

Section 1: Introduction and Planning Process

Wildfires are a part of the natural ecological cycle of forests. However, as humans encroach onto forested lands, the risk of catastrophic disaster increases. These areas of risk are known as the wildland/urban interface. They can be sharp geographical edges, or zones of ever increasing risk potential. Regardless, they pose a threat to human life and property. The National Fire Plan calls for reducing this risk through a variety of measures including the creation of local wildland/urban interface fire mitigation programs. Jefferson County Disaster Services received a grant through the Idaho Falls Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prepare a Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. This plan will document programmatic goals, identify implementing actions, and set priorities for reducing wildfire risk.

The Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan; hereafter referred to as the Plan, addresses privately held unincorporated urban and rural areas of the county and their interface points with Federal or State Lands such as the Caribou Targhee National Forest. While this Plan does not establish requirements for the city, county, state or federally held lands, it does provide them with a framework for planning for the common impacts associated with wildfires. The resources and background information in the Plan are applicable countywide, as the goals and recommendations lay groundwork for local mitigation plans and partnerships.

All mitigation is local, and the primary responsibility for development and implementation of risk reduction strategies and policies lies with local jurisdictions. Local jurisdictions, however, are not alone. Partners and resources exist at the state and federal levels. No plan is complete until implemented. This Plan describes prescriptive programmatic actions that will bring about mitigation. These mitigation actions, if implemented over the next several years, will help reduce the damages caused by wildfire in the wildland/urban interface. However, it is up to the community to ensure that these actions are taken.

The Plan, and Appendices that follow, are the culmination of work conducted by the Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Interagency Planning Group and includes a variety of measures designed to reduce the impact of wildfires.

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 by identifying resources, developing information, and formulating strategies for risk reduction, while helping to guide and coordinate mitigation activities throughout the county. The Jefferson 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 preventive 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 Jefferson County,
2. Identify and prioritize mitigation projects and implementing actions;
3. Assist in meeting the requirements of federal assistance programs.

Program Mission

The mission of the Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Program is to promote public policy designed to protect citizens, critical facilities, infrastructure, private property, and the environment from wildfires.

Program Goals

The Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Program has established goals that describe the overall direction that county agencies, organizations, and citizens will take toward mitigating wildland/urban interface risks from wildfires.

Protect Life and Property

- ❑ Implement activities that assist in protecting lives by making homes, businesses, infrastructure, critical facilities, and other property more resistant to wildfire hazards.
- ❑ Improve hazard assessment information; reduce losses and repetitive damages from hazard events.
- ❑ Improve countywide zoning, building codes, standards for new development and encouragement of preventative measures for existing development in areas vulnerable to wildfire hazards.

Public Awareness

- ❑ Develop and implement educational outreach programs.
- ❑ Provide information on tools, partnership opportunities, and funding resources to assist in implementation of mitigation actions.
- ❑ Develop a system to quickly and effectively communicate impending emergencies to residents of summer home areas.

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.

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

Background

Jefferson County received a grant through the Idaho Falls Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prepare a Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. This plan documents programmatic goals, identifies implementing actions, and sets priorities for reducing wildfire risk.

Wildfire hazard mitigation is the development and implementation of activities designed to reduce or eliminate losses resulting from wildfires. Wildfire mitigation can be used in conjunction with other county plans, including the County Comprehensive Land Use and Emergency Operations Plans. Each county within the state has received a request to write a simple Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. These plans are to contain at least the following five elements:

- 1) Documentation of the process used to develop the mitigation plan. This includes how the plan was developed, who was involved and how the public was involved.
- 2) A risk assessment to identify vulnerabilities to wildfire in the wildland/urban interface (WUI).
- 3) A prioritized mitigation strategy that addresses each of the risks. Examples of these strategies could be:
 - ❑ Training for fire departments
 - ❑ Public education
 - ❑ Hazardous fuel treatments
 - ❑ Equipment
 - ❑ Communications
 - ❑ Additional planning
 - ❑ New facilities
 - ❑ Infrastructure improvements
 - ❑ Code and/or ordinance revision
 - ❑ Volunteer efforts
 - ❑ Evacuation plans, etc.
- 4) A process for maintenance of the plan that includes monitoring and evaluation of mitigation activities.
- 5) Documentation that the plan has been formally adopted by the involved agencies.

To develop wildfire mitigation plans, it is suggested that each county bring together the following individuals, as appropriate for each county, to make up the County Wildland/Urban Fire Interagency Planning Group. This group should contain the following representatives.

- ❑ County Commissioners (Lead)
- ❑ Local Fire Chiefs
- ❑ Idaho Department of Lands representative
- ❑ USDA Forest Service representative
- ❑ USDI Bureau of Land Management representative
- ❑ US Fish and Wildlife representative
- ❑ Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security representative

- ❑ Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) Chairperson
- ❑ Resource Conservation and Development representative
- ❑ State Fish and Game representative
- ❑ Interested citizens and community leaders as appropriate
- ❑ Other officials as appropriate

The planning group, with critical input from homeowners and the general public, will determine where the risks and vulnerabilities to wildland/urban fire are located within the county and what mitigation actions are required.

In Jefferson County, existing assessments and planning documentation have fulfilled many of the requirements made above, however, the purpose of this planning activity is to integrate existing relevant information into a single place and develop a strategic pathway to fire mitigation implementation.

Project Requirements

The Plan is being written to establish the jurisdiction's commitment to reduce risks from disasters and technological hazards and serve as a guide for decision makers as they commit resources to reduce the effects of wildfires upon private property within the designated wildland/urban interface areas.

The project has been outlined and conducted in accordance with the following requirements set forth by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

1. Develop and Document the Planning Process
2. Assess the Risk
3. Develop Mitigation Strategies
4. Develop a Maintenance Process for the Plan

Planning Methodology

Information contained in the Plan is based on research and information taken from a variety of sources. The intention of the planning team is not to duplicate existing information, but rather to integrate resources provided by members of the planning committee. The following “outcome based” steps are taken to implement the methodology:

- ❑ Establish Boundaries
- ❑ Describe Conditions
- ❑ Define Hazards
- ❑ Examine Vulnerabilities
- ❑ Analyze Risk
- ❑ Determine *Mitigation* Alternatives
- ❑ Analyze Alternatives
 - Socio-Economic Impacts
 - Environmental Impacts
 - Cost Benefit
- ❑ Choose Alternatives
- ❑ Resource Load Action Plan
- ❑ Implement – TAKE ACTION

The Interagency Planning Group is comprised of the following:

Name	Representing
Debbie Karren	Jefferson County Disaster Services
Don Gosswiller	BLM
Keith Birch	IDL
Kevin Conran	BLM
Kim Ragotzkie	Idaho Fish and Game
Mike Clements	BHS
Daniel Jose	Jefferson County
Lance R. Brady	BLM GIS
Sherry Lufkin	Jefferson County
Joyce Briggs	Jefferson County
Kirt Hayes	Central Fire District Chief
John O'Neill	Idaho Fish and Game
Wes Jones	ERS Project Manager
Rick Fawcett	ERS – Senior Consultant

Meetings

Planning meetings have been held to gather information and develop natural hazard actions for this plan. Additional meetings will be held with the County Commission, homeowners and the public.

Date	Group	Purpose
06/23/04	Jefferson County Wildfire Mitigation Planning Group	Planning Meeting
07/28/04	Jefferson County Wildfire Mitigation Planning Group	Planning Meeting
09/1/04	Jefferson County Wildfire Mitigation Planning Group	Planning Meeting
09/09/2004	Jefferson County Wildfire Mitigation Planning Group	Public Meeting

Public Participation

Public participation is being assured in four specific ways:

- Ensure ongoing involvement of private homeowners and/or representatives from the communities served by this process on the planning committees.
- Provide access to the Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan and associated information on the Internet.
- Notification by mail to property owners who live within the vulnerability zones or who own property within the vulnerability zones but reside outside of the county, announcing the development of a plan, the opportunity to review the plan online, inviting them to make comments on the plan, and requesting them to complete a brief questionnaire.
- Facilitation of scheduled public meetings for residents living in the wildland/urban interface areas.

Mitigation Alternatives

Mitigation alternatives and resulting implementing actions are being prepared to address the vulnerabilities identified in Section 3. All mitigation alternatives will be analyzed for cost benefit where

possible. The resulting benefits will be summarized and provided as part of the final alternative descriptions.

The (*implementation*) Action Plan is the most important product that will be developed by this process. The Action Plan contained in the Executive Summary is a summary of Section 5 and identifies who is responsible for implementation of the action, what resources are required for implementation, and when the implementation is to be completed.

Plan Contents

Each section of the Plan provides important information and resources to assist in understanding the issues facing the county, its citizens, businesses, and emergency responders. The sections of the Plan work together to create a document that guides the mitigation mission to reduce risk and prevent loss from future wildfires.

The Plan is structured for ease of use and updating. Individuals interested in specific sections of the Plan will find the tabular format easy to negotiate and reference. The ability to update individual sections of the Plan places less financial burden on the county. Decision makers can allocate funding and staff resources to review and update selected sections, thereby avoiding a full update, which can be costly and time-consuming. New data can be easily incorporated, resulting in an evolving mitigation plan that remains current and relevant to Jefferson County.

The Plan is organized as follows:

1. **Executive Summary and Action Plan** - Provides an overview of the mitigation plan and a succinct listing of all implementing actions.
2. **Section 1: Introduction and Planning Process** - Describes mitigation planning requirements and the current planning methodology.
3. **Section 2: Jefferson County Idaho** - Presents a brief overview of Jefferson County.
4. **Section 3: Risk Assessment** - Provides hazard identification, vulnerability and risk analysis associated with wildfires in Jefferson County.
5. **Section 4: Public Participation** – Provides an overview of public involvement and documents public input into the planning process.
6. **Section 5: Hazard Mitigation Action Items** - Provides implementing actions developed to address the identified hazards and vulnerabilities.
7. **Section 6: Economic Analysis** – Provides the results of the economic analysis completed as part of the alternative selection process.
8. **Section 7: Plan Maintenance** - Provides guidance on plan implementation, evaluation and maintenance.

Plan Adoption

The Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners is responsible for adopting the Plan. Once the Plan has been adopted, the Jefferson County Director of Emergency Management is responsible for submitting it to the State Hazard Mitigation Officer at the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security who will then submit the plan to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for review. This review

will assess how the plan meets the federal criteria outlined in FEMA Interim Final Rule 44 CFR Part 201. Upon acceptance by FEMA, Jefferson County will gain eligibility for Wildfire Mitigation Grant Program funds. A formal Plan adoption form is included as the first page of the Plan.

Coordinating Body

The Jefferson County Wildland/Urban Interagency Planning Group is responsible for coordinating development and implementation of the Action Plan. This group will undertake the formal review process. The County Commissioners will assign appropriate members of the Wildland/Urban Interagency Planning Group, private property owners, and representatives of resource providing agencies to form the Wildland/Urban Mitigation Advisory Committee. This committee will implement, evaluate and conduct an annual review of the plan. They will meet, at least quarterly, to examine opportunities for implementation of specific mitigation actions and evaluate the implementation process.

Subcommittees may be formed under the direction of the Advisory Committee to further evaluate actions as established and categorized in Section 5. Recommendations will then be made as to specific implementation processes including acquisition of funding and other necessary resources.

Implementation through Existing Programs

The Plan will provide a series of recommendations, which Jefferson County will have the opportunity to implement through existing programs and procedures.

Upon adoption of the initial Plan, the county will continue developing their natural hazard mitigation goals and actions using this document as a baseline of information for the risks associated with wildfires within the county. Within six months of formal adoption of the Plan, the newly formed and appointed Wildland/Urban Mitigation Advisory Committee will review the recommendations listed. This committee will continue to evaluate the feasibility of each strategy, determine the current status, readjust the priorities as necessary, and monitor the progress for implementation.