

# The 2012 Colorado Wildfire Crisis

Managing Perceptions and Generating  
Positive Awareness During a Crisis



# Colorado's Visitor Profile

- Approximately 58M visitors to Colorado in 2011
- Summer is Colorado's biggest season (visitation)
- Nearly three quarters of Colorado visitors travel outside of the winter season
- Colorado ranks #9 in outdoor recreation activities
  - Backpacking, camping, hiking, national park visitation, etc.
- Visitors spent approximately \$14 million in 2011

*Longwoods International 2011  
Dean Runyan Associates*



# Looking Back: Summer 2012

- Summer 2012 was the worst wildfire season in a decade
- 98% of Colorado suffered drought (62 of 64 counties)
- Prolonged drought stressed mountain and urban trees and other landscapes
- Extremely arid conditions exacerbated pine beetle damage
- Weak snowpack drove river basins into single digit percentages of 30-year averages
- Extreme heat combined with arid conditions helped create Colorado's worst wildfire season in a decade



*Source: Colorado State University*

# Introduction to the Wildfire Crisis

- Wildfires began at the start of Colorado's summer season
- High Park Fire (Larimer County) was first major fire to pique national media attention.
- Nearly 250 homes destroyed; 41,000 acres burned
- First fire where tourism assets faced closures/restrictions
  - Rafting operators, state parks, campgrounds, highways, etc.



## Colorado wildfire: High Park fire jumps Poudre River; 80 homes ordered evacuated

By Joey Bunch and Tom McGhee

The Denver Post

Posted: 06/15/2012 01:00:00 AM MDT



A helicopter flies through Poudre Canyon on Thursday as flames scorch the forest south of the river. (Karl Gehring, The Denver Post)

# Challenges

- Colorado was dealing with a dozen wildfires in June/July
- Other parts of the state were unaffected by the wildfires, from a tourism perspective
- Less than one percent of public lands in Colorado were impacted by the fires
- Balance need to generate awareness about Colorado being “open for business” vs. communicating impact from wildfires
- Media reporting Colorado’s summer tourism season was in peril



# Phase I: Monitoring and Strategy

- Monitor and track media coverage; code messaging, slant
- Work with tourism industry partners; obtain real-time updates and impact on key tourist assets
- Begin to develop key messaging based on crisis level
- Keep the team informed and ready next steps



**70 large fires burn in 13 western states, cause haze in Colorado**





# Phase II: Initial Response

- Response phase begins when media coverage hits a point where a statement is needed
  - Initial media response was for the High Park Fire forced closure of tourism-related assets
- Sharpen messages and work with spokesperson on issuing statements, securing media opps
- Realize that it is going to get *worse* before it gets better
- Remember that people have lost homes or livelihoods; be sensitive to the fact that the crisis is beyond limiting damage to an industry



“If I have  
six hours to  
chop down  
a tree,  
I’ll spend  
the first  
four hours  
sharpening  
my ax.”

— *Abraham Lincoln*





# Phase III: The Game Changer

- In a crisis, there is always an escalation; a point of no return. *A game changer.*
- Deploy a broader multipoint strategy to combat image damage and perception
- Waldo Canyon Fire, Colorado Springs
  - Worst fire in Colorado history
  - Media reports called Colorado's summer tourism season was in peril
  - Yet, areas such as Crested Butte and Vail were completely unaffected





## Wildfires threaten Colorado's summer tourism

By Thomas Peipert  
The Associated Press

Updated: 06/26/2012 05:05:13 PM MDT



## Wildfires threaten summer Rocky Mountain tourism



## Vicious wildfires spread to Colo. tourist centers

By THOMAS PEIPERT | Associated Press – Mon, Jun 25, 2012

## Mass evacuations ordered as wildfires rage in Colorado

*32,000 people flee homes in the Colorado Springs area, including parts of the Air Force Academy, and Boulder is under threat.*



## Colorado wildfires spark concerns over tourism fallout

By Jayne Clark, USA TODAY

Updated 6/26/2012 6:00 PM

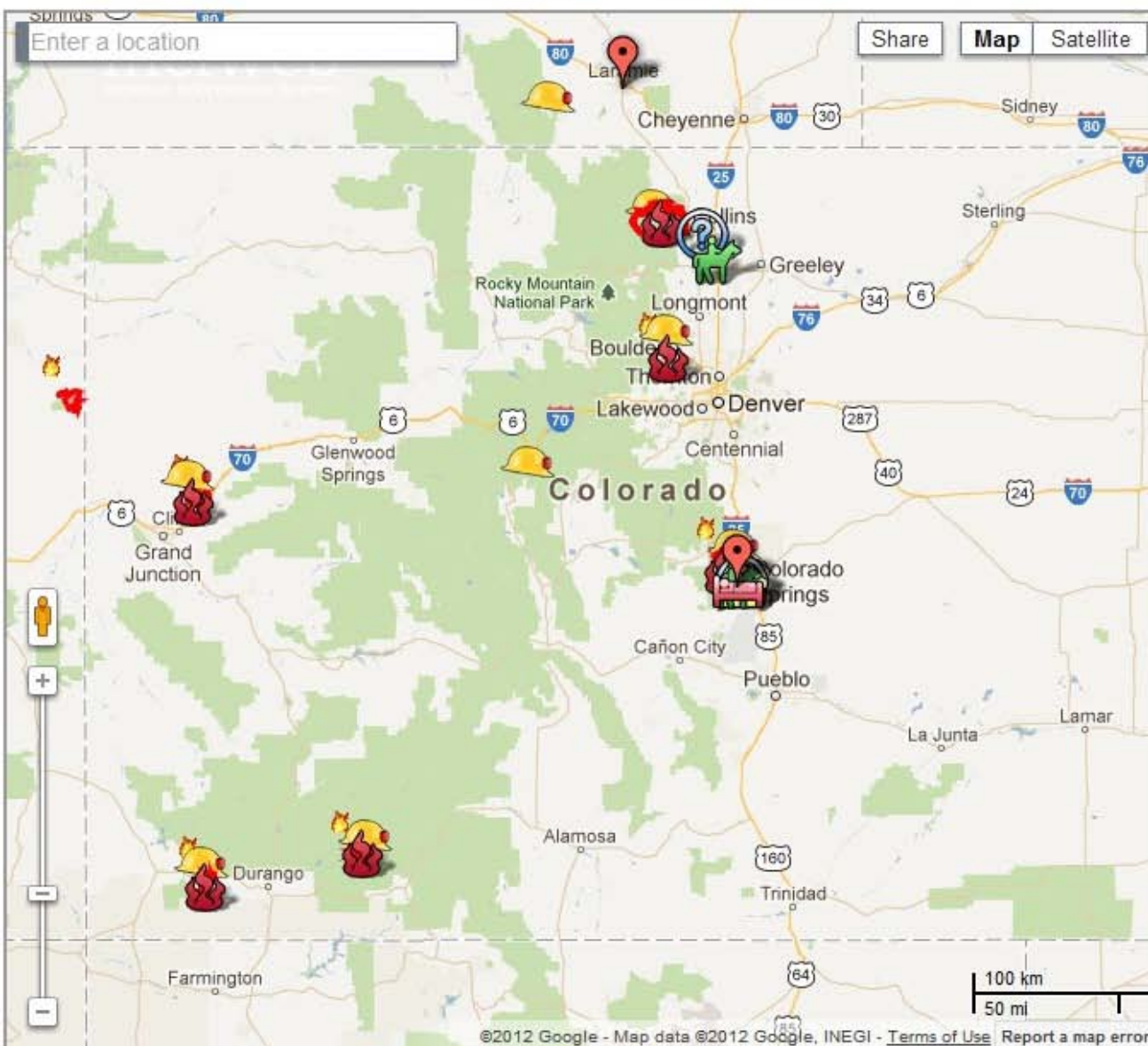


# Colorado wildfires: Google Crisis Response fire resource map

The Denver Post

POSTED: 06/27/2012 10:21:38 AM MDT

UPDATED: 06/27/2012 10:44:41 AM MDT



National and local-level wildfire-related data for the 2012 US wildfire season.

For breaking news on the currently active Colorado wildfires, please go to [coemergency.com](http://coemergency.com) or [@coemergency](https://twitter.com/coemergency) on Twitter.

## ☒ US Active Fire Perimeters

[Zoom to area](#) · [Download KML](#)

Source: [GEOMAC](#). GEOMAC wildfire data layers courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey. Layer metadata

## ☒ InciWeb Wildfire Information

[Zoom to area](#) · [Download KML](#)

Source: [InciWeb.org](#)

## ☐ Satellite Imagery - Waldo Canyon Fire

## ☐ Satellite Imagery - Waldo Canyon Fire (Near-Infrared)

## ☒ US Red Cross Shelter System

[Zoom to area](#)

Active Red Cross shelters. Source: [American Red Cross](#)

## ☒ Colorado Current Fire Information

[Zoom to area](#) · [Download KML](#)

Map data will be updated each morning and as needed throughout the day as new information is available. Source: [State of Colorado Division of Emergency Management](#)

## ☐ Colorado Springs Evacuations Area and Fire Vicinity

# Strategy: Become a Media Source

*You can help control the message if you can become a reliable media source*

- CTO created a dedicated landing page for real-time fire-related tourism updates: openings, closings, etc.
  - Central news source for media and travelers alike
  - The good, the bad and the ugly.



## Colorado, Utah fire updates for travelers

By **Jayne Clark**, USA TODAY

As multiple fires continue to rage in Colorado, the state tourism office has [launched a webpage](#) to update travelers on conditions statewide.





## Media Room

[GETTING TO KNOW COLORADO](#)[COLORADO TRAVEL FACTS](#)[NEWS RELEASES](#)[MEDIA RESOURCES](#)[B-Roll](#)[Photo Gallery](#)[► Colorado Wildfire Updates for Travelers](#)[Share the Love](#)

## COLORADO WILDFIRE UPDATES FOR TRAVELERS

The Colorado Tourism Office has launched this Travel Resource page to keep visitors up to date on tourism-specific information and contact information for tourist areas nearest to the fires. Bookmark this page for everything you need to know about a trip to Colorado this summer, as it will be regularly updated.

Information on the fires can be found at the [Colorado Division of Emergency Management website](#) or on Twitter at [@COEmergency](#). Updates on Colorado wildfires are also available at [www.inciweb.org/state/6/](#).

For ways to help those affected by the wildfires in Colorado, visit [www.HelpColoradoNow.org](#). The **Fire Relief Fund 2012** has also been set up to benefit those affected by Colorado wildfires. Individuals, foundations and corporations may contribute major or combined gifts through the Colorado Fire Relief Fund 2012 at The Denver Foundation. Additional activities that will help the Colorado Fire Relief Fund 2012 include:

- Individuals can text the word FIRE to 80000 to give \$10 through the mGive Colorado Fire Fund. AT&T is providing the inaugural donation in support of the mGive.
- AEG Live Rocky Mountains will host a series of VIP Experiences with Alan Jackson, Avett Brothers, Blues Traveler and Foster the People and other events.

## ROAD CLOSURES

Few roads are being impacted by the fires. For up-to-the-minute road conditions and closures, visit [cotrip.org](#).

## WELCOME CENTERS

Stop into one of [Colorado's 11 Welcome Centers](#) to receive current travel information. Volunteers can also assist in trip planning for those whose trips are impacted by closures.

## AIRPORT UPDATE

Colorado's two main airports, Denver International Airport and Colorado Springs Airport, have not experienced any flight cancellations or issues impacting visibility or airport operations. For information visit [www.flydenver.com](#) and [www.flycos.com](#).



# The Power of the Media

Media headlines can be damaging; but first-hand media accounts can help paint an accurate picture



A look at what it's been like to roadtrip through northern Colorado towns, including Fort Collins, Estes Park and Lyons, as wildfires burn.



But while the plume of smoke from High Park is visible from Fort Collins, as you can see in this photo taken around sunset on June 23, daily life in the city is still going strong. The city is known for its microbrews and the Colorado Brewers Festival, now in its 23rd year, went off without a hitch. Saturday night in Old Town remained lively, with packed bars and restaurants. Beer tours at New Belgium Brewery, home of Fat Tire and the third largest craft brewer in the country, are full.



# The Power of the Media

- Worked closely with 300+ travel bloggers in Colorado attending Travel Blog Exchange (TBEX)

**denverpost.com**

## BUSINESS

### Travel Blog Exchange in Keystone a bonanza for Colorado tourism

By Jason Blevins  
The Denver Post

POSTED: 06/15/2012 01:00:00 AM MDT  
UPDATED: 06/15/2012 02:40:48 AM MDT

Colorado is bracing for an online bomb of travel stories exploding from the more than 700 travel bloggers rallying in Keystone this weekend. The fourth annual Travel Blog Exchange — or TBEX — convention is designed as a training tool for travel bloggers, but hosts, like Denver, Keystone and Clear Creek County reap the biggest rewards.

"Nothing like that has ever happened," said Visit Denver's Rich Grant, who is helping to organize a treasure-hunt rally for vanloads of bloggers as they move from Denver to Keystone today, hitting things like Red Rocks and other draws along the way. "The whole travel



(Severiano Galván, The Denver Post)



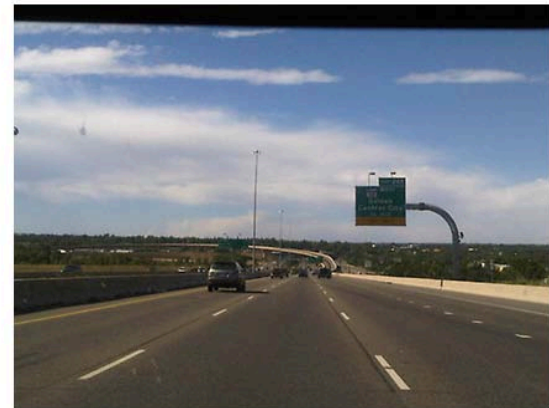
**JohnnyJet** ✓  
@JohnnyJet

Following



@TBEX Smooth sailing on I-70; have not seen any smoke from #wildfires. Keystone #Colorado here we come

Reply Retweet Favorite



By JohnnyJet @JohnnyJet

@TBEX Smooth sailing now on I-70. Only bummer is seeing smoke from #Colorado fires. #TBEX

TwitPic @TwitPic · Unfollow

# Finally...Recovery

- Share the Love campaign, focused on driving visitors back to fire-impacted destinations



Chicago Tribune  
**TRAVEL**

TAKING THE KIDS

## Taking the Kids: Exploring Colorado in summer?

The good news for those who love Colorado and exploring the outdoors with their kids is that you'll find plenty to do this summer and fall and great deals wherever you go. The Colorado Tourism Office (<http://www.colorado.com>) has launched a "Share the Love" initiative (<http://www.colorado.com/share-the-love>) to welcome back visitors. Get more involved with "Share the Love" by following Visit Colorado on Facebook and (at)Colorado on Twitter; for more ways to help those affected by the wildfires in Colorado, visit <http://www.helpcoloradonow.org>.



# Finally...Recovery

Satellite TV Tour with Orbitz, live from Colorado Springs.

- **286** interviews on **163** stations in **108** markets across the country, including New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Atlanta and others.
- **Total audience reached: 4,769,769**



# Generate Ongoing Positive News

Media Coverage appeared in August/September, or to appear October – December:

**The New York Times**

**TRAVEL+  
LEISURE**

**AMERICAN WAY**  
AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

**HOUSTON  
CHRONICLE**

**Chicago Tribune**

**AFAR**  
where travel can take you

**THE COSTCO  
CONNECTION**

**The Washington Post**

**Condé Nast  
Traveler**



**San Antonio Express-News**

**smarter TRAVEL**

**Austin American-Statesman**



# Q & A

