

## **IX. PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION**

Rocky Mountain National Park is located along the heavily populated Colorado Front Range in close proximity to the Denver metropolitan area. In addition, the park has an annual visitation of approximately 3 million people. These two factors – proximity to a heavily populated urban area and high levels of park visitation – contribute to an intense amount of public interest in events occurring within or near Rocky Mountain National Park. It is therefore very important that all fire management activities be proactively and accurately communicated.

The Fire Education/Prevention/Information Specialist (FEPIS), working in conjunction with the Public Information Officer (PIO) will be responsible for informing the public and the media about the park's fire management program. They will also work cooperatively to serve as Fire Information Officers during wildland fire management activities or as liaisons with assigned Incident Management Team Information Officers.

Communications plans will be developed as required, identifying objectives, audiences, messages or talking points, communication methods and tools, organization, and assignments.

- The objectives of fire information are to proactively provide the public, media, and park staff with accurate and timely information and to enlist public support for professional fire management practices.
- Audiences may include local residents, the local business community, park visitors, park inholders, park management, employees and volunteers, regional or national office staff, cooperating agencies, legislators, media, etc.
- Messages or talking points may include such topics as prescribed fire, fuel management activities, wildland fire use, wildland-urban interface issues, fire safety and prevention, Firewise and defensible space concepts, the Rural Fire Assistance Program, implementation of fire restrictions, etc.
- Communication methods or tools may include press releases, public service announcements, newsletters, signs, displays, web sites, direct mail, e-mail, telephone, and personal contacts, interpretive programs, public meetings, etc.

The FEPIS will also conduct public outreach activities and interpretive programs in coordination with the Park's Interpretation Division. Annual training programs to keep staff apprised of fire management activities and the ecological role of fire will be presented to seasonal interpretive employees and other divisions as requested. A site bulletin about fire management will be available and updated as necessary.

The interagency agreements currently in place provide opportunities for annual review and information exchange about the fire program with cooperating agencies. The Colorado State Forest Service and county governments have the primary responsibility for private land issues but work in partnership with the FEPIS on communicating wildland-urban interface issues in surrounding communities. The FEPIS will represent the park at the annual meeting of the informal Larimer County Fire Education Council.

Fire information and education efforts will be conducted on a year round basis. Prevention and fire information activities will increase as the fire danger and activity level escalates (Appendix E - Fire Prevention Plan). Staff from other divisions may be recruited to assist with information duties as required. All park staff should have a basic understanding of fire management in order to respond to visitor inquiries or be able to properly direct them to obtain the requested information. Whenever possible, implementation of fire restrictions and closures will be closely coordinated with cooperating agencies to promote consistency and avoid confusion.