

Section 8: Wildfire Updates

Community Wildfire Planning

Recent fires in Oregon and across the western United States have increased public awareness of the potential losses to life, property, and natural and cultural resources. In June of 2004, the Board of Clackamas County Commissioners (BCC) directed the County Departments to work with state and federal agencies, fire protection districts, and community organizations throughout the County to develop an integrated wildfire plan. The BCC initiated this effort to reduce wildfire risk to citizens, the environment, and quality of life within Clackamas County. The Clackamas County Community Wildfire Protection Plan provides a guide for taking a more wildfire-based approach in managing our forestlands. The CCWPP also assists the county in being more competitive for federal funding programs such as the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, the National Fire Plan, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program. For more information, please see Addendum 1: Clackamas Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Wildfire Hazard Assessment

Hazard Identification

Mapping: Clackamas County used "Identifying and Assessment of Communities-at-Risk in Oregon, Draft Version 4.0" dated October 18, 2004, and developed by ODF, with cooperators through a statewide steering committee, as a template to conduct the Assessment. This methodology was designed to conduct a statewide risk assessment for wildfire as well as provide guidance for county and local plans. This results obtained are intended to provide a broad view of the county and its relative risks, as shown on Map 9: Overall Risk of Wildfire in Clackamas County in Addendum #1: CCWPP. The Assessment considers four categories in determining the relative severity of fire risk. Structural Vulnerability (roof type, defensible space, and access) is a fifth category that will be examined in local plans but is not considered at the state or county level due to limited available data.

- **Hazard:** Fuels (developed from vegetation information), Slope, Aspect, Elevation, Weather
- **Risk:** Historic Fire Occurrence (derived from state and federal fire agency databases) and an estimation of ignition risk based on expert opinion and home density
- **Values:** Life/Property as determined by home density (homes per 10 acres) and community infrastructure
- **Protection Capability:** Fire Response Time (determined from fire district boundaries and district-reported response times) and Community Preparedness

Geographic Extent: Map 9 of the CCWPP shows that 71% of total acres in Clackamas County are in moderate to high wildfire hazard areas. This number is quite high because

over 50% of the total land in the County is forested. The number of homes being built in forest lands continues to grow, and currently 39% of total parcels are exposed.

Frequency: About 3,000 acres is lost every year on Mt Hood National Forest due to wildfires. There have been 5 major wildfires in Clackamas County in the last 100 years. Statewide, there have been 25 major wildfire events in last 100 years. Although average in Clackamas County is marginal (1 in 20 years), lack of fire increases probability of catastrophic fire on Mt Hood National Forest, as fuels continue to accumulate. The statewide average is about 1 every 4 years.

Vulnerability Assessment

Risk to Life & Property: High

The market value of parcels in moderate to high wildfire hazard zones is almost \$20 billion. These areas comprise approximately 48% of the total market value of all parcels in the county.

The risk to life is high because wildfire hazards are greatest in rural areas, which have the least number of access roads. If the fire starts far away from development, evacuation procedures may be able to save most of the people in hazard zones. However, if a fire starts close to development, it can travel very quickly, leaving little time for evacuation notices. The 57 vulnerable population sites (e.g. assisted living care facilities) located in moderate to high wildfire hazard zones are difficult to evacuate quickly.

Risk to Critical Facilities and Infrastructure: High

There are 31 critical facilities and 5 essential facilities in moderate to high wildfire hazard zones. Many of these facilities are fire stations that would be key in response efforts. Exposure could affect the efficiency of fire protection professionals during a large scale wildfire.

There are 28 substations to wildfires, which is about half of all the substations in the county. If these substations were damaged, there may be widespread power outages.

Vegetation along roadways highly dangerous, as negligent motorists provide ignition sources by tossing cigarette butts out car windows. Many roads are exposed the wildfire hazards, but can serve as a fire break if the vegetation in the right of way is well-maintained. Unfortunately, in many rural areas where there is only one way in and out, the roads are not maintained by the county or the property owners.

Risk Assessment

Key factors included in assessing wildfire risk include ignition sources, building materials and design, community design, structural density, slope, vegetative fuel, fire occurrence, and weather, as well as occurrences of drought. At the time of publication of this plan, data and modeling software were insufficient to conduct a risk analysis. The County has addressed this issue in the action items, and will be completing a wildfire risk assessment as data and resources become available.

Current Wildfire Mitigation Efforts

In 2005, the Clackamas Fire Prevention Cooperative and received grant funds to implement a Community Wildfire Planning Outreach Program to support implementation of the newly developed CCWPP. The following elements were included in the program

- **Development and Distribution Wildland Urban Interface Packet** including a brochure detailing the Clackamas Community Wildfire Protection Plan, defensible space guidelines, burn permit procedures and fire apparatus access and egress requirements.
- **Installation of Fire Danger Rating Boards** at strategic locations in the WUI and recreation corridors in forested lands to ensure that people are aware of fire danger.
- **Fire-Safety Messages on Safeway Grocery Bags** was used as a method to provide information on a county-wide scale.

This effort was continued in 2006, as the Wildfire Planning Executive Committee and the Clackamas Fire Prevention Cooperative received grant funds to:

- **Implement Fuels Reduction** along county Right of Ways in South County areas
- **Provide Cost Share** opportunities for homeowners to create defensible
- **Provide Address** markers to homes in targeted, high hazard areas.
- **Develop Public Service Announcements** for debris burning, defensible space, fireworks and campfires



Wildfire Mitigation Action Items

The wildfire mitigation action items provide direction on specific activities that organizations and residents in Clackamas can take to reduce wildfire hazards. The CCWPP includes action items for Fuels Reduction, Structural Ignitability, Community Outreach, Risk Assessment, and Emergency Operations. Please see Appendix 1: Clackamas Community Wildfire Protection Plan for a full listing of all wildfire action items.

WF#1: Develop and continuously update a wildfire risk assessment to accurately portray vulnerable populations, property, and infrastructure.

Coordinating Organization: CCWPP Risk Assessment Committee
Plan Goals Addressed: Protect Life and Property, Natural Systems, Emergency Services, Outreach & Education
Multi-Jurisdictional: Milwaukie, Lake Oswego, Gladstone, West Linn, Canby
Priority: Low

WF#2: Implement fuels reduction projects in highest risk areas and explore biomass utilization opportunities.

Coordinating Organization: CCWPP Fuels Reduction Committee
Plan Goals Addressed: Protect Life and Property, Natural Systems, Emergency Services, Partnerships and Implementation, Outreach & Education
Multi-Jurisdictional: Lake Oswego, Gladstone, West Linn, Canby
Priority: Medium

WF#3: Enhance Wildfire response efforts.

Coordinating Organization: Clackamas Wildland Operations Group
Plan Goals Addressed: Protect Life and Property, Natural Systems, Emergency Services, Partnerships and Implementation
Multi-Jurisdictional: Milwaukie, Canby, Gladstone, Lake Oswego
Priority: High

WF#4: Increase fire prevention and safety efforts throughout Clackamas County through public education and outreach.

Coordinating Organization: Clackamas Fire Prevention Cooperative
Plan Goals Addressed: Protect Life and Property, Natural Systems, Emergency Services, Partnerships and Implementation, Outreach & Education
Multi-Jurisdictional: Gladstone, Lake Oswego, West Linn, Canby
Priority: Medium

WF#5: Reduce structural ignitability of homes in the WUI.

Coordinating Organization: CCWPP Structural Ignitability Committee
Plan Goals Addressed: Protect Life and Property, Natural Systems, Emergency Services, Partnerships and Implementation, Outreach & Education
Multi-Jurisdictional: Milwaukie, Lake Oswego, Gladstone, West Linn
Priority: Low