



COLORADO

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Division of Fire Prevention and Control Selects Rifle/Garfield County as Location for Center of Excellence

DENVER – Wednesday, March 18, 2015 – The Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) today presented its recommendations and selection of Rifle-Garfield County Airport to Gov. John Hickenlooper as host community for the Center of Excellence for Advanced Technology Aerial Firefighting.

"We were fortunate to have a number of outstanding candidates to consider for the Center of Excellence and it was a difficult decision with both urban and rural applicants, but Rifle and Garfield County stood out as the best choice," said Hickenlooper.

"As home to the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management Facility and with its proximity to the Colorado Army National Guard High Altitude Aviation training site, we know the Center will be better positioned for success in Rifle which will benefit all of Colorado. This decision will serve as the best way forward to meet our shared goal of protecting lives, property and our natural environment from devastating wildfires," Hickenlooper said.

The Center of Excellence was created in Senate Bill 14-164, which also authorized the State Fire Division to purchase or contract for aerial firefighting assets. During the legislative session, proponents of the Center explained that there is currently no mechanism for determining the efficacy of aerial firefighting, and the need exists for an innovative, science- and data-focused research entity. For this reason, the Center was held up as an integral part of ensuring the successful implementation of Colorado's own aerial firefighting fleet.

"In short, the Center of Excellence will research, test, and evaluate existing and new technologies that support sustainable, effective, and efficient aerial firefighting techniques," said State Fire Director Paul Cooke.

Because several jurisdictions in Colorado expressed interest in hosting the Center of Excellence, a means to gather information from interested jurisdictions had to be established. The Division elected to go through a formal Request for Information (RFI) process as a way to collect information about the various benefits of interested jurisdictions in a non-binding fashion.

The Division received six responses to the RFI from the following jurisdictions:



- Centennial
- Clear Creek County
- Colorado Springs
- Fort Collins-Loveland Airport
- Montrose County
- City of Rifle/Garfield County
- Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport/Jefferson County

“Each of the seven communities that were vying for the Center has something unique to offer”, Cooke said. “In the end, it really comes down to which location offers the most significant and mutual benefit to the state and the host community.”

The City of Rifle is located on the Western Slope along I-70, less than one hour from Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction.

The reasons the Division selected Rifle to host the Center include:

- The location offers proximity to open lands and uncontrolled airspace with a variety of terrain, close proximity to high-risk wildfire areas, high altitude locations, and nearby watersheds that source much of the drinking water for nearby states.
- The area is where Colorado sees the majority of its wildland fires.
- Local understanding of the needs and risks for firefighting personnel and operations.
- Small town affordability.
- Nearby Higher Education institutions willing to tailor programs to graduate students with skills to staff the Center in the future.
- The area is host to the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management facility, which houses BLM, USFS, Colorado River Fire Rescue, and DFPC resources.
- Close proximity to the Grand Junction Air Center which provides tactical aircraft resources (air tankers, smokejumpers, lead planes, and air attack) for initial attack and large incident support.
- Close proximity to the Colorado Army National Guard High-Altitude Aviation Training Site (HAATS).
- Free, readily available, suitable office space for three years.
- Grant writing assistance from the city.
- Potential economic development benefits to the area.

Rifle/Garfield County also touted the willingness of its higher education institutions, government partners, and business organizations to embrace the activities of the Center of Excellence and build on their existing expertise in workforce training, curriculum development, firefighting experience, and related mutual interests to support the success of the Center of Excellence.

Further, this jurisdiction has garnered region-wide support for hosting the Center, with support from more than 21 different public and private entities throughout Colorado.

Cooke says, “The Rifle/Garfield County location offers DFPC the ability to pair its currently existing resources (Fire Management Officer and Engine Crew) with the Center of Excellence staff.” He added, “The location could easily become the Western Slope hub for DFPC programs.”

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