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Clear Creek County, Partner Agencies Recommend Dissolution of Castlewood Drive Evacuation Route Agreement

Denver Mountain Parks (DMP), the Clear Creek County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Clear Creek Fire Authority (CCFA), Clear Creek County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), Evergreen Fire/Rescue (EFR), Clear Creek County Road and Bridge, and the Clear Creek Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) have jointly recommended the dissolution of the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Short-Term and Long-Term Maintenance of an Emergency Evacuation Route in Pence Mountain Park (MOU). The MOU, signed in 2014, currently designates Castlewood Drive as an "evacuation route."

For the past decade, the MOU reflected a partnership between Clear Creek County and DMP in maintaining the roadway for recreation and emergency use. Following the 2013 floods, the county invested in repairs to restore safe passage. More recently, however, the County has only maintained the route for pedestrian and administrative access, with annual vegetation management rather than infrastructure improvements. On the advice fire experts, DMP and the County have agreed to formally initiate the dissolution of the agreement, ensuring that county resources are invested in more suitable evacuation routes. Although no longer designated as an evacuation route, Castlewood Drive will remain available for firefighting resources and emergency responder access.

After extensive discussions among government stakeholders, experts, and a dedicated work session with the BOCC, a clear consensus was reached: Castlewood Drive cannot be considered a safe or practical evacuation route for residents of the Echo Hills neighborhood.

"We recognize that Castlewood Drive does not meet the criteria for a formal evacuation route. This change in designation provides certainty for residents and responders that designated evacuation routes meet standards recommended by fire officials," said Shannon Dennison, Director of DMP. "Denver Mountain Parks remains committed to working closely with Clear Creek County and Evergreen Fire/Rescue to support public safety and emergency responders."

Recent investments in Sinton Road have made it a more suitable evacuation route for Echo Hills, where significant mitigation work has created a defensible and survivable evacuation

path. Improving Castlewood Drive to meet evacuation route criteria would require extensive upgrades and long-term investment far beyond current county resources.

“Sinton Road is a good example of what it takes to make a corridor truly viable for evacuation,” said Mike Weege, Fire Chief of EFR. “It has taken years of mitigation, coordination, and investment to bring that route to a point where we can say with confidence that it is defensible and survivable in a wildfire. Castlewood Drive simply does not meet those same standards.”

This conclusion is consistent with the findings outlined in EFR’s recently approved Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), adopted earlier this year.

Dissolving the MOU provides clarity for both residents and responders, aligns expectations with current wildfire behavior knowledge, and acknowledges fiscal limitations. While Echo Hills, like many areas of Clear Creek County, remains constrained by single-access roads, this decision emphasizes the county’s commitment to realistic, effective, and sustainable emergency planning.

Clear Creek County and partner agencies will continue to work on long-term strategies to address single-access challenges across the region, but this immediate action reinforces a commitment to transparency, safety, and responsible use of resources.

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