

Post-Fire Planning “By the Book”: Strategies for Landscape and Social Response

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Key Messages:

- **Wildfires are increasing in frequency and size across the Western United States and this will lead to greater impacts on a wide variety of western communities.**
- **The utilization of the Colorado Post-Fire Playbook can facilitate resiliency in communities impacted by fire and help to protect valuable infrastructure such as water delivery systems.**
- **Community Organizations Active in Disaster can facilitate in post-fire community response and recovery efforts that may not be met by traditional response agencies.**

On October 14th, 2020, the Southern Rockies Fire Science Network and Fire Adapted Colorado hosted the webinar “Post Fire Planning ‘By the Book’: Strategies for Landscape and Social Response”. This webinar gave an overview of the Colorado Post-fire Playbook and an exploration of the potential role of community organizations active in disaster (COADs) in emergency response and recovery. This webinar explored pre-fire planning for both landscape and social/economic post-fire response.

Colorado Post-Fire Playbook

Within the past 20 years, total area burned by wildfires larger than 400 acres has risen dramatically within the state of Colorado. All of Colorado’s 20 largest wildfires in history have burned since 2002, and the three largest wildfires in Colorado history (Pine Gulch Fire, East Troublesome Fire and Cameron Peak Fire) were ignited within 2020.

As these wildfire events have burned more acres with increased intensity and severity, valuable natural resources and vital infrastructure have been increasingly damaged both during and following wildfire events. One essential infrastructure that has been threatened by increasing wildfire events is the network of Front Range delivery systems that ensure water quality and supply. Severe wildfires decrease vegetation cover and increase soil hydrophobicity which can result in surface erosion and higher peak flows. This increased runoff can in turn lead to greater sedimentation and debris transport, jeopardizing the functionality of waterways. Specific impacts upon water delivery systems can include reduced storage capacity within reservoirs from increased debris and sediment, damage to pipelines and other delivery features resultant from rocks displaced in runoff events, and reduced water quality due to increased algal and particulate content.

In response to these conditions, local and national management agencies including the USFS, the City of Boulder, the City of Golden, Denver Water, Colorado Springs Utilities, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte, CO Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado State Forest Service, JW Associates, SWCA, and Coalitions and Collaborations Inc. partnered to produce the Colorado [Post-Fire Playbook](#). The playbook provides specific steps that counties, Tribes, municipalities, and water providers should take before, during, and within the first 30-days of a fire to facilitate recovery. The playbook is designed to be a concise, useable, workbook and includes space to fill

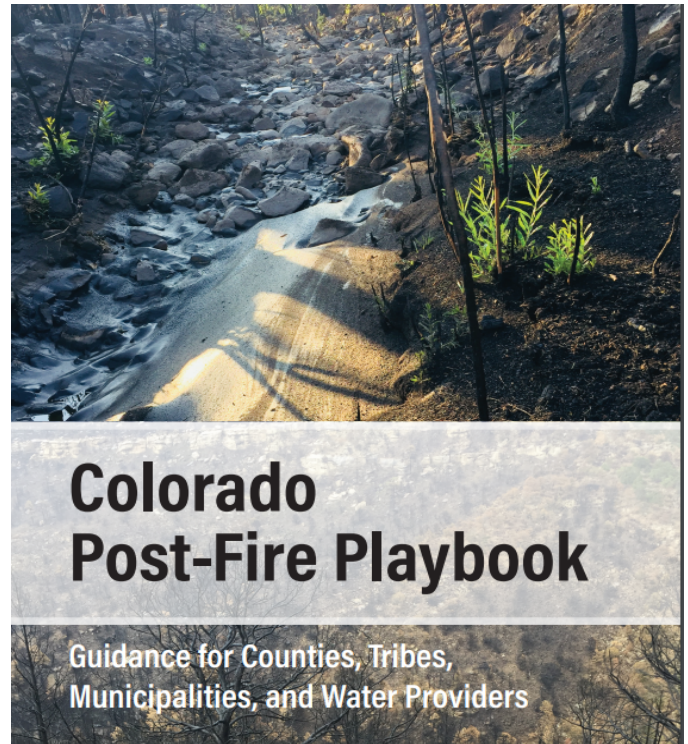


Figure 1. Colorado Post Fire Playbook Cover

out a list of critical contacts to help ensure swift coordination between management entities upon the ignition of a wildfire. During the fire, it is essential to establish a local recovery group that can share information on key assets at risk for post-fire impacts, such as water supplies. Finally, the playbook identifies key post-fire steps such as procuring funding from a list of additional relief sources. The playbook also guides the user through connecting with federal Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Teams.

COADs Assist in Emergency Response and Recovery in Missoula, MT

As wildfires have become more frequent and destructive, a growing consensus has developed around the importance of COADs in their ability to fill gaps in the response to and recovery from disasters that

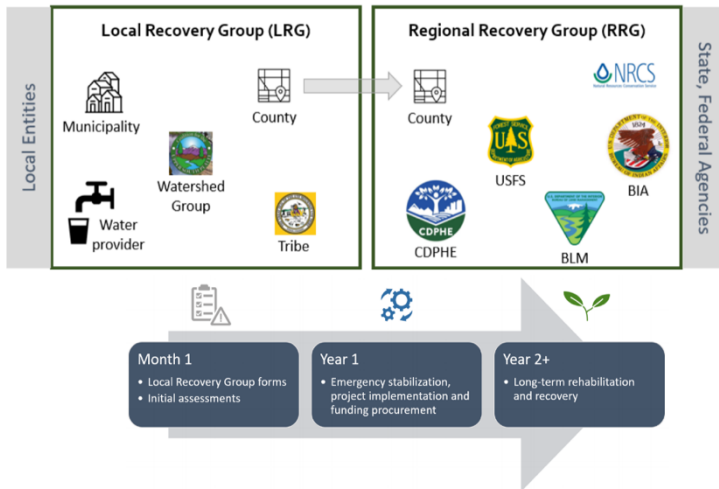


Figure 2. Post-Fire Playbook Infographics displaying possible sources of collaboration between local and regional recovery groups in post-fire response and the timeline of post-fire recovery.

fall outside the scope of established emergency management agencies. In Missoula, Montana, such organizations have been instrumental in sheltering and feeding evacuees, managing volunteers and donations, and ensuring the mental health of individuals directly impacted by disaster. In such situations, COADS in Missoula are organized by the Missoula County Emergency Operations Center and Joint Information Center and are delegated to meet the various needs of community after the fire.

While COADS are an integral part of community recovery after any natural disaster, they are especially useful after fires in their ability to 1) provide food to evacuees, 2) provision of additional funding in instances where insurance agencies underpay the value of lost property in settlements, and 3) assistance to traditional response agencies in organizing and directing disparate donations and volunteers. Traditional emergency management agencies can facilitate increased efficacy of COADS by 1) establishing an emergency

assistance fund with a trusted non-profit (in this case, the United Way) far in advance of disasters, and 2) integrate trusted COADS into the Joint Information Center for consistent messaging during a wildfire event.

COADS can serve as important partners in preparing communities for disaster events and reducing the time and expenditures needed for community response and recovery. However, several steps should be taken by emergency management agencies for COADS to be most impactful. First, relationships with COADS should be established as far in advance of disaster events as possible. Second, COADS should be included in the Joint Information Center during disaster events so that messaging can remain consistent. Third, prior to partnering with an organization as an emergency response affiliate, traditional response

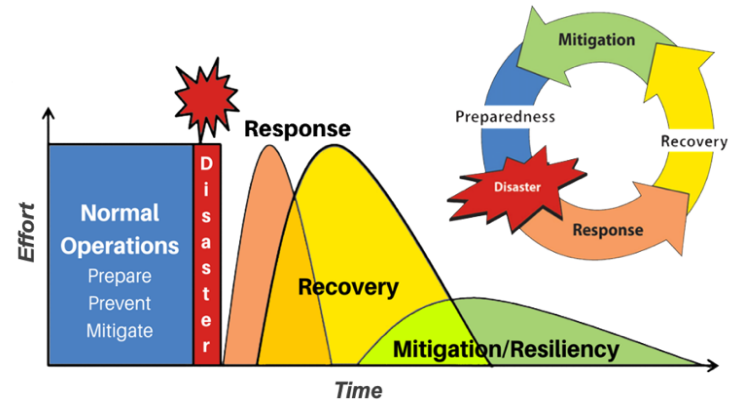


Figure 3. Graphical Representation of Typical Disaster Response Process

agencies should ensure that organization is suitable and legally able to be formalized as a COAD. Finally, COAD task forces should meet regularly within communities to maintain effective relationships and coordinate the delegation of responsibilities. If the above steps are taken, COADS can serve as a vital partner in emergency response and ensuring the resiliency of communities as disasters such as wildfire become more prevalent and destructive.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Kate Dunlap's Webinar PowerPoint Presentation](#)
- [Nick Holloway's Webinar PowerPoint Presentation](#)



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