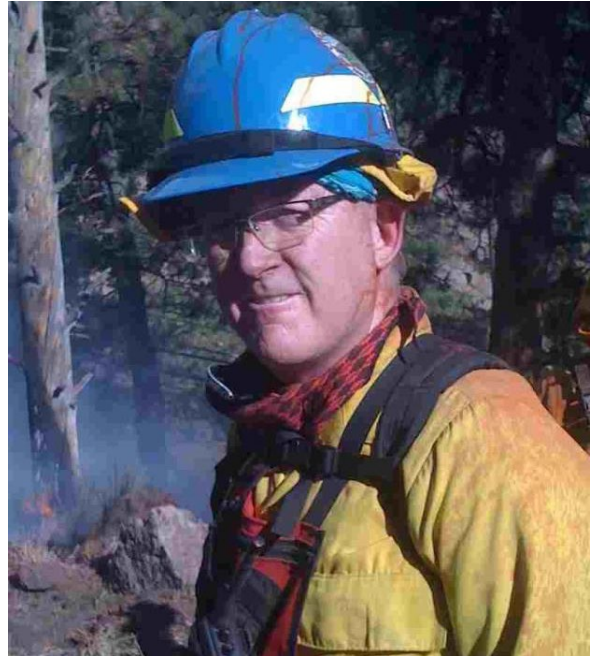


## Matt Jones

Boulder County Commissioner, Colorado  
First elected 2018



*Just before the new year, the Marshall Fire burned at least 1,086 homes in Louisville, Superior and unincorporated Boulder County, Colorado. Commissioner Jones was evacuated with his family from their Louisville home.*

*Prior to serving as a Boulder County commissioner, Jones served in the Colorado State House from 1987-1993, returned to the House in 2011 and then served in the State Senate from 2013-2019. He also worked as an open space planner and wildland firefighter.*

**NO MATTER HOW PREPARED AND EQUIPPED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE, EMERGENCY SITUATIONS LIKE THE MARSHALL FIRE STILL THROW CURVEBALLS AND BRING THE UNEXPECTED. ANY WISDOM TO SHARE OR LESSONS LEARNED THAT OTHER LOCAL LEADERS COULD BENEFIT FROM WITH REGARD TO EMERGENCY RESPONSE?**

Learn and be proactive – following the 2010 Fourmile Fire, 2013 Northern Colorado Flood and 2016 Cold Springs Fire, the county used what it had learned and set up a structure for the next disaster (it will come; just a matter of time). It proved effective in the initial days of the pandemic, the 2020 Calwood Fire and now the 2021 Marshall Fire.

Have great staff – With term limits, elected officials come and go. Long term staff is really who understands how to act. I am amazed at the Boulder County staff's speed and competence during the disaster and tenacity and caring during recovery.

Work together – Before the disaster, work with the sheriff and emergency response at the local, state and federal level on a general who-does-what plan. In recovery, work with other local governments, the state and federal agencies such as FEMA.

Know it will be bumpy – There always will be differences with each disaster and how to respond. Knowing it will be bumpy provides perspective and patience. These events cause trauma to members of the community. Publicly acknowledge that trauma, feel it and provide as many mental health resources as possible.

## INCIDENTS LIKE THIS CONFRONT COMMUNITIES WITH THE FACT THAT WILDFIRE SEASONS ARE LENGTHENING, CLIMATE CHANGE PLAYS A ROLE AND EVEN URBAN AREAS AREN'T IMMUNE TO ITS DESTRUCTION. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN AT THE LOCAL AND/OR STATE LEVEL TO PREVENT OR MITIGATE RISK?

Wildfire has been year-round for years. With climate change, fires are rapidly growing more destructive in terms of structures and acres burned. In 2010, Boulder County's Fourmile Fire burned the then-record 169 homes. That record has been surpassed by six other fires with the Marshall fire burning at least 1,084 homes in the latest count.

Requiring statewide building code minimums with a Wildland Urban Interface component is the cheapest and most effective way to approach the problem. In Colorado, it is way overdue and needed.

Much, much larger investments in forest health wildfire mitigation are also needed. Colorado state funding needs to be increased at least fivefold just to address the highest risk areas identified by the State Forest Service. This is the cheapest and most effective way to address the wildfire problem in forested areas, and it provides more protection for firefighters and communities and prevents ecosystem, water system and recreation setting damage.

We also need systemic climate action at the federal and state levels. The Marshall Fire was in large part caused by climate-primed grasslands after a wet spring and record dry last half of the year. Add an ignition source, 70-mile-an-hour wind with gusts up to 105, and the dried-out grasses, shrubs and trees all created embers that ignited houses that cast even more embers downwind. Alarm bells are ringing, and many legislators and regulators are acting like it is business as usual or just a little different. The cost to coal and oil and gas industries is often cited by regulators for modest action. But regular citizens like those in Louisville, Superior, unincorporated Boulder County and many other locations impacted by more severe natural disasters are paying the price. Regular people's health, safety and welfare are much more important than corporations' next profit statement.

## COMMUNITIES LOOK TO THEIR LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOR SUPPORT AND HOPE DURING CRISES. AS A LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL, HOW HAVE YOU APPROACHED THIS?

With trauma, feelings are raw. I was evacuated from Louisville and know the anxiety of not knowing if you still have a home, and I can only imagine how much worse it is to lose your home and everything in it. I think connecting with survivors by vocalizing that heartfelt sorrow is a start. Then have your government do whatever they can working with other governments and nonprofits. And finally, convey hope. While different, as a double cancer survivor, I know how critical hope is. That persistence, staying connected to others and keeping hope are all important to recovery.

