

BRIEFING PAPER

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

May 11, 2005

ISSUE: Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) represent the best opportunity we have to address the challenges of the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) in a way that brings about comprehensive and locally supported solutions. The long-term success of CWPPs will require dedicated and focused leadership along with meaningful collaboration by all partners. It is important that agency and organizational leaders understand and demonstrate commitment to the unique roles they play in producing and implementing effective CWPPs.

BACKGROUND: Community Wildfire Protection Plans are authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) passed by Congress on November 21, 2003, and signed into law by President Bush on December 3. The HFRA is the legislative component of President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. Title I of the HFRA authorizes the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to expedite the development and implementation of hazardous fuel reduction projects on federal lands managed by the USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, when they meet certain conditions. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is one of the identified priority areas that qualify for the use of these expedited environmental review authorities.

The HFRA also emphasizes the need for federal agencies to work collaboratively with communities in developing hazardous fuel reduction projects, and places priority on treatment areas identified by communities themselves in a CWPP. This provides communities with a tremendous opportunity to influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal land, as well as how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on nonfederal lands.

While the HFRA offers unique opportunities to communities with a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, such plans are not the only means of identifying community wildland fire risks and alternatives for mitigation.

KEY POINTS:

- Community Wildfire Protection Plans are generally developed by local government with assistance from state and federal agencies and other interested partners.
- Plans can take a variety of forms and may be as simple or complex as necessary, based on the specific needs and desires of the local community or county.
- While plans do not need to be overly complicated they should effectively address local forest and range conditions, values-at-risk, and priorities for action.
- The minimum requirements for a CWPP are:
 - **Collaboration.** A CWPP must be collaboratively developed. Local officials and state officials must meaningfully involve federal agencies that manage land in the vicinity of the community and other interested parties, particularly non-governmental stakeholders.

- **Prioritized Fuel Reduction.** A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments on both federal and non-federal land and recommend the types and methods of treatment that, if completed, would reduce the risk to the community.
- **Treatment of Structural Ignitability.** A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.
- The HFRA requires that three entities must mutually agree to the final contents of a CWPP:
 - The applicable local government (e.g. counties or cities);
 - The local fire department(s); and
 - The state agency responsible for forest management.
- Benefits to the community include:
 - The opportunity to establish a locally appropriate definition and boundary for the WUI.
 - The requirement for federal agencies, when planning fuel reduction projects, to give priority to projects that provide for the protection of at-risk-communities or watersheds, or that implement recommendations in a CWPP.
 - Expedited National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures for federal agencies implementing fuel reduction projects identified in a CWPP. (If a federal agency is planning a fuels reduction project to implement a recommendation in a CWPP that lies within the WUI and is located no further than 1 ½ miles from the community boundary, the federal agency does not need to analyze any other alternatives under NEPA.)
- The USDA Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must spend not less than 50% of the funds allocated for hazardous fuel reduction projects in the WUI, as defined by a community in a CWPP.
- When allocating federal funds for fuel reduction projects on nonfederal lands, federal and state agencies should, to the maximum extent practicable, give priority to communities that have adopted Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
- CWPPs provide a context for prioritizing fuels treatments projects in the cross-boundary, landscape-scale manner envisioned in the *National Fire Plan* and *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy*.

ROLES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

State Foresters:

- The HFRA gives State Foresters a unique and critical role by designating them as one of the three entities, along with local government and the local fire authority, which must agree on the final contents of a CWPP.
- Provide statewide leadership in encouraging local, state, federal, and non-governmental stakeholders to develop CWPPs and facilitate the participation of state personnel in the development process.

- Through established relationships with city and county officials, local fire chiefs, state and national fire organizations, federal land management agencies, private homeowners, and community groups:
 - Assist in bringing together diverse community partners.
 - Initiate the planning dialogue, if necessary.
 - Facilitate the implementation of priority actions across ownership boundaries.
- Bring specialized natural resource knowledge and technical expertise into the planning process.
- Provide statewide leadership in developing and maintaining a list, or map, of communities at risk within the state and work with partners to establish priorities for action.
- When allocating federal grant funds (such as the mitigation portion of State Fire Assistance) for projects on nonfederal lands, to the maximum extent possible give priority to communities that have adopted a CWPP.

USDA FS Regional Foresters, BLM State Directors, and Regional Directors of the US Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service:

- Provide federal leadership in encouraging communities to develop CWPPs.
- Convey the importance of CWPPs to federal line officers and encourage their active participation in their development and implementation.
- In planning fuel reduction projects on federal land:
 - Ensure full collaboration with local communities, state agencies, and all interested parties; and
 - Give priority to projects that provide for the protection of at-risk-communities or watersheds, or that implement recommendations in a CWPP.
- Bring specialized natural resource knowledge and technical expertise into the planning process, particularly in the areas of GIS and mapping, vegetation management, assessment of values and risks and funding strategies.
- Assist the community in identifying and prioritizing areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments on federal lands, and in determining the types and methods of treatment that, if completed, would reduce the risk to the community.
- Provide funding priority to projects and activities identified in a CWPP.
- Promote economic opportunities in rural communities where possible.

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Regional Foresters:

- Encourage Tribes to develop and implement, as appropriate, CWPPs (often referred to as wildland fire prevention plans) for landscapes at high-risk to wildland fire.
- Collaborate with Tribes to plan and implement WUI and/or HFRA treatments that meet tribal goals.
- Facilitate coordination with local communities and state and other federal agencies with land adjacent to reservation / tribal boundaries.

- Communicate the unique role of tribal governments to partners involved in developing CWPPs and assist with appropriate incorporation of tribal participants and interests in the resulting documents.

County and City Government Officials:

- The HFRA gives local government officials a unique and critical role by designating them as one of the three entities, along with state land management agencies and the local fire authority, which must agree on the final contents of a CWPP.
- Convene the core decision-making team that will be responsible for either developing the plan, or guiding its development.
- Engage local community leaders and stakeholders in the planning process.
- Along with local fire chiefs, provide local leadership in assessing community fire protection needs and determining the complexity of planning necessary.
- Enlist state and federal agency assistance and support for the planning effort.
- Ensure that the CWPP is collaboratively developed. Local officials must meaningfully involve state government representatives, federal agencies that manage land in the vicinity of the community, and other interested parties.
- In conjunction with local fire chiefs, clearly communicate to home and business owners their responsibility to reduce the ignitability of their homes and other structures, and to create defensible space around them.

Local Fire Chiefs:

The HFRA gives local fire chiefs a unique and critical role by designating them as one of the three entities, along with local government and the state forestry agencies, which must agree on the final contents of a CWPP.

- As trusted community members and leaders, take the lead in encouraging diverse local understanding of and support for the development of a CWPP, in organizing the planning process, and in ensuring meaningful participation from other community leaders and diverse stakeholders.
- Use local fire protection expertise to lead the assessment of community fire protection needs and to determine the necessary complexity of fire preparedness and response planning.
- In conjunction with local government officials, clearly communicate to home and business owners their responsibility to reduce the ignitability of their homes and other structures, and to create defensible space around them.
- Consider using The “Leaders Guide for developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan”, developed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), to guide the process.