

Request for PTHROS Funds for Wildfire Rx Fire Equipment

Date: 5/26/2026
To: Douglas County Board of County Commissioners
Through: Douglas J. DeBord, County Manager
From: Dan Dertz, Director of Open Space and Natural Resources
Subject: **Budget Request for Wildfire and Prescription Fire Equipment**

COSAC Meeting:	3/31/2026
Board of County Commissioners:	5/26/2026

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff requests supplemental funding from the Open Space Operations, Maintenance and Capital Improvement Projects (O&M/CIP) Fund of the Parks, Trails, Historic Resources and Open Space (PTHROS) sales tax in the amount of up to \$90,000 to purchase personal protective equipment and other equipment for wildfire emergency response and prescribed fire support for open space ranger staff. The extreme drought and mountain pine beetle outbreak has amplified the need to provide our first responders with the tools to assist when necessary. In addition to responding to wildfire, this equipment is also necessary for prescribed fires, an important land management treatment. Under the direction of Douglas County's Office of Emergency Management, all open space and natural resource rangers obtained their Incident Qualification Card (red card) and have the essential training to provide support. The O&M/CIP fund has approximately \$11.2M available.

II. BACKGROUND

The PTHROS sales tax resolution provides direction on how funds are distributed between parks, historic resources, and open space. For open space projects, the O&M/CIP receives 20% of the sales tax collected, which is estimated to be approximately \$3.9M in 2026. The 2026 budget approved for Open Space and Natural Resources for O&M/CIP was approximately \$3.2M.

The extreme drought and mountain pine beetle outbreak has highlighted the need for County staff to be as prepared as possible for a potential wildfire. This funding will ensure that open space staff will be able to support other first responder efforts in the event of wildfire on county open space properties.

III. COSAC RECOMMENDATION

The County Open Space Advisory Committee (COSAC) reviewed this request on March 31, 2026. COSAC unanimously recommended approving this request from funds available within the Open Space O&M/CIP fund.

IV. STAFF ASSESSMENT

The Board may approve using funds up to \$90,000 from the O&M/CIP from the PTHROS sales tax for the purchase of equipment, training, and permits to protect county open spaces from wildfire and to manage properties with prescribed fire.

ATTACHMENT:

Funding Proposal for Prescribed Fire Implementation Restoring Resilient Landscapes Through Strategic Prescribed Fire Implementation.

Funding Proposal for Prescribed Fire Implementation
Restoring Resilient Landscapes Through Strategic Prescribed Fire Implementation

Submitted By

Douglas County Open Space

Funding Request

\$88,810.00

Project Period

Fall/Winter 2026 2027

1. Executive Summary

Douglas County Open Space respectfully requests \$88,810.00 for 2026 to implement a comprehensive prescribed fire program across approximately 1000 acres in Douglas County Open Space. The recommendation is to adopt a permanent budget line item in 2027 to support prescribed fire implementation. This project will reduce hazardous fuel loads, restore fire-adapted ecosystems, protect communities from catastrophic wildfire, and enhance wildlife habitat.

In recent years, wildfire severity and frequency have increased dramatically due to prolonged drought, historical fire suppression, and climate-driven fuel accumulation. Prescribed fire is a science-based, cost-effective, and ecologically beneficial strategy for reducing wildfire risk while restoring natural ecological processes.

In 2025, Douglas County Open Space, with Douglas County OEM, conducted the first prescribed burn in 20 years, completing 382 acres on the Spruce Meadows Open Space. This burn was conducted with the assistance of numerous agencies and departments throughout the county without any additional funding requests.

Funding will support planning, permitting, personnel training, equipment acquisition, controlled burn implementation, monitoring, and community outreach.

2. Statement of Need

Decades of fire suppression have resulted in unnaturally dense vegetation and hazardous fuel accumulation across [region]. These conditions significantly increase the likelihood of high-intensity, destructive wildfires that threaten:

- Human life and property
- Critical infrastructure
- Water quality and watersheds
- Wildlife habitat
- Air quality
- Local economies

According to the National Interagency Fire Center, wildfire activity has steadily increased in both frequency and severity over the past several decades, placing unprecedented strain on suppression resources and communities.

Proactive fuel reduction through prescribed fire reduces wildfire intensity, improves firefighter safety, and enhances ecosystem resilience.

3. Project Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Reduce Hazardous Fuels

- Treat 1000 acres of high-risk landscape using prescribed fire per year
- Reduce surface and ladder fuels by an estimated 70%.

Goal 2: Restore Ecosystem Health

- Reintroduce natural fire regimes to fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Promote native vegetation regeneration.
- Improve habitat conditions for key species.

Goal 3: Protect Communities

- Establish defensible space buffers adjacent to wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas.
- Reduce wildfire intensity near populated zones.

Goal 4: Build Local Capacity

- Train personnel in prescribed fire planning and execution.
- Develop a long-term prescribed fire management plan.

4. Project Description

The project will be implemented in five phases:

Phase 1: Planning & Environmental Review

- Site assessments and fuel load mapping
- Burn plan development
- Permitting and regulatory compliance
- Coordination with local agencies and stakeholders

Phase 2: Community Outreach

- Public information meetings
- Notification procedures
- Educational materials on prescribed fire benefits

Phase 3: Training & Preparation

- Crew training and certification
- Equipment procurement (drip torches, radios, PPE, water tanks)
- Firebreak establishment and site preparation

Phase 4: Implementation

- Execution of prescribed burns under defined weather and fuel conditions
- Smoke management compliance
- Real-time monitoring and documentation

Phase 5: Monitoring & Evaluation

- Post-burn vegetation and fuel assessments

- Wildlife habitat evaluation
- Reporting and data analysis

5. Expected Outcomes

- Reduced wildfire risk across county-owned properties
- Increased landscape resilience to drought and climate variability
- Enhanced biodiversity and native plant regeneration
- Improved community safety in the WUI
- Strengthened local prescribed fire capacity

6. Budget Summary

Category	2026 Request	2027 Budget Line Request
Personnel	\$0.00	
Equipment	\$49,750.00	\$16,040.00
Training	\$5600.00	\$5,600.00
Planning & Permits	\$1500.00	\$1,500.00
Monitoring	\$0	\$0
Personal Protective Equipment	\$24960.00	\$4,000.00
Logistic Costs	\$7000.00	\$7000.00
Total Request	\$88810.00	\$34,140.00

7. Organizational Qualifications

Douglas County Open Space and Douglas County OEM have years of experience in land management, ecological restoration, and wildfire mitigation. Our team includes certified burn bosses, wildland firefighters, and ecological specialists trained in prescribed fire implementation and monitoring.

Douglas County OEM Emergency Service Unit (ESU) maintains a cache of equipment and specialized tools for fire suppression efforts that have been utilized to support the emerging prescribed fire program. The additional equipment and training requests would not only support prescribed fire but also enhance fire suppression within Douglas County, thereby adding capability. In addition, the ESU is training Open Space Rangers with wildland fire qualifications. This training is being completed in-house with an estimated cost savings of \$10,000.00.

We have successfully completed projects in collaboration with federal, state, and local partners, adhering to best management practices and safety standards.

8. Evaluation Plan

Project success will be measured through:

- Acres treated
- Fuel load reduction metrics

- Pre- and post-burn vegetation surveys
- Fire behavior modeling comparisons
- Community engagement participation rates

A final report will be submitted within 90 days of project completion.

9. Sustainability

Prescribed fire is not a one-time intervention but part of a long-term land stewardship strategy. This project will establish recurring burn intervals and build local workforce capacity to ensure continued ecosystem management beyond the grant period.

10. Conclusion

Investing in prescribed fire today prevents catastrophic wildfire tomorrow. This project represents a proactive, science-based solution that protects communities, restores ecosystems, and reduces long-term wildfire suppression costs.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal further.