

Use of public lands only increases chance of wildfires

Other views

By Paul Tanner

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In the past decade, the number, severity and overall size of wildfires have increased across much of the western United States.

For many Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service employees, fire season is something they remember from the start of their careers when they quickly learned there were five seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall and fire season. However, wildfire is yearround for much of the United States and both agencies are shifting to the concept of a fire year.

Wildfire season has become longer based on conditions that allow fires to start and burn — winter snows are melting earlier, and rain is coming later in the fall. What was once a four-month fire season now lasts six to eight months. For example, fires in recent years have burned well outside of the typical fire season throughout California, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. Fires in the winter months are becoming part of the norm.

Increased numbers of people utilizing the public lands only increase the chances of a wildfire beginning and spreading out of control. All it takes is one idiot burning love letters in a campfire on a windy day (Hayman Fire); one smoker who just couldn't bring himself to dirty the ashtray in his automobile and tossed his burning cigarette out the window onto the dry vegetation on the side of the road; one camping tourist/'outdoorsman' who can't see any reason why fire restrictions should apply to him or his family... after all, Colorado is his personal Disneyland, to use and abuse as he sees fit.

Zephyr Minerals has stated that their proposed gold mine will employ upwards of ninety people who, if the mine is permitted, will have to drive to and from the mine site daily. At such time that Zephyr would begin construction of a physical plant/mine, as they intend, the already imminent fire danger would become incalculably accelerated. The drastic increase in traffic on Temple Canyon Road only increases the chances of a wildfire as the result of a simple spark from a

can begin to work with them to rebuild anytime soon. To compound their problems, there are very few places to rent nearby while they wait.

The residents of Dawson Ranch, Wolf Park, etc. can expect the same problems when a wildfire destroys their neighborhoods. There are precious few rentals available in Fremont County. What do you suppose it would be like when 600-700 families suddenly require places to live while they sort out their lives? And do you think the Fremont County Commissioners, who will be the ones ultimately responsible for permitting a foreign mining company to mine in the tinder-dry foothills south of Canon City, will readily admit their culpability for the burned-out residents' costs, pain, anguish, losses, and anger? Expect to hear only that the commissioners' "thoughts and prayers" are with you.

We are one windy, dry day away from becoming the next "Marshall Fire" and that's without an increase in traffic on Temple Canyon Road, associated with what Zephyr Minerals refers to as an "environmentally benign" mine. An increase in traffic on that road and the associated thoughtless acts that some of the occupants of those vehicles may well perpetrate can only lead to the ruination of countless families' lives. But, in the name of allowing a business, any business, into the Cañon City area, apparently, no group or individual economic loss is too great to incur in the name of economic progress for Fremont County.

It does not have to be this way, citizens. *Paul Tanner worked 40-plus years for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and BLM in six different states and held a variety of positions including twenty-two years as a Field Manager. Other positions included Forester; Surface Protection Specialist (oil shale as well as oil and gas); Realty Specialist; Access, Transportation, and Right-of-Way (ATROW) Specialist; Planning and Environmental Coordinator; and Natural Resource Specialist (oil and gas permitting). Prior to his time with the USFS and BLM, he worked as a Forester with an environmental consulting firm in Ohio.*

casually tossed cigarette, a poorly maintained vehicle, parking off road enabling the heat from the vehicle's catalytic converter to set the surrounding grass on fire, etc.

And when — not if that wildfire spreads east into Dawson Ranch and Wolf Park subdivisions, residents will ask — when the unbelievable devastation to their lives becomes apparent, “Why was this mine allowed to happen?” “Who was responsible for permitting this travesty, knowing full well the possible impacts that would occur?”

You tell yourself that you are adequately insured but as many as two-thirds of those who lost homes in the Marshall fire in Boulder County last year lacked enough insurance to fully cover their rebuilding costs, according to the Colorado Division of Insurance. Even those families with adequate insurance are having trouble finding contractors who

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