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REAL ESTATE

Colorado Doesn't Need to Go Dark to Prevent Wildfires. Here's How

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Colorado is staring down another uneasy fire season. The 2026 snow drought left the state's high-country snowpack far below normal, stripping away the slow-melting moisture that typically keeps soils damp into early summer. Without that buffer, vegetation from the San Juans to the Front Range is drying weeks ahead of schedule, raising the stakes for utilities that must deliver reliable power through increasingly volatile terrain.

Colorado got its first taste of pre-emptive blackouts in 2025, when Xcel Energy shut off electricity to tens of thousands of customers during extreme wind events. Some communities remained without power for up to five days. For residents who rely on medical devices, refrigerated medications, or simply the ability to work from home, the outages were more than an inconvenience — they were a warning of what could become a recurring reality.

But Colorado doesn't have to follow California's path toward routine shut-offs. Energy researchers point to three practical, relatively fast solutions that can sharply reduce ignition risk without plunging the state into darkness.

1. Covered Conductors: Insulation for High-Risk Terrain

Much of Colorado's rural grid relies on bare aluminum wires stretched across wooden poles — a system designed decades before climate-driven megafires became common. When a branch or animal contacts exposed wires, sparks can fly.

Utilities in high-fire states are now replacing those lines with covered conductors, heavy polymer-insulated wires that dramatically reduce the chance of arcing. Southern California Edison has already installed 700 circuit miles of insulated "tree wire" and plans to upgrade more than 1,400 miles by 2028.

For Colorado, where transmission lines cross beetle-kill forests, steep canyons, and wind-scoured ridges, covered conductors offer a middle-ground solution: far cheaper than burying lines, yet highly effective at preventing sparks during windstorms.

2. Fast-Trip Breakers and Smarter Routing

Colorado's utilities can also reduce fire risk by changing how electricity behaves inside the grid. Historically, when a tree branch touched a line, the system tried to force power through the fault, often generating repeated sparks.

Fast-trip settings flip that logic. These ultra-sensitive breakers shut off power to a specific span of line within microseconds of detecting a disturbance. Instead of cutting electricity to an entire county, operators can isolate a single high-risk segment.

Another emerging tool — topology optimization — acts like Google Maps for the grid. When fire conditions spike in one corridor, software reroutes electricity through safer lines, reducing heat and stress on vulnerable infrastructure.

3. AI Cameras and Realtime Sensors

Colorado is already a leader in wildfire camera networks. Xcel Energy has deployed 81 AI-powered panoramic cameras that scan the landscape every 10 seconds, giving operators real-time visibility into wind gusts, smoke plumes, and line conditions.

Paired with dynamic line-rating sensors — devices that measure wire temperature, sag, and wind speed — utilities can pinpoint risk down to a single canyon. Instead of shutting off power to the entire foothills, operators can isolate a single dangerous span above a ridge or drainage.

A Smarter, Colorado-Ready Grid

The future of wildfire mitigation in Colorado lies in risk-aware dispatching — a dynamic approach that routes electricity based on real-time weather, terrain, and grid conditions. Insulated wires, targeted undergrounding, fast-trip breakers, AI cameras, and sensor- driven routing can work together to keep communities safe *and* powered.

Preemptive blackouts may remain a last- resort tool, but they don't need to become Colorado's new normal. With the right investments, utilities can prevent catastrophic fires without leaving the metro area, the Front Range cities and foothills or the Western Slope to deal with unexpected blackouts.

Adapted from an article by Jasmine Garland, a PhD Candidate at the University of Colorado Boulder, published July 7, 2026, in The Conversation. (Linked on my Substack)

Free Moving Boxes for Our Clients

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that our box shed was running low on gently used moving boxes, and readers responded magnificently (as always). and below is what our shed looks like now. We even created a new stack for "dish packs," those large double-walled boxes. We have enough boxes of all sizes now, including wardrobe boxes, plus packing paper, bubble wrap and tape. to satisfy our buyers and sellers, so don't plan on buying these supplies if you use our brokerage to buy or sell a home, even if you're moving out of state or into a rental.

Key Takeaways From the Big New Housing Bill

The 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, now law after President Trump allowed it to take effect without his signature, marks the most sweeping federal housing reform in a generation. For Colorado — where home prices have climbed faster than incomes for more than a decade — the bill lands at a moment when affordability has become the defining issue for buyers, sellers, and policymakers alike. The broad contours of the legislation are clear: Washington has finally decided to treat housing supply as a national priority.

In case you're wondering, **ROAD** is an acronym, and it stands for Renewing Opportunity in the American Dream. Despite its scale, experts note its impact may be modest without further reforms, given the depth of the affordability problem.

At its core, the bill is an attempt to reverse a structural shortage that has pushed the median U.S. existing-home price to $440,600, a 49.2% jump since 2020. Colorado has felt that pressure acutely. Metro Denver's inventory remains historically thin, and builders continue to struggle with labor shortages, high materials costs, and local land-use rules that slow down approvals. The new law tries to tackle those bottlenecks by modernizing federal programs, expanding financing options, and nudging local governments toward zoning reforms that allow more homes to be built more quickly.

One of the most talked-about provisions is the bill's effort to curb institutional investors' dominance in the single-family market. Large firms have purchased thousands of homes across the country, often outbidding first-time buyers. The bill limits certain types of investor acquisitions, a move supporters say will help level the playing field. Critics counter that the restrictions may be too narrow to meaningfully shift market dynamics, but the bipartisan margins — 358–32 in the House and 85–5 in the Senate — reflect broad agreement that investor activity has become a problem worth addressing.

The legislation also expands several affordable-housing tools, including a 100,000-unit increase to the Rental Assistance Demonstration program. It boosts support for shared-equity models, which keep homes affordable over multiple generations, and it opens new pathways for lower-income and first-time buyers to qualify for financing. These changes won't transform the market overnight, but they represent a notable shift in federal posture: affordability is no longer a niche concern, it's a national economic priority.

For Colorado homeowners, the bill's impact will unfold gradually. Increased supply could ease price pressures over time, though the state's persistent in-migration and limited developable land will continue to shape the market. Buyers may find new financing avenues opening, especially those shut out by rising rates and tight underwriting. And local governments, including those along the Front Range, will face fresh incentives to revisit zoning rules that limit density.

The ROAD Act is not a silver bullet. No single bill could unwind decades of underbuilding, nor can federal policy fully counteract the economic forces driving demand in places like Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins. But it is a meaningful step, and one that signals a rare moment of bipartisan consensus: the housing crisis is real, it is national, and it demands action. For Coloradans navigating one of the country's most competitive markets, even incremental relief would be welcome.

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