Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

Source: Boulder County

Hazards Addressed

How it Works

Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 authorizes communities to draft and implement **Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)**. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) are local plans that are designed to specifically address a community's unique conditions, values, and priorities related to wildfire risk reduction and resilience. Communities with CWPPs in place are given priority for funding of hazardous fuels reduction projects carried out under the HFRA.

CWPPs can vary in scope, scale, and detail, but if prepared they must meet minimum requirements for their contents and adoption in Colorado as described by HFRA and the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), per Colorado Senate Bill 09-001. These requirements include:

- A collaborative process including the local government, local fire authority, local CSFS representatives, representatives of relevant federal land management agencies, and other relevant non-governmental partners.
- A description of the community's wildland-urban interface (WUI) outlined on a map with an accompanying narrative.
- A community risk analysis that considers fuel hazards, risk of wildfire occurrence, and community values to be protected.
- Recommendations and an implementation plan to identify fuels treatment projects, methods to reduce structural ignitability, and project priorities.

In practice, many CWPPs go beyond these requirements by engaging additional stakeholders (e.g., non-governmental organizations, community groups, and residents) to provide input

and increase local buy-in for future projects. Many plans also include a narrative on local fire history, community demographic information that may affect the future WUI, and any linkages with other local plans.

To maximize synergy between wildfire risk reduction and community land use planning activities, CWPPs should reference comprehensive plan policies, consider and inform the future land use map as part of wildland-urban interface planning, and look for opportunities to implement wildfire risk reduction activities (e.g., defensible space) through the land development code.

Many communities also include CWPP actions to support their efforts in becoming a "fire adapted community" by participating in national wildfire mitigation programs such as Firewise: Residents Reducing Wildfire Risks (commonly referred to as "Firewise") is a national recognition program administered by the National Fire Protection Association that provides guidance and steps for homeowners and neighbors to voluntarily engage in wildfire risk reduction activities at a local scale. "Ready, Set, Go!" is a national program administered by the International Association of Fire Chiefs that provides guidance to homeowners and fire departments on wildfire preparedness, evacuation planning, and other emergency response issues associated with wildfire planning.

Further detail on plan components and guidance is available through the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) website: csfs.colostate.edu/wildfire-mitigation/community-wildfire-protection-plans.

Implementation

A CWPP's scale will determine the level of detail required for effective implementation. CWPPs can be developed for any type of community, such as neighborhoods, towns, fire protection districts, and counties. Information and level of specificity should match the plan's scale. For example, county-level CWPPs are excellent "umbrella" plans for guiding priorities in smaller communities or county subareas, but typically do not provide the level of detail needed for reducing risk at a site-specific scale.

CWPPs must be approved and signed by a representative from the three primary entities engaged in the development process—local government, local fire authority, and the Colorado State Forest Service. CWPPs can be adopted as a freestanding document or be attached to other plans. For example, some jurisdictions have included their CWPP as an appendix to the local hazard mitigation plan. A CWPP typically requires a major update every five years due to potential changes in the community, available data, and stakeholders. The CWPP should be regularly consulted to track project implementation and progress.

Different aspects of the CWPP process and outcomes can be seen as a best practice, including:

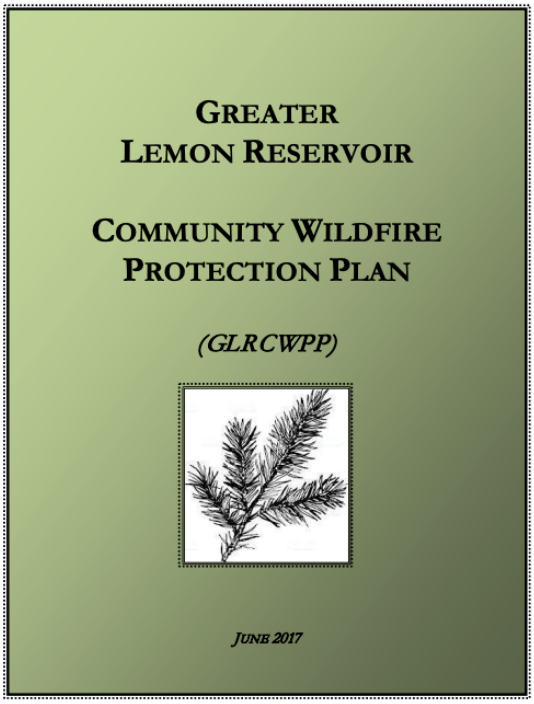
- **Collaboration.** Did the process for preparing it include genuine stakeholder engagement and public input?
- **Plan Implementation.** Does the final product reflect stakeholder input and will there be buy-in from the community? Does it capture an organized set of actions for the community to follow during implementation?

Tip:
The most successful CWPPs are those that are accessible to a wide variety of audiences, accurately reflect public and stakeholder input, provide specific actions, and can be tracked over time.

Where It's Been Done

The **Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)** works closely with communities across the state to support them in the development of their CWPP. CSFS also maintains a database of those communities with an approved CWPP and the year it was adopted or last revised. These CWPPs are available for download and planners are encouraged to view these examples to determine which CWPPs are in place within their local jurisdiction or county: https://csfs.colostate.edu/wildfire-mitigation/community-wildfire-protection-plans/#1552502695900-c1410167-4c05

The **Loma Linda Subdivision CWPP** (2016) is an example of how a small community can plan for wildfire risk in collaboration with nearby neighbors and local, state, and federal partners. Loma Linda was created as a residential subdivision in 1977 and includes 198 lots, timbered and partially-timbered land, and open space. It is located in Archuleta County, just five miles north of Pagosa Springs, and is part of a larger area identified as wildland-urban interface (WUI). Loma Linda has been recognized as a Firewise community since 2014. To develop its CWPP, the community partnered with numerous agency and community partners like the Archuleta County Office of Emergency Management, Bureau of Land Management, and the Echo Canyon Ranch Manager. The plan identifies the protection capabilities of the community, describes the community's potential exposure to wildfire, identifies populations and property at-risk, and proposes mitigation actions.



The Greater Lemon Reservoir Community Wildfire Plan in La Plata County, Colorado was initiated by area residents and stakeholders in 2016, with the assistance of subject matter experts from Wildfire Adapted Partnership, the Colorado State Forest Service, and the U.S. Forest Service

Source: csfs.colostate.edu

The **East Canyon CWPP (Montezuma County)** (2014) is a good example of two separate communities that came together to increase the safety of their community as a whole. East Canyon includes the Elk Springs Ranch and Elk Stream Ranch neighborhoods, two gated communities that share the same entrance road. The East Canyon community experienced the Weber Fire in 2012, and includes both primary residences and vacation homes. This CWPP outlines the community characteristics and history that led to the desire for the two communities to combine into a single CWPP. The community assessment is well thought out and provides supplementary images of hazards and community risks. The CWPP also contains a "Desired Conditions and Recommendations for Action" table that identifies roles and allows the community to easily prioritize and track steps for reducing wildfire risk. Finally, the CWPP shows how CWPPs can effectively operate on a variety of scales. This plan tiers to county and regional land management plans as well as Montezuma and La Plata County CWPPs.

In 2012, the **West Region Wildfire Council (WRWC)**, which is based in Montrose and supports several western Colorado counties, began integrating wildfire risk assessments into their community-level CWPPs. WRWC assesses homes based on 11 wildfire risk elements on properties that have a primary home. Each wildfire risk element is weighted based on how much that element effects home vulnerability from a wildfire (e.g., wood roof results in higher

points than missing address signage). The end result is a community map indicating Extreme to Low wildfire risk parcels, which can then enable each CWPP to provide community and individualized risk reduction recommendations.

This information makes the CWPP implementable and accessible because homeowners can look up their risk rating by address. In addition, this information provides a tool for targeting specific audiences. For example, as part of the annual National Community Wildfire Preparedness Day, WRWC sent postcards to all "Extreme", "Very High" and "High" rated homes within one of the local fire protection districts. The postcards informed homeowners that a recent wildfire risk assessment was completed along with their corresponding rating and invited them to attend the local community preparedness event to learn more.

The 2012 Waldo Canyon Fire – Colorado Springs, Colorado

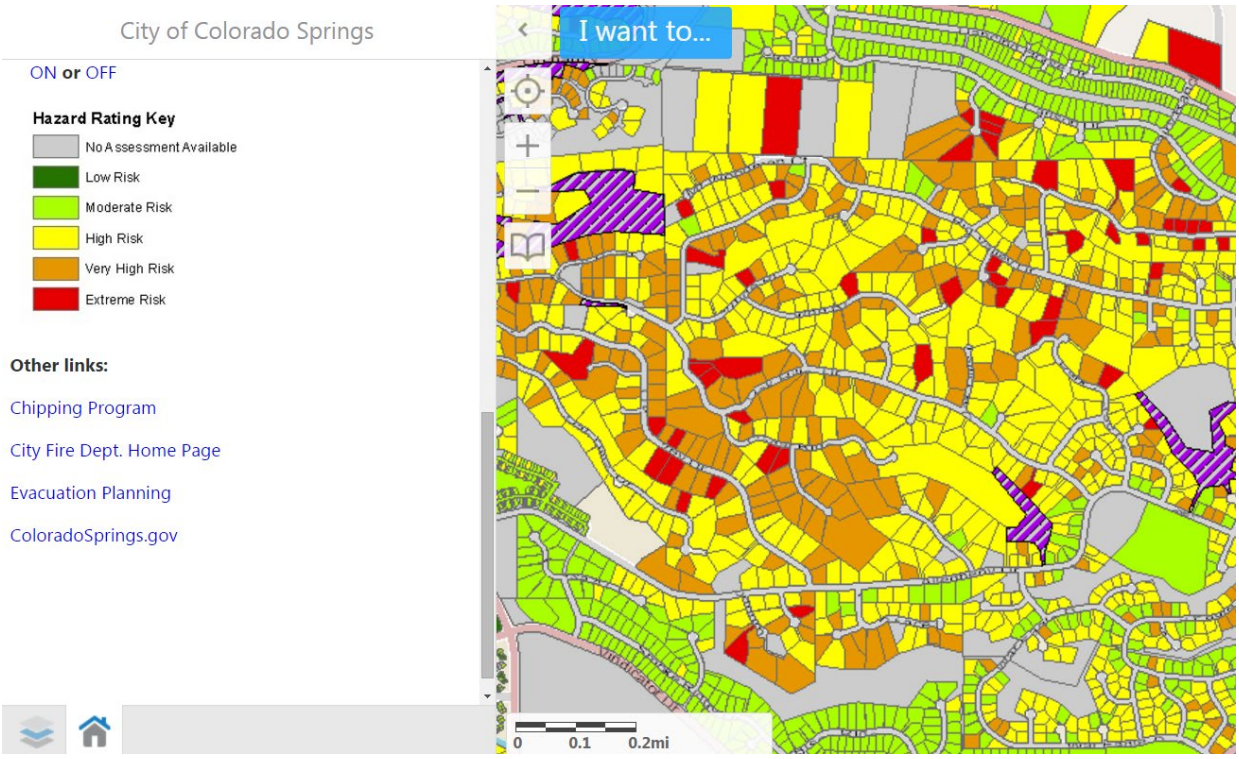
Understanding a community's wildfire risk prior to an event not only guides appropriate action but also provides valuable information during and after a wildfire. On June 23, 2012, the Waldo Canyon Fire started approximately four miles northwest of Colorado Springs, Colorado. The fire grew quickly and within days thousands of residents were evacuated. Several neighborhoods within city limits were severely affected – in total over 346 homes were destroyed. The often untold story, however, is that many positive mitigation efforts were in place prior to the wildfire event, enabling more effective wildfire response and contributing to over 80% of potentially at-risk homes being saved during the Waldo Canyon Fire.

The Colorado Springs Fire Department had been working on wildfire risk assessment and mitigation efforts for years prior to the Waldo Canyon Fire. As early as 1993, the City passed an ordinance on vegetation management, roadway width, and sprinkler installation (applicable to development occurring after April 1993), and has subsequently adopted additional ordinances to strengthen building and construction occurring in the wildland-urban interface. The City's first Wildfire Mitigation Plan was completed in 2001; meanwhile the Colorado Springs Fire Department Wildfire Mitigation Section began using the ***Wildfire Hazard Risk Assessment (WHINFOE****) tool to determine risk ratings from low to extreme. Nearly 36,000 homes in 63 neighborhoods were identified as at-risk in the wildland-urban interface. An online public mapping tool was developed to display fire hazard ratings and a risk category for each property, with additional details such as distance between structures, predominant roofing and siding material, defensible space around the structure, and vegetation density. Creating and maintaining accessible wildfire risk assessment information has proved useful in multiple ways:*

- *Homeowners were very responsive to the online website— it increased awareness and engagement.*
- *The site fosters proactive mitigation actions prior to any wildfire event occurring.*
- *The level of information available to practitioners has also facilitated greater learning after the wildfire.*

A post-fire assessment team, led by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, observed where mitigation strategies were effective during the Waldo Canyon Fire by conducting home assessment surveys. The results showed less damage to homes that had employed mitigation strategies such as reducing fuel loads, spacing structures appropriately, and including landscaping breaks to prevent spread. The pre-fire data provided invaluable information for comparative post-fire damage assessments, and enabled wildfire practitioners to glean insights on wildfire mitigation. Finally, promoting awareness and partnerships through the risk assessment process complemented the success of many other mitigation efforts, such as the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, grant funding and administration, adoption of progressive code requirements for new construction, and fuel treatments.

This outreach resulted in record turnout, with homeowners signing up for follow up professional assessments and completing additional mitigation projects.



Source: Colorado Springs Fire Department. Wildfire. March 11, 2019 gis.coloradosprings.gov/Html5Viewer/?viewer=

The Colorado Springs Fire Department provides the public with an opportunity to view their wildfire hazard rating online. This information is collected for properties in the area of the city designated as the WUI

Advantages and Key Talking Points

Developing and implementing a CWPP has many advantages for a local community, including:

- Provides the opportunity to establish a locally appropriate definition and boundary for the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and enables communities to identify local priorities and actions.
- Enables access to additional state funding opportunities (for example, CWPPs are an eligibility requirement for communities pursuing funds through the Colorado Forest Restoration program).
- Can assist communities in influencing where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal lands and how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on nonfederal lands.
- Reinforces existing stakeholder partnerships and establishes relationships among a wide variety of non-traditional partnerships.

Challenges

As is the case with many specialized local plans, there are also a few common challenges:

- Can become "one more plan" for stakeholders to put on their to-do list, and the burden of implementation may fall unevenly on a few individuals. To address this challenge, some communities now include their CWPP as a chapter or appendix to their local hazard mitigation plan. This ensures adoption and maintenance, and can provide additional leverage for funding support.
- Depending on the scale, scope, and level of detail, CWPPs can be time-intensive and costly to develop. Can require specialized knowledge to develop that may not exist in local agencies.
- Creating a plan does not necessarily guarantee actions will get funded, although this can be addressed more effectively when coordinated with other community plans and priorities.

Key Facts

Administrative capacity	Experienced planner; coordination with local fire authority; emergency manager
Mapping	WUI map required, which can be a substantial effort
Regulatory requirements	C.R.S. § 30-15-401.7
Maintenance	Recommended updates every five years
Adoption required	Yes for counties, optional for all others
Statutory reference	C.R.S. § 23-31-312; §30-15-401.7; §31-23-206 (municipalities)
Associated costs	Varies significantly depending on the level of detail and the technical analysis included in the document

Examples

Loma Linda Subdivision CWPP	https://csfs.colostate.edu/media/sites/22/2019/01/LL_CWPP_FINAL_3-24-17.pdf
Montezuma County East Canyon CWPP	csfs.colostate.edu/media/sites/22/2015/02/East-CanyonCWPP-0215.pdf
Lake Tahoe, CA CWPP	http://tahoe.livingwithfire.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LakeTahoeBasinCommunityWildfireProtectionPlan_ReducedQuality.pdf
West Region Wildfire Council CWPPs	cowildfire.org/cwpps

For More Information

Colorado State Forest Service CWPP webpage
csfs.colostate.edu/wildfire-mitigation/community-wildfire-protection-plans

Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (COWRAP) CSFS Webpage
https://csfs.colostate.edu/wildfire-mitigation/cowrap/

APA PAS Report: Planning in the Wildland-Urban Interface
https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9174069/

CWPPs in the American West (Ecosystem Workforce Program)
ewp.uoregon.edu/wfresilience

Fire Adapted Communities
fireadapted.org

Firewise Communities
https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA

Planning the Wildland-Urban Interface, American Planning Association
https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9174069/

Ready, Set, Go!
wildlandfirersg.org