

TAX BREAKS AID FIRE MITIGATION COSTS

Little-known law offers tax break for mitigation

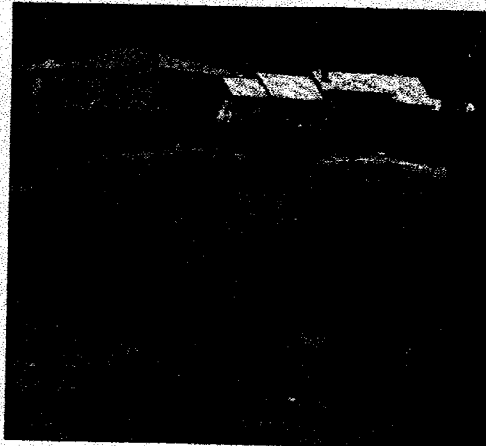
BY ANN ISME
Colorado Public News

As thousands of Colorado Springs homeowners begin to focus on rebuilding their lives on the blackened foothills of the Front Range, other mountain home and property owners across Colorado are turning their efforts toward fire mitigation.

What they may not know is that they can get both tax breaks and grant money to help.

A little-known state law passed in 2008 provides a write-off on the Colorado tax return for 50 percent of wildfire mitigation costs, up to \$2,500 annually, from 2009 through 2013.

While there's little help for the thousands of landowners working up a sweat, personally hauling logs and branches off their own mountain properties to reduce fire danger, the write-offs can be



applied to "actual" out-of-pocket expenses, including hiring tree-cutting services and paying for chainsaws.

In other words, one's own labor doesn't count.

The work must be authorized by a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and the work must have been done after the local plan was approved. Colorado has 196 approved Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and they call for defensible

space around many of the state's houses in the areas where urban living meets the forest.

The law, which never got much publicity, was sponsored by then-legislators Rob Witwer and Mike Kopp, who represented districts that included the mountainous Conifer/Evergreen communities southwest of Denver.

Witwer said the bill passed despite the cost to

Two houses stand above a grove of charred trees. In the distance stands the burned mountain-side above Mountain Shadows.

JERILEE BENNETT,
THE GAZETTE

the strapped state budget after he argued the entire state pays the bill when forests burn. For example, he noted, the 2002 Hayman Fire west of Colorado Springs has cost metro Denver residents tens of millions of dollars on their bills from Denver Water, for work the utility has done to deal with sediment from burned slopes ending up in reservoirs.

Landowners and homeowners associations can also apply for grants to assist their wildfire mitigation projects. Applications are available at the Colorado State Forest Service website and must be received by mail in by 4 p.m. on July 20.

Dan Gibbs, a former state senator from Breckenridge who sponsored the bill creating the grant program, said about 20 of the 25 applications this year received funding, with approvals generally going to areas with existing homes.