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ROOS KNOWS

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LA PLATA COUNTY

Officials adopt wildfire rules

Some worry code will increase local construction costs

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

After several years and countless hours of work, La Plata County commissioners adopted a state-mandated wildfire resiliency code last week.

The 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code – intended to promote wildfire resilience by setting standards for hardening structures and creating defensible space – stems from legislation passed in 2023. The law required local governments to adopt a compliant code by April 1.

The bill has been criticized by local officials as an unfunded mandate on already strained governments. Last April, county officials warned enforcement could add pressure to already stretched departments and budgets and increase building costs.

However, almost a year later, county officials have tempered some of those criticisms and say the code may help local homeowners reduce the cost of home insurance or obtain coverage.

Additionally, county officials said months of collaboration with community stakeholders on the wildfire code board has led to a code tailored to the county's limited resources while meeting state requirements – mitigating some of the initial concerns.

Main elements of the code

The new regulations are codified as Chapter 19 of the county code and apply to properties in wildfire hazard areas identified on the state's wildfire resiliency map, which classifies risk based on projected fire intensity.

The map designates areas by hazard level, determining how strict code requirements are.

► Class 1 standards apply to lower-risk areas and are less stringent.

► Class 2 standards apply to medium- or high-risk areas and are more stringent.

Much of La Plata County is classified as medium- or high-risk, which means both Class 1

See **CODE, 8A**

Lightning, mild winter didn't hold up Chapman Hill this winter



SHANE BENJAMIN/Durango Herald file

Tim Kuss grooms snow and checks the snow guns in December 2025 at Chapman Hill Ski Area in Durango. The snow guns in operation on Dec. 30 pumped 200 gallons of water per minute, adding up to about 120,000 gallons overnight.

UNSTOPPABLE SEASON

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Chapman Hill Ski Area had a great season despite complications caused by Mother Nature, including bleak snowfall and a lightning strike that required repairs ahead of the season's start, said Matt Nimetz, recreation facility operations supervisor.

Nimetz said from an operations standpoint, last season which ended on March 12 was one of the best seasons Chapman's had in years. It logged about 5,700 skier visits during its 77-day season.

The ski hill used 2.7 million gallons of water for snowmaking – about 700,000 more than it typically uses in a season, as a result of mild temperatures and having more surface area to cover since the ski hill's redesign with the introduction of new tow lifts and expansion of the skiable slope in 2024.

Based on the city's commercial and industrial water rates of \$4.77 per 1,000 gallons, snowmaking would have cost about \$12,879 this season.

The Durango Herald requested a cost for snowmaking and

See **CHAPMAN, 8A**



SCOUT EDMONDSON/Durango Herald file

Joan Mattingly teaches 4-year-old Breck Franklin how to ski at Chapman Hill in December 2025. Matt Nimetz, recreation facility operations supervisor, said despite low snowfall this winter, Chapman had one of its best winter seasons in recent years.

Fort Lewis Mesa fire chief resigns after three months

Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Protection District Chief Chris Gibbons resigned just three months after being hired. His resignation will take effect today.



JESSICA BOWMAN/Durango Herald file

Chris Gibbons cites 'significant family matter' as the reason for departure from the position

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Just months after he was hired, Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Protection District Chief Chris Gibbons has resigned, citing a family matter. The resignation was announced late last week. Gibbons submitted his res-

ignation letter March 17, said Jeannine Glasby, the district's office administrator.

In the letter, Gibbons said that while the decision was difficult, he has "a significant family matter" that requires his full time and presence right now. He thanked the district and the broader Fort Lewis Mesa

community for welcoming and trusting him as chief.

"The experiences, relationships, and accomplishments we have shared will remain with me throughout my career," he said.

A public announcement appeared on the district's Facebook page several days after Gibbons formally resigned.

Leading up to his resignation,

See **CHIEF, 8A**

A&E Wednesday | **3B**
City, Region, State | **3A**
Food & Nutrition | **1B**

Obituaries | **2A**
Opinion | **4A**
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