

V. Community Collaboration and Participation

Introduction

Wallowa County is characterized by large blocks of public lands primarily situated on the outer perimeter of the county surrounding a large portion of private lands. There is a patchwork of jurisdictions and ownership in which multi-agency protection is involved when managing wildland fire incidents. Approximately 39 percent of the county is privately owned with 58% public land ownership managed by the Forest Service. As a result, collaboration efforts are vital to integrating local land agencies, fire protection agencies, cooperators, and members of the public in an attempt to create a local stakeholders partnership. The first step in accomplishing a partnership was to share information regarding existing concerns, conditions, and efforts in creating a comprehensive community wildfire protection plan.

To ensure full success in implementing a collaborative approach it was important to identify issues and individual roles toward issue mitigation. Sharing responsibility is one way to establish a sense of ownership in both the mitigation of wildfire impacts and increasing the effectiveness of fire protection agencies.

Meetings were designed to collectively work with rural fire departments, cooperators, and community members to develop the wildfire protection plan. The CWPPs goal was to create a process that would:

1. Build upon existing partnerships and create new opportunities within the communities.
2. Provide Wallowa County community members with tools, methods, and the opportunity to partake in wildfire risk reduction.
3. Demonstrate the importance of shared responsibility in wildfire prevention, risk reduction, and forest management.
4. Identify additional opportunities for understanding what can be expected during the three phases of evacuation and wildfire events. (Pre, During, Post)

Efforts were made to gather local knowledge to include in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Combining a diversity of local knowledge with current data would provide as thorough a plan that would meet the needs of all landowners, cooperators and local fire management. This type of approach accomplishes several things.

1. It provides an opportunity to validate map display modeling data for accuracy with input by local resources with on the ground knowledge and expertise.
2. It establishes a collaboration forum essential for obtaining funding, especially for federal agencies through the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, thereby improving treatment opportunities on public lands and reducing potential for fire spread onto private lands. Collaboration-based decisions offer more opportunities toward efficient and effective approaches.
3. Improved chances for competitiveness in grant programs designed to provide support to state, counties, local fire departments and community members to prepare for and recover from wildfires.

4. Provides a message that is consistent with the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy to improve wildfire response, build a fire-adapted community, and move toward a resilient landscape to increase opportunities for effective suppression efforts while maintaining a healthy ecosystem.
5. Provides a mutual language and understanding of local environmental conditions to better prepare Wallowa County communities and fire managers for wildland fire events.
6. Provides the county with a plan based on local needs and expectations.
7. Communicate concerns and challenges that both fire managers and members have regarding wildfire risk.

All the meetings generated a similar message on why local knowledge was important to the CWPP process:

- a. Local involvement allows the plan to be a needs-based process on what is and is not working and identifying ways to improve wildfire protection.
- b. Demonstrates to all parties how a cohesive community approach through collaboration is imperative for success.
- c. It provides a means of validation of base information and verification that a need exists.
- d. It creates opportunities to incorporate new ideas and new approaches offered by local community members.

Collaboration and Input

Several avenues were used to incorporate local communities into the CWPP process. Media outlets such as newspapers, radio announcements, Facebook, local web sites, and postal mail were used to reach out to the public. These were found to be the best source in linking local citizens to the CWPP process.

Common messages in outreach materials and announcements were: intent of meetings and dates, opportunities to be locally involved, and local contacts for more information, opportunities to respond to an online public wildfire risk survey.

The CWPP committee designed workshops and community meetings in an attempt to reach as many Wallowa County citizens as possible. Information consistent with all workshops were to provide:

- An overview of West Wide Risk Assessment (WWRA) framework, highlighting various input data with the three key outcomes of Fire Threat Index, Fire Effects Index, and overall Final Risk Index.
- Information about Firewise and Ready, Set, Go - concepts
- Accomplishments achieved under the original 2005 CWPP
- The rationale and need to expand on current efforts
- How local conditions benefit or hinder achieving the three primary goals in the CWPP.
- Opportunities to work with local fire management in education and project design for reducing wildfire risks

- a message that we all have ownership in mitigating wildfire risks and identifying opportunities for agencies and community members to work together for a common cause.

Rural Fire Departments (RFD)

Wallowa County is supported by two rural fire department – Wallowa and Wallowa Lake that respond to both structural and wildland fires. There are also three city fire departments – Enterprise, Joseph, Lostine – that have paid contracts with identified boundaries in the rural areas providing response outside of the city limits. Rural fire departments have jurisdiction responsibilities on approximately 39,680 acres combined, of which 38,400 are protected by Wallowa Rural Fire Department. A rural and city fire department representative was a member of the steering committee throughout the CWPP development. Opportunities for RFDs to provide input during the process were important for the development of mitigation action items. A meeting with all the local fire chiefs, city and rural, was arranged. Present at the meeting were both rural fire departments, and the four city fire departments of Wallowa, Enterprise, Joseph, and Lostine.

Outreach

Fire Chiefs were contacted through via phone and email letter regarding the meeting date, location, and agenda. The letter provided a preliminary overview of new concepts and of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategies' three key goals as the foundation for the updated CWPP.

The letter stated,

“It is our hope that through these three goals that you as Fire Chiefs can begin to consider what and where improvements are needed, shortfalls exist, and opportunities for new innovative ideas can occur. We encourage you to approach your needs and recommendation on the premise that,

In a perfect world with available finances, what needs to be done to better protect life (firefighter and public) and property in within your jurisdiction?”

A list of topic categories along with a short list developed by the CWPP committee was provided with the letter to provoke thoughts and ideas in advance of the meeting. The list of specific issues that focused on areas that could potentially impact or enhance the county's capabilities of meeting the three CWS goals. These topic categories included: risk assessment in terms of life and property, potential structure loss or survivability, fuels treatment options/reduction, emergency management, collaboration/partnerships, education/outreach, technology and reporting systems, communication networks, etc.

Wallowa County Fire Chiefs Meeting

The meeting with CWPP committee members and local fire departments occurred on June 8, 2016. Rural fire departments arrived prepared to discuss all aspects of fire protection. There was representation of all fire departments, with some having multiple attendees. This meeting was productive and informative, and included discussion of existing accomplishments, fire response needs, and county and rural response concerns.

Highlights of the meeting included updates on the CWPP process and the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy key goals. Discussions centered around issues regarding road access to homes and geographic areas, water sources, future mitigation action items, public education, wildfire response capabilities, equipment and technological shortfalls, qualifications/training, home protection treatment options, communications, information sharing, and new opportunities. Specific action items developed out of the meeting are detailed in Chapter VIII Mitigation Action Items and Chapter IX Fuels Treatment.

The CWPP committee provided a time frame of 6 pm with an expectation the meeting would likely be done by 8 pm. The meeting lasted until 8:45.

Cooperators

Cooperator input was obtained through several venues such as the local fire simulation, public meetings, and one-on-one discussions with fire managers.

Information was gathered to ensure the best available data and issues that may arise for cooperators, fire managers, and members of the public during a wildfire event were identified:

- Review maps of known locations of infrastructure for accuracy.
- Discuss issues that could potentially impact or enhance the county's capabilities of response in terms of planning for, providing protection during a wildfire, and/or influencing efforts after a wildfire has occurred.
- Actively involve cooperators in developing options specific to their interests that improve their ability to effectively interact and coordinate with other cooperators and fire agencies in wildfire emergency situations.

The fire simulation provided the highest level of cooperator involvement. The simulation was held at the Cloverleaf Hall on May 4, 2016 from 0830 – 1630 (4:30pm). Simulation turnout resulted in a high degree of participation with a showing of approximately 23 participants from local cooperators. The local fire managers initiated a mock wildfire situation, that provided insight on the strengths and weaknesses of coordinated efforts prior to an actual incident. The simulation

was designed to cover the first 36 hours of a chaotic and disruptive wildfire emergency when local emergency coordination and preparedness is most critical. It also provided the opportunity to prepare everyone for the upcoming fire season. Simulation attendees are listed in Appendix H.

Outreach

Cooperators were contacted for the simulation via email notification and through the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy committee meeting notes where discussion regarding the simulation occurred. There was also occasional local one-on-one interaction between fire managers and cooperators.

Cooperators contacted fell into one or more of the three categories below:

- Those who have existing infrastructure in the area that has potential to either be compromised during a fire or could potentially impede suppression efforts. (i.e. transmission lines / Highway department)
- Those who regularly participate in fire response when communities at risk are involved (Sheriff Department)
- Those who would need to be notified in the event of potential evacuations (i.e.: Red Cross)

Some cooperators met all categories, while others may only be involved at certain times of the fire or on a specific fire based on location.

Local Residents and Communities

The CWPP committee attempted to include as many Wallowa County citizens as possible. Forums for information sharing included talking with individual land and homeowners, meeting with homeowner associations, online surveys, attending various local stakeholder meetings to share information updates

Outreach

Reaching the highest amount of community members involved a variety of settings such as: meetings, radio announcements, boots on the ground talking with local residence, and information surveys.

Wildfire Survey Questionnaire

The widest reaching venue for CWPP update notifications was primarily achieved through a letter submitted for release with the counties 2016 property tax statements. The letter dated October 7, 2016 provided community members with an explanation on the importance of updating the CWPP including; policy and guidance changes, influence and prioritize future funding, using new data and meeting changing conditions. The letter focused on the three goals of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy (CWS) with a brief explanation of each goal.

Included in the letter were local fire manager contact numbers to allow individuals to submit specific input as well as a web-link to the Wallowa County Wildfire Protection survey questionnaire.

In this letter the Oregon Department of Forestry included a web link to the survey as well as a Quick Response bar code (QR code) that provides immediate access to the survey. See Appendix H for the release letter.

Newspaper Articles

A news article was published in the La Grande Observer on November 14, 2016, emphasizing local fire organization efforts to involve the public to create a cohesive fire prevention and fire response program. The article highlighted some CWPP efforts to identify ways to promote fire-adapted communities to enable people to live in a fire-prone environment and mitigate loss in the event of a wildland fire, looked at ways to increase the forest's resiliency and health, especially around homes, and looked into ways to improve safety for both firefighters and the public.

The news release, in Appendix H, also provided some changing concepts on wildland urban interface and the link to the wildfire survey questionnaire. A brief description of the intent of the meeting was in the article. The article announced an opportunity for community members to learn and work collaboratively with local fire agencies to mitigate loss to wildfires. The U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry and other local and regional firefighting agencies requested publics' assistance in addressing fire risk issues in Wallowa County.

Public Meetings

Multiple public meetings were held to provide update information about the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. A list and short overview is provided below.

An overview of the CWPP update was provided to Wallowa County Natural Resource Advisory Committee on October 25, 2016.

Risk maps and the WUI Zone concept was displayed at the meeting. A suggestion was made with regard to the high level of public use in the Lostine Corridor and that connecting the Lapover Ranch with the main body of the southern WUI Zone would be more appropriate. This information was taken back to the CWPP committee for review, discussion and was accepted in November 2016.

Lostine Town Meeting

The public meeting was held on April 13, 2017, in the town of Lostine with the assistance of a local resident in preparing for the gathering. The meeting resulted in a show of 29 individuals, not counting the CWPP committee members. The focus of the

meeting was the community of Lostine and the Lostine Canyon. Flyers were posted around the town of Lostine with the assistance of the local residence.



Figure V - 1. Lostine Community meeting to discuss the CWPP and options for fire mitigation (photo Courtesy of Stephen Tool – Wallowa County Chieftain.

The focus of the meetings was to share information about current CWPP committee activities regarding plan development, current county fire risks, ongoing collaborative efforts, fire organization and landowner responsibilities, and ways to get involved in the process. Meetings were also designed to build new and improve existing partnerships with the community. Through the meetings, we provided tools, methods, and opportunities for playing an active role in risk reduction measures. Emphasis was put on using community input to

help develop portions of the CWPP and design a plan that encouraged landowner involvement in wildfire risk reduction

Several key messages were presented at the meetings to create an informative forum with up-to-date information. Discussion topics included:

- Planning efforts with an overview of the history of Wallowa County’s CWPP describing the plan updates, past accomplishments, and benefits since inception.
- An overview of the new Cohesive Wildfire Strategy and its three goals of Wildfire Response, Restoring and Maintaining Landscapes with high focus on Fire Adapted Communities
- Overview of the role of West Wide Risk Assessment role and the importance of local knowledge input.
- Opportunities for the steering committee to discuss the level of fire occurrence in their area, overview of the risk assessment, values threatened by wildfire risk, plan completion timeline, and work completed under the 2006 CWPP.
- The majority of the meeting time was given to discussions with community members about their concerns, roles, and involvement in wildfire risk reduction and protection.
- An opportunity for the CWPP committee to hear the public’s input related to emergency services, fire agency response, and perception of fire risk on their properties. Meeting notes can be found in project folder and a list of attendees can be found in Appendix H.
- Additional emphasis was put on the importance of shared responsibility in wildfire prevention, risk reduction and forest management. It was important to send a message of “we are in this together” in wildfire risk reduction and

prevention. Collective responsibility was also emphasized through program pamphlets offered during the meetings.

- Information was shared regarding assistance opportunities to landowners for creating defensible space while living in fire adapted communities and how best to prepare themselves through collaborative efforts and available programs. Pamphlets and information were distributed explaining programs such as Firewise and Ready-Set-Go.
- The Forest Service provided an update on the Lostine Public Safety Project that is planned in the Lostine Corridor.

It is worth noting that during and since the Grizzly Creek Fire in August of 2015, frequent public meetings have been conducted in the town of Troy. These meetings were put on by the Umatilla National Forest fire staff and Wallowa County fire managers.

Stock Growers Meeting

The CWPP committee was invited to the local Stock Growers meeting to provide updates about the wildfire protection plan. The meeting was held on December 20, 2016 at the local extension office. The update was intended to last 20 to 30 minutes; however the level of interest from the group took the topic to almost an hour of discussion. Topics of concern included the following:

- Ways stock growers can assist fire managers through grazing of tall grasses in an effort to reduce the flashy fuels and modify fire spread.
- There is an interest in seeing how grazing allotments and fire risk overlap and where there is potential for impacts to allotments and modifications to fire spread.
- The group sees a need for education and information outlet for debris burning on private lands.
- A smoother system for reporting wildfires
- Wilderness wildfires that are managed by monitoring instead of suppression approach.
- Creation of water sources for suppression resource drafting sights and livestock utilization.

Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

The SWCD sent out an invite for members of the CWPP committee to attend their monthly meeting to present new CWPP updates. The meeting was held on January 10, 2017. Two members of the CWPP committee presented the information and filtered questions from the group. The SWCD also included a link to the wildfire survey in their newsletter.

Wallowa County Wildfire Public Survey

The steering committee updated the 2006 CWPP questionnaire to identify potential educational opportunities, gauge what citizens value most, and assess how those values may be threatened by wildfire. The public survey contained two sections of 49 total questions designed to gain information regarding public knowledge of wildland urban interface, risk reduction activities and cost, and defensible space. The entire survey with questions and results can be found in Appendix L.

The fires section contained 33 questions starting with general property and locality information then moving into several questions about their knowledge of defensible space, National Fire Plan fuels reduction opportunities, and their overall concern about having defensible space on their property. Some questions allowed for multiple answers while other questions provided areas for comments. Some results of the first section include:

- Property owners who responded ranged from owning zero to over 700 acres of property.
- There was a wide representation of the county landscape with 30% living outside any of the 15 geographic options provided.
- Close to 38% felt that the risk of wildfire was High, while 46% thought it was Medium.
- Question 7 asked, *If a wildfire occurred in your area, what factors would place you and/or your home at risk?* Sixty percent felt the response time/capabilities of local fire agencies was the factor that put their property at risk (this is likely due to the remoteness of residence from fire response centers), followed closely by 56% contributing the fire risk to neighboring properties and the third highest at 40% was the flammability of their structures.
- Sixty-four percent have a plan in place if a fire were to threaten their property, however only 40% have participated in fire risk reduction activities. Eighty-five percent of those that had participated in defensible space work did not use National Fire Plan funds.
- When asked about their concern for scenic view being impacted by risk reduction work, 72% and 18% said not concerned to somewhat concerned respectively with 10 percent very concerned.
- The top six of 11 options regarding methods of outreach and education for fire risk mitigation revealed members of the public most preferred: the Internet Websites (40%), Postal Mail – brochures (39%), Individual consultation (35%), Centralized workshop/classes (33%), YouTube demonstrations (30%), and neighborhood workshops (26%).
- When asked about funding and willingness to pay for fire risk reduction at their homes 22% were willing to cover majority of the cost, 47% a portion of the cost, and 33% very little. Sixty-eight percent were unaware about financial assistance and 52% of those would like to learn and/or apply for funds.
- Only 14% were willing to put on an educational program in their neighborhood; however 88% were willing to share information with a neighbor or friend.

The second part, a shorter survey of 16 questions, focused on the landowner's assessment of their own property in terms of what they value as a community member, what is their familiarity with the CWPP, wildfire accessibility, structure vulnerability, and potential safety issues. Some highlights of section 2 include:

- When asked about a large wildfire event 41% were very concerned and 32% were moderately concerned.
- Respondents were asked to list three attributes they valued most. Listed from most valued to least were Scenic/Beauty (71%), Location/Remoteness (50%), Community (48%), Wildlife (31%), Stewardship of Natural Resources (17%), Clean Air/Water (14%), Livelihood (12%), Local Products (10%), Local Service (2%). A total of 58 answered this question. Seventy-nine percent felt that a wildfire would pose a threat to what they value most.
- Forty-four percent have heard of a CWPP and 59% would like to see the CWPP, and 36 left either an email or forwarding address at the end of the survey.
- Questions 45 through 48 asked respondents identifying how they would prioritize a list of CWPP preparedness issues. Worth noting are, Emergency notification, defensible space, hazardous fuels reduction, forest health and impacts to water quality ranked high.

Outreach

The CWPP committee felt it important to integrate as many community members as possible in the planning process. Several communication mechanisms were used in an attempt to reach the largest possible number of people in the county. Local media outlets were found to be best source of information for encouraging community involvement.

The surveys were also uploaded into a web-based program called SurveyMonkey, an online survey development cloud-based company that provides free, customizable surveys. Venues utilized for public outreach included:

- a. Distribution of the surveys in the county annual tax statements.
- b. Newspaper articles released with the link to the website where individuals could access the survey directly.
- c. The questionnaire was linked in a letter issued by Oregon Department of Forestry with a QR imbedded for scanning with a mobile application.
- d. The link was also posted Oregon Department of Forestry web site where one click would take the individual to the survey.
- e. Fire agencies email and distributed the link.
- f. The link was provided at all meetings with groups and community members.

The SWCD and Stock Growers also included a link to the wildfire survey in their newsletter in an effort to assist with outreach.

Programs

Firewise



Firewise is a community-based program that emphasizes involving homeowners in local solutions for wildland fire protection. It has a five-step process, in which communities develop an action plan that guides their residential fire risk reduction activities while engaging and encouraging their neighbors to become active participants in building a safer place to live (Firewise 2015). Firewise empowers neighbors to work with protection agencies to reduce wildfire risk across boundaries through a collaborative approach, of creating fire-adapted communities. Firewise encompasses actions that involve wildfire education, planning, on-site implementation of mitigation measures, and communication with those involved in protection from the risk of wildfire.

Nationally recognized for their program, Firewise focuses on communities and homeowners taking responsibility and showing interest in creating and maintaining defensible space; ensuring adequate access; addressing signage; and building or retrofitting structures designed with non-combustible building material in terms of siding, decks, and roofing. It is co-sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, the US Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters.

Ready-Set-Go

This program started in March of 2011 and strives to develop and improve the discussion and information flow between local community members and local fire organizations. It is designed to better equip fire personnel with tools to teach local residents in fire-prone wildland areas how best prepare for personal safety and protect their properties against wildfire. Ready-Set-Go emphasizes preparedness in all hazard situations.

This information was outlined and made available at the public meetings with discussions on not only landscape preparation, but also on key issues that many structures have that make them more receptive to burning embers cast off from the fire. Discussion occurred covering how wildland and structure preparedness prior to a wildfire can increase personal and firefighter safety, improving the likelihood of a positive outcome after a wildfire.

Ready-Set-Go represents the steps to be taken long before a wildfire as well as during a wildfire. The CWPP committee came prepared to discuss ways to be ready well in advance of a fire occurring in their area, finding funding sources to help, and how to find workforce help if needed. Emphasis was put on local fire personnel's willingness to work in conjunction with landowners to protect life and property. Additionally, the meeting was aimed at increased public understanding and situational awareness once

a fire was burning in the area through preparing emergency items to take and staying informed on current situations. Finally, a proactive public can increase the opportunity for firefighting resources to be successful through property preparation and in the event of a fire situation be prepared to leave the area for personal safety. Acting early was a key point in part of Ready-Set-Go.

Summary and Recommendations

Multiple outreach occurred to reach rural fire departments, cooperators, and community members. Efforts were made to build upon existing partnerships and create new ones prior to a wildfire event. These connections were intended to gain local information, discuss tools available for fire mitigation, and instill a sense of ownership for all landowners to participate.

A relatively high level of participation occurred through a wide range of outreach approaches. Fire simulation connected with fire departments and several cooperators during a mock wildfire emergency. The simulation provided participating parties with insight on best tactics during wildfires. that could assist or create further safety concerns during a wildfire. A separate meeting with county fire response organizations provided a list of issues facing rural and city fire departments and fire response issues geographically in the county. They provided valuable information both general and specific to meeting the needs of the CWS goals.

Local community members participated through an online wildfire survey, Lostine Community meeting, and a variety of small organizational meetings, with some local community members providing recounted events of historic large fire events. Local community members responding to the survey indicated that their community has not had a FireWise or Ready-Set-Go presentation.

Additional meetings are intended to be held at the completion of this document at local communities. This may be an additional opportunity for fire managers to provide FireWise and Ready-Set-Go information to homeowners. The public survey responses indicated the preferred method of outreach and education is websites, postal mail, one-on-one consultation and centralized workshops.

The public survey provides fire managers with insight on what community members find important and where efforts can be made to protect those values. Sharing responsibility and working together in wildfire mitigation will continue to build the already highly valued sense of community. All stakeholders must be responsible for supporting communication, informing, and joining in the formal and informal communication networks across organizations (CWS 2014).

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