

## GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

There is a great deal of flexibility in how a community decides on the content of their CWPP. However, there are some required components to for the CWPP to be eligible for grant funds.

- 1.) **Collaboration:** the CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies (where applicable) and other interested parties.

The grant requires that three entities must mutually agree to the final contents of a CWPP: A signature line shall be included for each

- **The applicable local government** (i.e., counties (COUNTY COMMISSIONER/S) or cities (MAYOR));
  - **The local fire department(s)**
  - **The state entity responsible for forest management** (MDC, Forestry Section)
- 2.) **Prioritize Fuel Reductions:** A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
  - 3.) **Treatment of structural ignitability:** A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures due to wildfires throughout the area addresses by the plan.

## **CWPP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

### **✓ STEP ONE: Convene Decision Makers**

The initial step in developing a CWPP should be formation of an operating group with representation from local government, local fire authorities, and the state agency responsible for forest management.

Together, these three entities form the core decision-making team responsible for the development of a CWPP as described in the HFRA. The core team members must mutually agree on the plan's final contents. In communities where several local governments and fire departments are within the planning area, each level of government/authority may need to convene ahead of time and identify a single representative to participate, on its behalf, as a core team member.

### **✓ STEP TWO: Involve Federal Agencies Where Appropriate**

Once convened, members of the core team should engage local representatives of the USFS and BLM to begin sharing perspectives, priorities, and other information relevant to the planning process. Because of their on-the-ground experience, mapping capabilities, and knowledge of natural resource planning, these local land management professionals will be key partners for the core team. In some landscapes, they will also be largely responsible for implementing the priorities established in the resulting CWPP.

### **✓ STEP THREE: Engage Interested Parties**

The success of a CWPP also hinges on the ability of the core team to effectively involve a broad range of local stakeholders, particularly when the landscape includes active and organized neighborhood associations, community forestry organizations that work in forest management, and other stakeholder groups that display a commitment to fire protection and fuels management. Substantive input from a diversity of interests will ensure that the final document reflects the highest priorities of the community. It will also help to facilitate timely implementation of recommended projects. In some circumstances, the core team may wish to invite local community leaders or stakeholder representatives to work along with them in final decision making. As early as possible, core team members should contact and seek active involvement from key stakeholders and constituencies such as:

- Existing collaborative forest management groups
- City Council members
- Resource Advisory Committees
- Homeowners Associations—particularly those representing subdivisions in the WUI
- Division of Wildlife/Fish and Game—to identify locally significant habitats
- Department of Transportation—to identify key escape corridors
- Local and/or state emergency management agencies
- Water districts—to identify key water infrastructure
- Utilities
- Recreation organizations

- Environmental organizations
- Forest products interests
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Watershed councils

In addition to directly contacting key individuals and organizations, core team members may want to consider using a public notice or public meeting process to acquire additional, more generalized input as the plan is developed.

#### ✓ STEP FOUR: **Establish a Community Base Map**

Using available technology and local expertise, the core team and key partners should develop a base map of the community and adjacent landscapes of interest. This map will provide a visual information baseline from which community members can assess and make recommendations regarding protection and risk-reduction priorities.

To the extent practicable, the map should identify:

- Inhabited areas at potential risk to wildland fire;
- Areas containing critical human infrastructure—such as escape routes, municipal water supply structures, and major power or communication lines—that are at risk from fire disturbance events
- A preliminary designation of the community’s WUI zone.

#### ✓ STEP FIVE: **Develop a Community Risk Assessment**

The development of a community risk assessment will help the core team and community members more effectively prioritize areas for treatment and identify the highest priority uses for available financial and human resources. A meaningful community assessment can be developed by considering the risk factors identified below. Choose an appropriate adjective rating (such as high, medium, and low) that best represents the risk to the community posed by each factor. Display the results on the base map to develop a useful tool for the final decision making process. State and federal land managers will be a valuable resource in helping communities locate the best available data and in producing quality maps that display and aid assessment of that data. Engaging key stakeholders in the rating process will be essential to a successful outcome.

##### **A. Fuel Hazards**

To the extent practicable, evaluate the vegetative fuels on federal and nonfederal land within or near the community. Identify specific areas where the condition of vegetative fuels is such that, if ignited, they would pose a significant threat to the community or essential community infrastructure. Consider how the local topography (such as slope, aspect, and elevation) may affect potential fire behavior.

Identify areas affected by windthrow, ice storms, or insect and disease epidemics where fuels treatment would reduce wildfire risks to communities and/or their essential infrastructure. State and federal resource planning documents can be a valuable source of information on local

forest and rangeland conditions. Rate each area of identified hazardous fuels and show each on the base map as a high, medium, or low threat to the community.

### **B. Risk of Wildfire Occurrence**

Using historical data and local knowledge, determine the common causes and relative frequency of wildfires in the vicinity of the community. Consider the range of factors, including critical weather patterns, that may contribute to the probability of fire ignitions and/or extreme fire behavior. Use relative ratings such as high, medium, and low to show areas of concern for fire starts on the base map.

### **C. Homes, Businesses, and Essential Infrastructure at Risk**

Assess the vulnerability of structures within the community to ignition from firebrands, radiation, and convection, document areas of concern. Identify specific human improvements within or adjacent to the community, such as homes, businesses, and essential infrastructure (e.g., escape routes, municipal water supply structures, and major power and communication lines) that would be adversely impacted by wildfire. Categorize all identified areas needing protection using ratings of high, medium, or low, and show them on the base map.

### **D. Other Community Values at Risk**

At the community's option, the risk assessment may also consider other areas of community importance, such as critical wildlife habitat; significant recreation and scenic areas; and landscapes of historical, economic, or cultural value that would benefit from treatment to reduce wildfire risks. Additional recommendations from local stakeholders should be incorporated as appropriate. Categorize all identified areas that warrant protection using the ratings of high, medium, or low, and show them on the base map.

### **E. Local Preparedness and Firefighting Capability**

Assess the level of the community's emergency preparedness, including evacuation planning, safety zones, and fire assistance agreements, as well as the response capability of community and cooperator fire protection forces. Consider the insurance industry ISO rating, if available and applicable. Use the knowledge and experience of local officials to identify areas in need of improvement. Incorporate local preparedness information into the base map as appropriate.

## **✓ STEP SIX: Establish Community Hazard Reduction Priorities and Recommendations to Reduce Structural Ignitability**

Once the community assessment and base map are completed, the core team should convene all interested parties to discuss the results and their implications for local protection and hazard mitigation needs. A key objective of these discussions is to develop the community's prioritized recommendations for fuel treatment projects on federal and nonfederal lands in the WUI, along with the preferred treatment methods for those projects. Recommendations should also be developed regarding actions that individuals and the community can take to reduce the ignitability of homes and other structures in the community's WUI zone. While local interests are gathered, communities may also want to take this opportunity to identify and develop strategies to improve their emergency preparedness and fire response capability. The discussion and identification of community priorities should be as open and collaborative as possible. Diverse community involvement at this stage is critical to the ultimate success of the CWPP.

Recommendations included in the final CWPP should clearly indicate whether priority projects primarily serve to protect the community and its essential infrastructure or are geared toward reducing risks to the other community values. Under the provisions of the HFRA, only projects that primarily serve to protect communities and essential infrastructure are eligible for the minimum 50 percent WUI funding specified in the legislation.

✓ **STEP SEVEN: Develop an Action Plan and Assessment Strategy**

Before finalizing the CWPP, core team members and key community partners should consider developing an action plan that identifies roles and responsibilities, funding needs, and timetables for carrying out the highest priority projects. Additional consideration should be given to establishing an assessment strategy for the CWPP to ensure that the document maintains its relevance and effectiveness over the long term.

✓ **STEP EIGHT: Finalize the Community Wildfire Protection Plan<sup>5</sup>**

The final step in developing a CWPP is for the core team to reconvene and mutually agree on the fuels treatment priorities, preferred methods for fuels treatment projects, the location of the wildland-urban interface, structural ignitability recommendations, and other information and actions to be contained in the final document. If an associated action plan has not been developed, the core team should identify a strategy for communicating the results of the planning process to community members and key land management partners in a timely manner.

## Summary and Checklist

### ✓ Step One: **Convene Decisionmakers**

- Form a core team made up of representatives from the appropriate local governments, local fire authority/s, and state agency responsible for forest management (MDC).

### ✓ Step Two: **Involve Federal Agencies Where Appropriate**

- Identify and engage local representatives of the USFS and BLM.
- Contact and involve other land management agencies as appropriate.

### ✓ Step Three: **Engage Interested Parties**

- Contact and encourage active involvement in plan development from a broad range of interested organizations and stakeholders.

### ✓ Step Four: **Establish a Community Base Map**

- Work with partners to establish a baseline map of the community that defines the community's WUI and displays inhabited areas at risk, forested areas that contain critical human infrastructure, and forest areas at risk for large-scale fire disturbance.

### ✓ Step Five: **Develop a Community Risk Assessment**

- Work with partners to develop a community risk assessment that considers fuel hazards; risk of wildfire occurrence; homes, businesses, and essential infrastructure at risk; other community values at risk; and local preparedness capability.
- Rate the level of risk for each factor and incorporate into the base map as appropriate.

### ✓ Step Six: **Establish Community Priorities and Recommendations**

- Use the base map and community risk assessment to facilitate a collaborative community discussion that leads to the identification of local priorities for fuel treatment, reducing structural ignitability, and other issues of interest, such as improving fire response capability.
- Clearly indicate whether priority projects are directly related to protection of communities and essential infrastructure or to reducing wildfire risks to other community values.

### ✓ Step Seven: **Develop an Action Plan and Assessment Strategy**

- Consider developing a detailed implementation strategy to accompany the CWPP, as well as a monitoring plan that will ensure its long-term success.

### ✓ Step Eight: **Finalize Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

- Finalize the CWPP and communicate the results to community and key partners.

## **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Definitions**

### ***Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or similar document***

A CWPP is a plan developed by a community in an area at-risk from wildfire. The Community Wildfire Protection Planning process is the collaboration between communities and agencies interested in reducing wildfire risk. Similar documents can capture the collaborative process and should have at the minimum the following elements: 1) clear evidence that the plan was collaborative developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties, 2) the plan identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure, 3) the plan recommends measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.

### ***Communities and the Wildland–Urban Interface (WUI)***

The wildland–urban interface (WUI) is commonly described as the zone where structures and other human development meet and intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. This WUI zone poses tremendous risks to life, property, and infrastructure in associated communities and is one of the most dangerous and complicated situations firefighters face.