

STATE OF COLORADO

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

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Bill Owens
Governor

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EXECUTIVE ORDER

Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to the Imminent Threat of Wildfires

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Office of the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, Colorado Revised Statute § 24-32-2101 *et seq.*, I, Bill Owens, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order making certain funds available from the Emergency Management Fund for wildfire preparation and suppression activities.

1. Background & Need.

The State of Colorado must continue preparing for the 2006 wildfire season. Colorado continues to experience varying degrees of lingering drought conditions throughout the state. While we continue to hope for significant precipitation predictions, climatologists and meteorologists predict equal chances of normal precipitation and higher than normal temperatures for much of the state. We must take measures to ensure that the State of Colorado is prepared for another active wildfire season in 2006.

Colorado is home to some 22.6 million acres of forested lands—nearly two-thirds of which are federally owned. The USDA Forest Service, in coordination with other state and federal agencies, has determined that some nine million forested acres in Colorado are so far overgrown and otherwise outside of their normal ecological condition that if a fire were to occur, the majority of the forests' ecosystem components would be lost, including wildlife habitat components. The combined impacts of drought and adverse forest conditions have led to insect and disease outbreaks, killing trees throughout the state and increasing the potential for wildland fire.

Colorado's recent experiences with wildfires demonstrate that it is nearly impossible to contain a high-intensity wildfire in drought conditions. For this reason, in the past four years I have focused state resources on mitigating wildfire risks and building the capability to contain wildfires before they become uncontrollable. Accordingly, I have

proactively utilized state disaster emergency funds to pre-position wildfire-fighting resources for the fire season.

Recent history has proved this to be an extremely effective strategy. The Colorado State Forest Service reported that 98 percent of the 2005 wildfires were controlled at less than 100 acres in size. The two percent that exceeded 100 acres burned 23,181 acres, or 85 percent of the total acreage affected in 2005. Similar suppression results were achieved the previous year. Consequently, mitigation and suppression activities have clearly proven to be a successful tool in minimizing damage caused by wildfires.

Wildfires pose a substantial threat to Colorado citizens' lives and property, and have detrimental effects on wildlife habitat, air quality, and water quality. I am committed to taking decisive and forceful measures to mitigate the destructive consequences of wildfires. As envisioned by the Colorado Disaster Emergency Act (the "Act"), threats to the public safety of this magnitude confer upon the Governor unique powers and responsibilities. As Governor, I am responsible for meeting dangers to our state presented by disasters. C.R.S. § 24-32-2104(1). The Act defines disasters as "the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural cause or cause of human origin, including but not limited to fire" C.R.S. § 24-32-2103(1.5). The purpose of the Act is to reduce the vulnerability of injury to the people of Colorado and damage to property located within the state and provide for coordination of activities relating to disaster prevention, preparedness and response by the state. C.R.S. § 24-32-2102(1)(a) and (f).

In order to reduce the imminent threat of wildfires, extensive resources are immediately necessary to increase the level of fire mitigation and suppression capability. In accordance with the Act, this Executive Order makes certain funds available for wildfire mitigation and preparedness activities. In order to permit contractual commitment of the funds for the beginning of the 2006 wildfire season, all of the funds allocated by this Order and required for 2006 wildfire preparedness activities will be available immediately.

2. Directive.

- A. In accordance with §24-32-2102 and in order to reduce the vulnerability of injury to the people of Colorado and damage to property located within the state and provide for coordination of activities relating to disaster prevention, preparedness and response by the state, I hereby declare that the imminent threat of wildfires constitutes a disaster, as defined by C.R.S. § 24-32-2103.
- B. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-32-2106, I order \$2,000,000 in disaster emergency funds be available for the expenses incurred during the period of this Executive Order.
- C. The disaster emergency funds and federal funds allocated by this order, shall be used to implement the 2006 Initial Air Attack Plan that includes the contracting of Single Engine Air Tankers, and call as needed helicopters

specifically equipped to fight wildfires, staffing additional wildland interface fire engines, employment of wildfire hand crews and also to provide for other preparedness and mitigation resources.

3. Duration.

This Executive Order shall expire thirty (30) days from the date of its execution unless extended by Executive Order.



GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of Colorado
this 19th day of April 2006.

Bill Owens
Governor