

NRCS and Colorado's Waldo Canyon Post Fire Stabilization Efforts

Denver, CO., September 11, 2012 – USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Colorado continues to provide support to private landowners impacted by the many wildfires of 2012. This season was most notable with more than 200,000 acres burned taking with them over 600 homes and structures. While those impacted work to restore some semblance of normality, simultaneously the NRCS along with the US Forest Service and other federal, state and county agencies work to help stabilize and restore Colorado's landscapes. The Forest Service is responsible for addressing concerns on National Forest System lands while NRCS utilizes its financial and technical assistance programs to help Colorado's non-federal, privately owned lands.

The NRCS provides technical assistance through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA) and provides financial assistance to private landowners impacted by natural disasters through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). The program was established by Congress to relieve imminent hazards to life and property with the most pressing natural resource concerns and to respond to emergencies created by floods, fires, blizzards, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

"This year we witnessed one of the most devastating fire seasons in Colorado's recent history. And although the recovery and rehabilitation of many burned areas will take many years, numerous agencies and organizations are working together and doing what we can with what we have," says John Andrews, NRCS State Conservation Engineer, Colorado. *"NRCS is providing technical assistance by attending community and public meeting as well as working one on one with individual landowners, advising and providing recommendations for conservation practices that will help stabilize and rehabilitate their land. Unfortunately however no new allocations for the EWP program have been appropriated and Colorado's \$21 million request remains on the wait list along with numerous other states'.*

NRCS manages and administers the EWP program through a partnership with local sponsors. Upon the occurrence of disaster such as the Waldo Canyon fire, local organizations can officially request emergency disaster assistance from NRCS. After an assessment of the devastated area is complete, NRCS at the state level determines if EWP assistance is warranted and upon a concurring determination, the request is forwarded to Washington DC.

"The emergence of a sponsor is a critical component of EWP. That's one of the first steps in the program's implementation," Andrews goes on to say. *"Through the continued partnership between NRCS, the City of Colorado Springs, Manitou Springs, Green Mountain Falls and El Paso County, EWP sponsors for the Waldo Canyon fire, we determined there is a need for some \$11 million in treatments. That request has been forwarded to Washington.*

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Sponsors for EWP projects work in collaboration with NRCS to efficiently implement and navigate the logistics of practice and structural installations onto private lands. They are responsible for providing land rights to do repair work, securing the necessary permits, furnishing the local cost share as well as successfully accomplishing the installation of work which could include removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; correcting damaged drainage facilities; repairing levees and structures; reseeding damaged areas; and purchasing floodplain easements. NRCS may provide up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures or up to 90 percent in limited resource areas. The remaining cost-share must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

“Although the unavailability of EWP funding is unfortunate, NRCS continues to provide technical assistance and is preparing agreements allowing the Waldo Canyon fire sponsors to receive reimbursement for the installation of certain stabilization practices when and if EWP funding becomes available in the future.” Andrews finally states.

For additional information about NRCS and the technical assistance it can provide to those impacted by the Waldo Canyon fire, please contact the local NRCS field office in Colorado Springs at 719-632-9598 or visit www.co.nrcs.usda.gov

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