

## **RUBY RANCH FIRE MITIGATION PLAN – Updated 8/2010**

The purpose of this plan is to provide guidelines for Ruby Ranch owners, and steps to be taken by the Owners Association and the Metro District Board to mitigate fire risk and improve forest health on the Ranch. This plan complements the Ruby Ranch Emergency Action Plan.

We all choose to live in Summit County with both its wonders and its inherent risks. Many of us chose our home sites in Ruby Ranch because of the forest's beauty and solitude. We wish to preserve this beauty for the future by being thoughtful about forest health and fire mitigation.

The destruction of our Lodgepole pines by the Mountain Pine Beetle over the last few years combined with climate change has resulted in radical change to our environment. The ongoing effects of past drought conditions in Colorado together with years of neglect in forest care continue to pose wildfire and forest health risks around Ruby Ranch.

Ruby Ranch and its owners have already taken significant steps to mitigate these threats: clearing downed trees, infected trees, and slash on private lots and common areas. Many trees continue to be sprayed and remain healthy. More progress can be made near term by making our homes more fire safe and by continuing to remove slash and dead trees.

All areas of the Ranch are at risk from a wildfire, although since the majority of wildfire fuel has been removed from the Ranch the risk of ignition is almost totally from the adjacent wilderness, forest service and county lands. We can't eliminate all risks; however, we can further mitigate fire risks and improve forest health by continuing work on those lots that still have dead and downed trees, and being aware of how to manage the emerging new forest. The latter is discussed in the "Background on Achieving Forest Health" document on this website.

This plan includes the following sections:

***I. Situation at Ruby Ranch***

***II. Guidelines for Owners***

***III. Steps to be Taken by the Owners Association and the Metro District***

***I. Situation at Ruby Ranch***

Ruby Ranch is a Rocky Mountain neighborhood of just under 500 acres in unincorporated Summit County, Colorado. Ruby Ranch directly abuts the Eagles Nest Wilderness Area, the White River National Forest, County Open Space, and the Town of Silverthorne. There are currently 47 homes on the Ranch. The Ranch and the surrounding wilderness are typical subalpine forests, consisting largely of lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and aspen. We ordinarily do not face a significant

wildfire danger because we generally have snow on the ground for eight months with rain in the summer months. The last major wildfire in our area was over 125 years ago. Although there is controversy among the experts, the U.S. Forest Service suggests that major natural forest fires in our area probably occur at 100 to 300 year intervals. The U.S. Forest Service also tells us that although the Silverthorne area is classified as an urban-wildland interface community at high risk from wildfire, the condition of our forests as well as the topology and weather patterns in the mountains west and north of Ruby Ranch make our area less susceptible to widespread fire disasters than, for example, the front range near Denver.

The nature of the wildfire risks we face changes over time. In 2002 we encountered the worst drought year in over a century, following three to five years of increasingly dry conditions. The drought and years of forest neglect increased not only the risk of fire, but also damaged the health of our forests. Our lodgepole forests were dense, robbing potentially healthy trees of needed sunlight, water, and nutrients as well as making the trees more susceptible to disease and insect infestations. Slash and dead trees covered portions of our forest floors. These factors, along with less extreme winters, led to a dramatic increase in the number of Mountain Pine Beetle infested trees on the Ranch and in the Wilderness in the last several years. Our major concern now is from the surrounding Wilderness, National Forest, and County Open Space. Embers from a fire in those areas can travel miles; the direction will be downwind. As the needles on the dead trees drop the risk decreases. As the trees fall down and new trees develop the risk will increase so that 15-20 years from now we will again be at an extreme risk for fire from these sources.

Fire mitigation and forest health go hand in hand. Fire mitigation steps can help slow a fire by decreasing fuels and increasing the health of the forest. However, fire mitigation and forest health approaches must be carefully tailored so as to achieve meaningful reduction in fire risk without compromising the beauty, wildlife values, and solitude which brought us all to Ruby Ranch.

Some steps make sense for virtually all private and common lots on Ruby Ranch, e.g., making your home fire safe, and cleaning up slash and fallen and standing dead trees if they serve no special role as wildlife habitats or unique specimens. Selective thinning of new young green trees is covered in the “Background on Achieving Forest Health” document on this website.

## **II. Guidelines for Owners**

In the event of a wildfire possibly threatening the Ruby Ranch see the Ruby Ranch Emergency Action Plan for emergency suggestions.

The guidelines below are good places to start in making your home fire safe. Any owner can also contact the Lake Dillon Fire and Rescue District or the Colorado State Forest Service if you'd like fire experts to visit your home and make tailored recommendations. Owners may also engage private forest consultants to assess risks on their lots, or, Pat or Doug Tormey with specific questions.

These guidelines are for consideration prior to a wildfire event and are presented in order of suggested priority. The priorities for your home may differ depending on the condition of your home and lot, work you may already have done towards fire mitigation, and your personal priorities regarding how you wish your property to look.

Because actions you may take may impact other owners, consider speaking with your adjacent neighbors about your plans and theirs. Per the Ruby Ranch Covenants, several of the actions listed below also require approval of the Architectural Review Committee (ARC).

These guidelines should be viewed as an annual Spring/early Summer fire safety checklist. A shortened quick checklist is in the document "Homeowners Defensible Space Guidelines" on this website.

1. Assure you and your family and guests are familiar with the Ruby Ranch Emergency Action Plan and hold emergency exit drills for your household.

2. Make your home fire safe

a. Choose and install fire resistant roofing materials. The U.S. Forest Service and other experts say a non-flammable roofing material has the greatest impact in making a home more fire safe. Fire resistant siding, windows, and doors can also make a difference. For more information see "Firewise Construction: Design and Materials", a brochure from the Colorado State Forest Service, and available at <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/NATRES/06304.html>, 06305.html, and 06306.html.

b. Consider placing shutters, fire curtains or heavy drapes on windows.

c. Clear gutters and roof of all debris.

d. Remove branches which overhang roofs and decks.

e. Install chimney and vent screens around house.

f. Clear debris and flammable material around decks, balconies, and

wooden fences that extend out over slopes or into heavily vegetated areas.

g. Place gravel or rocks around the base of the house for 3 feet, under decks, and screen decks with metal screening to keep out firebrands, or replace wood with 'hardyplank' products.

h. Keep fire extinguishers in working order.

i. Store propane and other flammable containers at least 50 feet away from your home and remove vegetation around them.

j. Install and test all smoke detectors.

k. Make sure the address signs for your home are clearly visible from the road.

l. Have water hoses with trigger nozzles available for each outside faucet.

m. Have a ladder and fire extinguisher available.

n. Maintain garden equipment and practice safe refueling to prevent equipment fires.

o. Consider whether fire retardant sprays or gels and/or fire wrap would be an appropriate fire fighting tool for your home. If you obtain such materials, contact Don Samuels at [don@snowedunder.com](mailto:don@snowedunder.com) who will make sure the information is given to fire fighting groups. See further information in the Ruby Ranch Emergency Action Plan.

3. Create a minimum 30-foot wide defensible space around each building by removing all fire fuels, and maintain this space annually.

a. Clean up all slash, debris, needles, leaves, twigs, fallen branches, dead sage and dried grasses from your home's perimeter.

b. The 30-foot space is measured from the outside edge of the home's eaves and any decks. If you keep trees within this space, consider them part of the structure and extend the distance of the defensible space accordingly.

c. Prune tree(s) within the defensible space to at least 12 feet above ground to remove ladder fuels.

The details of creating a defensible space from fire around a home can be found in several links on [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org), and at [www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/NATRES/06302.html](http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/NATRES/06302.html). In general, the principles are to have a zone 1 space that extends from your home (and decks) to at least 30 feet if your house is on level ground, and could extend to 100 feet or more if the house is on a hill. This space should be cleared of fuels as indicated above. Beyond zone 1 is a zone 2 space that could extend another 100 to 300 feet. Zone 2 requires less clean up but removal of slash and dead trees that do not provide a special wildlife or aesthetic value should be pursued along with consideration of selective thinning and removal of ladder fuels with greater attention near zone 1, and less as you approach zone 3. Zone 3 is the natural forest that should be managed for purposes of forest health.

d. Remove tall plants within 3-5 feet of structures. Do not plant directly beneath windows or next to foundation vents. Low plantings are generally safe around a home.

e. Keep grass and ground cover cut short. Clear sagebrush within your home's defensible space as it highly flammable.

f. Move all woodpiles including firewood piles outside the defensible perimeter and uphill of your home.

g. Remove or spray for noxious weeds that may rob water from desirable plants and trees.

4. Remove branches overhanging your driveway and, in conjunction with the ARC, trees along your driveway that could block fire fighters from reaching your home. In a fire situation these branches and trees can catch fire and trap you or firefighters.

5. Remove slash, old stacks of wood, and fallen dead trees from your lot. Burning of slash wood can be conducted at certain times of the year with proper permits. Contact the Lake Dillon Fire Rescue for more information.

6. Remove standing dead trees from your lot with the exceptions of dead trees that provide important wildlife habitats or are visually unique.

7. Spray desirable trees annually against infestations.

8. Prune and remove ladder fuels outside the Zone 1 defensible space. Ladder fuels up to at least 8 feet should be removed.

9. If you decide that selective thinning of green trees in Zones 2 or 3 (whether healthy or sick) is right for your lot, do so in conjunction with the Architectural Review Committee.

- a. Requires ARC approval.
- b. ARC will ask you to tag those trees you wish to remove and allow adjacent neighbors to comment.
- c. Talking with your neighbors first about your plans and theirs can help the process. Keep in mind that you and your neighbors appreciate the seclusion and privacy which trees offer, that trees are important wildlife habitats, and certain trees have historical value or are uniquely attractive.
- d. Before planning to do this visit the “Background on Achieving Forest Health” document at [www.rubyranch.com](http://www.rubyranch.com) for guidelines to consider when performing selective thinning.

### **III. Steps to be Taken by the Owners Association and the Metro District**

1. Continue to share this Ruby Ranch Fire Mitigation Plan as well as the Ruby Ranch Emergency Action Plan with all owners, and continue to post these plans on the [www.rubyranch.com](http://www.rubyranch.com) web site.
2. Be available to assist owners in making their homes fire safe and create adequate defensible space around their homes.
3. Per the priorities on the Ruby Ranch Fire Mitigation Status and Priorities Map, encourage owners to follow fire mitigation guidelines on their lots.
4. Foster continuing forest health measures across the Ranch, including spraying desirable trees for MPB and other ‘pests’.
5. Architectural Review Committee to work with interested owners to identify and approve selective tree thinning consistent with the Ruby Ranch Covenants.
6. Continue investigating grant opportunities to help fund forest cleanup and forest health across the Ranch. Also, continue funding levels as needed for forest health across the Common Areas of the Ranch.