

CROOK COUNTY COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

Introduction

This *Community Wildfire Protection Plan* (CWPP), in accordance with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), was developed by Crook County Fire Department with guidance and support from Wyoming State Forestry. This document will serve as a tool to coordinate the resource management of lands within Crook County in a manner that protects communities and local values at risk from wildfire.

The purpose of this CWPP is to clarify and refine the priorities for the protection of life and property in the wildland urban interface. Wildland Urban Interface, as defined by the National Fire Plan, refers to the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

With Crook County's steadily increasing population and continuing severe drought conditions it is our primary goal to identify and implement projects that will protect the residents living in the wildland urban interface as well as firefighters and emergency personnel. The secondary goal of this plan is to minimize or eliminate damage or loss of property to wildfire. Crook County residents living in the wildland urban interface value their homes, woods and privacy. Our aim is to protect life and property through outreach, strategic planning and action.

The recent Healthy Forest Restoration Act enacted by Congress in 2003 allows local government, local fire protection districts and state agencies responsible for forest management, in collaboration with interested parties and the federal land management agencies to develop a plan that will:

- Reduce dense undergrowth that fuels catastrophic fires through thinning and prescribed burns;
- Improve the public involvement in the review process by providing opportunities for earlier participation, thus accomplishing projects in a more timely fashion;
- Select projects on a collaborative basis involving local, tribal, state, federal and non-government entities;
- Focus projects on federal lands that meet strict criteria for risk of wildfire damage to communities, water supply systems and the environment;

- Authorize the Healthy Forests Reserve Program to protect, restore and enhance degraded forest ecosystems on private lands to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species;
- Encourage biomass energy production through grants and assistance to local communities creating market incentives for removal of otherwise valueless forest material; and
- Develop an accelerated program on certain Federal lands to combat insect infestations.

Our Situation

As in many other areas in the west, over the last few years Crook County has witnessed a large increase in human population which continues to result in rapid growth. This region is well known for its rugged natural scenery, open space and solitude, factors which appeal to a great many urban dwellers as well as to long time residents. In the past residents tended to make their livings directly from the land, wood products, ranching, hunting, etc. Now, more people who have moved to this area are building vacation homes, retire here or commute to jobs in surrounding counties. This has created an entire class of dwellings that are only occupied part-time and a large amount of undeveloped land held by absentee owners. This is of considerable significance to the wildfire danger of the area, as the structures often do not receive adequate maintenance, and owners are often not available to help with community efforts to reduce fire hazards. An important aspect of the human movement toward the forest is the general desire for solitude. This has led to a tendency for small, widely scattered communities or single residences that are difficult to organize or protect in the event of a wildfire. It has caused the people to be resourceful and independent, but also made emergency coordination and coherent planning on a large scale, difficult.

Another major area of concern is the drought experienced in recent years adds credence and necessity to promote and seek additional water supply systems and to mitigate epidemic insect and disease infestations within the forested areas of the county.

Financial Impact

The financial and social costs of wildfires demonstrate the need to reduce the impact on lives and property, as well as short and long term economic and environmental consequences of large scale fires, cost savings can be realized through preparedness and risk reduction including a coordinated effort of planning for fire protection among local, state and federal agencies and the

private sector. Individual property owners must play a major role in this coordinated effort to help ensure the project's success.

Plan of Action Overview

Community Wildfire Protection Plan incorporates the efforts of individual property and business owners, local, county and state governments, and the U.S. Forest Service. This has been a collaborative effort with the goal to create synergy to resolve the issues of forest health, and to control the damaging impact of wildfires on our rural communities. Actions range from increased public awareness, education and property owners' creating defensible spaces, to the tentative construction of fuel breaks and thinning of overgrown forest on Federal, State and private lands as well as prescribed burning. The following is, in short, a brief overview of the goals we have identified to be completed in collaboration with Federal agencies, Wyoming State Forestry, and local government entities:

- 1) Promote wildfire awareness and public safety;
- 2) Improve survivability to people, homes and the environment when wildfire occurs;
- 3) Access and utilize federal and other grant dollars;
- 4) Identify and prioritize actions for fire protection;
- 5) Develop evacuation plans if appropriate;
- 6) Monitor the changing conditions of wildfire risk and community action;
- 7) Continue to use harvests and thinning to maintain diversity in both age classes and stand densities to mitigate epidemic insect and disease outbreaks and to reduce the potential for large scale stand replacement wildfires;
- 8) Implement and complete fuel reduction and firebreak projects in appropriate areas; and
- 9) Continue to implement prescribe burning to facilitate fuels reduction.

This CWPP includes maps depicting areas within Crook County that have been identified and prioritized through the consultative efforts of the signatories. The maps also depict the areas identified on the National Fire Plan Register as being at risk to wildfire. The areas of concern have been prioritized as follows:

- Fuel Hazards. An evaluation of vegetation conditions within the community and on adjacent lands;
- Risk of Wildfire Occurrence. An evaluation of the probability of fire ignition within the community and surrounding lands.

- Risk to homes, business and essential infrastructure. An evaluation of the vulnerability of structures within the community to ignition from firebrands, radiation and convection.

Listed below are the areas within Crook County that were identified through a collaborated effort by Wyoming State Forestry and County Officials. The placement of these areas is not inherent to priority needs. All locations are in common with significant mitigation needs regarding the aforementioned analysis criteria. The high-risk areas are as follows:

High Risk Areas

Sand Creek	Including the surrounding communities of Beulah, Ranch A, Talley Subdivision
Aladdin	Including the surrounding communities of Aladdin and Hay Creek
Alva	Including the surrounding communities of Oak Creek and Mona
Bear Lodge	Including the surrounding areas of Farral, Lytle Creek, Blacktail Creek, Lame Jones, Farral, Sundance, Miller Creek and Government Valley
Black Buttes	Including the surrounding areas of Clark Road, Black Flats and Inyan Kara Mountain
Kara Creek Pine Ridge	Including Bank Land, Coal Divide, Kara Creek and Newman Divide Including the surrounding communities of Pine Haven, Thorne Divide, McFarland Divide, Pine Ridge
Hulett	Including the surrounding communities of Hulett, Sourdough and Storm Divide
New Haven	Including the surrounding communities of New Haven, Government Canyon and Strawberry
Devils Tower	Including the surrounding communities of Cabin Creek, Devils Tower & Lance Creek
Douglas	Including the surrounding area of Arch Creek and areas running south of Interstate 90 to Highway 116.

Sand Creek

The Sand Creek area meets all criteria as defined on the National Fireplan Registry as “At Risk” with wildland interface pockets throughout the area, high concentrations of brush, grass, timber, dense ladder fuel and questionable access to locations in the area. These conditions are dispersed in a steep slope, canyon topography. Access to and from the Sand Creek and

surrounding areas are hampered, as there are several bridges in the area with unknown weight limits. The necessity to increase fuel reduction and assessment projects is a paramount wildland management concern.

Aladdin

The Aladdin area is much like the Sand Creek area insofar as topography is concerned. Steep slope canyon topography, dense ladder fuel, high concentrations of brush, grass and timber are all common problems as well as the lack of availability of water. Another project in the works is the rural addressing being completed by the county assessor's office that will enable firefighters and emergency personnel are able to find locations more accurately in which an emergency would exist. The necessity to increase fuel reduction and make water more readily available for fire suppression would be a priority concern.

Alva

The Alva community is interlaced with the Federal Lands. Ingress and egress, water, and abundance of ground fuels are common problems found in this area. This area also has a high volume of wildland fires and is at high risk for wildland fires.

Bearlodge

The Bearlodge area encompasses the greatest acreage of wildland urban interface in Crook County and like Alva is interlaced with Federal Lands. Steep slopes, dense ladder fuels, oak understory with pine overstory, lack of grass management and high concentrations of brush, grass and timber are all common problems faced in this area. There are also numerous small ownership plots and cabins scattered throughout the area, limited suppression opportunities, the buildup of insect and disease infestations and deadfall situations in this area. Currently fuel breaks are being established as well as logging in insect infested areas.

Black Buttes

In the Black Butte and surrounding areas water, and the lack thereof would be the gravest concern. Steep, rocky slopes, ingress and egress, ground juniper with pine overstory and clusters of homes built tucked away into "pockets" are also factors that come into play which make fire suppression and structure protection dangerous.

Kara Creek

Kara Creek and surrounding area has steep slope topography, high fire call volume, Federal intermix as well as poor access make fire suppression and structure protection difficult. In this area there are a lot of summertime cabins, which are vacant for months at a time making it difficult to maintain a “defensible space” around the structures. Rural addressing is another problem in this area.

Pine Ridge

The Pine Ridge area is the fastest growing area in Crook County. The town of Pine Haven itself has more than doubled in population in the last year. Ingress and egress, rural addressing, defensible spaces around homes, thick juniper understory with pine overstory, small acreages with no grass management are all factors which make the Pine Ridge area problematic.

Hulett

The topography for the Hulett community and surrounding area is made up of steep slopes, juniper understory with pine overstory. Ingress and egress, rural addressing, and homes with very little defensible space are all problems facing this community and areas incorporated within for purposes of this document.

New Haven

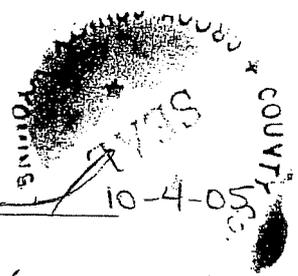
This area has steep slopes and canyons with mostly Juniper and pockets of Ponderosa Pine. Small ownership with lack of grass management, lack of defensible spaces, lack of water availability and rural addressing are all factors that affect this area. The New Haven and surrounding areas are also intermixed with Federal Lands.

Devils Tower

The Devils Tower area is made up of steep, rocky slopes. Other common problems in this area include lack of defensible space and no rural addressing in place as of yet.

Douglas

The area of Douglas and surrounding locations has a high fire call volume. Juniper understory with pine overstory, small acreages with limited grass management, ingress and egress, water, rural addressing, intermixed with federal lands, little to no fuel management on Federal lands are all factors leading to the need for wildland urban interface mitigation intervention in this area.



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