance for those people in a one-stop-shop setting.
- EPCPH logistics was activated at the onset of the fire. Three shelters were opened including animal shelters. EPCPH logistics put a portable storage unit in the CSC parking area where it could be secured at night. The Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) was established on June 13, 2013 at the CSC complex. Another DAC opened on June 20, 2013, at The Classical Academy, in an effort to locate Public Health services closer to the survivors of the fire. EPCPH provided N95 masks, water testing kits, and tetanus vaccines.

- No injuries were reported by EPCPH staff. Staff who were involved in locating and identifying damaged well heads and septic systems should have updated vaccinations and wear proper Personal Protective Equipment (gloves and N95 masks).
- EPCPH lab was tasked with providing water sample testing for the Black Forest area impacted by the wildfire. Due to the lengthy process for some to regain access to their property, the lab provided about 560 water tests without any significant decrease in day-to-day activities. Mutual Aid Agreements were already in place to acquire additional sample bottles for the expected increase in testing. The form used for sampling was informative and easy for the public to understand.
- AspenPointe behavioral health specialists were activated through the Medical Response Corps by Emergency Support Function 8 (ESF8) staff. Behavioral health staff were also available at the Incident Command Post through first responder chaplains. First Baptist Church of Black Forest provided volunteers to assist with capping damaged well heads. This partnership helped staff by providing additional field personnel and communicating with those affected by the fire. EPCPH staff provided training to these volunteers in the form of videos and Just-In-Time training.



El Paso County, Nancy Nelsen

EPC Public Health Field Member

Areas for Improvement

- EPCPH has written procedures identifying “what” needs to be done to activate disaster support, but still needs to develop more detailed instructions on “how”.

Issues & Recommendations

20. **Surge Capacity.** EPCPH staffing has declined 44% from 250 Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) to 138 FTEs over the past twenty years. Of these, only four are currently qualified to provide required representation to EOCs. During the Black Forest Fire, EPCPH was tasked to provide 24-hour support to both the El Paso County and Colorado Springs EOCs, severely straining their capacity and forcing cutbacks in other essential services including inspections of restaurants, tattoo parlors, and pools and spas. These cutbacks had the additional impact of reducing EPCPH revenue, and required the Department to draw on emergency funds to hire two temporary workers to relieve the backlog.

Recommendations:

- Train more staff to provide requisite support to EOCs.
- Develop “virtual EOC” so same EPCPH officials can lend simultaneous support to multiple EOCs.
- Acquire funding for 4 FTEs in order to retain 2 temporary environmental technicians and hire 2 more nurses.

21. **Recovery Backlog.** Recovery operations continued to place demands on EPCPH services for four months following the Black Forest Fire as the Department had to test and certify 358 septic systems representing an 80% increase over the 450 systems they normally permit each year. The increased demand and backlog of services occupied the Department until October 1st. While EPCPH can call on additional support from the state and surrounding counties, outside agency access to the disaster area may be difficult, and knowledge of local requirements problematic.

22. **CSC Disaster Assistance Center Phone Support.** The CSC only supports AT&T cell phone service within its interior. Personnel staffing the Disaster Assistance Center who didn’t have AT&T cell service were unable to use their own cell phones or access other supporting wireless services. This restriction impaired the ability of some agencies to provide full customer service, and induced additional delays and overhead to attain alternate access for supporting services.

Recommendation. Because many essential services are located at the CSC, some means is needed to overcome current technical restrictions and gain ready access to other wireless service providers.

23. **CSC Disaster Assistance Center Storage Space.** Adequate onsite storage space is required for emergency supplies by accommodating the storage of such supplies at the Citizens Service Center. It is imperative that access to such supplies is immediate in times of emergency.

Recommendation. Onsite storage of emergency supplies is currently under construction at the Citizens Service Center.

24. **Community Preparedness.** Community preparedness is the ability of communities to prepare for, withstand, and recover — in both the short and long terms — from public health incidents, by engaging and coordinating with emergency management, healthcare organizations (private and community-based), mental/behavioral health providers, community and faith-based partners, state, local, and territorial partners to develop systems that support sustainability and recovery.

Recommendation. Work with OEM to exercise evacuation plans which include AMR, long-term health care facilities and the Red Cross.

25. **Community Recovery.** Community recovery is the ability to collaborate with community partners, (e.g., healthcare organizations, business, education and emergency management) to plan and advocate for the rebuilding of public health, medical and mental/ behavioral health systems to at least a level of functioning comparable to pre-incident levels and improved levels where possible.

Recommendations:

- Continue to expand the ESF8 Coordinated Advisory Team (8CAT).
- Collaborate with behavioral health partners, and both City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County offices of emergency management to create a comprehensive behavioral health plan.

26. **Medical Materiel Management & Distribution.** Medical materiel management and distribution is the ability to acquire, maintain (e.g., cold chain storage or other storage protocol), transport, distribute, and track medical materiel (e.g., pharmaceuticals, gloves, masks, and ventilators) during an incident and to recover and account for unused medical materiel, as necessary, after an incident.

Recommendations:

- Create a rapid vendor list to be used in conjunction with the rapid vendors list maintained by the County EOC.
- Discuss which resources should be procured by EOC logistics and EPCPH logistics.

27. Responder Safety & Health. The responder safety and health capability describes the ability to protect public health agency staff responding to an incident, and the ability to support the health and safety needs of hospital and medical facility personnel if requested.

Recommendations:

- PPE protocols should be updated and reviewed for EPCPH staff.
- Educate staff about vaccines offered through EPCPH immunization program.

28. Public Health Laboratory Testing. Manage and coordinate communications and resource sharing with the jurisdiction's network of human, food, veterinary, and environmental testing laboratory efforts in order to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive and other public health threats.

Recommendations:

- Cross-train additional staff to help with answering questions and handing out sample bottles.
- Just-In-Time Training (JITT) processes in sample collection.

29. Volunteer Management. Volunteer management is the ability to coordinate the identification, recruitment, registration, credential verification, training, and engagement of volunteers to support the jurisdictional public health agency's response to incidents of public health significance.

Recommendations:

- Provide training opportunities on behavioral health, disaster behavioral health and/or psychological first aid to all staff.
- Develop a clear behavioral health plan to respond more effectively to future events.

Public Information Office

The County Public Information Office (PIO) assisted the Sheriff's PIO with establishing and operating a Joint Information Center (JIC) in support of the Emergency Operations Center during fire response operations. Emergency Support Function #15, External Affairs, is the responsibility of the Sheriff's Public Information Office under the El Paso County Emergency Operations Plan. However, the Sheriff's PIO was assisted by both the County and City PIO staffs in setting up and running the Black Forest Fire JIC. Based on lessons learned from the Waldo Canyon Fire, the JIC was located on the second floor above the EOC to reduce background noise. By coincidence, the County PIO had conducted a communications survey of the facility with Support Services Information Technology (IT) staff the day before the Black Forest Fire. Because of this survey, Support Services was able to deploy requisite communications capabilities in less than 90 minutes the day the fire erupted. The Sheriff's PIO served as the Communications Chief in charge of the JIC. The County PIO managed Media Communications, answering inquiries from accredited news agencies, while the City PIO managed Public Communications, answering inquiries from concerned citizens. Public Communications was assisted by professional volunteers from the Crisis Communications Network. Public Communications also prepared and supported the Sheriff's Press Conferences. Press Conferences were monitored by the JIC for updated disaster information. Information updates were also received directly from the EOC. Updates were posted on a centrally located white board for dissemination to both the public and the media. The JIC was open from 07:00 am to 10:30 pm daily.

Areas of Strength

- Open floor plan facilitated plenty of space and rapid cross-communications.
- IT was able to install all required communications in less than 90 minutes because of previous day's site survey.
- Social media posts were coordinated to ensure the same information was simultaneously updated on both County and City web sites to preclude conflict and confusion.
- On-site County IT support was "awesome!" IT assisted with quickly obtaining accounts for new volunteers, gaining access to critical outside services, and providing open Internet access to volunteers who brought their own computers.
- Geographic Information Services (GIS) did outstanding job quickly providing maps on demand.
- Air Force Academy Public Affairs Officers assisted with media control during the Town Hall meeting.
- The JIC effectively maintained Positive control over information released to the public.
- Federal officials lauded JIC operations, commending it to North Carolina emergency management officials who came to Colorado to observe its operations.



El Paso County, Nancy Nelsen

EPC Joint Information Center

Areas for Improvement

- Despite its separate location, background noise continued to interfere with JIC operations, making it particularly difficult to follow press conferences on the central television monitor.
- Travel between the JIC and ICP in support of Press Conferences consumed a lot of productive time of key personnel.
- Internet connection was unreliable.
- Monitoring media reporting to ensure the accuracy of broadcast information was accomplished within the EOC and not in the JIC.
- Microsoft SharePoint made posting updates to County web site slow and cumbersome.
- Insufficient laptop and tablet computers for all staff members.
- The flow of information between the EOC, ICP, and JIC was often cumbersome due to the amount of information being passed on; sometimes updates were learned through the television broadcasts.
- Coordinating media access to the burn area and providing escorts proved a challenge.
- Create JIC administrative assistant responsible for managing JIC facilities and replenishing consumable supplies.
- All PIOs should receive training from the FEMA Emergency Management Institute.
- Do not conduct Town Hall meetings at the same location as a Red Cross shelter and disrupt their operations.
- Overlay evacuation areas on Google Maps to quickly correlate given addresses with evacuation zones.

Issues & Recommendations

30. **Press Conference Support.** Travel between the JIC and ICP in support of Press Conferences consumed a lot of productive time of key personnel.

Recommendation. Provide driver to transport officials from JIC to ICP to facilitate more productive use of time.

31. **Personnel Logistics.** Lack of rotation and break schedule resulted in personnel burn-out after the first twenty hours of operation. Similarly, the JIC did not receive food and drink service during its first 48 hours of operation.

Recommendation: Establish shift schedules and food service at outset of JIC activation; identify personnel and shifts in advance of disaster.

32. **Public Communications.** As the EOC began examining how to facilitate residents' return to homes inside the burn area, an idea suggested but never implemented was that the Disaster Assistance Centers issue vehicle placards to identify returning residents. This idea was shared prematurely during a Town Hall meeting resulting in many residents to converge on the DACs requesting placards. Many were upset when they learned they drove to the DAC for nothing.

Recommendations:

- Formally defined information workflows to enhance authorization and accountability.
- Create County policy to ensure that ideas are not presented to the public before they are officially adopted.

Public Services: Contracts & Procurement

The Office's five contracting officers maintained daily County operations while providing 24x7 support to the EOC and contract support to the ICP until federal contracting agents arrived. Based on their experience in the Waldo Canyon Fire, the Office was prepared to deploy at moment's notice with all necessary forms and information kept in a "Ready Pack". Upon arriving at the EOC, the Office quickly began issuing Purchase Orders (POs) using a carefully considered tracking identification system that helped maintained positive control by matching delivered products with orders. When unable to source purchase requirements locally, the Office used its contacts to acquire products and services from neighboring county vendor lists, expediting acquisition of urgently needed products and services.

Areas of Strength

- The Office maintained positive control over POs ensuring what was purchased was also delivered by developing and employing a tracking spreadsheet.
- The Office ensured EOC representatives maintained situational awareness by arriving an hour before and departing an hour after their eight-hour shift (ten-hour rotation per person).
- The Office maintains a "Ready Pack" of folders with basic purchasing forms and vendor information to quickly deploy in support of emergency operations.
- The Office maintained continuity of operations by locating EOC staff near white boards to post updates and track ongoing requirements.
- The Office employed a tracking identification system that allowed them to quickly and easily match delivered products and services with Purchase Orders.
- The Office was able to source purchase requirements through neighboring county vendor lists, expediting acquisition of urgent products and services.
- Cooperative vendor lists need to be periodically reviewed for currency, and contact information collected on how to reach them after business hours.
- Acquire more staff training through the FEMA Emergency Management Institute (EMI).
- Conduct periodic meetings across County departments to review and update disaster response procedures.

Issues and Recommendations

33. **Centralized Authorization.** Improve coordination and processes for purchase order authorizations.

Recommendations:

- Develop enhanced lines-of-authority to ensure purchase requests are duly authorized by designated approving officials.
- Raise visibility on the tracking process to ensure leased equipment is promptly returned to preclude additional costs.
- Coordinate purchases to prevent unnecessary duplication and ensure proper accounting.

34. **Terminology.** Some Purchase Orders contained acronyms that were not easily decipherable and resulted in delays meeting requests.

Recommendation. Compile a working glossary of terms used during an incident to clarify understanding of various acronyms used by different agencies and ensure the right products and services are ordered.

35. **Surge Support.** More than the 50% of County contracting officers were engaged in supporting fire response operations.

Recommendations:

- Develop mutual aid agreements with neighboring counties to provide additional qualified staff to support disaster surge requirements.
- Hire additional contracting officers to oversee additional workload imposed by ongoing disaster recovery.

Public Services: Engineering, Security, & Operations

The Executive Director of Public Services effectively and tirelessly oversaw operations of the Engineering, Security, and Operations Divisions in support of fire response and recovery efforts. The Engineering Division assisted the Sheriff's Office with developing unofficial damage estimates and mapping the burn area. The Security Division provided security at both DAC locations ensuring the safety of staff and customers, and also assisted by providing information and directions. The Operations Division was tasked to provide bulldozers and operators to cut fire breaks ahead of the fire line. As evacuations began to be lifted, the Operations Division assisted with re-entry by replacing 160 burned or melted traffic signs and 347 linear feet (LF) of wooden support posts. The Operations Division was also instrumental in recovery by conducting a survey of 55 acres along County roads and cataloging 6,975 trees posing a potential traffic hazard. The Division submitted a request for FEMA funds which was approved by the Board of County Commissioners in February 2014 to pay for hazardous tree removal. The Operations Division also applied for FEMA reimbursement of the replaced road signs.

Areas of Strength

- The County Assessor lauded the accuracy of unofficial fire damage estimates and credited them with helping rapidly complete the official estimates.
- The Security Division rapidly provided security to DAC locations, and quickly established rotation schedules to seamlessly absorb surge requirements.
- The Operations Division implemented critical safety measures while saving County taxpayers nearly \$1 million in direct expenditures.



El Paso County, Nancy Nelsen

Areas for Improvement

- Provide uniform procedures to pay for extended security services.
- Develop position binders to assist Operations Division EOC representatives.

Issues and Recommendations

36. Bulldozer Operator Certification and PPE. While the Operations Division provided bulldozers and operators to cut fire breaks ahead of the fire line, none of the operators had any specialized fire training, nor did they have appropriate PPE to operate in a hazardous environment.

Recommendations:

- Conduct certification training and maintain Red Card certifications for bulldozer operators who may be called upon to cut fire breaks.
- Acquire PPE to allow bulldozer operators to safely work in proximity to a fire.

37. Hazardous Tree Removal. The Division conducted a survey of 55 acres of burned trees obstructing County roads right of way. The Division determined that about 9,300 trees standing near the right of way are an imminent threat to health and safety as they are in danger of falling on to County roads. The Division determined that a tree posed a hazard if 1) more than 50% of the crown was burned, and 2) the trunk was heavily scorched on both sides. The survey included such trees within 60 feet of the road centerline. As a result of the survey, the Division applied for FEMA funds to remove and dispose of approximately 6,975 trees posing a hazard to County roads in the burn area.

Support Services

County IT deployed seven secure remote Internet Protocol (IP) networks, 262 Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephones, 100 laptops, and 80 computer tablets, and provided wireless internet access, plus Geographic Information Service support to the County Emergency Operations Center, Joint Information Center, Incident Command Post, and two Disaster Assistance Centers. The Department's 70 personnel provided 24x7 support in three shifts for the duration of the disaster while still maintaining the County's 4,600 telephones, 3,000 Personal Computers (PCs), 1,300 iPhones, 900 laptop computers, and 600 iPads.

Areas of Strength

- The Department created independent subnets to maintain security for sensitive data traffic supporting the Federal Incident Management Team.
- The Department generated over 1,200 linear feet of high-resolution paper maps, Adobe PDF format map files providing tactical and strategic views of the disaster area that helped save residents' property, and law enforcement and firefighters' lives.
- The Department provided the IMT with plotters and audio-visual (A/V) equipment, including a cart with 70-inch flat-screen television, Apple TV, sound system, and cable-TV input that helped the ICP monitor media reports and quickly correct any inaccurate public information.
- The Department maintained good communications with the Commissioners and other Departments.
- Department staff were very creative in developing and implementing solutions.

Areas for Improvement

- Reserve equipment needs to be replaced to ensure compatible service capabilities.
- SharePoint is "horrible" for maintaining updated websites and disseminating public information.
- FEMA paperwork is difficult; need to change process or provide better information technology.

Issues and Recommendations

38. Surge Capacity. Unique technical requirements placed higher demands on 10-15 key staff specialists. It took three months to clear the internal backlog generated by the disaster.

Recommendations:

- Cut back on internal service requests to essential services during a disaster to be able to refocus assets and resources to emergency and recovery operations.
- Hire ten additional staff from various disciplines.

39. **Disaster Assistance Center.** Support Services expanded Internet capacity and installed communications equipment to accommodate more than fifty agencies providing citizen services from the DAC.

Recommendation. Pre-plan five DAC locations: 1) Citizens Service Center (Central), 2) North, 3) South, 4) East, and 5) West; reduce travel for affected residents.

40. **Communications Upgrades.** By all accounts, Support Services did a phenomenal job deploying and supporting communications requirements across all agencies and departments. However, the Executive Director noted a number of recommendations to further improve services for future disasters.

Recommendations:

- Need deployable communications suite to provide data and voice coverage leveraging IP Network assets and capabilities, and a backup platform if and when existing infrastructure is evacuated or destroyed in the disaster.
- Need capability to interface and unify communications to provide interoperability between different agencies using diverse equipment and platforms.
- Leverage smart phone technology and acquire mobile applications to provide life-saving services more quickly and directly to the public.
- Rotate staff on a weekly basis to provide longer rest and rehabilitation to cope with the tremendous stress of disaster, fatigue and safety.
- Begin active disaster planning to identify potential staging and operating areas before next disaster; pursue mutual aid agreements for IT assistance with mutual aid agencies.
- Participate in more disaster exercises; support exercise development and execution.
- Have external cell phone battery backups for extended events.

Deputy County Administrator

The Deputy Administrator was charged by the County Administrator to activate the DAC shortly after the fire erupted. The first DAC opened within 24-hours at the Citizens Service Center at 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Rd. Staffed by both public and private aid agencies, the DAC offered a “one-stop-shop” where citizens could receive needed care, temporary relief, and important recovery information. Again, Support Services provided critical computer and communications capabilities accommodating about fifty organizations supporting the DAC. Due to their large presence in the CSC, Human Services coordinated overall direction of the DAC. They also offered counseling services and initially administered relief funds donated by the El Pomar Foundation. Public Health offered tetanus shots to preclude future infections among returning residents, and also provided test kits for those with private water wells. Development Services answered questions and distributed packets addressing rebuilding concerns. And Public Services provided security officers to help direct customers and maintain order within the emotionally charged environment. A second DAC was opened June 25th at The Classical Academy East Campus at 12201 Cross Peak View to assist residents closer to the disaster area. During the three weeks the DACs were active they provided service to 1,812 customers.

Areas of Strength

- The first DAC was activated within 24-hours of BFF.
- A “DAC pack” with all forms, local resources and clip boards, proved valuable to facilitating rapid activation.
- Both DACs were conveniently located with plenty of parking, and had large meeting and storage spaces to accommodate community partners and extra supplies.
- Department of Human Services case worker experience proved to be valuable, as did advance security arrangements.
- Security personnel provided a reassuring presence and were essential to maintaining order in the emotionally charged environment.
- The Black Forest Communications Network Email Distribution List assisted government officials in communicating with affected residents.
- Effective collaboration helped ensure the availability of adequate office supplies and information technology.
- Separate rooms proved useful in allowing customers to deal with the emotional impact, and also facilitated mental health counseling and day care services.
- Volunteer Organizations Active in a Disaster (VOAD) provided valuable volunteer management through their HelpColoradoNow.org web site.

Areas for Improvement

- When the second DAC location was opened, the signage in the parking lots was not sufficient and residents had trouble locating the DAC among the many buildings in the new location.
- While the Smartsheet Tracking System was a valuable system to have, it was created after the DAC closed. Ideally this would be created as soon after activation as possible.

Issues and Recommendations

41. **Customer Reception.** Greeters must be knowledgeable of all services and their location in the DAC. They should be provided a current floor plan and directory of DAC services. They are responsible for directing people to Intake Stations to assess customer' needs.

Recommendations:

- Intake specialists should be trained professionals who are capable of serving citizens who may have recently suffered traumatic events and are under severe stress.
- Intake personnel should have a standardized questionnaire for interviewing customers.
- Data taken in the questionnaire should be made available to service agencies to preclude too many redundant questions.

42. **Phone Bank.** Phone Bank personnel are key to successful DAC operations. Their primary goal is to provide current and accurate information to callers.

Recommendations:

- Phone Bank should be located in a quiet room with sufficient computers and communications equipment and white boards.
- Phone Bank volunteers should be given a notebook with up-to-date contact information for the EOC, JIC, ICP, and other service agencies, and should include a list of "frequently asked questions".
- Phone Bank volunteers should have detailed maps and access to the latest fire information.
- A system should be devised to follow-up with customers who do not initially receive answers to their questions.

43. **Facilities Management.** Facilities personnel are critical to establishing and operating the DAC. They are responsible for designing the floor plan and arranging service stations to conveniently accommodate both customers and supporting agencies. Similarly, facilities managers must ensure there is sufficient electrical, heating, and cooling capacity.

Recommendations:

- DACs must be arranged to avoid bottlenecks and facilitate the efficient flow of customers.
- Maps and signs must be abundantly available and clearly visible to assist customers with finding needed services.
- DAC design should include a Waiting Area so customers don't have to stand in line while waiting for services.
- The Waiting Area should make telephones and computers available to customers to contact their families and check the latest information.
- Some agencies might be clustered together to reduce customer traffic. For example, Mental Health might be located near faith-based and other counseling organizations. Similarly, utility representatives might be located near Development Services.
- Adequate parking needs to be planned for insurance agencies who typically bring large trucks and vans to support their client services.
- Large areas also need to be planned to secure bulk supplies including food, water, and clothing donations.
- Separate rooms should be planned for private counseling and child care.
- Refreshments should be available to customers and staff.
- Break areas need to be provided for staff and volunteers.

44. **Donations Management.** Supporting agencies can help manage donations. For instance, Goodwill is experienced with managing donated clothing; Red Cross manages donated shelters; Care and Share will accept food donations; and both the Humane Society and 4-H will assist with donations for pets and large animals.

45. **Volunteer Management.** Unfortunately, volunteers must be screened to ensure malicious elements don't take advantage of the crisis. Fortunately, Volunteer Organizations Active in a Disaster maintain a list of pre-screened volunteers who apply through their HelpColoradoNow.org website.

Recommendations:

- Direct all volunteers to HelpColoradoNow.org and rely on the VOAD list of volunteers and services.

46. Supporting Agencies. The DAC relies on the services of many supporting agencies to meet customer needs.

Recommendations:

- Organize planning meetings with supporting agencies to assess their requirements and enhance their ability to better help customers.
- Provide some form of recognition to these agencies and thank them for their support.

County Administrator

The County Administrator was responsible for overseeing all response and recovery efforts initiated by County Administration, and the coordination of operational processes to ensure the emergency mission of the Board of County Commissioners was achieved through the crisis.

Areas of Strength

- Without exception, the County Administrator and the County Administrative Executive Directors worked diligently and made sacrifices to overcome many obstacles to meet the demands of the Black Forest Fire disaster and continue to provide required County Services. County Administration responded to the disaster with competence and compassion, doing whatever was required to effectively and efficiently address the needs of County citizens.

Areas for Improvement

- Communications with the Board of County Commissioners was complicated by the State Sunshine Law.
- Streamline the coordination process, clearly defining roles and liaison responsibilities of the Commissioners to meet the demands of disaster response.
- Appropriate and judicious restoration of County Administrative budgets to effectively and aggressively respond and support emergency operations during disasters while maintaining required citizen services.

Issues and Recommendations

47. Surge Capacity. Response and recovery operations occupied a significant portion of County staff while County Administration continued to provide basic services summarized in Table 3. The Black Forest Fire engaged 25% of accountants from the Budget Department, 50% of County contracting officers, 66% of County attorneys, and nearly 100% of all County Administrator and County Administrative Executive Directors. The diversion of County resources created a backlog of tasks that in some instances weren't reduced until six months after the fire.

Recommendation. Restore all or some part of the \$45 million in administrative budget reductions implemented between 2007 and 2009; expand capacity to better absorb additional workload and requirements imposed by disaster.

48. State Sunshine Law. The State Sunshine Law precludes a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners without a 48-hour public notice. Accordingly, County staff briefed Commissioners individually or no more than two at a time to provide updates and operational briefings during fire response operations. Understandably, the process was considered cumbersome and inefficient by both the Commissioners and County Administrator to the extent they are considering means for modifying the law. This measure may not be necessary as the County Attorney believes the law relaxes restrictions during an emergency.

Recommendation. Review Sunshine Law to ensure it does not unnecessarily impede swift County response during a disaster.

49. Commissioners Roles & Responsibilities. Need to separate responsibilities between elected and appointed officials. Important to have defined structure and processes in place, and ensure elected officials are kept duly informed. This will also assist with prioritizing actions and ensuring policies are appropriately addressed at the right time.

Recommendation. Develop County policies to clearly define roles and responsibilities of elected officials, appointed officials and staff. Exercise the policy group process more frequently.

Recommendation. Emergency Management training for all Commissioners and ongoing inclusion at community preparedness exercises.

Board of County Commissioners

The BoCC holds a key role during disasters. Commissioners are responsible for ensuring that the protection of and the saving of lives is their number one priority. The BoCC proved again that they can and will make the instant decisions required to support all emergency operations. During the initial hours of the Black Forest fire the BoCC immediately directed staff and funds to support all aspects of the firefighting and evacuation efforts without reservation. Later as the fire came under control the BoCC continued to represent the interests of their constituents and ensure citizens' concerns were addressed within the administration of County government and by directing the DAC to be established and staffed. While each of the five Commissioners is individually accountable to their electorate, they acted collectively in governing the County according to the Board Rules.

Areas of Strength

- While the Black Forest Fire was contained to District 1, all five Commissioners engaged with County Administration and the Sheriff's Office to ensure every effort was made to assist with the fire response.
- Within hours of the fire erupting, the Board of County Commissioners directed the establishment of a Disaster Assistance Center to help County residents.
- Even while fire response operations continued, Commissioners began addressing recovery concerns by quickly approving measures waiving zoning requirements up to a year for previously "grand-fathered" properties to facilitate residents' quick return. Had they not taken these actions, some residents would have been unable to rebuild on their property.

Areas for Improvement

- The State Sunshine Law complicated communications with County Administrative Staff.
- Appropriate and judicious restoration of County Administrative budgets to effectively and aggressively address emergency planning and response without straining the required daily operations and responsibilities during times of a disaster.
- Ensure that District Commissioner, Chair and Vice Chair receive priority briefings.

Issues and Recommendations

50. **County Communications.** Communication between County agencies need to be streamlined in order to prevent duplication of effort.

Recommendations:

- Resident Commissioner, Chair, Vice Chair, and County Administrator should be briefed by the PIO before any public press release.
- Develop and train processes to maintain more robust communications during a disaster.
- Enhance EOC exercises to include directors and commissioners.
- Colorado Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) conference or Emergency Management Institute offers courses to gain better understanding of roles and responsibilities during disasters.

51. **Disaster Support.** Decisions made during the emergency impacted the County budgets as administered by the Board of County Commissioners. As Commissioners set about their oversight responsibilities, they interacted separately to obtain information and make inquiries on the part of their electorate. A defined framework and designated Points of Contact would assist Commissioners with executing their responsibilities.

Recommendations:

- Develop formal procedures and processes.
- Expand Commissioners "Liaison" roles to define formal points of contact for making inquiries and coordinating with County Administration.
- Develop committees organized around functional expertise.
- Conduct Tabletop Exercises (TTXs) based on lessons learned to strengthen relationships and improve understanding among all stakeholders.
- Coordinate information and messaging before announcing it to the public.
- Make the message pertinent and succinct.
- Resident commissioner and chair should be spokespeople during an emergency.
- Vice Chair should be spokesperson in the event the Chair is unavailable.
- Capitalize on training opportunities from FEMA Emergency Management Institute.

52. **State Sunshine Law.** Commissioners felt they were impeded by the State Sunshine Law which precluded more than two Commissioners from meeting without first posting a notice at least 24-hours in advance. To uphold the law, Commissioners separately convened no more than two-at-a-time to receive briefings, placing additional burden on County Staff. It is important early on to have organized meetings to combat misinformation.

Recommendations:

- Convene a meeting within 24-hours of a disaster after posting the requisite notice, but do not adjourn, only hold the meeting in recess until the emergency passes.
- Sponsor a bill amending state law to reduce or suspend meeting restrictions during declared disasters.
- Conduct more community exercises involving elected officials.

Observations

- Some residents refused to evacuate if they couldn't take their pets or livestock, endangering their own lives and those of First Responders. Need to increase awareness among citizens and possibly expand capability within County.
- Enhance ties with military installations, Colorado Mounted Rangers, and various Faith-Based Communities (FBCs) to more fully engage their capabilities.



Reuters, Rick Wilking, <http://www.reuters.com/>

Recommendations

Without exception, every person interviewed for this report was dedicated to doing whatever it took to ensure the safety and well-being of County citizens. There was no hint of political or parochial concerns shading the decisions of Directors or Commissioners during response or recovery of the Black Forest Fire. But having the “will” is insufficient without also having the “ability”. Personnel need to be adequately organized, equipped, and trained to meet the increasing demand for their services, especially as the County faces the prospect of more frequent disasters. Accordingly, the following recommendations are based on comments made in this report.

Organize

1. **Define Commissioner Roles and Responsibilities.** The Board of County Commissioners need to exercise their roles and responsibilities as the Policy Group to reduce duplication of effort. As a suggestion, establish Board Rules designating the Resident Commissioner and Chairman as BoCC spokespersons during emergencies. Provisions should be considered for defining and designating roles and responsibilities of the commissioners in coordinating and communicating with the County Administrator and Administrative Executive Directors. Clear lines of communication will enhance effectiveness, ensure the appropriate utilization of resources, and eliminate redundancies.

Equip

2. **Hire Additional Staff.** Surge requirements placed a strain on existing County Staff and created a backlog of services that was not cleared, in some cases, until six months after the fire. Specific requests were made by the County Attorney, Budget, Contracting, and Public Health. The County Administrator made a broader argument for restoring some of the \$45 million in administrative budget reductions taken between 2007 and 2009.
3. **Develop Formal Support Agreements.** Even with the advantage of an expanded staff, some disasters will still overwhelm County Administration. Many recommendations were advanced for dealing with the problem. The key difficulty is finding augments with requisite skills and certifications. Many such qualified personnel work for neighboring County governments. While El Paso County received assistance from them during the Black Forest Fire, formal agreements could ensure the consistency and capabilities of the support provided. Such agreements might be facilitated through the auspices of the Colorado South Central All-Hazards Region.
4. **Standardize Emergency Activation Procedures.** All County Departments and Offices should have standard emergency activation procedures identifying on-call personnel and shift rotation schedules, with corresponding "Ready Packs" containing contacts and checklists for performing required tasks at the EOC, ICP, or DAC.
5. **Acquire Safety Equipment and Certifications.** All personnel who may be called upon to support tactical operations should have requisite Personal Protective Equipment and certifications to operate in a hazardous zone. This recommendation applies specifically to bulldozer operators needed to cut fire lines, but may apply to other personnel as well.
6. **Establish County Communication Procedures.** Revise the Emergency Operations Plan with respect to County communications establishing procedures to ensure the Board of County Commissioners, County Administrator, and Joint Information Center are aware and informed before events are made public.

7. **Review State Sunshine Law.** Review State Sunshine Law and, if necessary, seek an amendment to ensure it does not unnecessarily impede swift County response during a disaster.
8. **Communications Upgrades.** By all accounts, Support Services went “above and beyond” to meet the communications requirements of all principal officials, without which support many things might not have gone so smooth. However, future service abilities are not assured unless adequate capabilities are maintained. Serious consideration should be given to the list of communications upgrades proposed by the Department.
9. **Capture Lessons Learned.** Revise the County EOP to capture lessons learned and incorporate best practices to assist with the next disaster.

Train

10. **Conduct Annual Disaster Training.** Conduct more training to better understand the expanding principles and practices of emergency management.
11. **Participate in Quarterly EOC Exercises.** Commissioners and County Administrative staff expressed a desire to participate in quarterly EOC exercises in order to strengthen procedures and forge closer relationships.

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Glossary

AMR	American Medical Response
A/V	Audio/Visual
BLM	United States Bureau of Land Management
BoCC	Board of County Commissioners
CART	County Animal Response Team
CAT	Coordinated Advisory Team
CEMA	Colorado Emergency Management Agency
CO-AOP	Colorado Statewide Wildland Fire Management Annual Operating Plan
CS	Colorado Springs
CSC	Citizens Service Center
CSFS	Colorado State Forest Service
CSU	Colorado Springs Utilities
DAC	Disaster Assistance Center
DAT	Damage Assessment Team
DHS	El Paso County Department of Human Services
DOD	United States Department of Defense
DOI	United States Department of the Interior
EFF	Emergency Fire Fund Agreement
EMI	Emergency Management Institute
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
EPC	El Paso County
EPC-AOP	El Paso County Annual Wildfire Operating Plan
EPC-ESD	El Paso County Emergency Services Division
EPC-OEM	El Paso County Office of Emergency Management
EPCPH	El Paso County Public Health
EPC-WFC	El Paso County Wildland Fire Crew
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FBC	Faith-Based Community
FCO	Federal Coordinating Officer
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FMAG	Fire Management Assistance Grant
FPD	Fire Protection District

FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GIS	Geographic Information Services
IC	Incident Command
ICP	Incident Command Post
ICS	Incident Command System
IGA	Intergovernmental Agreement
IMT	Incident Management Team
IP	Internet Protocol
JIC	Joint Information Center
JITT	Just In Time Training
LA	Lead Agency
LF	Linear Feet
MAA	Mutual Aid Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Medical Reserve Corps
NWCG	National Wildfire Coordination Group
NIFC	National Interagency Fire Center
PC	Personal Computer
PIO	Public Information Office
PO	Purchase Order
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PPR	Pikes Peak Region
RACES	Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services
RC	Red Cross
TTX	Tabletop Exercise
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFS	United States Forest Service
VOIP	Voice Over Internet Protocol
VOAD	Volunteer Organizations Active in a Disaster

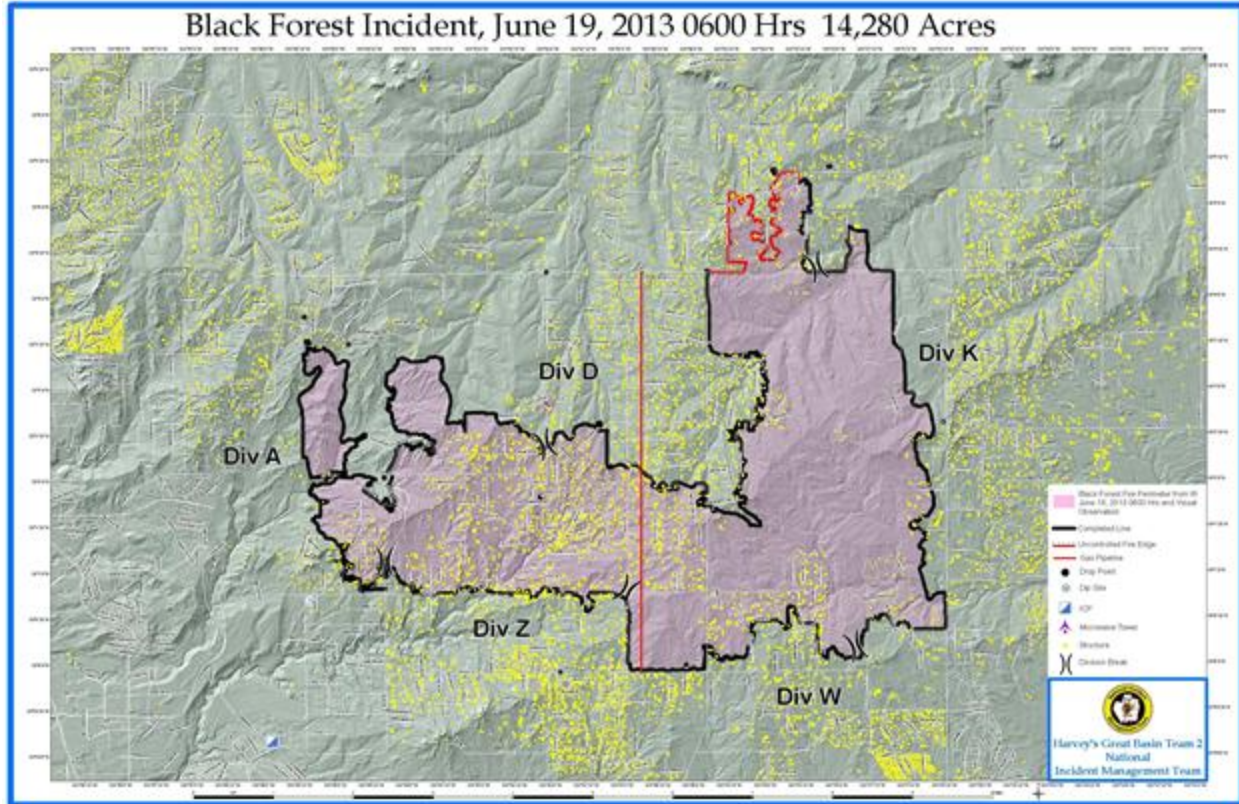
Maps



Map 1: El Paso County, Colorado



Map 2: El Paso County Commissioner Districts



Map 3: Maximum Extent of the Black Forest Fire

References

2009 Senate Bill 09-001, Community Wildfire Preparedness Plans.

2009 El Paso County Emergency Operations Plan.

2012 Colorado Statewide Wildland Fire Management Annual Operating Plan.

2013 Colorado Revised Statutes 29-22.5-103, Wildland Fire Planning.

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