

2015 COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN (CWPP) UPDATE GUIDELINES

The State of New Mexico and collaborative stakeholders have made a concerted effort over the past fifteen years to identify areas throughout the state that are at risk for wildland fires. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) have become the primary mechanism for evaluating risk due to their emphasis on community involvement and assessment of local resources. CWPPs are also an important planning document used by emergency responders and citizens to plan for and respond to wildfire emergencies. Local leaders and governmental entities find CWPPs valuable for the purposes of identifying critical needs and prioritizing funding. The New Mexico State Forestry Division has used CWPPs to rank risk communities for the annual Communities At Risk Report that is provided to the Governor and New Mexico legislature by December 15 of each year.

Most of the wildfire risk areas in New Mexico are now included in a CWPP, but the work does not stop there. Resources and landscapes change over time and CWPPs must be revisited and refreshed regularly. Changes in risk ratings should be reflected upon completion of priority projects and new initiatives developed for the CWPP to remain viable. In addition, effective new strategies and wildland programs should be incorporated into CWPP planning efforts. For example, across the country, natural resources and fire managers are increasingly operating under the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) which has these goals:

- a. Restore and maintain resilient landscapes,
- b. Create and sustain [Fire Adapted Communities](#), and
- c. Respond safely, effectively and efficiently to wildfire.

CWPPs should be updated every five years to be most useful. These guidelines are designed to enhance a CWPP's effectiveness and were generated from actual experiences with mitigation and large wildfires, as well as community planning processes.

Process for Updating Your CWPP

1. Review existing CWPP.
2. Host collaborative meetings.
3. Update maps.
4. Reflect changes in risk ratings due to completed projects or changes in landscape.
5. Develop updated priorities.
6. Distribute CWPP update drafts to key stakeholders (including local, state, tribal and federal partners) for review and input before the final approval.
7. Submit the final document to your local government body, local fire department(s) and State Forestry for required signatures and endorsement.
8. Once signed and endorsed by your local governing parties, submit all documentation to NM State Forestry no later than September 1st for final approval by the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force.

Requirements for updating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in New Mexico

All CWPPs and CWPP updates must be reviewed and approved by the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force (FPTF). The FPTF recommends that communities update their CWPP every five years. Minimum requirements for all new CWPPs and updates must address the following items:

1. Collaboration: A CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties.
2. Prioritized fuel reduction: A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
3. Reduce structural ignitability: A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.
4. Secure signature:
 - a. The applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities);
 - b. The local fire department(s); and
 - c. The state entity responsible for forest management.

In addition, in New Mexico all CWPPs – including updates – must include the following criteria:

1. Describe progress made and list accomplishments since the CWPP was adopted.
2. Identify any new risks that have developed.
3. List any changes in a community's hazard risk rating. Risk must be rated as either high, medium, or low.
4. Appropriate signatures (local government, local fire department(s), and State Forestry)
5. List of communities-at-risk and each individual community hazard risk rating
6. Map the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas within the CWPP boundaries with either a high, medium, or low risk rating. Deliver paper, PDF, and digital WUI boundary files to New Mexico State Forestry's Resource Protection Bureau. Digital files must be shapefiles. WUI boundary files must have the high, medium, or low risk rating delineated.
7. Include a list of new prioritized projects. The list must reflect state, tribal and federal priorities. Narrative should capture collaborative efforts and best practices within your landscape.
8. State Forestry accepts CWPP updates either as a preface to a previously approved plan, or as a new document with the updates integrated into the existing approved plan.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAKING YOUR CWPP MORE EFFECTIVE

Make your pre-fire plan sustainable and inclusive.

1. Develop a plan to reconvene your Core Team at least annually. By meeting regularly, and inviting relevant land management entities, you can stay in communication, convene around funding opportunities, coordinate implementation across organizations and manage changes to contacts. Consider your CWPP a "living document" that can be updated as conditions change or projects are completed. Make sure to create a timeline to review progress and identify a person or entity to evaluate and make recommendations back to the Core Team.
 - a. Engage stakeholders and the public. The CWPP development process is an ideal time for education and outreach about wildfire risk and developing fire adapted communities.
2. Prepare a user-friendly CWPP that is written in plain language and is understandable to a broad audience.
3. Plan at both the community scale and the landscape scale. Prioritize and rank community risk at the landscape scale, but also draw from your Core Team's knowledge of local conditions and issues to develop community-level action items, regardless of overall risk rating.
4. Don't forget to include action items like testing your Reverse 911 calling system and maintaining and improving rural addressing.
5. Ensure that the CWPP recognizes the needs of especially vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged populations. For some communities, extra effort is needed to engage part-time residents.
6. Action plans should be as specific as possible with concrete tasks, a timeline, and the names of responsible individuals, organizations or other stakeholders. Similarly, be as specific as possible about the values at risk and identifying the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundaries. Labeling large areas or entire counties as WUI makes project identification and prioritization difficult.
7. Recognize that your CWPP may be used to inform other plans such as land use plans, emergency management and hazard mitigation plans and regional water plans.
 - a. When you engage land use planners or developers, discuss:
 - Creating adequate ingress and egress for residents and emergency response vehicles.
 - Ensuring roads have sufficient right of way to allow for managing roadside vegetation and utility infrastructure.
 - Ensuring open space or common lands have management options that allow managing vegetation for defensible conditions.
 - b. When you engage emergency managers, discuss:
 - Emergency evacuation routes, shelters, and smoke refuge for wildfire and post-fire flood situations.
 - Ask them about other topics your community should be considering for wildfire planning and response.
 - c. When you engage water planners, discuss:
 - Including consideration of fire impacts on water resources and watersheds in state, regional and local water plans.

- Projects and activities that improve watershed health, reduce wildfire risk and mitigate impacts from wildfire and post-fire floods to watersheds and water resources.

Consider planning for events during and after wildfire

Traditionally, CWPPs have focused on wildfire prevention and response. Recent wildfires have shown the importance of planning ahead for community action during the fire event, as well as for the post-wildfire effects and recovery, which can be as devastating as the fire itself.

1. Develop a plan to provide communities with refuge from smoke during a wildfire. For example, clean air shelters can be brought into an area for a period of time. The wildfire response and recovery team should identify where to find them, where would it be set-up, what size is needed, where are vulnerable populations in your area.
2. Identify a community liaison for each community to interface with incident command and/or Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams during and after wildfires. It is recommended that this person take IS-700 (“National Incident Management System: An Introduction”) and IS-800 (“National Response Framework: An Introduction”) to be familiar with the incident command structure. Also consider taking S-203 (“Introduction to Incident Information”) to become familiar with fire information techniques.
3. Review “After Wildfire: A Guide for New Mexico Communities” (www.afterwildfirenm.org) with your Core Team. Consider integrating applicable elements into a post-fire section of your CWPP.
4. Identify and establish a wildfire response and recovery team (which may be different from your CWPP Core Team) along with a strategy (see the “Mobilize Your Community: Assess Your Needs” section of the After Wildfire Guide) and an annual action plan to keep the team together.
5. Identify values at risk from post-fire impacts and use those to develop desired post-fire conditions for your landscape. Consider which techniques you might utilize to help protect areas from post-fire flooding or to rehabilitate burned areas (see the “Post Fire Treatments” section of the After Wildfire Guide).