

Wildfire Protection through Fire-Adapted Communities

A Discussion Paper about Community Resilience

November 2015

Brief: The loss of life, property, and natural resources has focused attention on the increasing wildland urban interface (WUI) problem and the need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildland fire. With predictions of ongoing drought conditions and increased potential of large, high-intensity fires and reduced water supplies, wildland urban interface planning, fire suppression, vegetation management, and building construction provide effective strategies for managing the risk of wildfire to people, structures, and the environment.

communities increase these costs exponentially, as much as 30 times more than reported suppression costs, when severe wildfires destroy businesses and recreational property and ultimately contribute to flooding, erosion, and loss of wildlife habitat (Headwaters Economics 2013, IAWF 2013).

Background and Significance

The Fire Adapted Communities concept highlights the need for a collaborative team where community members, private organizations and governmental agencies are involved in efforts to recognize and address the wildland fire challenge. Meeting this challenge requires a wide variety of participation with representatives who know their role and take an active part in wildfire resiliency efforts.

Problem

Overgrown forests, excess fuels, severe weather, and more frequent droughts, complicated by rapid growth and limited regulations in development of WUI areas, has resulted in wildfires becoming increasingly large and destructive over the past several decades. The cost of federal, state and local wildfire response exceeds \$4.7 billion annually. Short- and long-term economic impact to affected



THE PEOPLE



www.fireadapted.org

THE TOOLS



Codes & Ordinances: A Case Study

The task of protecting lives and property from wildfires in WUI areas poses a significant problem to wildfire protection agencies. In an attempt to promote adequate protection, Yakima County began discussing the need for fire prevention education and regulation in 1999 as development extended into interface areas. Informal meetings were held by representatives of a number of fire protection districts with citizens to explain the hazards of living in these areas. In concert with these efforts, the Yakima County Planning Department was reviewing requirements for development in natural resource areas.

As the 2000 wildfire season progressed into one of the most disastrous in Washington State history (at that time), public awareness of the fire problem became increasingly apparent. Locally this was vividly illustrated when a wildland fire threatened the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and spread from Benton County to Yakima County. Under the direction of the County

Commissioners, Fire Marshal's Office staff began to pursue measures to help prevent and mitigate the dangers from wildfire in Yakima County.



Courtesy of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory

In October of 2000, an initial meeting of residents and special interest groups was held to discuss the adoption of code requirements to address wildfire issues. These discussions included a risk assessment and mapping of the County to identify various risk zones.

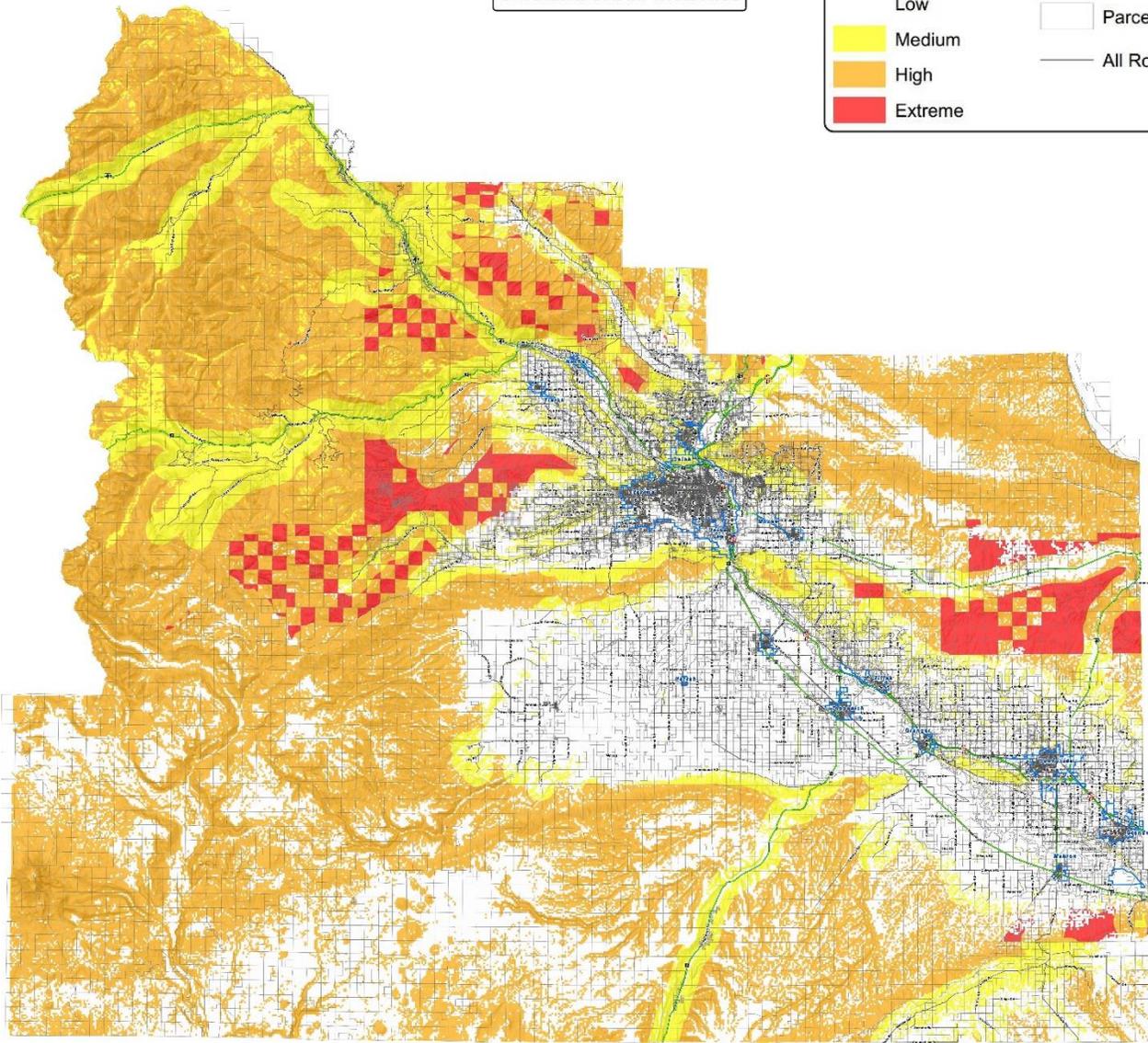
See Map on Next Page

After several months of stakeholder meetings, which led to recommending code adoption, the Board of County Commissioners enacted an ordinance adopting the Urban Wildland Interface Code. (Note: The updated editions of this code have since been identified as the International Wildland Urban Interface Code). Enforcement of the provisions of this code became the responsibility of the Fire Marshal's Office. Staff was further directed to develop and deliver public safety education programs for wildfire prevention to meet the needs of various interest groups within the community.

Yakima County Wildland Urban Interface

Yakima County
Wildland Urban Interface

Urban Wildlands - Risk	 City Limits
Low	 Parcels
 Medium	 All Roads
 High	
 Extreme	



Recognizing that wildfire education had been ongoing throughout the adoption process for the 2000 UWI Code, staff began to consider potential audiences that would benefit from a better understanding of a comprehensive wildland fire prevention program. Based upon the composition of the stakeholder group, a broad spectrum of experience and expertise represented diverse interests of business and the community. Presentations that acknowledged this diversity helped to promote acceptance of wildland fire education programs and enhance continued political support. Since the initial code adoption, Yakima County has further adopted a county-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This document identifies the need for ongoing code review and encompasses the broad spectrum of strategies and partnerships involved in the development and maintenance of Fire Adapted Communities.

Conclusion

Fire Adapted Communities provide an effective means of preparing for and mitigating the impacts of wildland fire. Successful efforts involve the combination of collaboration, outreach, planning, and neighborhood engagement and should be viewed as a long-term process. This shared responsibility provides a sustainable strategy for managing the risk of fire to people, structures, and the environment, as we are all learning to live with fire in the wildland urban interface.

Additional Resources

Headwaters Economics. 2013. The Rising Cost of Wildfire Protection.

Available from:

www.headwaterseconomics.org/wildfire/fire-cost-background

Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (aka Healthy Forests Initiative). Pub. L. No. 108-148. 2003. December 3, 2003. Available from:

www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ148/pdf/PLAW-108publ148.pdf

Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS). 2011. Vulnerabilities of Buildings to Wildfire Exposures. Available from:

www.disastersafety.org/disastersafety/vulnerabilities-of-buildings-to-wildfire-exposures

International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF). 2013. WUI Fact Sheet. Available from:

www.iawfonline.org/pdf/WUI_Fact_Sheet_08012013.pdf

Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC). 2011. A National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. Available from:

www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/documents/report/1_CohesiveStrategy03172011.pdf

Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC). 2012. A National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: Phase II Strategy Report (and other progress reports). Available from:

www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/reports.shtml

PARTNERS FOR FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES

*The reference document, “A Guide to Fire Adapted Communities” was

developed by members of the Fire Adapted Communities Coalition. The following is a list of contributors and their online contact information:

The Watershed Research and Training Center at www.thewatershedcenter.com

Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety at www.disastersafety.org

International Association of Fire Chiefs, Ready, Set, Go! at [www.http://iafc.org](http://www.iafc.org) or www.wildlandfirersg.org

National Fire Protection Association, Firewise Communities/USA at www.nfpa.org, www.firewise.org, or www.fireadapted.org

National Volunteer Fire Council, Wildland Fire Assessment Program at www.nvfc.org or www.nvfc.org/programs/wildland-fire-assessment-program

National Wildfire Coordinating Group, Wildland Urban Interface Mitigation Committee at www.nwcg.gov or www.nwcg.gov/var/sections/policy-planning-and-management/wildland-urban-interface-mitigation-committee

The Nature Conservancy, Fire Learning Network at www.nature.org or www.conservationgateway.org/fln

US Department of the Interior at www.doi.gov/index.cfm

US Fire Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, US Department of Homeland Security at www.usfa.fema.gov

USDA Forest Service at www.fs.fed.us or www.fireadapted.org