

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

WUI Definition: The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. (National Wildfire Coordinating Group-Nov. 2008)

Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (H.R. 1904) definitions

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE.—The term “wildland urban interface” means—

(A) an area within or adjacent to an at-risk community that is identified in recommendations to the Secretary in

a community wildfire protection plan; or

(B) in the case of any area for which a community wildfire protection plan is not in effect—

(i) an area extending 1/2-mile from the boundary of an at-risk community;

(ii) an area within 1 1/2 miles of the boundary of an at-risk community, including any land that—

(I) has a sustained steep slope that creates the potential for wildfire behavior endangering the

at-risk community;

(II) has a geographic feature that aids in creating an effective fire break, such as a road or ridge top; or

(III) is in condition class 3, as documented by the Secretary in the project-specific environmental

analysis; and

(iii) an area that is adjacent to an evacuation route for an at-risk community that the Secretary determines, in cooperation with the at-risk community, requires hazardous fuel reduction to provide safer evacuation from the at-risk community.

AT-RISK COMMUNITY.—The term “at-risk community” means an area—

(A) that is comprised of—

(i) an interface community as defined in the notice entitled “Wildland Urban Interface Communities Within the Vicinity of Federal Lands That Are at High Risk From Wildfire” issued by the Secretary

of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior in accordance with title IV of the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001 (114 Stat. 1009) (66 Fed. Reg. 753, January 4, 2001); or

(ii) a group of homes and other structures with basic infrastructure and services (such as utilities and collectively maintained transportation routes) within or adjacent to Federal land;

(B) in which conditions are conducive to a large-scale wildland fire disturbance event; and

(C) for which a significant threat to human life or property exists as a result of a wildland fire disturbance event.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN.—The term “community wildfire protection plan” means a plan for an at risk community that—

(A) is developed within the context of the collaborative agreements and the guidance established by the Wildland

Fire Leadership Council and agreed to by the applicable local government, local fire department, and State agency

responsible for forest management, in consultation with interested parties and the Federal land management agencies

managing land in the vicinity of the at-risk community;

(B) identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment on Federal and non-Federal land that will protect 1 or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure; and

(C) recommends measures to reduce structural ignitability throughout the at-risk community.

(4) CONDITION CLASS 2.—The term “condition class 2”, with respect to an area of Federal land, means the condition class description developed by the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station in the general technical report entitled “Development of Coarse-Scale Spatial Data for Wildland Fire and Fuel Management” (RMRS-87), dated April 2000 (including any subsequent revision to the report), under which—

(A) fire regimes on the land have been moderately altered from historical ranges;
(B) there exists a moderate risk of losing key ecosystem components from fire;
(C) fire frequencies have increased or decreased from historical frequencies by 1 or more return intervals, resulting in moderate changes to—

- (i) the size, frequency, intensity, or severity of fires; or
- (ii) landscape patterns; and

(D) vegetation attributes have been moderately altered from the historical range of the attributes.

(5) CONDITION CLASS 3.—The term “condition class 3”, with respect to an area of Federal land, means the condition class description developed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station in the general technical report referred to in paragraph (4) (including any subsequent revision to the report), under which—

(A) fire regimes on land have been significantly altered from historical ranges;
(B) there exists a high risk of losing key ecosystem components from fire;
(C) fire frequencies have departed from historical frequencies by multiple return intervals, resulting in dramatic changes to—

- (i) the size, frequency, intensity, or severity of fires; or
- (ii) landscape patterns; and

(D) vegetation attributes have been significantly altered from the historical range of the attributes.

Exerts from : A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment – 10-Year Strategy Implementation Plan – December 2006

**Congressional Direction for the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy
Conference Report for the Fiscal Year 2001
Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act
(Public Law 106-291)**

“The Secretaries should also work with the Governors on a long-term strategy to deal with the wildland fire and hazardous fuels situation, as well as the needs for habitat restoration and rehabilitation in the Nation. The managers expect that a collaborative structure, with the states and local governments as full partners, will be the most efficient and effective way of implementing a long-term program.

The managers are very concerned that the agencies need to work closely with the affected states, including Governors, county official, and other citizens. Successful implementation of this program will require close collaboration among citizens and governments at all levels... The managers direct the Secretaries to engage Governors in a collaborative structure to cooperatively develop a coordinated, National ten-year comprehensive strategy with the states as full partners in the planning, decision-making, and implementation of the plan.

Key decisions should be made at local levels.”

I. Introduction

The goals and guiding principles of the 10-Year Strategy are intended to remain constant over time. Performance measures and implementation tasks are subject to review and modification as needed.

The *10-Year Strategy* August 2001

The fires of 2000 focused national attention on the threats wildland fire posed to people, communities, and natural resources. All levels of government responded and, in concert with a wide spectrum of non-governmental interests, joined forces to develop a comprehensive Nation-wide approach to lessen the impacts of unwanted fires.

A major component of that overall effort emerged in August 2001 with the approval of “*A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: 10-Year Strategy*,” (*10-Year Strategy*) by the Western Governors’ Association (WGA), the Secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and many others including southern Governors, counties, and tribes. The Governors, Secretaries, and their partners subsequently approved the *Implementation Plan* for the *10-Year Strategy* in May 2002. Both documents benefited from the contributions of numerous non-governmental partners.

Recognizing that effective management depends on adaptation in response to new understanding, the *Implementation Plan* envisioned its own review and modification over time. The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), chartered by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to give collaborative strategic and policy oversight to the fire program, initiated a review of the *Implementation Plan* in December 2004. As an important part of this review, WFLC considered an evaluation completed in November 2004 by the WGA Forest Health Advisory Committee.

This updated *Implementation Plan* focuses anew on the collaborative framework essential for success, and as to the Strategy’s four goals, sets forth desired outcomes, performance measures, and responsibilities for tasks identified. The goals are interrelated and mutually reinforcing: restoring fire-adapted ecosystems and reducing hazardous fuels will reduce risks to communities and provide economic benefits, as well as improve fire prevention and suppression. This updated *Implementation Plan* emphasizes:

- Information sharing and monitoring of accomplishments and forest conditions to improve transparency,
- A long-term commitment to maintaining the essential resources for implementation,
- Landscape-level vision for restoration of fire adapted ecosystems,
- The importance of using fire as a management tool, and
- Continuing to improve collaboration consistent with the vision of the *10-Year Strategy* and this *Implementation Plan*.

Progress to Date and Future Challenges

Since the advent of the National Fire Plan in 2000, governmental and non-governmental entities have collaborated to make significant progress on multiple fronts in addressing the issues brought to national attention by the fires of 2000 and addressed in the *10-Year Strategy* and *Implementation Plan*.

The President and the Congress agreed on substantially increased spending for fire-related issues, including the appropriation of \$2.7 billion for fuels treatment from 2001 to 2006. Increased funding levels, coupled with new management tools and improved coordination of vegetation management programs, have enabled federal and state agencies to greatly expand their capability to remove hazardous fuels. Together, land managers have treated a total of nearly 19 million acres on federal, state, and private land in the six years from 2001 through 2006 compared to 9 million acres of hazardous fuels treatments in the previous six years.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service further improved the effectiveness of wildfire mitigation and suppression activities by jointly adopting and publishing a “Cohesive Fuels Treatment Strategy;” developing a now widely-used national data base (National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System—NFPORS) to track fuels treatments, community assistance, and restoration/rehabilitation work across all agencies and bureaus; and by putting in place a mechanism to track fire suppression costs on a consistent basis. The WFLC approved a comprehensive monitoring program to provide increased program oversight, which puts in place a consistent means of tracking trends and following the impacts of fuels treatments for all federal lands. It captures a nationwide picture of burn severity and incorporates third-party monitoring to insure transparency under this *Implementation Plan*.

The last six years have also seen a new focus on the wildland urban interface (WUI), the zone where structures and other human development meet at-risk forest and rangelands. Federal land management agencies have invested more than 60 percent of fuels treatment dollars in the WUI, enabling the collaborative treatment of some 8.5 million acres near communities beginning in 2001.

The protection of local communities was further enhanced by the completion in June 2003 of the report to Congress titled “The Changing Role and Needs of Local, Rural, and Volunteer Fire Departments in the Wildland Urban Interface” (also known as The Rural Fire Report, see at http://www.nvfc.org/pdf/wildland_fire_report_03.pdf). This document was developed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the U.S. Fire Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and federal and state land managers in response to an action item in the original *10-Year Strategy and Implementation Plan*. It identifies critical needs and outlines recommendations for improving the safety, equipment, and training of local fire responders working in WUI situations. Implementation of the recommendations is underway.

Policy reform has reflected a growing national priority for protecting communities and the environment from the risk of wildfire. The President’s 2002 Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) emphasized administrative and legislative reforms to expedite the delivery of fuels treatments and post-fire actions. Congress joined this streamlining effort when it gave long-term stewardship contracting authority to the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in February 2003 and passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) in December 2003. Congress expanded this authority to allow the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to enter into sole source contracts with Indian tribes under the Tribal Forest Protection Act in 2004. By 2005, federal agencies were using the tools provided by HFI and

HFRA to expedite environmental review on new projects. These two agencies have also used stewardship contracting on some 250 contracts reaching over 100,000 acres.

The HFRA also called for the preparation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) or comparable plans to define the WUI and establish locally based strategic priorities for wildfire preparedness and hazardous fuels reduction work in these areas. In June 2003, the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) developed guidance for identifying and prioritizing communities at-risk. Subsequently, in March 2004, NASF partnered with WGA, Society of American Foresters, National Association of Counties, and the Communities Committee of the 7th American Forest Congress to develop a handbook for the preparation of CWPPs (see handbook at <http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/cwpphandbook.pdf>). By the end of 2005, states, tribes, and local communities had completed some 650 CWPPs covering 2,700 communities, with an additional 600 plans still in progress. Land managers at the local, state, and federal levels are using these CWPPs to help them identify and prioritize locations and methods for fuels treatment projects in the WUI.

State and federal agencies have also worked cooperatively to improve scientific contributions to decision-making. The interagency LANDFIRE program now provides nationally consistent spatial data sets on over two-dozen primary fire-related variables as well as dozens of additional underlying variables. Coverage for the western states will be complete by the end of 2006 with the remainder of the contiguous states finished by the end of 2008. Federal scientists are mining LANDSAT data back to 1982 to develop fire severity atlases for the country as well as preparing annual burn severity maps for the nation that will allow managers to track fire impacts in a comprehensive and consistent manner. Researchers are continuing to develop models that will improve the ability to strategically place fuels treatments on the landscape to better protect people and natural resources.

Despite the best efforts of government and others thus far, it is understood that much work remains. For example, in many areas, drought conditions are contributing to extensive outbreaks of tree-killing insects. Given the potential for the existing wildfire problem created by excessive fuel loading to become even more severe due to other potentially contributing factors, efforts must be redoubled to implement this comprehensive and collaborative forest health strategy.

Together, government agencies at all levels, tribes, communities, volunteers, scientists, and a variety of other participants have reduced the threats posed by wildland fire since adoption of the *10-Year Strategy*. This revision of the *Implementation Plan* helps point the way to continued improvement in the efforts to do two things: create landscape conditions that improve our effectiveness in suppressing unwanted fires and reducing risks to firefighters, communities, and the environment; and using desirable fires to help achieve natural resource management objectives.

This entire document can be accessed on the world wide web at:
<http://www.westgov.org/wga/publicat/TYIP.pdf>

Another publication that addresses lessons learned in the Wildland/Urban Interface is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's document "At Home in the Woods." This publication discusses 17 case studies conducted in 7 western states about community involvement in fuel mitigation efforts, wildfire responses, and wildfire recovery efforts. These studies will show the importance of pre-planning to respond to wildfire emergencies and the results of those planning efforts.

http://www.fema.gov/hazard/fire/pubs/athome_woods.shtm