Section 2: Custer County Idaho

The rising cost of disasters has led to a renewed interest in identifying effective ways to reduce vulnerability to wildfires. Wildland/urban interface fire mitigation planning assists communities in reducing risk from wildfires by identifying resources, information, and strategies for risk reduction, while helping to guide and coordinate mitigation activities throughout the county. The Custer County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan provides documentation of implementing actions designed to reduce risk from wildfires through education and outreach programs, the development of partnerships, and implementation of preventative activities such as land use or building codes. The resources and information within the Mitigation Plan:

1. Establish a foundation for coordination and collaboration among agencies and the public in Custer County,

2. Identify and prioritize mitigation projects and implementing actions;

3. Assists in meeting the requirements of federal assistance programs.

Program Mission

The mission of the Custer County Wildland/Urban Fire Mitigation Program is to promote public policy designed to protect citizens, critical facilities, infrastructure, private property, and the environment from Wildfires. This can be achieved by increasing public awareness, documenting the resources for risk reduction and loss-prevention, and identifying activities to guide the county towards building a safer, more sustainable community.

Program Goals

The Custer County Wildland/Urban Fire Mitigation Program establishes goals that describe the overall direction that Custer County agencies, organizations, and citizens are taking to work toward mitigating wildland/urban interface risks from wildfires. The goals are stepping-stones between the broad direction of the mission statement and the specific recommendations outlined in the implementing actions.

Protect Life and Property

- Implement activities that assist in protecting lives by making homes, businesses, infrastructure, critical facilities, and other property more resistant to losses from wildfire hazards.

- Reduce losses and repetitive damages for chronic hazard events while promoting insurance coverage for catastrophic hazards.

- Improve hazard assessment information to make recommendations the creation of County wide zoning and building codes and standards for new developments and encouraging preventative measures for existing development in areas vulnerable to wildfire hazards.

Public Awareness

- Develop and implement education and outreach programs to increase public awareness of the risks associated with wildfire hazards.

- Provide information on tools, partnership opportunities, and funding resources to assist in implementing mitigation actions.

Natural Systems

- Balance watershed planning, natural resource management, and land use planning with wildfire mitigation to protect life, property, and the environment.

- Preserve, rehabilitate, and enhance natural systems to serve wildfire mitigation functions.

Partnerships and Implementation

- Strengthen communication and coordinate participation among and within public agencies, citizens, non-profit organizations, business, and industry to gain a vested interest in implementation.

- Encourage leadership within public and private sector organizations to prioritize and implement local, county, and regional hazard mitigation actions.

Emergency Services

- Establish policy to ensure mitigation projects for critical facilities, services, and infrastructure.

- Strengthen emergency operations by increasing collaboration and coordination among public agencies, non-profit organizations, business, and industry.

- Coordinate and integrate wildfire mitigation activities, where appropriate, with emergency operations plans and procedures.

Profile of Custer County

Historical and scenic Custer County, founded in 1881 and located in Central Idaho, has a population of 4,185 and an area of 4,938 sq. miles. Its landscape consists of arid desert, flat green valleys, and rugged rocky peaks and contains the highest mountain in Idaho, Mount Borah at 12,662 ft. The County Seat is Challis, with a population of just over 900. Other small towns include Mackay, Stanley, and Clayton. Custer County relies on ranching, mining, and tourism for economic resources. Custer County contains much of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness and the famous Salmon River as well as the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Custer County is characterized by the unique and attractive landscape that connects the various communities throughout the area. However, the potential impacts of hazards associated with the terrain make the environment and population vulnerable to disaster situations. It is impossible to predict exactly when these wildfires will occur, or the extent to which they will affect the county. Using modern technology, natural phenomena can sometimes be predicted, but the size and magnitude of their effects cannot.

Custer County has a total population of 4,342 with an expected growth rate of –2% according to the 2000 United States Census. This negative growth rate however, does not take into account the increased seasonal usage of the public lands in Custer County nor does it take into account the increased summer home construction underway specifically within the Stanley Basin and Sawtooth Valley. Currently there are 2,983 housing units in the County with 1770 of them occupied. Of those unoccupied housing units 747 of them are designated as seasonal or for recreation use. These 747 units are primarily located within the wildland/urban interface for which this planning effort is being conducted.

The current property valuation or market value of private lands inside of Custer County is $662,990,627. The total net property valuation for taxation purposes for the fire districts located in the County is $289,482, 658. As one can see the market value exceeds the tax value because of the homeowners' exemption, circuit breaker savings, and other reductions. The issue from a mitigation point of view

however, is the actual property loss or in other words the replacement value of the destroyed structures. The challenge facing the county is the cost for increased protection by the fire districts is not directly proportional to the replacement value of the property being protected.

Custer County Fire Districts desire to be actively involved in fire mitigation techniques reducing the fuel loading in key areas and re-planting burned areas following fire events. In addition, there is a strong BLM and USFS presence in Custer County and an excellent code or work ethic to meet the needs of the County. These departments all share a jurisdictional responsibility within the region. Rapid deployment of resources is a key advantage to the County in the protection of life, property and the environment.

Custer County Fire District Profiles

Stanley:

The Sawtooth Valley Fire District is a fire protection district. This small tourist town has a year round population of 300 and is situated in a road valley within the boundaries of the spectacular Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The surrounding terrain is rugged and mountainous with several large lakes. The Salmon River National Scenic Byway on State Highway 75 is the area's main transportation corridor with recreational activities and ranching as its primary economic base.

The fire protection area includes agriculture, rangelands, forest, wildland/urban interface, residential and business. The response area includes 76 square miles.

Over the past four years there have been 119 responses by Fire District Responders. The average response per year is 30. The highest single response total for one year was 39. The average annual loss due within the District is not available. The operating budget for the past five years has been $235,000 with an average annual budget of $47,000. The following tables provide a summary of existing resources, assets, and needs as reported in the June 2003 RC&D Fire Districts needs assessments.

Firefighting Program

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• 1 Station, 3 Bays • Volunteer Personnel • 2,750 Structural/1,400 Wildland Total GPM Capacity • Computerized Record Keeping System • Fire Response: Structural and Wildlands, EMS, HazMat, Rescue & High Angle Swift Water Rescue • 1 Structural/4 Wildland/Structural Vehicles • Planning for Grid Access Addressing System	• Fire Station • Public Education on Larger Access Roads • Widen and Better Maintain Access Roads • Central Water System • Underground Storage Tanks and Dry Hydrants • Assistance with Grant Writing • Local, Low-cost Grant Writing Courses • Grant Source Library • Updated Software • Truck Upgrades • SCBA Testing Equipment • Training on Apparatus Operations and Maintenance • Ongoing Wildlands Training

Hazardous Material

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Tech Level Trained Personnel • Operations Level Trained Personnel • HazMat Awareness Training – All Personnel	• Refresher Training • Improved Equipment • PPE and Improved Communications Equipment

Training and Certification

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• IFSTA Training Manuals • Structural Protection, Wildland Suppression, HazMat and Rescue Trained Personnel • Standard Operating Procedures in Place	• S.O.G.'s Completion • Updated Training Manuals & Workbooks

Communication

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Responds to Remote Alarm Calls • Some Portable Radios • Radios in All Vehicles	• Multi-Band Radios

Prevention and Inspection

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Fire Cause & Origin Investigations	• Promote Wildland Interface Public Safety • Packaged Presentations • Public Meetings with BLM/FS as Guest Speakers

Public Education

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Public Education Programs • Outreach Education	• Grants for Materials for Media Education

Challis:

The North Custer/Challis Fire District is a combined municipal and fire protection district. The protection area includes a slow growing area of Southern Idaho. Topography is a combination of flat farming, ranching, some mining ground and mountains with steep slopes along with rivers and streams. The Main Salmon Rivers runs through the District response area. Although sparsely populated, because of the high recreational interests of the area, the population swells during the hunting, fishing and camping seasons.

The fire protection area includes agricultural, rangelands, forest, wildland/urban interface, residential, business, and high tech/high risk (Thompson Creek Mine). The response area includes 730 miles of response area.

Over the past five years there have been 385 responses by Fire District Responders. The average response per year is 77. The highest single response total for one year was 92. The average annual

loss due within the District is estimated to be $592,000. The operating budget for the past five years has been $272,500 with an average annual budget of $54,500.

Clayton is part of the North Custer Rural Fire District and is located on the upper Main Salmon River. The industry is primarily agricultural, ranching and recreational. The recreational opportunities include camping, fishing, hunting, river rafting and off road activities. Population growth in the area is less than 5% per year and it is experiencing some increase in wildland/urban interface growth.

The topography of the area is a combination of mountains, rivers and public lands (Forest Service and BLM) with Highway 75 running through the middle of the town site. This Highway is designated the Salmon River National Scenic Byway and is the area's only transportation corridor. There are difficulties in responding to some of the areas covered due to poor road and bridge conditions, property access issues and the general remote nature of the terrain.

Over the past five years there have been 35 responses by Fire District Responders. The average response per year is 7. The highest single response total for one year was 10. The average annual loss due within the District is estimated to be $25,000. The operating budget for this department is included in the North Custer Rural Fire District budget. The following tables provide a summary of existing resources, assets, and needs as reported in the June 2003 RC&D Fire Districts needs assessments.

Firefighting Program

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• 4 Station, 14 Bays • Volunteer Personnel • 2,500 Structural/250 Wildland Total GPM Capacity • Manual Record Keeping System • Fire Response: Structural and Wildlands • 3 Structural/3 Wildland/Structural/2 Wildland Vehicles • Planning for Grid Access Addressing System	• Training Room Addition at North Custer and Challis City Stations • Light Fire Apparatus and Medium Sized Trucks • 2 Tenders • Grants • NFPA Manuals • All Department Personnel Trained to the Same Level • Refresher Courses • Ongoing Course for New Hires • Full Complement of Wildlands Equipment

Training and Certification

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Training Provided • Videos and Manuals	• All Personnel Trained to Same Level • Recertification Courses and Continuing Education Classes at the Local Level (Low-cost) • Training Room with AV Equipment • NFPA Manuals and Workbooks • Video Library for Rental and Lending

Communication

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Responds to Remote Alarm Calls • Some Portable Radios • Radios in All Vehicles	• Hand Held Units • Repeaters

Prevention and Inspection

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Fire Cause & Investigations	• None Identified

Public Education

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Public Education Programs • Outreach Education	• Prepackages Presentations

Clayton Substation/Department Firefighting Program

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• 1 Station, 3 Bays • 1 Fast Attack Mini Pumper Building • Volunteer Personnel • 2,400 Structural and 2,400 Wildland Total GPM Capacity • Grant Funding to Install Grid Address System • Manual Record Keeping System • Fire Response: Structural, Wildlands, HazMat, EMS Assists • 4 Structural/Wildland Vehicles • Meets ISO Water Flow Requirements • Meets NFPA Standards	• New Station with Space for Office, Classroom/Training • Ability to Enforce Codes for Roadway Access • City Hydrants • Computerized Record Tracking System (Hardware and Software) • Grant Writer • Grant Writing Assistance Courses • Grant Identification Sources—Grant Library • Assistance with Grant Writing • Improved Communication with Other Departments • NFPA Manuals for Testing, Maintenance & Operations • Service Manual & Training for Apparatus, Pump Operation • Wildlands Refresher Courses • County Tax Override for Funding

Hazardous Materials

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• None	• Local Training for Personnel through Grant Funding

Training and Certification

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Wildland Suppression	• Training Materials: Manuals, Workbooks, Videos, Computer Assisted Training Aids • Funding for Courses and Instructors • Grants • Certified Local Trainer • Facility for Training • Distance Learning System

Communication

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Responds to Remote Alarm Calls • Some Portable Radios • All Vehicles Radio Equipped	• Repeater for Remote Areas • Hand Held Radios

Prevention and Inspection

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Support from South Custer County	• Increase Personnel

Public Education

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Public Education Programs • Outreach Education	• Prepackaged Presentations • Sources for Additional Handouts

Mackay:

The Mackay/South Custer Fire District is a combined municipal and fire protection district. The protection area includes a slow growing area of Southern Idaho. Topography is varied from flat grasslands to mountainous areas. The Mackay Reservoir is within the boundaries of the District's response area with recreation, ranching and farming as the primary economic base.

The fire protection area includes agricultural, rangelands, forest, wildland urban interface, residential, and business. The response area includes two square miles of city area and 1,700 miles of district area.

Over the past five years there have been 230 responses by Fire District Responders. The average response per year is 46. The highest single response total for one year was 52. The average annual loss due within the District is estimated to be $450,000. The operating budget for the past five years has been $245,000 with an average annual budget of $49,000. The following tables provide a summary of existing resources, assets, and needs as reported in the June 2003 RC&D Fire Districts needs assessments.

Firefighting Program

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• 4 Station, 7 Bays • Volunteer Personnel • 4,750 Structural/3.700 Wildland Total GPM Capacity • Manual Record Keeping System • Fire Response: Structural and Wildlands • 4 Structural/5 Wildland/Structural/2 Wildland Vehicles • 1 Caterpillar Dozer	• Codes for New Developments • Smaller, More Versatile Apparatus • Additional Wells, Pumps and Holding Tanks in Accessible Areas • Another Station • Grants for One-time Purchases • Resources for the Procurement of Surplus Equipment • Wildlands Refresher Courses • Better Communication with Other Entities in the County • Current NFPA Manuals • Improved Tracking System for Training, Apparatus Maintenance, Building Maintenance, Personnel and Equipment • Better Use of Computerization

Training and Certification

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Structural Protection • Wildland Fire Suppression • HazMat • Shares Mosby Produced Training Videos • Some IFSTA Essentials Books	• Grants for Training and Materials • IFSTA Training Materials, Manuals & Workbooks, Videos • Subsidized Courses • On-line Library • Certified Instructor for the Local Area

Communication

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Responds to Remote Alarm Calls • Portable Radios • Radios in All Vehicles	• Improved Radio Frequencies

Prevention and Inspection

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Fire Cause & Origin Investigations	• Fire Code Enforcement Training

Public Education

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• Public Education Programs • Outreach Education	• Prepackages Presentations

Lost River:

The Lost Rivers Fire District protection area includes a slow growing area of Southern Idaho at the Southern end of Custer County in Moore. The area's primary industry is agricultural based with ranching and farming operations. The District has a wide range of topography from flat, cultivated fields and grazing lands to severe mountain slopes. The fire protection area includes agricultural, rangelands, forest, wildland/urban interface, residential, and business, with mutual aid to the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory. The District serves a 200 square mile area.

Over the past five years there have been 100 responses by Fire District Responders. The average response per year is 20. The highest single response total for one year was 30. The average annual loss due within the District is estimated to be $105,000. The operating budget for the past five years has been $42,460 with an average annual budget of $8,492. The following tables provide a summary of existing resources, assets, and needs as reported in the June 2003 RC&D Fire Districts needs assessments.

Firefighting Program

Existing Resources/Assets	Needs
• 1 Station, 6 Bays • Volunteer Personnel • 1,750 Structural/745 Wildland Total GPM Capacity • Grid Access Address System • Manual Record Keeping System • Fire Response: Structural and Wildlands • 2 Structural/4 Wildland/Structural Vehicles	• New Station • Codes for New Developments • Underground Water Storage Tanks • Dry Hydrants • Tender • Grants for One-time Purchases • Local Courses on Grant Writing • Regular Fleet Maintenance Program • NFPA Manuals • Regular Pump Testing Program/Equipment • Wildland Vehicles

Profiles of Federal Lands

Salmon Challis National Forest:

The Salmon-Challis National Forest covers over 4.3 million acres in east-central Idaho. Included within the boundaries of the Forest is 1.3 million acres of the Frank Church-- River of No Return Wilderness Area, the largest wilderness area in the Continental United States. Rugged and remote, this country offers adventure, solitude and breathtaking scenery. The Forest also contains Borah Peak, Idaho's tallest peak, the Wild & Scenic Salmon River and the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. The area is a highly desired destination for hunting, fishing, white-water rafting and many other popular recreational pursuits.

Sawtooth National Recreation Area:

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA), a part of the Sawtooth National Forest, is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful spots in Western America. Three classic mountain ranges with 40 peaks of 10,000 feet or higher provide scenic landscapes in every direction. More than 300 high mountain lakes are within the SNRA and hundreds of sparkling streams with the clarity of crystal. Headwater creeks of the mighty Salmon River converge in the Sawtooth Valley to form this legendary "River of No Return."

Although the heartland of the SNRA is a 217,000-acre wilderness, it is only part of the total 756,000-acre SNRA, an area larger than the state of Rhode Island. Roads provide access to beautiful scenic places and recreational activities suited to individuals of all ages and degrees of physical ability.

ESTIMATED FIRE SUPPRESSION COSTS FOR THE SAWTOOTH SNRA FOR 1997-2002

COSTS		1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	TOTAL
Lighting	$	34,000	$ 35,000	$ 208,000	$ 228,000	$ 70,000	$ 33,000	$ 608,000
Human	$	8,000	$ 1,000	$ 2,500	$ 6,500	$ 16,000	$ 194,000	$ 228,000
TOTAL	$	42,000	$ 36,000	$ 210,500	$ 234,500	$ 86,000	$ 227,000	$ 836,000
Acres								
Lightning		92	664	4133	1	5	11	4906
Human		1	1	1	26	2	50	81
TOTAL		93	665	4134	27	7	61	4987

Salmon Challis National Forest:

The combining of the Salmon and Challis National Forests in 1998 formed the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The current forest still operates under two Land and Resource Plans based on the previous administrative boundaries of the two forests. A forest plan revision is scheduled to begin on the Salmon-Challis in 2005, and will produce a single Land and Resource Management Plan. This new plan will have strong collaboration with the local government, State of Idaho and federal agencies in its development of fire management direction.

Three Fire Management Units have been designated on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. They reflect the dominant management considerations found in the Land and Resource Management Plans for the Salmon and Challis National Forests, as well as, national policy regarding the protection of communities from the impacts of wildland fires. These units are as follows:

- Wilderness Fire Management Unit
- Suppression Non-WUI Fire Management Unit
- Suppression WUI Fire Management Unit

Bureau of Land Management

Lands managed by the Challis Bureau of Land Management Office are largely boundary or interface lands between the two National Forests and private property. The map below provided by the BLM illustrates the location of Federal, State, and private property for the entire County. Note the white areas on the map. These areas are indicative of the private or urban interface areas.