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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For headshots of Rachel Ward Oppermann, click [here](#).

### **Badass Women in Travel: Where Firefighting Meets Tourism In Estes Park**

**ESTES PARK, Colo. (July 30, 2021)** – In Fall 2020, Colorado saw the two largest wildfires in state history: The Cameron Peak Fire and The East Troublesome Fire, both of which threatened [Estes Park](#) and the neighboring Rocky Mountain National Park. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic was at its height. For Estes Park, a spot that thrives on year-round tourism, it was a perfect storm of crises.

However, the destination had an ace up its sleeve: Rachel Ward Oppermann, who serves as both Marketing & Communications Manager at Visit Estes Park and a volunteer firefighter with the Allenspark Fire Protection District, which has a mutual aid relationship with the Estes Valley Fire Protection District (EVFPD). Last year, she served double duty on the front lines of the fire protection effort and in the virtual world to help inspire future travel to Estes. In other words, she's the definition of a badass woman in travel.

“When the East Troublesome fire jumped the divide and threatened Estes Park we were sent out at 1 a.m. to help,” Oppermann says. “We sent crews to work on the fireline in the national park and help EVFPD with structure protection in town. We also had crews patrolling the end of our district that meets EVFPD’s district. There was a real threat of fire jumping into Estes Park from there and if it had, it would have threatened Allenspark, which is 15 miles south of Estes.”

From Oppermann’s unique vantage point last year, she was able to adapt Estes Park’s communications strategy during a challenging time. “At Visit Estes Park we adjusted to a more informational communications approach, and worked to stoke wanderlust and in turn, visitation, once it was safe to travel again,” she says. “Estes Park was founded on tourism, and it remains the most important industry today. If fire impacts or destroys Estes Park, then we can’t welcome visitors. And if we can’t welcome visitors then the community cannot support itself. When I responded to the mutual aid call for the East Troublesome fire, I wasn’t just helping to defend the town, but helping to defend our ability to support ourselves.”

Oppermann signed up as a volunteer in 2018 after an up-close-and-personal experience with a dangerous blaze. One night, a cabin downhill from her home caught fire. She and her husband watched as the fire department worked until dawn to put it out.

“For a while we were concerned the fire would spread into nearby trees, which would have put our house at risk,” Oppermann remembers. “I was impressed by the firefighter’s operations, feeling vulnerable and worrying about my own house. I knew that the department needed volunteers— and at some point, I thought, ‘If I don’t join, who will?’”

Today, she thinks of the department — which is 20 percent women — as family. “We’d do anything for each other,” Oppermann says. “I wasn’t expecting to find a community, a second family, when I joined.”

As another Colorado fire season begins in 2021, Oppermann is working to spread fire-prevention awareness to Estes Park visitors. “First and foremost: what you do matters,” she says. “The ‘it won’t happen to me’ mentality is flawed thinking. A well-intentioned campfire during fire restrictions or a fire ban could have immediate and devastating consequences not just for you, but for the community you’re vacationing in. And, frankly, for the firefighters who come to put the fire out.”

*For more information, activity ideas and photos, visit [www.visitestepark.com](http://www.visitestepark.com).*

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