

2021 COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN (CWPP) UPDATE GUIDELINES

The State of New Mexico and collaborative stakeholders have made a concerted effort over the past fifteen years to identify areas throughout the state that are at risk for wildland fires. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) have become the primary mechanism for evaluating risk due to their emphasis on community involvement and assessment of local resources. CWPPs are also an important planning document used by emergency responders and citizens to plan for and respond to wildfire emergencies. Local leaders and governmental entities find CWPPs valuable for the purposes of identifying critical needs and prioritizing funding. The New Mexico Forestry Division has used CWPPs to rank risk communities for the annual [Communities At Risk Report](#) that is provided to the Governor and New Mexico legislature by December 15 of each year.

Most of the wildfire risk areas in New Mexico are now included in a CWPP, but the work does not stop there. Resources and landscapes change over time and CWPPs must be revisited and refreshed regularly. Changes in risk ratings should be reflected upon completion of priority projects and new initiatives developed for the CWPP to remain viable. In addition, effective new strategies and wildland programs should be incorporated into CWPP planning efforts. For example, across the country, natural resources and fire managers are increasingly operating under the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) which has these goals:

- a. Restore and maintain resilient landscapes,
- b. Create and sustain [Fire Adapted Communities](#), and
- c. Respond safely, effectively and efficiently to wildfire.

CWPPs should be updated every five years to be most useful. Core teams should update priority projects and action items annually to encourage engagement and maintain momentum. These guidelines are designed to enhance a CWPP's effectiveness and were generated from actual experiences with mitigation and large wildfires, as well as community planning processes.

Process for Updating Your CWPP

1. Review existing CWPP.
2. Engage stakeholders including federal and state agencies; political subdivisions; tribes, pueblos, and nations; or other stakeholders that have a vested interest in the plan
3. Host collaborative meetings.
4. Gather plans and information developed since the last CWPP update. (See number 8 on page 3)
5. Update maps.
6. Reflect changes in risk ratings due to completed projects or changes in landscape.
7. Develop updated community wildfire risk reduction priorities (fuel treatments, restoration projects, outreach and education, etc.).
8. Distribute CWPP update drafts to key stakeholders (including local, state, tribal and federal partners) for review and input before the final approval.
9. Submit the final document to your local government body, local fire department(s) and New Mexico Forestry Division District Forester for required signatures and endorsement.
10. Once signed and endorsed by your local governing parties, submit all documentation to New Mexico Forestry Division no later than September 1st for final approval by the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force.

Requirements for updating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in New Mexico

All CWPPs and CWPP updates must be reviewed and approved by the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force (FPTF). The FPTF recommends that communities update their CWPP every five years. Minimum

requirements for all new CWPPs and updates must address the following items:

1. Collaboration: A CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties. This should be demonstrated through the inclusion of sign-in sheets from public meetings. If critical stakeholders choose not to engage, this should also be documented.
2. Prioritized fuel reduction: A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
3. Reduce structural ignitability: A CWPP should identify actions that homeowners, residents, and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area.
4. Secure signature:
 - a. The applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities);
 - b. The local fire department(s); and
 - c. The state entity responsible for forest management.

In addition, in New Mexico all CWPPs – including updates – must include the following criteria:

5. Describe progress made and list accomplishments since the CWPP was adopted. New Mexico has developed a database of fuel treatments at www.vegetationtreatments.org. CWPP developers should ensure that prior treatments are accurately reflected in the database as part of their CWPP update. CWPP developers can consult and create maps with the free tool available in the database.
6. Include a list of communities-at-risk and each individual community hazard risk rating. Risk must be rated as either high, medium, or low.
7. Identify any new risks that have developed. Note any changes in a community's hazard risk rating, by reflecting the previous rating and the new rating. Improvements in risk ratings attributable to projects completed under previous CWPPs can enhance future requests for funding by demonstrating success.
8. CWPP developers should ensure that community-level plans reflect and align the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) objectives and goals of the over-arching countywide plan and other neighboring CWPPs. Map the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas, noting any updates or discrepancies within the CWPP boundaries with a high, medium, or low risk rating.
9. Include a spreadsheet or table of new prioritized projects. The list must reflect state, tribal and federal priorities including detail on specific objectives, responsible entity and timelines. Narrative should capture collaborative efforts and best practices within your landscape.
10. Core teams should commit to meet no less than annually and should develop a 1-2 year Action Plan that can be easily updated during the life of the CWPP in order to plan, implement, track, and report on progress made. "Outside or in addition to a Core Team that develops a CWPP, there should be a community-based Action Plan team that carries the CWPP actions forward."
11. New Mexico Forestry Division accepts CWPP updates either as a preface to a previously approved plan, or as a new document with the updates integrated into the existing approved plan.
12. Secure appropriate signatures (local government, local fire department(s), and New Mexico Forestry Division District Forester)
13. Deliver paper, PDF, and digital WUI boundary files to New Mexico Forestry Division's Resource Protection Bureau. Digital files must be shapefiles. WUI boundary files must have the high, medium, or low risk rating delineated. These files should be sent to your [New Mexico Forestry District Forester](#).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAKING YOUR CWPP MORE EFFECTIVE

Make your pre-fire plan sustainable and inclusive.

1. Develop a plan to reconvene your Core Team or convene a CWPP Action Team at least annually. By meeting regularly, and inviting relevant land management entities, you can stay in communication, convene around funding opportunities, incorporate new plans and information, coordinate implementation across organizations and manage changes to contacts. Consider your CWPP a "living document" that can be updated as conditions change or projects are completed, or as new community-level Action Plans are developed. Make sure to create a timeline to review progress and identify a person or entity to evaluate and make recommendations back to the Core Team.
 - a. Engage stakeholders and the public. The CWPP development process is an ideal time for education and outreach about wildfire risk and developing fire adapted communities.
2. Prepare a user-friendly CWPP that is written in plain language and is understandable to a broad audience, is concise, and usable.
3. Plan at both the community scale (e.g. municipality or rural subdivision) and the landscape scale (e.g. County or Pueblo). Prioritize and rank community risk at the landscape scale, but also draw from your Core Team's knowledge of local conditions and issues to develop community-level action items, regardless of overall risk rating. CWPP developers should ensure that community-level plans reflect and align the objectives and goals of the over-arching countywide plan and other neighboring CWPPs.
4. Address issues of fire response and evacuation. Include action items like testing your Reverse 911 calling system and maintaining and improving rural addressing.
5. Ensure that the CWPP recognizes the needs of especially vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged populations. For some communities, extra effort is needed to engage part-time residents.
6. Action plans should be as specific as possible with concrete tasks, a timeline, and the names of responsible individuals, organizations or other stakeholders. Similarly, be as specific as possible about the values at risk, including critical infrastructure.
7. Identify the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundaries. Labeling large areas or entire counties as WUI makes project identification and prioritization difficult.
8. Recognize that your CWPP may draw from or be used to inform other plans such as land use plans, emergency management, hazard mitigation plans and regional water plans. Such plans might include, but are not limited to, County All Hazard Mitigation Plan, Potential Operational Delineation (PODs), State Forest Action Plan, Section 319 Watershed Plan, or Source Water Protection Plans for local and mutual domestic water supplies.
 - a. When you engage land use planners or developers, discuss:
 - Creating adequate ingress and egress for residents and emergency response vehicles.
 - Ensuring roads have sufficient right of way to allow for managing roadside vegetation and utility infrastructure.
 - Ensuring open space or common lands have management options that allow managing vegetation for defensible conditions.
 - b. When you engage emergency managers, discuss:
 - Emergency evacuation routes, shelters, and smoke refuge for wildfire and post-fire flood situations.
 - Ask them about other topics your community should be considering for wildfire planning and response.
 - c. When you engage water planners, discuss:
 - Including consideration of fire impacts on water resources and watersheds in state, regional and local water plans. The New Mexico Rural Water Users Association is a good

resource to get started.

- Projects and activities that improve watershed health, reduce wildfire risk and mitigate impacts from wildfire and post-fire floods to watersheds and water resources.

Consider planning for events during and after wildfire

Traditionally, CWPPs have focused on wildfire prevention and response. Recent wildfires have shown the importance of planning ahead for community action during the fire event, as well as for the post-wildfire effects and recovery, which can be as devastating as the fire itself.

1. Identify and establish a wildfire response and recovery team (which may be different from your CWPP Core Team) along with a strategy (see the “Mobilize Your Community: Assess Your Needs” section of the After Wildfire Guide) and an annual action plan to keep the team together.
2. Develop a plan to provide communities with refuge from smoke during a wildfire. For example, clean air shelters (or personal air cleaning devices with HEPA filters) can be brought into an area or community facilities with filters can be set up. The wildfire response and recovery team should identify where to find them, where would it be set up, what size is needed, where are vulnerable populations in your area. CWPP developers should consider incorporating recommendations from the New Mexico Environment Department Fire and Smoke Guide:
<http://www.nmtracking.org/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html>.
3. Identify a community liaison for each community to interface with incident command and/or Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams during and after wildfires. It is recommended that this person take IS-700 (“National Incident Management System: An Introduction”) and IS-800 (“National Response Framework: An Introduction”) to be familiar with the incident command structure. Also consider taking S-203 (“Introduction to Incident Information”) to become familiar with fire information techniques.
4. Review “After Wildfire: A Guide for New Mexico Communities” (www.afterwildfirenm.org) with your Core Team. Consider integrating applicable elements, not copy and paste, into a post-fire section of your CWPP.
5. Identify existing and potential flood zones as well as values at risk from post-fire impacts and use those to develop desired post-fire conditions for your landscape.