

## **Role of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) provides communities with a tremendous opportunity to influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal lands and how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on non-federal lands. A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is the most effective way to take advantage of this opportunity. Local wildfire protection plans can take a variety of forms, based on the needs of those involved in their development. They can be as simple or complex as a fire department or community desires. *(10 year implementation plan)*

The idea for community-based forest planning and prioritization is not new. However, the incentive for communities to engage in comprehensive forest planning and prioritization was given with the enactment of the HFRA in 2003, along with the National Fire Plan and the 10 year implementation plan. CWPPs may address issues such as cooperators, wildfire response, hazard mitigation, community preparedness, structure protection, or all of the above.

The CWPP will be used to identify the areas of concern (AOC) for the fire district or response area. AOCs can be identified by geographical features, roads, streams or any other type of natural break that would be used to stop a fire or be used in a natural disaster. Think large scale. Multiple communities at risk or developments can be in one AOC. These multiple AOCs should cover the entire Fire District.

In the CWPP process, community risk assessments will be conducted within the AOC. These communities can be individual developments or areas where one or more houses are in danger due to the risk of wildfire. Community risk assessments consider fuel hazards, risk of wildfire occurrence, homes, businesses, essential infrastructure at risk, other community values at risk, and local preparedness capability.

There will be 2 to 3 meetings from start to finish: pre-plan, up-date, and finalize. Try to set a reasonable time table for the meetings with the communities and field data collection. Participants in collaboration should mutually agree on ways to accomplish their objectives within a reasonable time frame and in consideration of resource limitations.

During the CWPP Process, there is a great amount of information collected. If more than one fire district is being worked at once, the information can get mixed up or lost. This is why filling out the database as the information is being collected is so important.

CWPP's should involve planning, prioritizing actions and implementation responsibilities, timely decision making (particularly for implementing projects and activities), monitoring and assuring that activities are consistent with relevant science and new information, and communicating to the public the goals, tasks and outcomes of the CWPP and implementation plan.

## **8 Steps for conducting a Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

1. Convene with decision makers.
2. Involve other agencies.
3. Engage interested parties.
4. Establish a community base map.
5. Develop a community risk assessment.
6. Establish community priorities and recommendations.
7. Develop an action plan and assessment strategy.
8. Finalize Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

### **Convene with decision makers**

Form a core team composed of representatives from the appropriate local governments, local fire authority, and state land management resources. Identify and engage local representatives of the USFS, N.C. Wildlife, Nature Conservancy, etc. Contact and involve other land management agencies as appropriate.

The HFRA requires that three entities must mutually agree to the final contents of a CWPP: applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities), local fire department(s), and the state entity responsible for forest management.

In addition, these entities are directed to consult with and involve local representatives of the USFS, BLM and other interested parties or persons in the development of the plan. CWPPs can address issues such as equipment, safety awareness, and services provided by rural, volunteer, and other firefighters who work within the wildland-urban interface.

### **Engage interested parties**

Contact and encourage active involvement in plan development from a broad range of interested organizations and stakeholders. Include a diverse and balanced stakeholder representation. Potential stakeholders include local property owners, homeowners associations, local governments, tribal representatives, industry groups, conservation groups, academics, and the interested public. Collaborative organizers should make a reasonable effort to include balanced representation from relevant interests in the collaborative process.

Participants in collaboration should serve as a liaison between the collaborative group and the interests they represent and, when appropriate, advocate within their constituency for the agreed plan, project, or activity. Communication between the entities should be enhanced as a result of the collaborative effort.

## **Establish a community base map**

Establish a baseline map of the community that defines the community's WUI and displays inhabited areas at risk (Communities at Risk), forested areas that contain critical human infrastructure, and forest areas at risk for large-scale fire disturbance. This can be done using the Interactive map along with data taken from Southern Fire Risk Assessment System (SFRAS) and Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA) to create the associated maps. Maps that are used include:

- 1 Plotter size map with complete infrastructure including topography or aerial photo with streets, ownership, slope, wildfire susceptibility index, fire occurrence area, and incident command system (water points, ICP's, etc).
- 1 Plotter size map with complete infrastructure including ICS and AOC or CAR (polygons)
- Individual maps for communities at risk (8.5 x 11 or something similar)
- Associated community assessment forms attached to the individual CAR maps.

*See appendix for base maps*

## **Develop a Community Risk Assessment**

Develop a community risk assessment that considers fuel hazards, risk of wildfire occurrence, homes, businesses, and other essential infrastructure at risk, other community values at risk, and local preparedness capability. Rate the level of risk for each factor and incorporate this into the base map as appropriate. This is done with the NFPA 1144. Evaluate the AOC and conduct these assessments. This should be done for the entire fire district.

## **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.

Collaboration is enhanced when participants are involved at all stages of project planning. This includes the identification of issues and concerns, potential project areas, the development of alternatives, project design, and where applicable, implementation and post-treatment monitoring.

## **Develop an Action Plan and Assessment Strategy**

Consider developing a detailed implementation strategy, such as a Firewise Plan to accompany the CWPP, as well as a monitoring plan that will ensure its long-term success. This is where GIS can help ensure the success of the CWPP. Also, SFRAS data will be updated periodically. As infrastructure points and community information change, these can be updated within the database. This will allow the most up-to-date information to be displayed on the maps created from the data.

## **Finalize Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

Finalize the CWPP and communicate the results to community and key partners. For a CWPP to be complete it needs to have the report along with associated base maps depicting infrastructure, wildfire occurrence, areas of concern, communities at risk and recommendations.

## **Questions to be addressed in the Process**

What are the current roles of rural, volunteer, and other local fire departments in fighting wildland fire?

What unique challenges are posed by fire suppression in the wildland-urban interface?

Are local fire departments able to safely and effectively fulfill these roles?

What programs are in place to help local firefighters improve their preparedness for wildland fire?

What changes or improvements are needed to increase the fire departments' preparedness in responding to wildland fire?

## **Key steps to ensuring the success of the CWPP**

Collaborate early and often

Include diverse and balanced stakeholder representation

Recognize time frames and resources

Encourage stakeholders to function as representatives

Establish clear expectations and goals

Foster long term participation

Enhance decision making