



Quick-Guide #4: Scale of Wildfire Problems / Goals

The scale for the CWPP can be purposefully chosen for a strategic reason, such as aligning with jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., county) or ecological features (e.g., watershed). Other times, the scale comes from the ground-up when neighbors band together to work at their subdivision or Firewise community level. There is no “best” scale – if there is sufficient motivation and resources to work at a particular scale, a CWPP should be developed. Below are lessons learned from various cases we studied as part of this JFSP-sponsored research project:

Work at a scale that fits the community or ecological context, jurisdiction of participants and/or sponsors. The flexibility offered by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act allows for developing CWPPs where opportunity, motivation, and resources exist. County-wide or landscape-scale CWPPs can be tiered with subdivision or community-level mitigation efforts. Conversely, smaller-scale CWPPs can be linked to county-wide fire plans or regional fuels management plans. The linkage across scales is as important as the scale of any particular CWPP.

Examples:

- East Portal is not part of a fire protection district (FPD), so the CWPP was scaled toward communities located along a dead-end highway and community interest in involvement.
- Harris Park has twenty subdivisions located within one FPD, plus two subdivisions located in the neighboring FPD -- these two were included due to geographic proximity and local interest in being involved. The Harris Park CWPP is tiered to a broader regional strategy for fuels management and watershed restoration.

If the objective is to develop strategic fuels management plans, the County or landscape-scale may be appropriate. If your State Department of Forestry is leading the process, they are likely to favor counties; western counties may have Title 3 funds for county level CWPPs. County plans are most often strategic, prioritizing projects in terms of risk or coordinating hazardous fuel reduction. **Strategic planning is appropriate at a larger scale**, at least at the county and sometimes the watershed level. These larger scale plans allow for the opportunity to address problems on a landscape level, but may take longer to implement.

Examples:

- Josephine County’s Integrated Fire Plan involved GIS mapping of risk throughout the county and created new relationships among federal, state and county fire management officers.
- In Wisconsin, planning was done at the multiple township level, to address the forest system in the bottom third of the county. The participants’ objectives were to improve public safety and fuel treatment efficiencies on public lands within and around these two municipalities.
- In Lake County, MN participants focused the plan at a county landscape level. This will allow for coordinating fuels reduction across agency land boundaries (County, US Forest Service, MN Department of Natural Resources). However, problems with jurisdiction and funding have slowed implementation. (over)

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If the objective is to motivate homeowners to accomplish hazard reduction on private land, a small scale is advisable. These community-based plans reflect local values and fire department expertise; projects and emergency planning are more likely to gain the support of community members. Working on a smaller scale may produce quicker on-the-ground results in a limited area; however, links would need to be made to county- or landscape-level planning objectives.

Examples:

- In Larimer County, Colorado, CWPPs have been developed at the subdivision scale with willing homeowners' associations. Consistency across CWPPs is assured through a county fire plan, and CWPPs are also linked to landscape-scale fuels management strategies on national forest land. The Larimer County Coordinating Group consisting of county, state, and federal wildfire and land management agency representatives communicate on a regular basis to make sure priority treatment areas are connected in a way that maximizes impact on wildfire behavior and risk to homes, communities, and natural resources.
- In Virginia, the State Department of Forestry made a strategic decision to conduct CWPPs at the subdivision level in higher fire risk areas. High Knob Homeowners' Association was able to develop a plan and initiate implementation of priority projects within private and community land in less than a year.

CWPPs can be linked to larger or smaller scales, either by starting at the community level and moving up, or at a larger entity which then coordinates plans for smaller units. External coordinating organizations (e.g., Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership, Larimer County Coordinating Group, and El Dorado, CA County Fire Safe Council) can sponsor neighborhood/community meetings and nest CWPPs in a larger scale project, but it is important to involve local leaders and fire departments.

The pre-planning phase can be an important stage for identifying and linking into larger-scale regional and statewide CWPP initiatives and coordinating groups. Contractors or coordinating organizations can reach communities lacking the capacity to do their own plans by facilitating community processes and building local capacity. They can then coordinate with larger landscape-level risk prioritization data bases, and fire mitigation and forest restoration efforts. And some CWPPs have gained efficiencies by coordinating with other planning efforts, such as county disaster mitigation plans mandated by FEMA.

Examples:

- ◆ Trinity County, California, held a series of community meetings sponsored by the Volunteer Fire Departments in order to gather community values at risk and to gather recommendations for county fire management planning efforts. These were followed by a two-day planning summit and summarized in a county-level fire plan sponsored by the Trinity County Fire Safe Council.
- ◆ Grizzly Flats, California is similarly nested in their county (El Dorado) Fire Safe Council plan.
- ◆ Lake County, Colorado's plan covers the entire county which is served by one FPD. Action items and risk assessments are listed for individual subdivisions rather than the entire county. There are seven subdivisions included as of the 2005 version, and the plan will be updated as additional subdivisions are included according to local interest in being involved.

Mechanisms need to be put in place for policy makers to understand and facilitate assistance and resources for CWPPs to ensure wildfire planning and mitigation across the landscape. Policy makers need to be able to identify and equitably distribute pools of resources to ensure that local-level CWPP efforts have what they need to link into larger, regional-scale efforts, but also to provide support for coordinating staff. Policy should also consider the implications of "citizen" alternatives developed by multiple interests collaborating on a CWPP and NEPA requirements (which may be required on cross scale, multi-ownership projects).

Example:

- ◆ In Ashland, Oregon, the CWPP was written to support a citizens' alternative to a federal land management project. This made coordination with CWPPs at other scales problematic.