



*There is no better way to understand a project or organization than from the passionate individuals who are leading the effort. We asked Paul Branson, Cody Siebert and Pam Wilson to answer some questions so you can dive even deeper into their mitigation and coalition building journey.*



*Cody Siebert*



*Pam Wilson*



*Paul Branson*

**What led to ordering a CMAT? What were your goals? Did the Team help bring you closer to those goals?** *Paul Branson, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist, Huerfano County:*

We do regular AARs (After Action Reviews) and run a heavily HRO (High Reliability Organization) influenced program so access and incorporation of a constant line of "what went well, what didn't, solution for..." That is core intel for our programs. Probably the sole reason we got so much done with so few. Our decision to request CMAT (heavily thought over given our context and capacity at the time) rested on: 1) getting more local partners engaged (capacity increase) 2) validating our plans/process-Social/political program credibility 3) providing external expert advice and encouragement- this added fantastic local MOMENTUM!

Upon review, requesting the CMAT process is one of the best decisions I've made as a wildfire practitioner (and in one of the most challenging circumstances). In my opinion, CMAT will help any WF outfit regardless of their capability. It definitely brought us closer to attaining our goals. Simply by engaging more local partners, we have been able to address and complete more complex tasks, such as adopting WUI Codes, updating Comprehensive Plans, creating a County CWPP, establishing Biomass utilization options, etc. This will in turn leverage further benefits for our stakeholders. The expert critique and transfer of know-how by the CMAT team has been, well, priceless.

**Give our audience some insight on how the CMAT process was, and how you feel about the local follow up since the CMAT team was in the area?** *Pam Wilson, CMAT Team Member:*

Most of the participants that showed up for the SWOT analysis were hungry for suggestions on how to move forward and better engage both residents and state and federal agencies in creating a better prepared and more resilient community.

In terms of follow-up, CMAT consulted frequently on the establishment of SPAWP as a 501c3 organization and potential grant opportunities for mitigation projects. SPAWP has come a long way in its first 18 months and is off to a great start. We connected SPAWP with Fire Adapted Colorado (FACO) who facilitated a Home Ignition Zone Workshop for local residents and partners.

**When the AIM grant was announced, what were your main needs and gaps? What are your needs and gaps now?** *Paul Branson, Huerfano County:*

Initially, our overt need concerned the potential loss of key local wildfire preparedness leadership (operating at peak capacity) and an uncertain future for previously developed programs. This was accentuated by the addition of a tremendous amount of flood mitigation, disaster recovery and emergency management tasks unto a skeleton crew of County personnel. The Spring Creek fire and the CMAT process facilitated two very important developments: 1) It stimulated new leaders to share the burden involved with sustaining (and expanding) the current wildfire preparedness programs and 2) substantiated the importance of those programs continuing indefinitely (across all sectors).

Currently, the needs and gaps center around developing clearly defined roles within a greatly expanded partnership capacity and aligning respective endeavors to meet mutual objectives. We are in a new stage of development and ability so the integration of efforts is and will need to remain an essential component. As many of our wildfire partners are new to the field, or even to the area, there is a pronounced gap in knowledge of what's been developed here already, what works across the industry, as well as basic know-how about 'applied' wildfire preparedness and mitigation. These seem to be valid growth challenges and could be resolved with a commitment to collaboration and knowledge exchange.

**The successes of the AIM grant are a ripple effect of the CMAT experience. Can you share any lessons learned for future CMAT and AIM program organizations, hitting on the importance of stepping back and evaluating before acting on mitigation?** *Pam Wilson, CMAT Team Member:*

As the CMAT team worked on our recommendations, we quickly recognized that we couldn't just recommend they develop a partnership and leave, as many of the residents were seasonal. We felt we really needed to push the concept along and build on the new relationships and momentum gained during the SWOT exercise. We strongly encouraged them to choose a date, time and location for their first partnership meeting. Fortunately, Jim Littlefield, the Chairman of the La Veta Fire Protection District stepped up and offered to both host and facilitate the meeting. Accommodations were made to allow interested residents to participate by phone. By their second meeting the partnership had a name and several committees ready to move forward on a variety of tasks and they have continued the great momentum built during the SWOT exercise.

**Where do you see SPAWP in 1 year? What do you see as your biggest needs at this point in time? What types of projects are on your priority list?** *Cody Siebert, Vice President, SPAWP:*

Together we will double our awareness education and membership via networking and unifying our systems. For example, we shall advance by streamlining our donation membership renewal systems and increase our technology services via our website to integrate project management tracking and streamline financial reporting. We are employing a program to engage and help people who want to learn how to prevent or recover from fire devastation by educational presentations and personal home protection assessments via Members who attended formal NFPA training.

We are grateful for and need ongoing donations/grants towards projects while helping property owners feel comfortable investing money into protecting or re-cultivating their property.

Engaging/Educating multigenerational support of folks ages 7 to 107 to invest in protecting, restoring and preserving their properties that generations before them cultivated to pass on into the next

generation's future. We need help transforming property owners into thinking like Forest Land Farmers helping our private lands to flourish in a sustainable healthy safe way that prevents devastating fire opportunity. The Spring Fire 2018 was on 99% privately owned lands. I and others lost our homes because neighbors did not effectively fire mitigate their lands.

Projects are on priority list:

- 1) Coordinating projects that reduce flammable risks, protect humans, animals, homes, businesses and watershed resources from fire destruction. The valuable Cuchara River and other similar watershed systems supplies water to Walsenburg, La Veta and surrounding areas. Without water, well, there's nothing without water.
- 2) Our hard working SPAWP community group is currently completing a shaded fuel break along Highway 12 south known as the Redhill Project that reduces massive fire risks in the Cuchara area yet still maintains beauty and forest life .
- 3) Recently our SPAWP community group was awarded a CSFS (Colorado State Forestry Service) FRWRM (Forest Restoration and Wildfire Mitigation) grant that will continue our efforts.

Prior National and local recent post-fire studies have shown that homes, business and water sources that survived forest fires increased in value in the areas where critical infrastructure were quickly restored. Our local municipal governments, power/communications and insurance companies are key to our survival as a community.

***"We want to get ahead of fire and floods and survive them!" Please become a member of [SPAWP.org](http://SPAWP.org)!***