

**Wildland Urban Interface Communities Action
National Fire Plan
Pacific Northwest**

Northwest Strategy for Mitigating the Wildfire Hazard in Wildland Urban Interface Communities

Communities play a key role in mitigation of wildfire hazard; if there were no communities, there would be no Wildland Urban Interface issue. The resources, authorities and in large part responsibility, for developing healthy and *disaster resistant* communities lay at the community level. It is critical that communities become equal partners with the agencies in implementing the National Fire Plan. Without significant action by communities to mitigate hazards (i.e. homes and yards that are highly ignitable), we will continue to have significant fire disasters in the wildland urban interface regardless of our actions on federal and state lands. The federal and state agencies can assist communities in their efforts to become disaster resistant with a wide variety of resources, some of which are described below.

The vision of the NWCG Wildland Urban Interface Working Team is:

Wildland fires can occur in areas of residential development without the occurrence of disastrous fire loss.

This vision acknowledges that where communities mix with fire dependent ecosystems fires will continue to occur under severe conditions despite our best efforts. What is different than the current situation is that communities have planned and are prepared, and withstand events without the disastrous losses that occur today. This should be our vision in the Northwest. Additionally, our strategy should be that communities and wildland fire agencies be full partners in implementation of this vision.

Proposed actions:

1. Focus National Fire Plan efforts around communities that are currently planning or taking action to become disaster resistant.

There are currently a number of communities in the Northwest with outstanding projects underway. For example:

Deschutes County: The city of Bend has in place an outstanding homeowner action/awareness campaign, Fire Free, that is expanding to the County, and eventually statewide. Deschutes County is also a FEMA Project Impact Community, with a focus on mitigating wildfire hazard. Oregon has a pilot project in Deschutes County to test implementation of Senate Bill 360, the wildland urban fire interface legislation.

Focusing additional community efforts, and wildland fuels treatment in the vicinity of such communities, will result in significant positive impact in mitigating fire hazard.

2. Focus National Fire Plan community efforts on WUI mitigation and prevention efforts, more than building response capability.

For example, National Fire Plan efforts should favor:

Development and implementation of community plans that include ignition resistant building and landscaping, not just additional fire stations and hydrants.

Public awareness programs that result in continued homeowner action and responsibility to create and maintain their homes and properties to be fire resistant.

3. Maximize positive impact to communities by bundling community programs, such as state, rural, and volunteer fire assistance, stewardship, economic action, and wildland urban interface fuels.

Use existing mechanisms and “one stop shopping” applications and request for proposals. Consider community action programs as a whole to distribute the most appropriate mix of programs and money to the communities.

4. Build federal and state programs (i.e. fuels treatment), around successful community packages.

Work at the local level to plan and coordinate projects that maximize impact of state, private and federal efforts.

Existing Efforts

Identification of Wildland Urban Interface Communities and Associated Projects

The list of wildland urban interface communities, to be published in the Federal Register May 1, is currently being revised, following the direction in the Interagency Instruction Memorandum dated February 21, 2001(a.k.a. the 6 step memo). Along with identifying communities, we have been directed to have an interagency discussion regarding coordinating ongoing projects for 2001 and identification of projects associated with communities for FY 2002 and 2003. The States have taken the lead in completing this task. It is critical that the federal partners participate in the process.

Both states are approaching the task in a similar manner, with some differences. Both states are verifying the communities’ list with the field. Oregon is also coordinating at the

local level on projects underway or planned. Washington is also verifying communities with the field, and is coordinating projects at the state level.

In the short term, this process is an initial effort to coordinate projects in the wildland urban interface. It is hoped, that this process, in combination with the assistance programs listed below, may lead us to the long-term strategy.

When: March 31, 2001

Key Contacts:

Washington: Mark Gray, 503-902-1300

Oregon: Lanny Quackenbush, 503-945-7435

FS/USDI: Barbara Kennedy 503-808-2323

Fire Department Assistance

Increased funding to a longstanding Forest Service grant program, Volunteer Fire Assistance, and new funding through the Department of Interior's Rural Fire Assistance Program, is available to Fire Districts that serve communities under 10,000 people. The programs provide financial assistance through grants to help organize, train and equip rural fire districts. Fire departments must match at least 10%-50% of the federal funds with either monetary or in-kind services.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program, and Rural Fire Assistance Program for USDI agencies will be administered through the Oregon Department of Forestry and Washington Department of Natural Resources. BIA, while managing a separate process, will coordinate their process with the other agencies this year. Fire districts may contact and apply for the any of the Forest Service or USDI grants through a single application managed by the states.

A separate fire district assistance program, administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is available for the first time this year to all rural and municipal fire departments. Fire departments should contact FEMA for more information.

When: Spring 2001, both states

Key Contacts:

FS/USDI: Barbara Kennedy 503-808-2323

Oregon Department of Forestry: Don Matlick 503-945-7444

Washington Department of Natural Resources: Bob Bannon 360-902-1300

National Fire Plan Request for Proposals to Assist Communities

The Forest Service and USDI agencies have bundled several community action programs into a single Request For Proposal, which will be available to counties, cities, federal, state or local government agencies, tribes, and non-profit organizations such as Resource Conservation and Development Areas, and Economic Development Districts. The Forest

Service Programs are existing programs that have had new emphasis placed on the National Fire Plan. USDI programs are new. Depending on the program, money will be distributed by either a grant, or agreement. The programs include:

- Wildland Urban Interface Fuels (USDI)
- Economic Action Program (Forest Service)
- Economic Action Program Pilot Projects (Forest Service)
- Community Planning for Fire Protection (Forest Service)

While each of the programs have different focus, they have a common themes of expanding community participation in hazard mitigation, community action, increased interagency and community coordination, increasing local employment, and encouraging grass root solutions best suited to local communities to reduce wildfire risk. Proposals must have the potential to reduce fire hazard, and must be focused on either an area with high risk for wildfire, or be in a county that was impacted by wildfires in 2000. Project proposals may include:

- Fuels treatment projects (including plans) with an emphasis on including treatment of private, non-industrial lands in or near the Wildland Urban Interface
- Wildland Urban Interface Prevention and Education programs
- Community based fire planning
- Utilization of materials created by fuels treatment
- Studies, business plans, and pilot or demonstration projects of small diameter utilization

When: The request for proposals will be distributed in late March/early April. Potential applicants will have six weeks to reply.

Key Contacts:

FS State and Private Forestry Programs: Bill VonSegen 503-808-2348
FS/USDI Fire Management: Barbara Kennedy 503-808-2323.

State Fire Assistance Wildland Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation Grants

Oregon and Washington have been awarded grants for a number of projects designed to mitigate hazards in the wildland urban interface. They are an emphasis area of the State Fire Assistance programs, a longstanding program that provides grant assistance to the states to improve fire protection on state and private lands. Projects include:

- Cost sharing and technical assistance for landowners in the Wildland Urban Interface to reduce fuels in high hazard areas in Oregon
- Establishing a “Fire Free” Program Statewide in Oregon
- Seven Firewise Communities workshops in Oregon and Washington
- Firewise demonstration site at the Oregon High Desert Museum
- Fuels reduction, creation of defensible space, homeowner education throughout a number of geographic areas in Washington

- Create and implement a fuels management reduction plan in forested park in the middle of Spokane.

When: Grants have been awarded and are being implemented.

Key Contacts:

Forest Service: Barbara Kennedy 503-808-2323

Washington Department of Natural Resources: Joel Greene 360-902-1300

Oregon Department of Forestry: Don Matlick 503-9545-7444