



POLICY SNAPSHOT:

Wildland Fire Prevention 2022

Wildfire Exposure

The City of Boulder owns and manages over 46,000 acres of land, most immediately around its jurisdictional boundaries. In the city limits there are at least 5,000 homes, businesses, and other structures that lie within 500 feet of wildland fuels, and even more in the surrounding county. Over the past 10 years, 2,700 acres of city-owned or managed land have experienced wildfire events. Many of these fires, like the NCAR Fire (2022), Sunshine Canyon Fire (2017) and Flagstaff Fire (2012), required extensive community evacuations. While the ecosystems surrounding the city have historically experienced wildfires as part of their natural cycle, climate change, and the ensuing temperature and wind extremes, have created an increasingly longer wildfire season with significantly greater risk to the community.

Since the Marshall Fire, the city has learned that each ecosystem comes with a complex set of fuel considerations. The city's main exposure lies in its roughly 10,000 acre of forests and 30,000 acres of grasslands, including 281 miles of agricultural ditches, with woody vegetation running through them, that can significantly contribute to fuel loads.

Land Management Practices

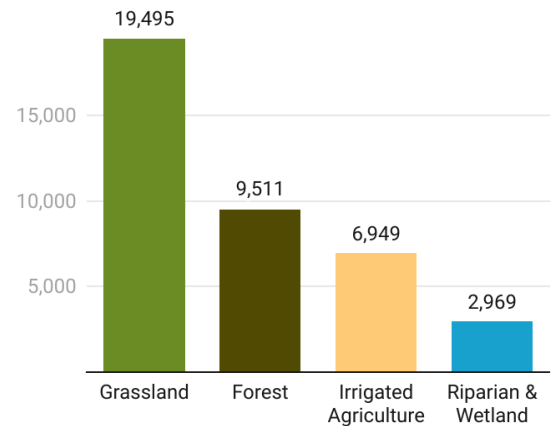
The city is a leader in wildfire prevention and in maintaining and managing healthy forests, both in an urban and wildland context. The practices it employs are guided by the recognition that healthy, biodiverse forests, regardless of location, are inherently more resilient to wildfire than thick forests that lack diversity in species, age and spatial distribution. The city's [Forest Ecosystem Management Plan](#) contains a framework for on-the-ground management and specific, prioritized treatment areas and management objectives to meet forestry goals. The city's Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) department has built the capacity to implement thinning and prescribed burn projects, established monitoring efforts that track treatment success and inform adaptive management, and developed partnerships to advance broader forest management goals.

The city has been a key player in a variety of collaborative efforts focused on ecological health and wildfire mitigation. In 2020, the city signed an MOU with regional, state and federal governmental partners to develop a shared vision for the future of forest and wildfire management in the "[Boulder County Fireshed](#)."

Since 1999, the city has completed over 2,500 acres of thinning projects on OSMP lands. Treatments focused on areas where the risk of wildfire is greatest to surrounding homes or neighborhoods and

Acres of Land by Type

Source: OSMP System Overview Report (2018; p67)



Note: Total adds up to <46,000 acres due to properties that have yet to be mapped to a habitat type.

where the highest ecological benefits can be realized. As compared to untreated areas, treated forest stands have 53% fewer trees per acre and a 40% reduction in canopy cover following thinning.

An OSMP forest before thinning (left) and after thinning (right).



The **city periodically conducts prescribed burns** to reduce fire danger for the community, improve forest and grassland ecosystem health and maintain agricultural water infrastructure. By introducing prescribed fire, the city can restore the natural balance for fire-adapted ecosystems and reduce the amount of fuel during a wildfire. Unfortunately, due to various limitations, the city is significantly limited in the number of days that it can conduct these burns.

Support Needed from State and Federal Policy Makers

- a) Funding and regulatory tools to mitigate fire dangers that accumulate along ditches impacting multiple public and private entities.
- b) Increased flexibility on periods when prescribed burns can be conducted.
- c) Development of, and support for, an equity-centered workforce program aimed at addressing wildland and wildland-interface fire mitigation.
- d) Firefighting resources that can assist the city and its regional partners in responding to wildfires.
- e) Accelerated utility wildfire mitigation and vegetation management.
- f) Requirements and resources for utilities to underground their wires in high-risk areas, including urban areas where vegetation density is a concern.
- g) Requirements and resources for utilities to have robust and proactive asset management practices to mitigate risk of equipment failure serving as an ignition source.
- h) Resources to address forest health and post-fire land recovery and stabilization
- i) Strategic-location of water resource infrastructure for firefighting purposes

For More Information:

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Visit Open Space Wildfire Risk Management page