

Enchanted Circle Regional Fire Protection Association

Strategy for Developing a Regional “Community Wildfire Protection Plan” for the Colfax / Taos Community Protection Zone

BACKGROUND

The Health Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), passed by Congress and signed into law on December 3, 2003, creates an unprecedented incentive for communities to engage in forest and fire protection planning. This legislation creates a statutory process for communities to define realistic urban interface boundaries that are not limited to the default ½ mile buffer zone, and gives funding priority to fuels projects within the defined zone.

In order for a community to take full advantage of this opportunity, it must first prepare a “Community Wildfire Protection Plan”. Such a plan will not be officially recognized until approved and published by the State in its “Communities At Risk Plan”. The State of New Mexico, through the Fire Planning Taskforce has gone on record as encouraging larger scale “regional” planning. In the 2004 publication of the “Communities At Risk” document the state has defined a land area that closely coincides with the jurisdictions of the Enchanted Circle communities, and named it the “Colfax / Taos Community Protection Zone”.

The opportunity exists to build on the existing Colfax / Taos zone, and develop a regional CWPP. The potential benefits to the communities and their citizens are:

- Enhanced preparedness for wildfire events through collaborative planning.
- Clarification of local priorities.
- The ability for communities to define urban interface zones that are realistic, even on federal lands.
- Higher priority for funding for hazard fuels reduction (forest thinning and fuel breaks) and forest and watershed restoration projects.

TIMEFRAMES

The State reviews CWPP submittals for possible publication in September of each year. In order to meet the timeframe for publication in December 2005, the following target dates are proposed:

- Initial collaborative planning meeting : **March 9, 2005**
- Draft plan completed: **June 15, 2005**
- All approvals in place: **August 15, 2005**
- Plan submitted to NM FPTF **September 1, 2005**

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR A CWPP

The HFRA allows considerable flexibility for communities to determine the substance and detail of their plans and the procedures they use to achieve them. They can be as simple or complex as the communities want them to be. However, the Act establishes the following as the minimum requirements for a CWPP.

- 1) The development of the plan must be collaborative, involving local government, local fire agencies, State Forestry, other local stakeholders, and in consultation with federal land management agencies.
- 2) The plan must identify and prioritize hazard fuels areas, and recommend methods of treatment that will provide meaningful protection to one or more communities.
- 3) The plan must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures in the planning area
- 4) The HFRA requires that at least the following three entities agree on the final content of the plan:
 - Applicable local governments (municipalities and counties)
 - Applicable local fire departments
 - The state agency with responsibility for forest management (NM EMNRD)

PROCESS

The following represents a step-by-step process recommended by the National Association of State Foresters and the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force that may be used to produce a CWPP.

- 1) Form a planning group
 - Local government, Fire Departments and State Forestry form core
 - Intergovernmental Council
 - Enchanted Circle Regional Fire Association
 - Cimarron District, Forestry Division, EMNRD
 - Federal Agency collaboration
 - Carson National Forest
 - Taos BLM
 - BIA
 - Engage local utilities and industry
 - PNM
 - Kit Carson Electric
 - Molycorp
 - Others?
- 2) Develop base map and overlays
 - Planning Area (Protection Zone) boundaries
 - Communities and developments
 - Critical infrastructure
 - Hazardous fuels
 - Community WUI boundaries
 - Historical fire occurrence
 - Hazard fuels projects

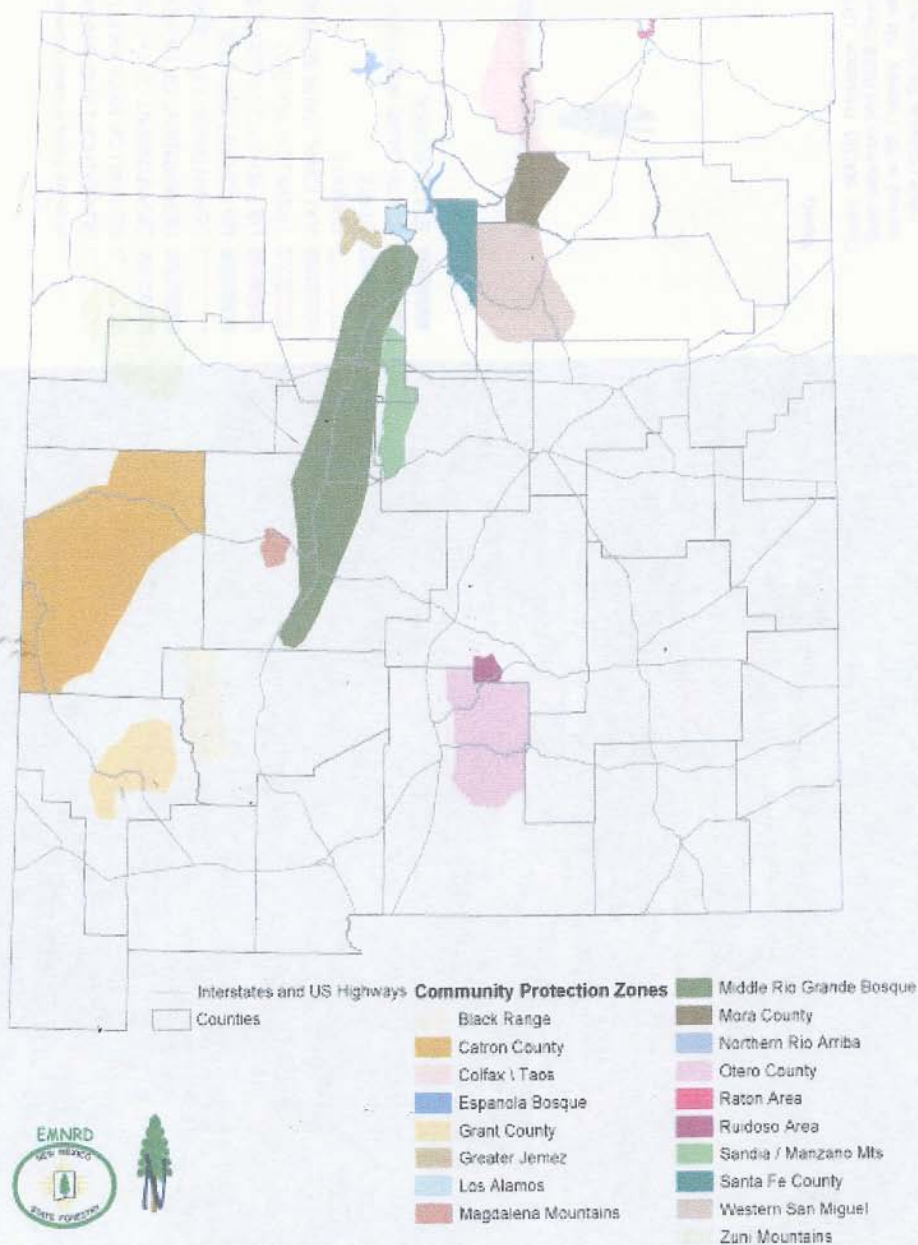
- 3) Perform regional community assessment
 - Hazard Fuels (on federal and non-federal lands)
 - Historical Wildfire Occurrence
 - Vulnerability of homes, businesses and infrastructure
 - Local fire response capacity
- 4) Establish priorities and recommendations
 - Adjective priority categories (High, Moderate, Low)
 - Establish relative risk of communities as high, moderate or low
 - Prioritize hazard fuel reduction projects
 - Recommendations for improvement of fire response capacity
 - Recommendations to reduce ignitability of structures
- 5) Develop an action plan
- 6) Finalize plan and document approvals
 - Local government resolutions
 - Letters of approval from Local Fire departments
 - Resolution of support from ECRFA
 - Letters of support from EMNRD, Cimarron District
- 7) Submit to State for review and publication

GUIDING PRINCIPALS

- Plan is a living document; 2005 version is only an initial “snapshot”
- Stay tightly focuses on producing a straightforward product within the time frames.
- Light on theory, speculation and fluff; heavy on practical outcomes.

FIGURE 2
2004 Community Protection Zones

NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY PROTECTION ZONES



Datum: NAD83 Projection: UTM, Zone 13N
 Project location data as of October 2003
 Base data from NM RGIS Clearinghouse or derived by NM Forestry
 No warranties are made regarding the accuracy of this data
 Produced by NM EMNRD Forestry Division GIS



COLFAX / TAOS

○ CITIES AND TOWNS INCLUDED IN CAMP ZONES

-  BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
-  BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
-  DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
-  DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
-  DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
-  US FOREST SERVICE
-  US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
-  TRIBAL OR PUEBLO
-  NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
-  PRIVATE
-  STATE
-  STATE GAME AND FISH
-  STATE PARKS



Vicinity



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