



REALTORS® Launch Push for

Wildfire Mitigation Education by *Josie Klemaier, Denver Post.*

A new effort to teach Evergreen residents how to protect their homes from wildfires is being led not by fire agencies or property owners, but by another group with a huge stake in area properties: REALTORS®.

“As REALTORS®, we got involved in this because we believe in making our communities better,” said Bonnie Smith, director of the National Association of REALTORS® and chairwoman and founder of Colorado Project Wildfire. “We believe that if we partner with fire officials and other stakeholders in the area, we can really accomplish a lot more than if there’s suddenly legislation coming from Capitol Hill.” Colorado Project Wildfire is a statewide effort anchored by regional REALTOR® associations, such as the Mountain Metro Association of REALTORS® based in Evergreen. The project connects property owners to educational resources through real estate agents and a website, coloradorealtors.com/projectwildfire.

The project officially kicked off in Evergreen July 28.

While it can be difficult for a fire district to make contact with every resident, Smith said, real estate agents have direct contact with new property owners. If they are buying a home in a wildland-urban interface, they are often faced with the need to mitigate their land when it comes time to find homeowners insurance, and for that the agent can direct them to Colorado Project Wildfire.

In parts of Summit County, where Smith works as a REALTOR® and where she founded the project, she said homeowners were able to connect with mitigation resources and reduce the overall insurance vulnerability in the area.

“The crux of this project is a partnership between REALTORS® and the community, and the fire officials and other stakeholders,” Smith said.

Evergreen Fire Rescue chief Mike Weege was at the kickoff event and said afterward that one of his department’s biggest struggles is getting the message out about the need for wildfire mitigation.

The Mountain Metro Association of REALTORS® brought Colorado Project Wildfire to his department’s attention last year, Weege said, and asked to cross-check its information with the district to make sure they were both spreading the same message. “Any community outreach that’s giving the same message that the local fire departments are giving regarding wildfire preparation or mitigation is huge to us,” Weege said.

The Evergreen Fire Protection District continues to encourage neighborhoods and HOAs to implement Community Wildfire Protection Plans and has been able to provide a consultant to help them start those plans through donations and grants.

Other Colorado Project Wildfire participants include the people doing the hands-on work, the local wildland fire mitigation companies with the know-how to clear tree and brush in a way that satisfies insurance companies. Splintered Forest owner Brad Huddleston sits on the Mountain Metro Association of Realtors’ wildfire committee, which he said is focused on community education. Huddleston said he started his business a few years after losing his own home to the Hi Meadow fire near Bailey in 2000. Before that time, he said, he did not know much about mitigation.

“I’d say we’re still very early on in the education of our residents up here,” he said. “There’s so many transplants — this is a new phenomenon that’s slowly gaining momentum.”

Original story by the Denver Post. See it [here](#).

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