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# NEWS

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Current wildfires demonstrate how rapidly fire danger can increase**

**FORT COLLINS, Colo.** – With several wildfires burning thousands of acres and many homes, Coloradans are reminded of just how quickly fire conditions can change. As the state enters a period of hot, dry weather, foresters warn that it takes a very short time for downed wood to dry out and turn green grasses yellow – making the landscape susceptible to large wildfires.

Areas of southern and western Colorado received little spring precipitation and many residents already are aware of heightened fire danger, but much of northern Colorado welcomed a very wet spring, with enough moisture along the northern Front Range to nearly eliminate drought conditions. That same moisture may lull some landowners, surrounded by green vegetation, into thinking wildfire is not currently a concern for them – as it was last year at this time, when the High Park Fire was well on its way to burning more than 87,000 acres west of Fort Collins.

“Colorado is heading into a period where we will have above-normal temperatures and below-normal precipitation, so the fire danger will increase,” said Boyd Lebeda, district forester for the CSFS Fort Collins District and a National Wildfire Coordinating Group-qualified fire behavior analyst.

Foresters use fuel classes to determine how long it takes different types of dead vegetation to dry out or cure. Without significant precipitation, fine fuels, such as yellow grasses and small sticks, can dry out in just one hour, while thousand-hour fuels, like downed logs up to 8 inches in diameter, can go from waterlogged to completely cured in just 40 days. When the moisture content of the fuels on the ground is comparable to the dry air around them, they can quickly spread large fires.

To help prevent ignitions this summer, Lebeda says Coloradans should avoid burning slash, flicking cigarette butts, driving ATVs through dead grass, leaving fire pits unattended and engaging in other activities that could start a fire. He also reminds landowners that early summer is a great time to address basic wildfire mitigation, such as mowing tall grasses around the home, relocating wood piles more than 30 feet from structures and clearing decks and gutters of pine needles – all steps that are necessary to maintain an effective wildfire-defensible space.

“Attention to details makes a real difference,” Lebeda said.

The CSFS is the state lead for the Fire Adapted Communities and Firewise Communities/USA<sup>®</sup> programs, and provides resources to help Coloradans proactively protect their homes and properties from wildfire. For more information, visit the CSFS website at <http://csfs.colostate.edu>.