Best Management Practices for Creating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Cover photos:

Upper left: "Sometimes others are motivated to become involved when a neighbor takes visible action." Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Upper right: "Smaller scale plans inspire landowners to remove hazards in undeveloped areas on their land." Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

Lower left: "Multiple frames bring more people to the CWPP process. A frame centered on safe evacuation motivated residents of the community to clear along roadways." Photo credit: D. Williams, U.S. Forest Service

Lower right: "A Firewise plan is useful for implementing on-the-ground projects identified in larger scale county CWPPs." Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

Best Management Practices for Creating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan

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Abstract

A community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) is a means of bringing local solutions to wildland fire management. In developing and implementing CWPPs, communities assume a leadership role in reducing wildfire risk on federal and nonfederal land. Although many communities have created CWPPs, foresters estimate that less than 10 percent of the communities at risk from wildfire have CWPPs in place. These communities can learn a great deal from the experiences of those who have developed CWPPs before them. In this publication, we identify best management practices for CWPP development and implementation based on the experiences of 13 communities in 8 states. These communities represent much of the social and ecological diversity found across the U.S. in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)—where human development meets forested areas.

Introduction

Empowerment. That is the goal of this booklet, to help you, your neighbors, and emergency management professionals work together to protect your important things from wildfire—before a wildfire happens.

What tool can you use to make that happen? A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). A CWPP is a plan that communities create, in collaboration with emergency management and land management agencies, allowing them to be proactive in managing their wildfire risk.

Although this booklet is about developing a CWPP, it is not a step-by-step, how-to guide to creating one. (Such references are already available; see the Resources section, page 25). Instead, beginning with a quick guide, it is a collection of best management practices suggested by a variety of communities that have already implemented CWPPs.

What should you consider when deciding whether to begin a CWPP process? What are the most important community assets for creating a CWPP? What should you expect during the planning process and after? This booklet provides answers based on the experiences of a diverse set of communities located across the country. While some of the answers may validate your experience, others may offer you new insights.

The journey in managing wildfire risk and protecting your home and community is ongoing. Let your first steps begin here.

Two Minute Guide to CWPP Best Management Practices

Context

Pay attention to the local community context because what precedes the CWPP can help or hinder the process.

- Remind community members of how they handled past challenges, such as a wildfire or environmental disaster; this will help the community understand how it is vulnerable and create a sense of urgency for developing a CWPP.
- Study previous collaborative efforts in the community, whether wildfire planning or other projects, to identify how they were successful and use lessons from those experiences to lay the groundwork for doing a CWPP.
- Identify people who were involved in earlier collaborative or wildfire planning efforts and bring their experience to developing a CWPP.
- If your community has little or no experience with collaboration or wildfire planning, find ways to overcome this inexperience.
- If previous disagreements within a community, related to wildlife or not, threaten the CWPP process, address them early to prevent them from becoming barriers.

Community Capacity

Identify the community's capacities, or resources, and employ them in developing a CWPP. Find ways to further develop community capacity during the CWPP process.

- Identify leaders, from within the community or drawn from outside it, who can mobilize others and serve as catalysts for action, and recruit them for your CWPP process.
- Tap into resources that help CWPP participants successfully work together because an effectively functioning collaborative group can overcome obstacles such as shortages in financial and physical resources.
- Build community capacity and use these new resources to achieve outcomes beyond wildfire preparedness.

Networks

Use existing social networks and build new ones to facilitate the CWPP process.

- Involve people in the CWPP process who have access to multiple social networks and can serve as intermediaries between the networks.
- Build or expand social networks during the CWPP process to bring more resources (people, technology, and funding) to the process and increase support for CWPP implementation and other community activities.
- Be aware that social networks and their members have goals for wildfire or resource management that could potentially conflict with goals identified in the CWPP and keep your eyes on what you want to achieve.

Framing

Consider how the CWPP frame will impact the planning process and outcomes.

- Continually evaluate how the CWPP frame is impacting the process and be open to changing how the CWPP frames wildfire issues.
- Consider multiple frames to bring more people to the process and broaden potential resources, projects, and outcomes.
- Engage community residents by selecting a CWPP frame of protecting lives and property; engage larger forest land owners and public land managers by selecting a CWPP frame of ecosystem restoration or other landscape level issue.
- Ensure that the CWPP frame reflects local values to increase CWPP relevance.

Scale

Select a scale at which you can make something happen.

- Develop a smaller scale CWPP, at the neighborhood or community level, if your goal is to motivate homeowners to reduce hazards on their properties.
- Develop a larger scale plan, such as at the county level, if your goal is to reduce wildfire risk across the landscape.
- Consider how framing and scale are linked and make sure they are compatible.

Long-term Success

Help ensure long-term success by quickly showing progress on CWPP goals, linking the CWPP to other plans and frameworks, and allowing the CWPP to evolve as conditions change.

- Incorporate projects into the CWPP that can be accomplished quickly to foster homeowner buy-in and broaden support for the longer term effort.
- Nest local CWPPs within broader plans or link them with other types of plans to augment resources, broaden support, and enhance implementation.
- Where possible, incorporate the CWPP into a formal government structure.
- Quickly identify changes affecting the CWPP and adapt the plan to new conditions as they arise.

Best Management Practices and Community Stories

Context

Pay attention to the local community context because what precedes the CWPP can help or hinder the process.

Community history provides a context for the CWPP and shapes the CWPP process. Positive past experiences can help create a strong foundation for the CWPP. Identifying negative past experiences, and lessons learned from them, prevents those experiences from becoming barriers to developing and implementing a CWPP.
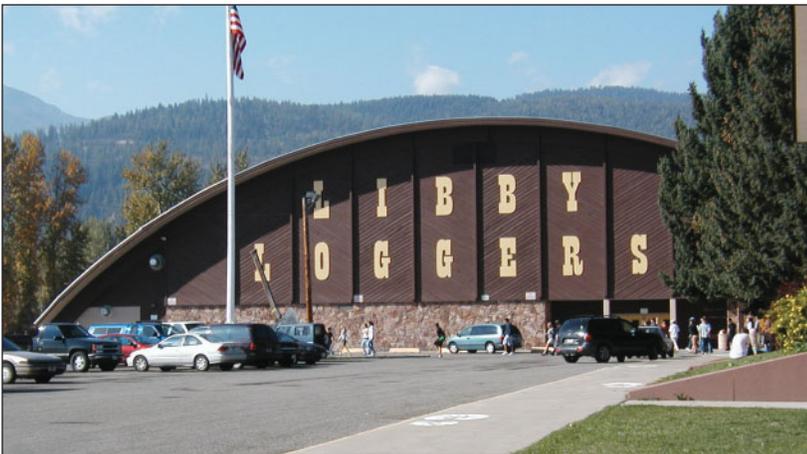

The Libby, Montana, high school teams are named the Libby Loggers, reflecting a local culture and context that emphasizes the importance of forest industries to the community.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

- **Remind community members of how they handled past challenges, such as a wildfire or environmental disaster; this will help the community understand how it is vulnerable and create a sense of urgency for developing a CWPP.**

  Even though an adverse event happened in the past or in another place, it can open a window of opportunity for inspiring change in a community. It is important to act quickly before the window closes and the urgency of the desired action diminishes.

- **Study previous collaborative efforts in the community, whether wildfire planning or other projects, to identify how they were successful and use lessons from those experiences to lay the groundwork for doing a CWPP.**

  The Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program provides a series of steps that people living in an area at risk from wildfire can follow to keep their homes and neighborhoods safer from fire. Fire Safe Councils began in California as a way to support individuals and communities in eliminating the impacts of catastrophic wildfires. Achieving Firewise designation and establishing a Fire Safe Council are examples of collaborative projects that can feed into a CWPP. Having one of these organizations means that a community has a group of landowners who are already aware of wildfire risk and are committed to protecting their properties. These individuals may have recently participated in wildfire education programs or advocated for Firewise inspired local ordinances.

Examples of other collaborative efforts that may have taken place in a community include projects to improve rangeland or watershed health, clean up environmental contamination, or develop a community center. Any activity that brings the community together to take civic action to improve local conditions can enhance the CWPP process.

Likewise, homeowners associations and other neighborhood groups that are already organized for taking local collective action can support creation of a CWPP.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Previous collaborative projects in a community, such as the community coming together to dispose of flammable vegetation, can lay the groundwork for doing a CWPP.

• **Identify people who were involved in earlier collaborative or wildfire planning efforts and bring their experience to developing a CWPP.**

Participants in projects such as those described above provide a pool of candidates for the CWPP team who have experience working collaboratively and can convey its benefits to new team members.

• **If your community has little or no experience with collaboration or wildfire planning, find ways to overcome this inexperience.**

Just because a community has not engaged in an earlier collaborative process does not mean it cannot successfully create a CWPP. However, a community may need to draw on the expertise of a public agency, nongovernmental organization, or consultant to lead it through the necessary collaborative process. It may also invest in training or other resources to increase its level of collaboration readiness.

To foster collaboration, the CWPP committee may need to meet more often at first, focus on information sharing and learning, and take field trips to build a shared understanding of the situation and a sense of being part of a team.

• **If previous disagreements within a community, related to wildfire or not, threaten the CWPP process, address them early to prevent them from becoming barriers.**

Being aware of earlier conflicts can help participants address different interests and keep the CWPP process moving forward. By openly discussing what occurred during these disagreements and by brainstorming lessons to be learned, those involved in the CWPP gain skills that improve and strengthen the CWPP process. Professional facilitation can be especially useful in these circumstances.

Taylor: A Town with a History of Collaboration

Taylor, Florida, is a small, relatively isolated community surrounded by federal, state, and private industrial forest lands. In the 10 years preceding creation of the town's CWPP, the area around Taylor had three major wildfires. As a result, public and private landowners in the Taylor area were well accustomed to working together on fire suppression. By way of the local Taylor Church, community members also had a history of working together; more than half of the town's residents belong to the church.

Communities in which citizens are engaged in local issues are primed for developing a CWPP.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Setting the Stage for a CWPP. Although none of the previous fires burned into the town of Taylor, the fact that there were so many, relatively nearby, and recent spurred a sense of urgency. And the collaborative skills already exhibited by public and private landowners, as well as members of the community, meant that the collaboration necessary for creating a CWPP was indeed possible.

The Florida Department of Forestry initiated the CWPP process and convened representatives from federal, state, county, and local government agencies, along with the industrial landowners – all of whom were already familiar with each other's concerns and needs because of their previous work together in fire suppression. In just four meetings, they drew up a CWPP.

Although none of the previous fires burned into the town of Taylor, the fact that there were so many, relatively nearby, and recent spurred a sense of urgency.

Connecting to the Community. When it came time to bring the plan to the community, the team turned to the pastor of Taylor Church, who served as a trusted link between the planners and the local community. The church hosted a meeting at which the team could present the CWPP.

The fire chief and members of the local fire department also became key conduits at this point. Their fire suppression experience meant they already had relationships with the agencies represented on the CWPP team. And their roots in the community gave them insider credibility.

One outcome of the CWPP is a fire break that completely encircles Taylor. That it crosses an array of public and private properties is a testament to the strong context from which the Taylor CWPP developed.

Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service

Wildfires near the town of Taylor, Florida, helped residents see that they are vulnerable and instilled a sense of urgency for developing a plan to protect their community.

Community Capacity

Identify the community's capacities, or resources, and employ them in developing a CWPP. Find ways to further develop community capacity during the CWPP process.

Just as ecosystems vary, communities vary in the resources they can draw on to develop a CWPP. Characteristics such as community norms and values, along with other qualities such as a community's economic diversity, growth trends, and land ownership patterns, affect its ability to launch a collaborative project like a CWPP. But when a community develops a CWPP, it gains not only an action plan, but also more capacity to get things done. The lasting outcome of a CWPP is not necessarily the plan itself but the capacity for action that it builds, the opportunities it creates, the knowledge it advances, and the connections among people and organizations it forges.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Sometimes others are motivated to become involved when a neighbor takes visible action.

- **Identify leaders, from within the community or drawn from outside it, who can mobilize others and serve as catalysts for action, and recruit them for your CWPP process.**

  Developing a CWPP relies on highly motivated individuals—mobilizers—who recruit others to participate, lend legitimacy to the CWPP, help secure funding, and shepherd the process. These leaders might include federal, state, or local government representatives, as well as local community residents and activists. A diverse core team of such sparkplugs can not only motivate others to help create the CWPP but also reach out across organizational, philosophical, and jurisdictional divides to solve problems.

- **Tap into resources that help CWPP participants successfully work together because an effectively functioning collaborative group can overcome obstacles such as shortages in financial and physical resources.**

  Communities that lack financial or physical resources can overcome these shortages by tapping into what they do have – inspired leaders, networks, norms, and values that support civic action and collective decisionmaking.

Communities with adequate financial and physical capacity may find that they do not have the resources they need to launch and sustain a CWPP process. Communities without mobilizing leaders and the ability to work together may find their CWPP stalled or lacking in community or agency support.

- **Build community capacity and use these new resources to achieve outcomes beyond wildfire preparedness.**

  Working on a CWPP helps communities develop a shared understanding of wildfire and wildfire management. They build their knowledge of local ecological issues, including the role of fire in the area's ecology, and identify specific, local wildfire preparedness challenges.

  The CWPP process also strengthens and builds relationships among residents and other stakeholders, including government agencies. That, in turn, builds the community's capacity for further planning and implementation, not only in wildfire management but in other areas as well.

  Creating a CWPP cultivates a community's ability to define common goals and a course of action to achieve those goals.

Grizzly Flats—Starting Small, Gaining Momentum

The remote subdivision of Grizzly Flats, in one of California's most fire prone areas, had no plan for protecting itself from wildfire or increasing preparedness, and little sense of community. That is, until the hamburger suppers began. A new resident of the development of nearly 700 people missed the camaraderie of his old neighborhood and resolved to connect with his new neighbors by hosting hamburger suppers.

At the same time, another recent transplant, upon learning from the Forest Service of the town's fire vulnerability, decided to do something about it. He became active in the county's Fire Safe Council and learned what communities can do to reduce their risk from wildfire.

These three mobilizers—the two residents and consultant—helped Grizzly Flats work with a variety of government partners to tackle immediate fire protection needs…

Hamburger Supper Learning. The two newcomers teamed up to use the hamburger suppers as a chance for residents to discuss and learn about wildfire risk and safety. Through their efforts, Grizzly Flats developed a local Fire Safe Council. When a federal grant became available for hiring a consultant to develop a CWPP, the council seized the opportunity, with help from the county and state.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Developing and implementing a CWPP relies on highly motivated individuals who serve as catalysts for action.

These three mobilizers—the two residents and consultant—helped Grizzly Flats work with a variety of government partners to tackle immediate fire protection needs, like improving the safety of the development's existing evacuation route and adding an alternative route. In the process, community members found they could work together toward common goals. So they set their sights higher—to a new community center that could also house a fire truck.

Expanded Impact. The Fire Safe Council secured more federal grants to support residents' efforts to reduce fire hazards, turning their homes into models of wildfire safety and inspiring neighbors to take similar steps. They also aligned their efforts with Forest Service work on nearby public land so the projects would complement and strengthen each other.

Creating a CWPP empowered residents to think big. It also linked Grizzly Flats with other local communities that could serve as models of fire preparedness and with government agencies that could provide critical resources.

Neighbors and the community were no longer isolated.

Networks

Use existing social networks and build new ones to facilitate the CWPP process.

Social networks, or the relationships and ties between individuals and organizations, are central to creating a CWPP. Whether strengthening community capacity, improving communication, developing resources, or coordinating wildfire protection activities, networks help communities achieve common goals by linking organizations and individuals who can support the CWPP. They promote trust among the diverse people and organizations that are important in carrying out CWPP projects.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Members of the community wildfire protection planning committee use their networks to build support for the plan and locate critical resources.

Networks can be formal or informal, local or broad based. Local networks, like homeowners associations, help bring legitimacy to the CWPP process. Broader networks across the region and state, like watershed councils and Fire Safe Councils, help bring in new ideas and resources.

- **Involve people in the CWPP process who have access to multiple social networks and can serve as intermediaries between the networks**.

  Fire department or government agency staff members, paid consultants, even outside organizations often are part of multiple and extended networks that are valuable in expanding the information, ideas, and resources

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

Fire crews are trusted and admired members of a community. Involving them in the CWPP process not only builds a level of comfort in residents but also takes advantage of the firefighters' many and extended networks.

of a CWPP. Because they belong to more than one network, they become intermediaries, helping the CWPP committee develop contacts with other communities, agencies, and jurisdictions. They play strong leadership and bridging roles, and many have the time and skills to organize the knowledge of CWPP participants and push action toward on-the-ground projects.

- **Build or expand social networks during the CWPP process to bring more resources (people, technology, and funding) to the process and increase support for CWPP implementation and other community activities.**

By drawing on multiple networks to develop the CWPP, team members build support for the plan that extends beyond the CWPP committee and agencies implementing the plan. This broad base of individuals and organizations linked to the CWPP helps communicate the plan's importance and build enthusiasm for it. These same networks provide resources and support that help make other community projects possible.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

Expanded social networks provide access to new resources and help implement a CWPP. In Libby, Montana, members of a local chapter of the Society of American Foresters donated their time to remove flammable vegetation in this community park, thereby reducing wildfire risk.

- **Be aware that social networks and their members have goals for wildfire or resource management that could potentially conflict with goals identified in the CWPP and keep your eyes on what you want to achieve.**

Each individual or group working on a CWPP has particular goals for the CWPP. Involving members of diverse social networks means participants could have conflicting goals. Some tightly organized networks might not want to collaborate on the CWPP, especially if they think wildfire preparedness conflicts with their primary goals or diverts resources from those goals. But key early activities, such as identifying the CWPP frame(s) and strategic goals, can build bridges between diverse networks that help overcome such reluctance. (For more on Framing, see page 15.)

It is not necessary to involve all social networks throughout the CWPP process—a network's relevance or level of participation may change as the process unfolds. For instance, a church network might be less involved in selecting wildfire protection projects but become more active as CWPP participants begin an outreach program for homeowners.

Networks Connect and Protect Josephine County

Sprawling Josephine County, in southwest Oregon, covers more than a million acres. Yet fewer than 100,000 people live there, mostly in unincorporated areas. The county does not have the typical governmental infrastructure that helps in creating a CWPP but has other tools instead. Among them are networks, which connected the CWPP team to diverse and far flung stakeholders, and brought in new resources.

Three critical existing networks formed the foundation for the CWPP's development: fire chiefs from throughout the county; the federal agencies that manage much of the land in the county; and the county agencies, including planning and emergency services. Although each of these networks had functioned independently and effectively in responding to wildfire, they would now need to join forces to be able to create a countywide plan.

Photo credit: N. Benson

Josephine County, Oregon, hired an outside consultant to help with its CWPP. She served as a valuable intermediary who brought expertise and drew on her regional and national networks.

A Valuable Intermediary. Enter an outside consultant, who had been hired by the county planner to facilitate the CWPP process. Her extensive regional and national contacts made her an invaluable intermediary, building bridges between existing networks in Josephine County—and beyond—to create powerful new linkages.

She was also able to expand the range of CWPP participants to include groups that have historically been underrepresented in fire planning—the elderly, people with disabilities, and other special needs individuals—which helped create new local networks.

Access to New Resources. The consultant's contacts also yielded valuable additional resources, such as grant writing skills and access to new funding. One of the grants she helped secure supported a fuels risk assessment that included maps of areas with particularly fire prone vegetation. The CWPP risk assessment committee that carried out the project then created even

[The consultant's] extensive regional and national contacts made her an invaluable intermediary, building bridges between existing networks in Josephine County—and beyond—to create powerful new linkages.

more connections and networks, reaching out to new contacts at county, state, and federal agencies, as well as fire officials.

Not all of the networks brought to the CWPP process were necessarily amicable at first. The county had a history of conflict between environmental organizations and land management agencies. But, by inviting an environmental education organization into the planning process, along with emergency managers who were already known and respected in the community, the CWPP team worked to ameliorate tensions.

In Josephine County, new and existing networks, plus a well-connected intermediary, overcame distance and obstacles to protect it from wildfire.

Framing

Consider how the CWPP frame will impact the planning process and outcomes.

Those involved with developing a CWPP look at and frame the issue of wildfire management in ways that reflect their values and concerns about wildfire. CWPPs have been framed in a variety of ways, including a fuels management concern, life safety concern, and ecosystem restoration concern. When developing a CWPP, it is critical to be aware of which frame or frames are at work and what that means for who is likely to participate in the CWPP process and what projects will become priorities. For example, someone that frames wildfire management as a life safety concern will be more interested in a CWPP that frames wildfire management in terms of evacuation and response times than one that frames wildfire management in terms of fuels management at a landscape scale.

One challenge to recruiting community residents to participate in a CWPP is persuading them that involvement is in their self interest. Take the time to consider the CWPP's frame, selecting one or more frames that help engage residents by (1) recognizing that people see or define issues differently and (2) presenting the CWPP in the ways that are compelling.

- **Continually evaluate how the CWPP frame is impacting the process and be open to changing how the CWPP frames wildfire issues.**

  The initial frame for developing a CWPP need not be the only or final one. During the planning process, participants will learn more about fire ecology, fire behavior, and ways to adapt and live with fire. They will also hear from neighbors and colleagues about how those individuals view the "fire problem." New frames might emerge that reflect more diverse views of wildfire management and broader understanding of what it means for a community to live with wildfire.

Photo credit: D. Williams, U.S. Forest Service

Multiple frames bring more people to the CWPP process. A frame centered on safe evacuation motivated residents of this community to clear along roadways.

- **Consider multiple frames to bring more people to the process and broaden potential resources, projects, and outcomes**.

  CWPP organizers often need to develop different messages and frames to target different segments of the community. Framing wildfire management in different ways brings a more diverse group of people and organizations to the CWPP process,

potentially increasing resources such as funding and available skills. It is important to evaluate who will connect with a given frame—to avoid inadvertently excluding participants—and how a frame might limit possible CWPP solutions and projects.

The most effective CWPP frames reflect values held in the community. Group activities can help identify and build shared values.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

- **Engage community residents by selecting a CWPP frame of protecting lives and property; engage larger forest land owners and public land managers by selecting a CWPP frame of ecosystem restoration or other landscape level issue.**

  One of the most basic human needs is safety. A frame that focuses on protecting lives and property will readily connect with most community residents. On the other hand, a frame that focuses on larger landscape issues, such as ecosystem restoration, will necessarily involve larger landowners and public land managers in projects that cross ownership boundaries. These frames, and others, can be complementary and result in CWPP projects that have impact across the landscape.

- **Ensure that the CWPP frame reflects local values to increase CWPP relevance.**

  Most community residents hold deep seated values that shape why they live where they do and how they view forests and local ecosystems. These values are rooted in family history and other experiences, and they help explain preferences for independence, privacy, lifestyle, land use, and aesthetics.

  Questionnaires, focus groups, or simple informal interviews of residents help identify community values. Community leaders, such as elected officials and representatives of homeowner associations and local nonprofits, can be particularly helpful.

  Taking time to identify the range of values held in the community, not just about wildfire but also about the broader landscape where people live, can be time well spent by ensuring that the CWPP is relevant to the community.

Windcliff's Evolving Frames and Growing Impact

Residents of Colorado's Windcliff subdivision, just southwest of the town of Estes Park in the East Portal community, have spectacular views of Rocky Mountain National Park. But they have also been particularly vulnerable to wildfire. In addition to being largely surrounded by flammable forested land, there is only one way into and out of Windcliff, presenting significant challenges for firefighting and evacuation in the event of a wildfire.

The County's Frame. That's why, when the surrounding county completed a countywide wildfire plan and began identifying communities at high wildfire risk, Windcliff was an obvious candidate. A county-level interagency working group approached the community to conduct wildfire protection planning.

The working group's framing of the issue, while focused on ensuring public safety and reducing wildfire risk, also centered on firefighter safety and expanding options for wildfire suppression. In fact, local firefighters had decided that many properties in Windcliff would not receive protection because of the danger posed to firefighting crews. Having only one access road to the community meant that, during a wildfire, firefighters would concentrate on evacuating people, because they could not safely send in crews and equipment to protect residents' homes.

The Residents' Frame. Although initially reluctant about wildfire protection planning that might require them to cut down trees and degrade their forested vistas, residents reconsidered after experiencing a significant wildfire. Their framing of the wildfire issue focused on protecting lives and property from wildfire.

That point of view expanded when they learned that thinning fire prone vegetation would not only reduce their wildfire risk but also create a more natural forest condition. Doing their part to foster the natural ecology of a landscape they valued was meaningful to residents. So their framing expanded to include promoting the area's natural ecology.

A frame of protecting lives and property can be a good starting point for engaging community residents. The owners of this home have cleared brush, used rocks and nonflammable plantings around the foundation of their house, and created a buffer between the woods and their house.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

The Growing Impact. As their framing of wildfire issues expanded and they became more engaged in developing an East Portal CWPP, Windcliff residents sought Firewise Community designation. The planning and projects they undertook to achieve this designation increased their competitiveness for grants, like one they received to conduct fire mitigation work.

> *[Residents'] point of view expanded when they learned that thinning fire prone vegetation would not only reduce their wildfire risk but also create a more natural forest condition.*

Next, the YMCA camp across the valley from Windcliff got involved in the East Portal CWPP process, meaning the entire valley would be better protected from wildfire.

The evolving frames of Windcliff residents cascaded even beyond participation in the East Portal CWPP to the creation of the Estes Valley Forest Issues Forum to cultivate broader forest stewardship dialog with the U.S. Forest Service.

Scale

Develop a scale at which you can make something happen.

"Scale" is the delineation of boundaries across the landscape that defines the area covered by the CWPP. Scale can be chosen for a strategic reason, such as improving coordination among firefighting agencies; aligning the CWPP with a jurisdiction, such as a county; or enhancing ecosystem health, where alignment with ecological features, such as a watershed, makes the most sense.

Photo credit: J. Szymoniak, U.S. Forest Service

A smaller scale CWPP encourages residents to take action.

Other times, the scale decision is made from the ground up, when neighbors band together to work at a level that makes sense to them, such as at the subdivision or development level. The appropriate scale for a CWPP is the one that enables participants to accomplish their goals.

- **Develop a smaller scale CWPP, at the neighborhood or community level, if your goal is to motivate homeowners to reduce hazards on their properties.**

    Community based plans reflect local values and resources. As a result, they are more likely to gain the support of community members. Working on a smaller scale may also produce quicker on-the-ground results.

    Examples of a smaller scale include a neighborhood, development, or the area served by a volunteer fire department district. Many small-scale CWPPs link with county- or landscape-level plans, linking their on-the-ground projects with more strategic plans. (See "Long-term Success" on page 22 for more on linking CWPPs.)

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

Smaller scale plans inspire landowners to remove hazards in undeveloped areas on their land.

- **Develop a larger scale plan, such as at the county level, if your goal is to reduce wildfire risk across the landscape.**

  Reducing wildfire risk across a broad area requires coordination by many partners. A larger scale plan makes that possible. Such plans can forge valuable new relationships and coordination among federal, state, and county fire management offices. Also, larger scale plans are often more strategic, prioritizing projects in terms of risk or coordinating the reduction of fire prone vegetation.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

A larger scale plan, such as at the county level, may be best if the goal is to reduce wildfire risk across the landscape.

Using a county scale helps CWPP participants use a variety of data already collected at the county level. It also makes it easier to link the CWPP to other planning efforts, such as land use plans or hazard mitigation plans that are done at the county level.

Although larger scale plans are effective in addressing problems on a landscape level, they may take longer to implement because of the greater number of partners and issues involved. They may need to be linked to smaller scale plans to convert their strategies to local action.

- **Consider how framing and scale are linked and make sure they are compatible.**

  How CWPP participants frame the wildfire management problem will influence the plan's scale. (For more on "Framing," see page 15.) If the problem is framed as ecosystem restoration, the frame will require a larger scale plan—perhaps at a watershed or county level. If it is framed as reducing hazards around homes, the frame will call for a smaller scale plan that focuses on individual homeowners within a neighborhood.

Wildfire Planning in All Shapes, Sizes in Lincoln County

When it comes to CWPPs, one size does not fit all, as evidenced by Lincoln County in northwestern Montana. County commissioners from throughout the state were developing CWPPs as part of hazard mitigation planning required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Lincoln County's CWPP would serve as the wildfire chapter in the Lincoln County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.

Larger Scale Strategic Planning. This larger scale CWPP is a strategic document that assesses the countywide landscape, identifies areas with high fire risk, and prioritizes them for treatment. While larger scale CWPPs can help allocate resources to the most vulnerable communities, they do not provide an on-the-ground course of action for those communities.

That's where smaller scale planning for wildfire protection comes in. A retired Forest Service district ranger and a state conservation forester, both of whom had been keys to developing the county CWPP,

> *When it comes to CWPPs, one size does not fit all …*

were champions of the plan and took the CWPP on the road—targeting communities identified as high priority in the plan. They customized their approach to each community's unique needs.

Customized Smaller Scale Efforts. In Em Kayan Village, a Lincoln County development that is surrounded by national forest land, the focus was on becoming a Firewise Community. The homeowners association was already concerned about wildfire, so when the county CWPP identified Em Kayan as high risk, the association was ready to take action. Becoming

a Firewise Community linked Em Kayan into a large network of other communities facing similar challenges, helping the development figure out its own action plan.

In other high risk communities, such as those without homeowners associations or other government organizations, the approach had to be different. In those cases, the CWPP champions dedicated themselves to going door-to-door to talk to residents about the wildfire risk and protective steps they could take. They obtained grants to launch some of the wildfire mitigation efforts on individual properties and inspire further action by residents.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

A Firewise plan is useful for implementing on-the-ground projects identified in larger scale county CWPPs.

Local, customized wildfire management efforts nested within the county CWPP, and the county CWPP nested within the FEMA plan: a way to help keep residents of Lincoln County and their property safe from wildfire.

Long-term Success

Help ensure long-term success by quickly showing progress on CWPP goals, linking the CWPP to other plans and frameworks, and allowing the CWPP to evolve as conditions change.

Implementing the action plan of a CWPP is a longer term, multiyear effort. So sustaining interest, participation, resources, and support must be a priority throughout the planning process.

The relatively stable group of participants from public fire and land management agencies can help maintain commitment to implementing the CWPP. Continued involvement by community members can help ensure that the document represents and addresses changing conditions.

Working together to remove flammable roadside vegetation is a doable project that the community can celebrate and build upon.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

- **Incorporate projects into the CWPP that can be accomplished quickly to foster homeowner buy-in and broaden support for the longer term effort.**

  The importance of planning is in achieving on-the-ground results. A CWPP should include projects that can be implemented quickly to demonstrate the importance of the CWPP to community well-being and to provide successes that the community can celebrate and build on.

- **Nest local CWPPs within broader plans or link them with other types of plans to augment resources, broaden support, and enhance implementation.**

  A CWPP at one scale can be linked to CWPPs at other scales to expand the plan's impact and relevance. CWPPs at the county level, which tend to be more strategic and less prescriptive, can have local value through projects that are identified in neighborhood CWPPs and implemented at the local level. Similarly, the importance of projects identified in neighborhood CWPPs can be magnified if they complement projects that other communities are undertaking—thereby contributing to broader strategic goals in a county level plan.

Working early in the development of a local CWPP to identify other plans that it can link to is important for nesting it into larger scale regional and statewide initiatives and coordinating groups.

- **Where possible, incorporate the CWPP into a formal government structure.**

  Some CWPPs have gained efficiencies and relevance by coordinating with other types of planning efforts, such as county disaster mitigation plans mandated by FEMA or Forest Service fire plans. In some communities, CWPPs have been adopted by a local government department, making the CWPP goals the department's goals and providing further support for longer term sustainability of the CWPP.

- **Quickly identify changes affecting the CWPP and adapt the plan to new conditions as they arise.**

  When changes happen—whether social, ecological, or otherwise—analyze how they will affect implementation of the CWPP. Then take steps to minimize the potential negative impacts and build on the potential positive impacts.

  A diverse, representative CWPP "core team" is critical for this, because members are well connected to many different organizations and social networks within and outside the community. Their different roles and contacts help identify and respond to critical changes.

Photo credit: V. Sturtevant, Southern Oregon University

One community decided that it could quickly create a firebreak to foster local awareness in the CWPP. When residents saw it, they became interested in reducing fuels on their properties.

Long-term Success—Assured at Auburn Lake Trails

Fire protection planning was no stranger to the residents of Auburn Lake Trails, California, when it came time to develop a CWPP. The hillside subdivision of roughly 2,800 residents, at high risk of wildfire because of flammable vegetation on adjacent public recreation land, had already earned Firewise Community designation. It was also a longtime participant in Volunteers in Prevention (VIP), a state program that focuses on landowner responsibility for reducing fire risk.

In the subdivision's VIP program, roughly 50 volunteers visit their neighbors door-to-door every year, assessing homes for wildfire risk and using Firewise principles to recommend steps for homeowners to protect themselves. They return later to make sure residents have actually taken those steps.

Linking Plans. The state had also hired contractors to write a plan for reducing fire prone vegetation, known as a fuels reduction plan, for Auburn Lake Trails. Then, when the CWPP concept came into being, the community slightly modified the fuels reduction plan, incorporated Firewise measures from its own VIP program, and created the Auburn Lake Trails CWPP. The development of the CWPP strengthened the community's relationship with its public neighbors, who began creating a firebreak downslope from Auburn Lake Trails.

Removing the brush was a relatively easy and an obvious way to demonstrate progress on CWPP priorities and gain support for future CWPP efforts among residents.

All the earlier fire protection work meant that the subdivision's CWPP had a strong foundation to build on. The Auburn Lake Trails Property Owners Board created a new Resource Management Department within its governing structure. The department adopted the CWPP as its work plan. And, to fund the new department's work, the board sought residents' approval for a fee increase. Wildfire protection is such a priority in the community that the increase was quickly approved.

The Auburn Lake Trails Property Owners Board created a new Resource Management Department to implement its CWPP.

Quick, visible projects. When the Resource Management Department began implementing the CWPP, it focused early on visible community projects, such as clearing roadside brush that had been identified in the plan as a fire and traffic safety hazard. Removing the brush was a relatively easy and obvious way to demonstrate progress on CWPP priorities and gain support for future CWPP efforts among residents.

Auburn Lake Trails has taken necessary steps to ensure longer term success of its CWPP; it linked the plan with familiar community initiatives and broader fire planning frameworks; it made the plan part of a formal government structure; and it identified projects in high visibility areas that it could quickly accomplish.

Photo credit: P. Jakes, U.S. Forest Service

Resources

A wealth of resources awaits you as you embark on a CWPP.

- Start with a useful guide and supplement for preparing and implementing CWPPs:

  Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan: A Handbook for Wildland-Urban Interface Communities, March 2004
  http://www.communitiescommittee.org/pdfs/cwpphandbook.pdf

  Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (supplement), August 2008
  http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/communities/documents/CWPP_Report_Aug2008.pdf

- The Partnership Resource Center of the National Forest Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service provides links to many resources, including guides developed by Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon. Begin your investigation at:
  http://www.partnershipresourcecenter.org/cwpp/

- Many states offer online advice. Search the Web for CWPP information for your state. If none is available, borrow from another state. See, for example:

  California: http://www.cafirealliance.org/cwpp/

  Colorado: http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/community-wf-protection-planning.html
  Oklahoma: http://www.forestry.ok.gov/community-wildfire-preparedness-planning
  Oregon: http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/FIRE/FirePlans.shtml

- The Web site of the U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry has links to many CWPP resources:
  http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fire/cwpp/

- Web sites with additional guidance include:
  The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition, which monitors the status of western CWPPs:
  http://www.wflccenter.org/news_pdf/168_pdf.pdf

  The National Association of State Foresters report on communities at risk:
  http://www.stateforesters.org/files/201106-NASF-CAR-Briefing-Paper.pdf

  And a site offering a CWPP evaluation guide:
  http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/eval_9-8-08_web.pdf

- Firewise Communities/USA and Fire Safe Councils were identified as examples of programs that can support and be integrated with CWPPs. For more information on these programs, see:

  Firewise Communities/USA
  http://www.firewise.org/Communities/USA-Recognition-Program.aspx
  Fire Safe Council
  http://www.firesafecouncil.org/

- More information on this research project including methodology (case selection, participant selection, and data collection and analysis) and detailed research findings are found at the following Web sites:

  Project Web site: http://jfsp.fortlewis.edu/

  Final report submitted to the Joint Fire Science Program:
  http://www.firescience.gov/projects/04-S-01/project/04-S-01_final_report.pdf

  Project publications:

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Acknowledgments

A community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) is a means of bringing local solutions to wildland fire management. In developing and implementing CWPPs, communities assume a leadership role in reducing wildfire risk on federal and nonfederal land. In this publication, we identify best management practices for CWPP development and implementation based on the experiences of 13 communities in 8 states. These communities represent much of the social and ecological diversity found across the U.S. in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)—where human development meets forested areas.

KEY WORDS: Wildland-Urban Interface, wildfire risk, Firewise communities,
                        risk reduction, wildfire planning, wildfire, community wildfire
                        protection plan

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