

Rocky Mountain Area
Wildfire Prevention Communication Plan
2006 - 2007



Communications Plan contact:

Common Vision

Wildland fire management agencies and organizations share a common vision: to enhance personal safety and reduce loss of life while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and property. To that end, we encourage those who live or recreate in wildland areas to be aware of the role of wildland fire in ecosystems, actions that land management agencies are taking to reduce risks and realize benefits of wildland fire, and the need for partnerships among agencies, residents, and communities to understand and prepare for and prevent unwanted wildfires.

Purpose

The purpose of this Communication Plan is to spell out the objectives used to guide interagency outreach efforts for wildland fire prevention in Rocky Mountain Area. Even though the focus of this plan is on fire prevention, messages are developed as part of an overall strategy for fire management. The immediate goal is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of fire management and reduce the potential for conflicting messages. The ultimate goal is to reduce unwanted human-caused wildfires.

Goals

1. Reduce the number of unwanted human-caused wildfires by raising overall public awareness of the potential losses from wildfire and promoting good wildfire prevention safety measures.
2. Maintain coordination and collaboration among agencies with fire management responsibilities in enacting fire restrictions and developing and disseminating prevention and restriction materials and information.
3. Increase public understanding of landscape dynamics as part of the overall effort to create a community vision of this forested landscape as a fire-adapted ecosystem that needs disturbance such as insects and wildland fire to remain resilient and productive.
4. Develop wildfire prevention and mitigation messages that explain the need to exclude unwanted wildfire and mitigate the risks and hazards in areas where fires cannot be managed safely and can be very destructive.
5. Develop messages that foster understanding of the need to manage wildland fires in areas where they are desirable and can be managed safely to help restore and sustain forest health.

Potentially Sensitive Issues

- Inability to use fireworks
- Inability to use campfires
- Temporary closure of areas
- Perceived harm from fire to wildlife, threatened and endangered species and “green trees”
- Lack of tolerance for smoke in the air – i.e. effect of smoke on human health
- Slash removal – concern with perceived “waste” of biomass when it is chipped or masticated
- Aesthetics – perception that fire just “nukes” everything
- Public perception that all fire is bad

Target Audiences – For all the goals in this plan

Internal:

- Local Fire Departments/Local Governments
- Local, State, and Federal Land Management Personnel

External:

- Urban Interface Residents/Second Homeowners
- Hunters/OHV
- Local Communities
- All Recreationists/Tourists
- Contractors

Terminology

The Interagency Strategy for the implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy directs agencies to establish common terms and definitions. The newly updated National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology is the only authorized source of terms and definitions that meet federal fire management policy. The glossary can be found at: www.nwcg.gov/. The strategy has established that there are three kinds of Wildland Fire. The definitions are as follows:

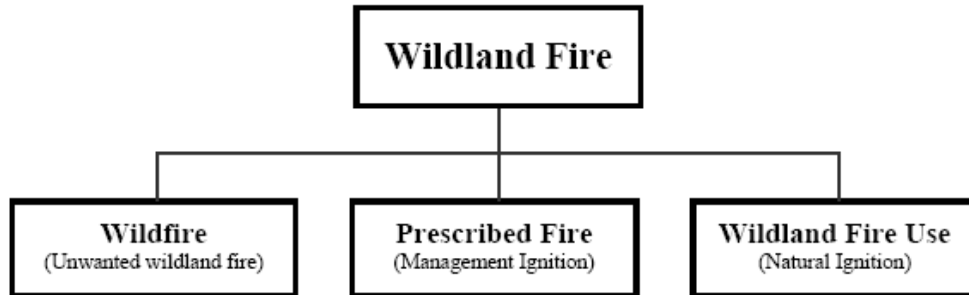
Wildland Fire. Any non-structure fire, that occurs in the wildland. Three distinct types of wildland fire have been defined and include **wildfire**, **wildland fire use** and **prescribed fire**.

Wildfire - An unplanned, unwanted wildland fire, including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped wildland fire use events, escaped prescribed fire projects and all other wildland fires where the objective is to put the fire out.

Wildland Fire Use - The application of the appropriate management response to naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas outlined in Fire Management Plans.

Prescribed Fire - Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements (where applicable) must be met, prior to ignition.

Mitigation – Process to reduce intensity and make less severe.



Goal 1

Raise overall public awareness of the potential damage and losses from wildfire by promoting good wildfire prevention safety measures.

Objective

Reduce the number of human-caused fires

Key Messages

- **Careless people can cause wildfires. Wildfires can cause loss of lives and destroy property and valuable resources such as watersheds and habitat, power facilities, campgrounds and other developed recreation sites.**
- **Take personal responsibly – do not leave a campfire behind!**
- **Use spark arresters on chainsaws, generators and other equipment; be careful with catalytic converters near dry grass and brush.**

Talking Points

Bug kill creates falling dead trees that threaten public and firefighter safety. Dead and down trees increase buildup of burnable materials and wildfire hazards to homes, recreation sites, transmission lines, and watersheds; it also impairs values in ski areas and recreation sites. Risk of severe wildfires in areas where they cannot be safely managed is a particular concern.

Wildfires that occur in the wildland-urban interface cause economic and other hardships to homeowners and communities.

We all have a responsibility to keep unwanted fires out of our forests and public lands.

- Never leave campfires unattended
- Always make sure your campfire is “dead out”
- Observe fire restrictions

It’s your back yard – protect it from careless wildfires.

Action Plan – Strategies and Tactics

Goal #1 - Raise overall public awareness of the potential dangers and losses from wildfire by promoting good prevention and safety measures.

Strategy: Use a variety of communication tools to increase public understanding of the potential dangers and losses from unwanted wildfires and how to prevent them.

Tactic	Due Date	Responsible Party
Media campaign aimed at local and Denver audiences		
DOT & Business – reader board displays		
Signing program at trailheads, campgrounds and key locations		
Public Gatherings, Town Hall Meetings		
Presentations, celebrity, VIP endorsements		

Goal 2

Maintain coordination and collaboration among agencies with fire management responsibilities to:

- Enact and communicate about coordinated fire restrictions
- Develop and disseminate consistent prevention and restriction materials and information

Objective

Deliver coordinated and consistent fire restriction messages to the public

Key Messages

- **Level of fire restrictions and what is required to comply.**
- **Location where fire restrictions are in effect.**
- **Liability: potential consequences for not complying**

Talking Points

Fire Restrictions are in effect.

For more information on restrictions: contact your local sheriff's office, fire department or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/fire/rmacc.htm

Persons violating these restrictions face substantial fines and possible imprisonment. They could also be held liable for fire suppression costs.

Action Plan – Strategies and Tactics

Goal #2 - Deliver coordinated and consistent fire restriction messages to the public

Strategy: Maintain internal communication to ensure coordinated and consistent messages. Use a variety of communication tools to inform the public about fire restrictions and their various stages.

Tactic	Due Date	Responsible Party
Coordinate among the County Sheriff's and the Public Land Management Agencies to enact fire restrictions		
Distribute information to internal audiences such as front desk, visitor center personnel, and campground hosts		
Media campaigns		
Signing program at trailheads, campgrounds and key locations		
Patrol program to make contacts and enforcement		

Goal 3

Increase public understanding of landscape dynamics – changing mosaic

- Build awareness of insects and fire as natural disturbances
 - Examples of natural disturbances: Age of the timber, disease, drought, insects and fire
- Cultivate an acceptance for brown, blackened trees and smoke in the air
 - Fire and insect kill is a natural phenomena brings new life to the wildlands

Objective

Create a community vision of forested landscapes as a fire-adapted ecosystem that needs insects and fire to regenerate.

Key Messages

- **You Moved into a Forest – Learn to live WITH It!**
- **Forest landscapes are dynamic systems and always changing.**
- **Many forests are dependent on disturbances to maintain their health.**
- **You think forest fires are destructive but, forests without fire are just as destructive**
- **Wildfire is a necessary disturbance to maintain forest health.**
- **Careless human-caused fires are not nature's natural disturbances.**

Talking Points

Forest landscapes appear to change slowly compared to changes in human lives. Therefore we tend to view our forests as relatively static. We have a vision of a healthy forest as one that provides us with a continuous green carpet of trees across the hillsides. This is the vision that forests have provided for most of our lifetimes. Our forests are now entering a time when they could change rapidly.

As a community, we need to think about landscape changes over a longer period. The goal should be to help create a sustainable forest landscape that, while inevitably changing, will also provide for our needs and ecosystem functions as it changes.

Many forests are dependent on disturbances to maintain their health and dominance. For example, the natural disturbance regime for lodgepole pine is stand-replacing wildland fire as well as drought, age of the trees insects and disease.

Wildfire is a necessary disturbance to maintain overall forest health.

Careless unwanted wildfires do not play a natural role in a forest's succession. Wildland fire scars blanket hundreds of acres of wildland. Some wildfires are natural and of benefit to the cycle of renewal. Careless human-caused wildfires occur in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Action Plan – Strategies and Tactics

Goal #3 - Increase public understanding of landscape dynamics

Strategy: Work through existing partnerships to develop broad public understanding of ecosystem dynamics and build acceptance for brown trees and smoke

Tactic	Due Date	Responsible Party
Work with interagency partners to develop and distribute information and conduct outreach such as field trips, training programs targeted at realtors etc...		
Provide training and distribute information to internal audiences such as front desk, visitor center personnel, campground hosts, agencies and cooperators		
Media campaign aimed at local and regional audiences		
Develop interpretive programs and educational materials		

Goal 4

Develop wildfire prevention and mitigation messages that explain the need to exclude unnatural wildfire and mitigate the hazards and risks in areas where fires cannot be managed safely and can be very destructive. Messages should foster understanding of the need to manage wildland fires in areas where they are desirable and can be managed safely to help restore and sustain forest health.

Objective

Create public understanding of multiple (and potentially conflicting) fire management messages and management strategies – i.e. where we want to have fire and where we should not.

Key Messages

- **Careless fires can hurt; natural fires can help.**
- **There are places where fire can be managed safely and effectively under the appropriate conditions.**

- **There are places where fire cannot be managed safely and must be prevented, and mitigation should be done to reduce risks from wildfires.**
- **There are projects being conducted around priority areas identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Here is what you can do to help.**
- **There are places where prescribed fire can be used to begin the restoration of beetle-infested stands.**
- **Prescribed burning is designed to mimic natural processes.**
- **Wildfire is inevitable and we must plan for it.**
 - **Communities can plan for inevitable wildfires by developing a Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP). Help is available for this process.**

Talking Points

Land management agencies are committed to a balanced fire management program that will reduce risks and capitalize on the benefits of fire. Fire management programs are customized for specific wildland areas to restore the land to more natural conditions, maintain already healthy ecosystems, and protect neighboring communities. Fire management programs are based on a balance of needs, including fire suppression, prevention and fire use.

Fire is a management tool used to accomplish specific objectives in a plan such as removal of excess vegetation or stimulating plant growth and regeneration. Fire use is a managed process with comprehensive guidelines that prioritize safety and direct the planning and operations of the activity.

- **Naturally occurring fires**, such as those caused by lightning, are either suppressed or allowed to burn in a closely monitored and confined area, based on the fire plan for that area.
- Sometimes it may be necessary and/or beneficial for land managers to start fires in a closely monitored and confined area. These fires are referred to as **“prescribed fires.”**
- A fire program also may include **non-fire treatments** to prepare the land before natural or prescribed fire can be applied safely and effectively.

The amount of lodgepole on western National Forest lands is vastly greater than any other forest type. There will not be enough money to mechanically treat large landscapes. Wildland fire use is a management tool to help restore large landscapes.

Communities work together to identify priority areas to focus forest treatments like thinning and mechanical treatments to protect key values such as homes, ski areas, recreation sites, roads, transmission lines, and water resources.

Because a forest does not recognize ownership boundaries, communities must work together to restore forest health over the larger landscape.

Many communities are striving to act decisively across ownership boundaries in the most cost-effective and environmentally sound way.

By doing regular yard maintenance, individuals can reduce the possibility of fire damaging or destroying their home. It is each person’s responsibility, in cooperation with the community, fire department and neighbors, to take the necessary actions to prevent fire.

Action Plan – Strategies and Tactics

Goal #4 - Develop wildfire prevention and mitigation messages that explain the need to exclude unnatural wildfire and mitigate the risks in areas where fires cannot be managed safely and can be very destructive. Messages should foster understanding of the need to manage wildland fires in areas where they are desirable and can be managed safely to help restore and sustain forest health.

Strategy: Work through existing partnerships to develop broad public understanding of multiple (and potentially conflicting) fire management messages and management strategies		
Tactic	Due Date	Responsible Party
Work with interagency partners in to develop and distribute information and conduct outreach such as field trips		
Develop GIS maps and other visual displays that illustrate where fire use is desired and where it will not be allowed		
Develop a media campaign aimed at local and Regional audiences		
Provide training for campground hosts and other volunteers with high public contact		
Develop an educational interpretive program with materials illustrating the then and now effects of stand replacing fire areas		

Methods and Products

1. News Releases:
2. Personal Contacts and Coordination:
3. Key Messages and Prevention Tips:
4. Materials:

Snapshots that can be used for PowerPoint presentations or reference

Prevention & Mitigation- Priorities

- Priorities for prevention and mitigation are based on local assessment information throughout the year
- Initiate prevention prior to developing fire season
- Empower communities and property owners to mitigate hazards in WUI areas
- Work with cooperators to develop and deliver wildland fuel reduction programs

Prevention & Mitigation- Projects/Methods

- Fire prevention teams & cooperators
- Communications plan including media relations
- Tracking fire occurrence-statistical probabilities- predictive services
- Fire Restrictions
- Fireworks restrictions
- Displays and special products
- Presentations and events