

National Fire Plan La Plata County Community Fire Plan

March 2002



**Prepared by the
Office of Community Services --
Fort Lewis College**

A part of the National Fire Plan.

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This Community Fire Plan was developed from October 2001 to March 2002. Contained in this document are recommendations for making La Plata County a safer place to live by reducing catastrophic wildfire risk. Many individuals and organizations gave input. Their time is appreciated.

The Community Fire Plan will only be successful with the participation of the communities in La Plata County and through keeping strong partnerships between all the players. Similar yet individualized plans are in place for the counties of Southwest Colorado and can be obtained by calling Mike Preston at the Office of Community Services -- Fort Lewis College: phone 970-565-8525 or email: mpreston@co.montezuma.co.us

Contact for La Plata County

Marsha Porter-Norton
Projects Consultant
Office of Community Services -- Fort Lewis College
c/o P. O. Box 4506
Durango, Colorado 81302
970-375-0753
porternorton@frontier.net

National Fire Plan -- La Plata County Community Fire Plan

Introduction

La Plata County, Colorado is home to 42,506 residents and is situated in the southwest corner of Colorado. The county encompasses 1.08 million acres and is a region with stark striking landscapes ranging from high alpine peaks and meadows in the north to arid plateaus, sage plains and mesas in the south. Land use, by acreage, is as follows:

Type of Ownership	Number of Acres
Private	461,185
San Juan National Forest	396,050
Bureau of Land Management	21,823
State of Colorado	23,287
Southern Ute Indian Tribe	179,055
Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe	1,685
Total	1,083,085

There are a number of entities involved in fire prevention and firefighting in La Plata County including:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)
- La Plata County (LPC)
- Local Fire Departments
- United State Forest Service (USFS)

All of these organizations work with each other and community partners to share resources and information. Over the years strong partnerships have developed related to fire prevention demonstration projects, firefighting, public education and accessing resources such as equipment, grants, and training. It is in the spirit of these partnerships that this National Fire Plan -- Community Fire Plan (CFP) was developed and that its recommendations will be carried out.

Growth is a significant issue for the county affecting all aspects of catastrophic wildfire prevention and mitigation. The population of La Plata County is growing at an average rate of 3% each year. From 1993 to 1999, 2,895 new lots were created through major and minor subdivisions. Since 1978, over 11,000 residential structures have been placed throughout the county. Newcomers from all over the world find the environs of this place desirable for home building in vegetation, that, in many places is at great risk for catastrophic wildfire. It is against this backdrop of a rapidly urbanizing community that this CFP was developed. Since the Colorado State Forest Service ranks Southwest Colorado as one of the three most at-risk areas of the state, this effort is timely.

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Summary Recommendations -- La Plata County Community Fire Plan

Recommendation #1

Continue to develop and refine the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* for use by fire management agencies, La Plata County, and communities across Southwest Colorado.

Recommendation #2

Encourage and support the implementation of a community-led and community-driven Fire Council in La Plata County that could carry out collaborative projects. The Council would be comprised of the local Fire Department Chiefs, the US Forest Service, Southern Ute Indian Tribe and BIA fire management officers, the Colorado State Forest Service, BLM, La Plata County officials, and representatives from potentially affected stakeholder groups such as realtors, insurance agents, environmental organizations, and homeowner associations, etc.

Recommendation #3

Develop and carry out grassroots, neighbor-to-neighbor public education strategies in areas identified as high risk in the CFP planning process and through the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project.

Recommendation #4

Initiate fire prevention and mitigation projects on federal lands identified in the CFP planning process after appropriate review processes are completed, and assist other fire managers with fire management activities in their jurisdictions. These projects will be carried out by the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, in partnership with local communities, the local Fire Departments, the Colorado State Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Recommendation #5

Continue working collaboratively across jurisdictions to explore and possibly implement county policies that would lessen the chances of catastrophic wildfires on private lands, and lands in the urban interface.

Recommendation #6

Implement demonstration projects that will give communities and neighborhoods a visual picture of fire wise strategies, combining these projects with public education meetings and campaigns.

Recommendation #7

Support and advertise the existence of private contractors who can carry out fire wise prevention projects on homeowners' properties.

Recommendation #8

Continue to build, create and strengthen partnerships to carry out this CFP among federal, state, and local governments and agencies, and with private sector entities and non-profits.

Recommendation #9

Encourage the development of private, small diameter wood products processing businesses.

La Plata County -- Community Fire Plan: Firefighting and Prevention Capacity

Prevention and firefighting in La Plata County is done by the following entities:

On Private and State Lands fire protection is provided by the fire districts of: Upper Pine, Los Piños, Fort Lewis Mesa, and by the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority (includes Hermosa Cliffs and Animas Fire Districts, the City of Durango Fire Department, and Mercy Medical Center's paramedics.)

Increased demand on already stretched budgets and volunteers is evident as the county's population climbs. The Animas District, which is La Plata County's largest, logged 78 calls in 1978; 800 calls in 1999; and an estimated 1,000 calls in the year 2000. Adequate funding is needed, and, is usually contingent on bond issues passing. Several of the fire districts have seen failed bond issues recently but the Animas District did receive a funding increase in 1995. Recruiting volunteers for fire districts is increasingly more difficult.

In 2001, the fire districts that melded into the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority did so under a joint services agreement that, in essence, consolidated the districts into one entity. This move created greater efficiencies in the system, reduced service redundancies and territorial discrepancies while also reducing response times.

The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) fire programs provide effective readiness, and response and suppression of wildfires. This organization's greatest emphasis is on prevention and mitigation to lessen the chances of catastrophic wildfires on state and private lands in Colorado. The CSFS's activities include:

- a) promoting fire mitigation projects;
- b) assisting county governments in assessing wildfire hazards; and
- c) sharing information with diverse audiences on the importance of mitigating hazards on their forested lands to help protect lives and property.

The CSFS leads efforts such as Fire Academies and Fire Conferences – avenues for sharing new information and training fire professionals in the most up-to-date techniques. The CSFS also distributes fire equipment and grants, trains personnel, and carries out “on the ground” projects.

On Tribal Lands the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides wildland fire protection on tribal lands. With La Plata County's southern portions being dotted and interspersed with private, federal, tribal and state lands, coordination between fire fighting entities is imperative.

On Federal Lands the Columbine Ranger District and the San Juan Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management cover La Plata County. The Columbine District and has one engine with a crew of five, and a new nine-person fuels reduction crew. A new 20 member San Juan Interagency Hot Shot Crew will be stationed in Durango but will work elsewhere across the nation. They are considered a national resource and will be assigned to priority fires outside of La Plata County. A new position has been created at the San Juan Public Lands Center to work on goals and projects identified in the National Fire Plan -- Community Fire Plans.

The Durango Interagency Fire Dispatch Center helps to make fire response quick and effective. The USFS, BLM, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mesa Verde National Park and CSFS each contribute staff and resources to operate the full-time facility – located in the San Juan Public Lands Center, 15 Burnett Court, Durango. And finally, a new air tanker base is scheduled for completion at the La Plata County airport in 2002 that will improve the firefighting capabilities in the region.

La Plata County -- Community Fire Plan: The Process

In order to complete the La Plata County Community Fire Plan, the following steps were taken:

- The *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project was created by Dr. Bill Romme, a professor at Fort Lewis College (now at Colorado State University) and several of his colleagues. This mapping project is an initial strategic planning tool that can help Fire Departments, federal fire management officers and La Plata County officials better identify areas that are high risk for catastrophic wildfires. In March 2001, meetings were held in Durango and Bayfield to unveil the project and seek citizen input about wildfire.
- Also, as a part of the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project, a questionnaire was sent to over 1,000 residents of the county to gather input. See Appendix A for a sample questionnaire.
- The USFS and BLM Fire Management Officers, working with the Fort Lewis College – Office of Community Services and all the local Fire Chiefs, spent a number of months creating a map of high-risk priority areas. This mapping process produced a set of projects that will now be considered for controlled burns and other fire mitigation strategies by the

USFS and BLM in the future. It also includes priority areas of high concern identified by each Local Fire District.

- A survey was sent to all the local Fire Chiefs seeking their input about wildfire issues, equipment and training needs, and further collaboration strategies to increase effectiveness in dealing with wildfires.
- Key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders and this CFP was sent out in draft to seek input and changes.

Goals of the National Fire Plan

- ensure firefighting resources;
- rebuild communities damaged in past year's fires and rehabilitate fire-damaged ecosystems;
- thin vegetation in areas where private development adjoins public lands; and
- work with local residents to reduce fire risk and improve fire protection.

Action Strategies for Achieving These Goals

- developing this Community Fire Plan, and implementing it;
- using the work produced by the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project;
- carrying out community meetings and a survey;
- conducting public education; and
- strengthening collaboration between La Plata County, the local Fire Districts, USFS, BLM, BIA, CSFS, and communities.

La Plata County – Community Fire Plan: Goals

- #1) *Increase* La Plata County's capacity to identify high-risk areas and work to prevent catastrophic wildfire on those lands.
- #2) *Improve* the effectiveness of fire prevention public education by taking current education efforts to personal, grassroots and neighborhood level(s.)
- #3) *Decrease* fire risk in the urban interface(s) by implementing key projects identified in the CFP planning process.
- #4) *Increase* the number of homeowners implementing fire wise strategies.
- #5) *Continue* to support the myriad partnerships between communities and local, state and federal agencies to lessen the chances of catastrophic wildfire in La Plata County.

“Resource managers have been dealing with the management problems created by the intermingling of wildlands with interspersed and adjacent development for years. What has changed is the dimensions of the conflict in these wildland urban interface situations. As more and more people move to woodland environments to capture social and natural amenities, conflicts are becoming more intense, more complex, and more visible than before. A growing consensus has emerged that wildland issues have become the most contentious and problematic issues for forest managers.”

- *Fire Hazards at the Urban-Wildland Interface: What the Public Expects* (Corner, Gardner, & Taylor.)

La Plata County – Community Fire Plan: Recommendations

In order to carry out the goals just mentioned, the CFP recommends the following:

Recommendation #1

Continue to develop and refine the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* for use by fire management agencies, La Plata County, and communities across Southwest Colorado.

A very exciting tool is emerging in La Plata County that could have significant impacts on the ability of local, state and federal fire management officers to lessen the chances of catastrophic wildfires. The tool is the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* for La Plata County, Colorado. This project was launched in 2001 headed by Dr. Bill Romme, an ecologist from Colorado State University formerly of Fort Lewis College, along with other colleagues from the University of Colorado and Prescott College (full report can be emailed upon request.)

“Our BEHAVE (a fire behavior modeling system) simulations indicated that the environments likely to produce the most damaging and uncontrollable fire behavior are those with (1) steep southerly slopes and (2) oak, ponderosa pine, or piñon-juniper vegetation. Unfortunately, these are some of the most popular locations for building homes, because of the views and greenery that they afford.”

- *Wildfire Hazard and Assessment Map for La Plata County Colorado*

This first-of-its-kind mapping project is distinct and includes variables not looked at before by similar wildfire hazard assessments.

Once completed, the assessment could have two broad applications:

- a) resource managers and fire control officers can use the assessment map to identify areas of highest priority for mitigation treatments on public and private lands to reduce wildfire risk; and
- b) land management agencies and County officials can better target public education to include those areas deemed most acute for fire risk.

While this project currently now covers La Plata County, the results and methodology can serve as examples and a model for future fire risk assessment and mapping throughout the region, and maybe even the State of Colorado. Indeed, the La Plata County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in December 2001, states:

“The 2001 wildfire risk assessment provides La Plata County with invaluable information that can be used during the development review process to ensure wildfire risk in developing areas can be minimized.”

Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map: The Model

The project involves creating maps by assembling topographical data including slope and aspect from the USGS, vegetation data, and fuel models. These data were input into BEHAVE, the widely used mechanistic fire behavior model, to produce the maps in the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map*.

The ultimate product of the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project are maps that show wildfire hazard from three perspectives: a) spread rate; b) flame length; and c) total potential heat release. The maps show where these three parameters are most risky. For example, heat release tends to be especially high in the central portion of the county. The greatest simulated flame lengths tend to be in the southern and central portions of the county, including the central zone (where development is also very dense.) The greatest occurrence of moderate and high spread rates is also in the central zone.

For a more detailed discussion of methodology and analysis, go to Appendix B where you will find the paper written by Dr. Romme and his colleagues. The actual maps are available through the USFS.

Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map: Summary Conclusions

The initial results of this work were released in June 2001 to local fire management officials. Two major areas of improvement were recommended as follows:

- a) the maps needed to show a greater fire risk in the ponderosa pine and piñon-juniper forests; and
- b) southern aspect tends to burn more vigorously than northerly aspects -- the maps did not reflect this phenomenon.

Since June, both of these areas of improvement have been dealt with in a second iteration which was released in November 2001.

The project shows that environments likely to produce the most damaging and uncontrollable fire behavior are those with:

- a) steep southerly slopes; and
- b) oak, ponderosa pine, or piñon-juniper vegetation.

The scientists note that, unfortunately, these vegetation types are also the most popular places where new developments are occurring. This is evidenced by their findings that the greatest portion of the county having the greatest risk is the central zone which also contains the major subdivisions of: Shenandoah, Durango West, Rafter J, Edgemont Ranch, and the Grandview area, plus numerous subdivisions on the northern portion of Florida Mesa. Other areas of high risk noted were areas such as Falls Creek and the Dry Side.

Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map: Survey

In the Spring of 2001, a Community Survey was sent out to over 1,000 La Plata County residents and homeowners. While the response rate was low (62), there was some interesting information reported from questionnaires returned:

- The majority were “very concerned” about the risk of wildfire in Southwest Colorado.
- The majority were “very concerned” about potential damage from wildfires to property in the residential area where they live.
- Most felt “moderately well informed” about strategies and techniques that could be used to protect homes or business from natural wildfire.
- Most felt that the federal land agencies, local government and fire protection organizations are “moderately well prepared” to address the wildfire risks they believe exist in their neighborhood or community.
- Respondents felt that there is a high responsibility on citizens to reduce wildfire risk on their properties in relation to government responsibility. Most said it was either 60% or 80% private property owners’ responsibility – with the remaining percentages being the governments’ responsibility.
- The number one action taken to reduce risk was trimming branches on the lower parts of trees followed by constructing a non-combustible roof, clearing properties of combustible materials, and removing wood piles near homes.

Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map: Refining the Model

While this *Wildfire Risk Assessment and Map* project can be used for initial strategic planning purposes in La Plata County and is an emerging invaluable tool, to further utilize the model the following steps are recommended and need taken:

- refinement of the fuels and vegetation maps (e.g. perhaps through aerial photographs);
- improvement of the precision as to the location of homes and other structures; and
- identification of community and cultural values that need protection beyond homes (e.g. historic sites, watersheds, viewsheds, and wildlife habitat.)

The Colorado State Forest Service deems southwest Colorado as one of the top three areas of greatest risk for wildfire so this emerging scientific tool is a valuable resource for predicting, mitigating and preventing catastrophic wildfire.

Recommendation #2

Encourage and support the implementation of a community-led and community-driven Fire Council in La Plata County that could carry out collaborative projects. The Council would be comprised of the local Fire Department Chiefs, US Forest Service, Southern Ute Indian Tribe and BIA fire management officers, the Colorado State Forest Service, the BLM, La Plata County officials, and representatives from potentially affected stakeholder groups such as realtors, insurance agents, environmental organizations, and homeowner associations, etc.

It is recommended that this Council be formed in the year 2002. This Council needs to not duplicate current efforts, add value, and bring new voices and interests to the table with local Chiefs and federal FMO's. To "jump start" the process, it is recommended that representatives from a successful Fire Council (such as Boulder or Prescott) be recruited to do a workshop on their efforts.

Example Councils

Source: www.firewise.org

Here are some quick examples of showcase communities that have established Councils which could be used as models:

- **Prescott, Arizona:** The Prescott Area Wildland/Urban Interface Commission includes five jurisdictions including the City of Prescott, Yavapai County, the Central Yavapai Fire District, the Arizona Department of Forestry, and the United States Forest Service. A memorandum of understanding guides their work. The Commission advises the cooperating agencies; identifies, develops and prioritizes wildfire issues; develops plans and makes recommendations to appropriate levels of government; takes on citizen education initiatives; and provides all agencies with a quarterly report of their activities.
- **Big Canoe, Georgia:** This is a development of 900 high-dollar homes on 10,000 acres. The Georgia Forestry Commission has worked with their Fire Safety and Security Committee to implement fire prevention strategies such as evacuation protocols, development expansion planning, pruning fuel loads, marking roads more appropriately, creating a quarterly magazine for homeowners and getting better equipment for fire-fighting.
- **Jefferson County, Alabama:** This community formed the Wildland/Urban Interface Advisory Board to prevent as many disasters in the urban interface as possible. Not only are firefighting entities and governments represented but so are realtors, insurance agents, developers, landscape planners, the transportation department, home builders, and residential inspectors. They have done many things such as conducting cross training sessions, and designing door hangers, brochures and hazard rating forms plus other educational projects.
- **Boulder, Colorado, Incline Village, Nevada and Flagstaff, Arizona** were noted in the planning process as being models and are being researched.

"Only through a cooperative effort among these entities and with the citizens of these communities can the multi-faceted challenges posed by development of the wildland areas in the Prescott basin be addressed. In view of these considerations, these entities desire to establish an enduring basis for such cooperation and assistance and therefore enter in this Memorandum of Understanding." - Prescott Area Wildland/Urban Interface Commission's purpose statement

Recommendation #3

Develop and carry out grassroots, neighbor-to-neighbor public education strategies in areas identified as high risk in the CFP planning process and through the *Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Map* project.

La Plata County is fortunate to have several public education tools already in place including:

- A brochure that the County planning department is developing called “*Knowing Your Wildfire Neighbor.*”
- *Family Emergency Preparedness Guide*, Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), a booklet handed out at the La Plata County Building Department that contains information about wildland fires.
- Firewise Construction: Design and Materials – Peter Slack, a manual that is available at the La Plata County Building Department.
- Educational materials and presentations developed by the Colorado State Forest Service.
- A 15 minute video, “Protecting Your Home from Wildfire,” a partnership of the City of Durango, La Plata County, the San Juan National Forest and the Colorado State Forest Service.
- Mass media publications produced by the San Juan Public Lands Center and Colorado State Forest Service such as “*Living with WILDFIRE in Southwest Colorado,*” a newsletter published in the summer of 2001 with more to be released this year.

With these mass public education tools in place, a need has been identified to “get more grassroots” ...making public education a personal, relationship-building and neighborhood process. Often, the question arose in the planning process:

With all this public education being done, why aren't more homeowners taking more actions to reduce their risk?

While the answers to this question can be elusive, in the CFP process, it was decided that a series of targeted public education meetings will be held over the next year. These meetings will be carried out by any combination of: Federal Fire Management Officers; the Bureau of Indian Affairs; public education personnel of the San Juan Public Lands Center; Colorado State Forest Service; and/or local Fire Departments.

The meetings will be utilized to directly interface with neighbors and neighborhoods in the highest risk areas identified on the map. The agenda will be teaching fire wise strategies, educating participants on risks to their homes and properties, and the reasoning behind their risk categorization. Also, ways to make their properties safer will be covered. The meetings will be creative and tailored to each Fire District – and even communities within each District.

Recommendation #4

Initiate fire prevention and mitigation projects on federal lands identified in the CFP planning process after appropriate review processes are completed, and assist other fire managers with fire management activities in their jurisdictions. These projects will be carried out by the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, in partnership with local communities, the local Fire Departments, the Colorado State Forest Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Federal Projects

The following projects were identified for treatments in 2002 and 2003 by the USFS and BLM (map is available upon request):

Bull Canyon,	Rx burning
Logchutes	Rx burning
Sauls Creek	Mechanical
Spring Gulch	Rx burning
Falls Creek	Mechanical
Mitchell Lakes	Rx burning
Deep Creek	Rx burning
Wickenson Mountain	Rx burning
Hermosa	Rx burning
Lange Canyon	Rx burning
Little Bear Creek	Mechanical
HD Mountains	Mechanical
Electra Lake	Mechanical
Vallecito	Mechanical
Red Creek	Mechanical
Forest Lakes	Mechanical
Perrins Peak	Mechanical
Mayhan	Mechanical
Edgemont	Mechanical
Timberline Ridge	Mechanical and Rx burning

This list of projects is currently undergoing the required scoping, planning and environmental assessment phases required by federal law and implemented through the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Local Fire Departments "Areas of High Risk and Concern"

The following areas of La Plata County are deemed as " areas of high risk and concern" by the Fire Departments' Chiefs. Each area is ranked in order with " 1" being the highest concern.

Animas Fire District (now Durango Fire and Rescue Authority)

- 1 -- Timberline, Valley Vista, Songbird, Wildwood
- 2 -- Sailing Hawks and Jacob's Cliff
- 3 -- Every Green Valley
- 4 -- Falls Creek Subdivision
- 5 -- Trappers Crossing
- 6 -- Artesian Valley Ranch, Squaw Apple Estates, Chastain

Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Department

- 1 -- Lands surrounding Vista de Oro
- 2 -- Eastern lands at entrance to La Plata Canyon
- 3 -- lands directly east of Cougar Mesa and Hesperus Land and Cattle Co.

Hermosa Cliffs Fire Department (now Durango Fire and Rescue Authority)

- 1 and 2 -- directly west and north of Electra Lake
- 3 -- lands near the Columbine and Lake Purgatory Subdivisions
- 4 -- Rockwood Subdivision
- 5 -- Rockwood Subdivision – Tamarron

Los Piños Fire Department

- 1 -- Candalaria Heights
- 2 -- Rancho Florida
- 3 -- Rivers End Estates and Florida River Ranch
- 4 and 5 -- Sundance Hills +
- 4 and 5 -- Lands directly southwest of Ignacio at the northwest intersection of Highway #318 and #172
- 6 -- Lands in and around Tucker Subdivision & Lands south of the Ignacio Pump Station and north of Piñon Mesa Ranches

Upper Pine River Fire District

- 1 -- Forest Lakes
- 2 -- Enchanted Forest, Tween Lakes, Cherry Valley Estates
- 3, 4, 5 -- Ragsdale, Texas Creek Ranch, and Timberdale Ranch
- 6 -- Homestead Ranches
- 7 -- Pine Springs Ranch
- 8 -- Deer Valley
- 9 -- Piney Woods

The La Plata County Fire Chiefs are currently in the process of refining and further categorizing this list in terms of the actions their departments will take at these locales -- taking into consideration criterion such as slope, accessibility, and data that is produced by Dr. Romme's *Wildland Hazard and Assessment Map* project. This process is ongoing.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Projects

The BIA is currently carrying out fire mitigation and prevention efforts. The list of projects the BIA has prioritized to accomplish from 2001 – 2003 is as follows:

Meadow Brook in Ignacio
Ignacio Peak near Ignacio
Florida Mesa
Youth Camp near Chimney Rock
Aspen Springs (more on the next page)
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Hall Canon in Aspen Springs
Vega Redonda
Madrid Canyon
Mesa Mountain
Sandoval Mesa
Payan Canyon

Recommendation #5

Continue working collaboratively across jurisdictions to explore and possibly implement county policies that would lessen the chances of catastrophic wildfires on private lands, and lands in the urban interface.

La Plata County and the federal and state fire management agencies consistently report that they work well together. Representatives meet regularly and collaborate on a number of projects --- including the identification of treatment projects on federal lands that are adjacent to private lands.

The Colorado State Forest Service leads an effort in resource sharing called the Annual Fire Operating Plan which involves La Plata County and all the Fire Districts. The Plan describes agreements that are made related to funding, personnel power on fires, and equipment sharing.

Rapid development of private lands impacts all entities in myriad ways. The county's Fire Districts are asked to comment on proposed developments and their project design but typically do not play a role in determining the location of new developments. The location of developments impact Fire Districts' abilities to fight fires due to issues such as road and driveway design and maintenance, adequate road and residence signage, water availability, fuel loadings, and the building materials of the subdivisions.

The county's Fire Districts have endorsed the adoption of the 1997 Uniform Fire Code (UFC) that would give them broad authority -- more than now -- over building and subdivision design standards and fire hazard mitigation measures. It is likely that the districts will request that the Board of County Commissioners approve its adoption. Recently, the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority announced it would enforce a provision in the 1985 UFC that was adopted by the County relating to driveway design at new building sites.

It was noted in several conversations that with the high cost of living in Durango and the county, it is important to not over-regulate new building sites. The more requirements placed on new buildings, the higher the cost of construction.

Recommendation #6

Implement demonstration projects that will give communities and neighborhoods a visual picture of fire wise strategies, combining these projects with public education meetings and campaigns.

The following projects are considered to be likely demonstration projects for La Plata County as the residents have expressed a keen interest in mitigating their fire risk, and, the subdivisions are adjacent to public lands. These projects could be carried out with various sources of public and private funding.

- Forest Lakes subdivision –north of Bayfield
- Falls Creek subdivision – northwest of Durango
- Deer Valley Estates – east of Bayfield

Recommendation #7

Support and advertise the existence of private contractors who can carry out fire wise prevention projects on homeowners' properties.

There are various private contractors in La Plata County who can be paid to complete fire mitigation and prevention projects on homeowners' properties. A list of contractors can be obtained by calling the Colorado State Forest Service at: 970-247-5250. Several issues emerged in talking with these contractors. The points are summarized below:

- the National Fire Plan, and any ensuing public education, need to continue to educate the public about the existence of these businesses;
- when the public education meetings take place in La Plata County, the private contractors should be invited and included;
- when homeowners utilize contractors, those contractors need to emphasize that the activity is an *ongoing* maintenance issue needing regular scrutiny and attention; and
- there is no quality control mechanism in place which can be problematic --
- if one contractor completes a job that is sloppy, inadequate or inaccurate, he/she gives the concepts of "fire wise" and creating defensible space a bad image.

Recommendation #8

Continue to build, create and strengthen partnerships to carry out this CFP among federal, state, and local governments and agencies, and with private sector entities and non-profits.

In carrying out this CFP, building and maintaining partnerships between the public and private sectors cannot be emphasized enough. Many strong links already exist in the county. These partnerships carry out effective public education; spawn action on the part of homeowners; get work done on-the-

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ground, and bring together various interests to lessen wildfire risk. Several new partnership opportunities were found in the CFP planning which are notable:

Southwest Youth Corps

Southwest Colorado is lucky to have an active youth conservation corps, Southwest Youth Corps (SYC.) These youth are paid to do various public lands projects across the Four Corners. They can be called upon to carry out fire prevention and mitigation projects both on private and public lands. The organization's mission statement is:

“Southwest Youth Corps provides young men and women of the Four Corners Region with structured, safe and challenging work and education opportunities through employment projects that promote personal growth, the development of social skills, and an ethic of natural resource stewardship.”

The Southwest Youth Corps, a non-profit organization, is a conservation-based program modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. Developed in 1997, SYC was modeled after the other 120+ Corps around the nation. SYC has developed into a sustainable organization based in Durango, Colorado and is governed by a Board of Directors. SYC is an accredited youth corps in the State of Colorado as defined by the Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA), and is also a member of the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC).

Southwest Youth Corps hires young adults between the ages of 16-23 and organizes them into crews of eight corps members with two adult mentor crew leaders. These crews then complete conservation projects for a variety of land management agencies in the Four Corners, including: the USFS, BLM, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado State Parks, local governments and non-profit organizations. SYC primarily offers eight-week residential conservation programs during the spring, summer and fall.

Their fuels reduction program is described in their brochure as follows:

SYC is pleased to offer a new opportunity for 18- to 25-year-olds. This 22-week non-residential program is ideal for anyone interested in a career in preventing and fighting forest fires. Corps members are paid an hourly wage, are eligible to earn a \$2,400 AmeriCorps Education Award, and work 40-hours/week.

The Federal Authorizations that specifically lists "Youth Conservation Corps" as a resource are available upon request.

American Red Cross

In other parts of Western Colorado, the American Red Cross has been approached to take on a role in fire education. The local Red Cross chapter has expressed an interest. This could be a potential resource for the BLM, CSFS, and USFS, and/or BIA to utilize as this CFP moves forward.

Recommendation #9

Encourage the development of private, small diameter wood products processing businesses.

Once a homeowner, private contractor or developer removes fuels from a home site, the question is: *What to do with the refuse pile?* The continued development of market for these materials will create win/win partnerships with the local small-diameter timber industries in the region, and homeowners who need the fuel piles removed. Several efforts are underway to expand and increase these markets, and they should be supported. □



La Plata County – Community Fire Plan: Bibliography & Sources

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www.firewise.org -- a web site of the Fire Wise movement.

