



The Community Wildfire Protection Planning Process: A Quick-Guide Series on Collaboration

This series offers a set of lessons learned concerning the collaborative processes that influence and guide the development of community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs) under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA 2003). The lessons learned are offered in relatively short quick-guide (QG) formats, which are linked together into an overall framework.

The narrative framework begins with the community and ecological context within which the CWPP is being prepared. It then describes a number of factors that make up the collaborative planning process itself, illustrating a range of the critical elements, roles, and activities which will most likely strengthen and sustain collaboration within the CWPP. Finally, it spells out some of the benefits and outcomes of working collaboratively to formulate a community plan for wildfire protection.

The lessons described herein have been derived from a set of quite diverse community case studies conducted as part of a Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) research project (<http://JFSP.fortlewis.edu>); each of these in its own way illustrates the unique context, process, and outcomes being experienced by many community citizens, governmental leaders, and public land managers in working with wildfire protection planning. Our intent is not to present any of the quick-guides as if they stand alone as singular indicators of success, but rather as a menu of factors that influence each other, that are continually interacting to guide, adapt, and improve the collective actions of communities and organizations. While each QG fits within a broad framework about the collaborative development of CWPPs, our intent is not to present a comprehensive story of the planning process as if it were a formal set of discreet, sequential steps. While indeed there can be some order or guiding structures to preparing and implementing a high-quality

CWPP, most often there is a significant level of interplay between many conditions, resources and actions, which are reflected in the Quick Guides (QG's) that follow.

Below, each quick guide is introduced by a short overview that describes its distinctive features. If you wish to view that particular guide in its entirety, click on the appropriate **LINK**. You may find any number of interrelationships among the QG's, and perhaps discover that several of them together provide you the assistance being sought because of the inherent parallels and influences among them.



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In reviewing the work of communities and organizations to address wildfire threats and protection measures we found that the history, characteristics, and conditions of both the community and ecological situations played a very significant role in defining the CWPP. All of these aspects, whether they are past wildfire occurrences, the scientific or perceived risks of future occurrences, or the abilities of community members and land managers to work together on natural resource issues, make up the context for building a CWPP.

In examining the CWPP case studies we have found a number of important contextual characteristics that establish starting points, opportunities, goals, and capacities that in turn clearly influence the development and outcomes of the plan.



Quick-Guide #1: Context: Current Community Situation



Because CWPPs are by and large meant to be community-based, it is quite helpful to know about the capacity of the county, town, or neighborhood to lead and participate in the planning process. This capacity is spoken of as “capital.” Another name might be resources, which may include social, economic and political attributes such as previous experiences of working together, knowledge of local natural resource values, natural resource mapping abilities, commitment to solve problems in a cooperative manner, and funding to obtain technical assistance.

While it is worthwhile to be aware of the levels of “capital” within the community, one should not conclude that situations or places that might be said to have less capital should not be engaged to build a CWPP. However, a significant awareness of the levels of available resources will help define appropriate methods of community involvement and increase the likelihood of success. ([LINK to QG1](#))

Quick-Guide #2: Context: Existing Leadership



Within each CWPP context there are a variety of leadership situations and patterns. Through them the community establishes ways to address its common problems and concerns. Because CWPPs require collective or community-based action, leadership is a critical ingredient. Can the protection planning process rely upon strong political leadership from local governments and fire protection organizations? Do leaders exist at a neighborhood or subdivision level? What leadership role can be played by non-profit organizations and interest groups?

Within each community context there will be a level of cooperation between and among leaders, citizens, and various social and political sectors with regard to natural resources. Is there a history of having worked together on land and forest management? In the past, have people demonstrated a commitment to participate in creating a common vision or working agreements about desired community interactions with the natural environment? ([LINK to QG2](#))





Quick-Guide #3: Context: Existing Networks



Somewhat parallel to existing leadership capacities are the presence and depth of resource networks. Again there is a great variety among these. Some might be described as social networks that are based on interactions and relationships among neighbors, different interest groups, or perhaps among diverse leaders throughout the community. Often networks will exist among governmental entities, community service organizations, and forest land user groups. Sometimes there will be coalitions among groups and organizations who share a common interest in natural resource issues, such as public land partnerships or conservation associations.

Whatever the nature of the networks, be they leadership, organizational, or issue-based, they likely possess resources useful or appropriate to a collaborative planning process. What networks exist? Can the existing resource networks in the community context be mobilized? How well are these networks connected with regard to the issues and concerns of wildfire protection and mitigation? ([LINK QG3](#))

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



Quite often one of the initial questions that arise as CWPP work begins concerns the area to be covered or addressed. This can be defined as a question of scale. Will the CWPP deal with an entire county or region in a broad landscape sense and in a manner that local communities and subdivisions can tier to it? Or will local communities be encouraged to begin at a smaller scale with the intent that the individual CWPPs will be linked together over time? Obviously, the scale chosen has many impacts on the planning process and on associated factors such as selecting the key leaders, the number and nature of the resource networks that need to be involved, and the complexity of the risk assessment process, among many others.

Although the case studies don't indicate a single right answer as to how a CWPP core group decides on the scale of the plan, the choice does have many concrete implications for the collaborative process and its outcomes. ([LINK QG4](#))



Context also addresses the scale of the CWPP. Defining the area a CWPP will cover is a vital first step.



PROCESS

Establishing the WUI boundaries is also an important first step in the CWPP development



Quick-Guide #5: Process: Role of the WUI in Planning and Implementation



The Healthy Forests Restoration Act provides an opportunity through the CWPP development process for communities, fire protection authorities, and public land managers to set the boundaries of the Wildland-Urban Interface, or WUI, that will guide the planning effort. The WUI zone seeks to define the geographic area where community features such as houses, commercial buildings and activities, and key social infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, and transportation systems meet or connect with natural or wildland vegetation. The trend for residential development to spread out onto the wildland landscape has increased the risk of wildfire impacts on communities.

When communities, land managers, and other collaborative partners take the initiative in defining the WUI, its boundaries and characteristics can be “customized” to fit the local ecological and jurisdictional scales. If initiative is not taken through the CWPP process, the WUI defaults to a boundary 1 ½ miles beyond the urban edge of the community. There are many social, economic, and political or governmental reasons to define the WUI boundaries in a collaborative manner. **(LINK QG5)**

Quick-Guide #6: Process: Assessing Community Resources for Collaboration



Not all communities start at square one in terms of collaboration for CWPPs; on the other hand, not all communities are prepared to immediately enter discussions about values-at-risk and priority treatment areas. Understanding the availability of the community’s resources for collaboration can help organizers of a CWPP to hit the ground running. This Quick Guide provides CWPP organizers with a set of categories and probing questions to assess a community’s resources for collaborating in CWPP development. The Quick Guide also provides Suggestions on how to proceed, given available community collaboration resources. **(LINK QG6)**



Quick-Guide #7: Process: Crafting Effective Messages to Inspire Community Participation



To the surprise and dismay of many wildfire mitigation specialists and land managers, community residents often don't respond to the messages specialists use to persuade them to participate in CWPP development and take mitigation activities. One way to think about this issue is that wildfire specialists, land managers, and community residents have different frames of reference for how wildfire will affect the community. Understanding the diversity of frames that community residents have can better help CWPP organizers to recruit community residents. It is likely that CWPP organizers have to develop different messages to target different segments of a community. For some individuals, the appropriate message might emphasize wildfire risk to life and property. For others, the message might focus on scenery, wildlife, and the "sense of place" that might be impacted by a wildfire. Conducting an assessment regarding what the community residents value about their place can provide essential information for what kinds of messages might resonate. It is also important to let residents know where in the CWPP process they can provide input, such as identifying values-at-risk. **(LINK QG7)**

Quick-Guide #8: Process: Participant Roles and Functions



Developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a collaborative effort among government entities, and between government entities and interested and affected non-governmental interests, especially local community residents. All participants bring something to the table, such as: leadership and vision; fostering mutual learning and inclusive discussion among participants; facilitating communication among participants; locating financial resources; recruiting key agency and community participants through their social networks; linkages to other mitigation, emergency preparedness, and forest management plans; and scientific and technical information. Conducting an inventory of available resources, identifying gaps in these resources, and assigning who will be responsible for bringing what resources can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the collaborative process to develop a CWPP. **(LINK QG8)**





Quick-Guide #9: Process: Key Components of CWPPs and Templates



There continues to be a wide array of formats for CWPPs. Since considerable latitude is allowed within the HFRA authorizing legislation, with only three primary elements spelled out, local communities and land management agencies have created numerous models. These reflect the size and scale of the planning area, the ways the wildfire problem is defined, and whether the planning group has minimal or extensive resources at its disposal. Nevertheless, given all the variations in social and ecological situations, a number of key elements stand out as typical or highly significant. **(LINK QG9)**

Quick-Guide #10: Process: Factors that Influence Collaboration



While participants typically desire to utilize collaborative practices in developing and implementing a CWPP, consideration of the specific factors that enhance collaboration can help make the process more practical. Success can be increased by working collaboratively to address the wildfire protection issue, but where do you start? What are the building blocks and key activities that define the shared efforts? **(LINK QG10)**

Quick-Guide #11: Process: Potential Resource and Authorities Brought by Government



Communities and public land agencies are often identified as primary participants in the CWPP process. These two entities are fundamental because of the CWPP's explicit focus on the wildland-urban interface (WUI), that critical geographic and topographic landscape within which wildland fire risks can severely affect social and human assets, and where community activities and functions can significantly affect ecological functions and health. Overlaying these two entities is a wide array of governmental organizations and functions. These include fire protection organizations, city councils, planning departments, emergency management units, and a variety of regional councils. These organizations can provide fiscal resources, coordination, scientific knowledge, geographic information, monitoring, and numerous statutory authorities to assist with policy development and implementation. **(LINK QG11)**

OUTCOMES

Quick-Guide #12 : Diverse Benefits of CWPPs



As with most collective efforts, the benefits of a social planning process need to be understandable and as tangible as possible. Developing a CWPP is a substantial investment of individual and organizational resources, for which the participants need to sense worthwhile outcomes. The nature of these outcomes can be quite varied and unique to the interests of different stakeholders. In examining the 13 cases of this research project several types of benefits were recognized, including ones that might be termed social, knowledge or capacity-based, natural system or infrastructure, and financial. It appears to help maintain the commitment of participants in a CWPP process if they can recognize benefits such as these that are relevant to their goals. For those communities asking whether making the investment in a CWPP is worthwhile, these examples of potential benefits may provide encouragement. ([LINK QG12](#))

Quick-Guide #13: Knowledge / Learning Community



One of the more interesting discoveries about collaboration in CWPPs is that participants of diverse backgrounds learn about the social and ecological aspects of wildfire and their own community. By entering into a variety of planning activities, including debate about objectives and priorities and research, they obtain local knowledge and facts about the wildlands that surround their neighborhoods. They begin to understand how the water, trees and critters function together in an ecosystem; how wildfire plays a role in that ecosystem along with its risks; how fire behavior will change with topography and types of vegetation. Citizens in neighborhoods get to know each other in ways that might be helpful in other emergency situations and in governance. The many ways that a whole community can work together through its governmental, non-profit, scientific and voluntary resources become far more apparent as participants learn about and increase their readiness for wildfire. Over time a learning community is formed out of a CWPP development process that has lasting values for participants and for ongoing collective action. ([LINK QG13](#))



