

Appendix I

Priorities for pre- during and post-fire activities

Compilation of the NACD Community Wildfire Desk Guide and Toolkit was guided by an advisory team comprised of local resource leaders. The team included Karen Berry, board member of the Jefferson County Conservation District, Colorado; Stephen Campbell, University of Arizona Extension forester; Doug Martin, director of the Nevada-Tahoe Conservation District in Nevada; Kit Sutherland, coordinator of the Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development Council, Missoula, Montana; and Steve Ellis of the Colorado State Forest Service. Their work was supported by a broader circle of advisors that included NACD staff and representatives of local, state and federal agencies.

Team members were chosen because they were “fire-tested”: All had direct experience dealing with wildfires, working to protect communities at risk, conducting fuels reduction efforts and addressing other issues in fire-prone areas.

A key outcome of the team’s work was development of a list of priorities for local resource leaders engaged in addressing community wildfire issues before, during and after fires. Their focus was on roles and responsibilities in helping protect people, property and resources. A two-day meeting focused on identifying priorities, and follow-up teleconferences and email communications were used to rank the priorities. Team members assigned values of “3” for high priority, “2” for medium and “1” for lower. Scores were tabulated to determine placement within categories. While the scoring helped to rank priorities according to levels of importance, team members stressed that even those that received low ranks in the scoring system still merited attention from local resource leaders.

While team members are all local resource leaders who have extensive experience dealing with wildfires and its impact on communities, professionals from other backgrounds will likely identify other priorities and assign different values to those listed here. But since the focus of this project was to develop materials for local resource leaders, the input of team members provides valuable insights.

QUICK SUMMARY

As documented here, team members viewed the scope of activities for local resource leaders to be broad. It identified activities prior to and after fires to be of highest priority. It assigned lower values to activities during the fire, when fire-fighting professionals are doing their jobs. This finding corresponds with resources developed by other professionals, including “Interagency Coordination Guides” developed by the USDA Forest Service in cooperation with other partners.

The range of priorities identified in all three categories parallels much of the traditional work done by local resource leaders. There is strong emphasis on educating various audiences, engaging with other partners, providing technical assistance and arranging financial assistance. There is also emphasis on serving as important connectors to programs and services that will benefit communities in planning for, dealing with and responding to wildfires. Following is a list of priorities in each of three categories.

PRE-FIRE

Analysis: The team emphasized the need for local resource leaders to first understand their roles and the roles of those working with or around them. Educating community members about reducing risks and working with local agencies to accomplish that are key priorities. The emphasis here focuses on how to minimize the impact of fire with the understanding that it is a likely occurrence in many settings. It is also crucial to determine if a CWPP is already in place or being developed, and how local resource organizations such as conservation districts and resource conservation and development councils can help develop and/or implement the plan.

High Priority

Educate community members about fire and the need to prepare for it: It is natural, and it will happen. (Score of 10)

Reduce risks: Community members and landowners need to be educated about necessary steps to reducing risks from wildfires, including reduction of hazardous fuels, appropriate landscaping, building to fire-safe codes and other steps. (10)



Education is an important tool local resource leaders use to help defend against wildfire. Here school children learn about the many benefits of the Fuels for Schools program.

Work with community planning and zoning: Team members felt that local resource leaders should be engaged in decisions about how and where communities develop, providing expertise about natural resource issues and concerns and how they interface with other development issues. (10)

Define the hazards: This was seen as part of the educational process. (9)

Educate citizens about incident command centers: These centers are hubs of activities during fires. (9)

Reference identified resources and players, and fill gaps or niches: Team members said this is related to developing strong relationships and important to developing and implementing strong CWPPs or hazard mitigation plans. (8)

Determine if a CWPP already exists or if another group is working on one. Help develop the plan or work to maintain and strengthen the existing plan. (8)

Medium Priority

Understand roles and relationships and what is and isn't being done: Seen as part of the CWPP process. (7)

Empower and assist locals in creating community disaster mitigation plans. (7)

Plan for post-fire activities, roles and responsibilities. (7)

Establish common ground with partners: Seen as related to the CWPP and partner-building priorities. (5)

Lower Priority

Locate water supplies. (Originally listed as during-fire activity, but more appropriately placed here.) This was seen as a necessary activity by all local fire departments, federal, state and private landowners. Local resource leaders with knowledge of water resources can provide valuable assistance. (4, as a during-fire activity)

Identify people living in the wildland-urban interface. (3)

Emphasize the value of memoranda of understanding. (3)

Learn about and seek to qualify for red and/or yellow cards: Here the committee noted that partners such as NRCS personnel and conservation district and RC&D staff may want to obtain these qualifications ahead of time so they can assist on private property or on burned area emergency recovery teams. (2)

DURING FIRE

Analysis: Top priorities here focus on serving as a resource to fire-fighting teams and community residents by sharing knowledge and information.

Be available as a resource; ask incident command how you can help. (8)

Help familiarize outside resource professionals with the community: This could include serving as guides and linking outside professionals with community leaders and resources such as GIS maps. (8)

Gain knowledge about the fire and relay it to landowners. Here the team acknowledged the importance of working with incident command to gather and disseminate correct information. (6)

Educate and create awareness during the “panic,” or active fire stage. Related to above item. (6)

Continue planning efforts for post-fire. This could include creating a checklist of needs/ actions and beginning the search for financial and technical assistance. (6)

Medium/Lower Priority

Activate the multi-agency group, including conservation districts, RC&Ds, incident command representatives and other entities that can help in recovery efforts. Activities may include assisting in evacuations and assuring timely and accurate information is available to landowners and other residents. (5)

Let the pros in each area do what they do: Stay out of their way. (5)

Assist with evacuation of pets and livestock. This was identified as an unmet need by two team members. (4)

Help to retain infrastructure. (4)

Distribute an evacuation fact sheet. (4)

Organize supplies and link with partners. (4)

Be involved as part of the rehabilitation team. This was seen as being covered by several other points above. (2)

POST FIRE

Analysis: Local resource professionals are well schooled in identifying financial and technical assistance. Post-fire situations are seen as crucial times for filling that role. Coordinating volunteer activities, helping to rebuild community infrastructure and supporting people who have been through a stressful event are also seen as important.

High Priority

Explain financial and technical assistance processes and timelines to community members and partners, and secure and implement financial and technical assistance. (10)

Help people deal with post-traumatic stress, which was identified as an important and often unmet need in the wake of fires, especially those that cause heavy damage. Team members emphasized the key here was not trying to serve the role of providers, but rather connecting those who need services to those who can provide them. (10)

Work to revitalize community infrastructure if needed. This may include helping businesses get up and running after the fire. (9)

Coordinate volunteer efforts. People want to pitch in, and volunteer hours serve as an important match for some recovery programs. (8)

Build and maintain a healthy forest. (8)

Identify mutual aid needs based on experiences during and after the fire. Seen as a good activity for a multi-agency group. (8)

Work to assist incident command team and burned area emergency recovery team on access, crossing boundaries and jurisdictional issues. (8)

Medium Priority

Celebrate good work. Seen as important to rebuilding community spirit and serving an educational role. (7)

Coordinate long-term follow-up with residents. (7)

Address rebuilding issues and avoid replicating the problem of building in the wrong place. Seen as important but difficult to accomplish among those who have suffered fire



When the fire is active, local resource leaders should offer to help however they can, but it's important to let the firefighting agencies take the lead in the suppression efforts.

loss. (7)

Work with fire chief and other entities in the CWPP. (7)

Conduct a private land hazard survey. (6)

Help people protect lives and property in a post-fire situation. (6)

Facilitate the salvage of timber when appropriate: Seen as an important step in rebuilding a healthy forest and also important to protecting lives and property. (6)

Implement demonstration projects and/or utilize examples from fire. Organize tours and educate about hazardous fuels reduction. (6)

Pool resources and purchase in bulk to save money. Context here deals with reforestation efforts. (6)

Evaluate short-term options. (5)

Lower Priority

Think outside the box. (1)