

**Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)**  
**Final Public Meeting – Okanogan PUD Auditorium**

1331 2nd Ave N, Okanogan, WA

09/25/2024 | 6:45pm – 8:30pm

**6:45 Welcome, Introductions, & CWPP Overview**

Eli Loftis with the Okanogan Conservation District welcomed everyone to the final CWPP community meeting. There were 14 people in attendance and 16 people online.

The CWPP partners in attendance included various agencies such as the Okanogan Conservation District, Okanogan County Emergency Management, OK County Long Term Recovery Group, WADNR representatives, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation representatives, and Conservation Northwest.

**6:50 Overview CWPP Draft and Efforts in 2024**

Eli Loftis overviewed the CWPP process and efforts throughout 2024 through a PowerPoint presentation (for full presentation, please see the CWPP resources section at [www.okanogancd.org/cwpp](http://www.okanogancd.org/cwpp)). Partners who collaborated and contributed to the update of the 2024 CWPP were highlighted.

The CWPP is a planning document and collaborative process. The CWPP is not a legally binding document, actions and projects highlighted in the document are not required, and the CWPP is not an evacuation plan. An updated timeline of the efforts throughout 2024 were displayed to show planning efforts, partner and community meetings, generation of the document, and the final public meeting tonight.

Objectives of the CWPP were shared. The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map was displayed. Community input included 725 residents of Okanogan County completed the community survey, more data and information about the survey can be found in Appendix C of the CWPP document. Also, the 5 public community meetings held in the Spring of 2024. These meetings took place in Tonasket, Okanogan, Nespelem, Winthrop, and Pateros. There was also a meeting with Chiliwist residents which took place at the Okanogan Conservation District office. Over 300 people attended the public meetings, resulting in greater than 1,000 community members total who contributed in the process of updating the CWPP document.

The structure of the CWPP document includes the following main components: Introduction, Okanogan County Background, Wildfire Risk and Preparedness, Fire Protection and District Capacity, Mitigation Efforts (this includes educational materials for individuals, and Project Action Recommendations.

Project Action Recommendations in the CWPP include specific projects displayed in a table developed by the CWPP planning committee and input from community members who attended the public meetings. There are 180 project recommendations. Examples slides of the project action table were displayed. Projects include a section title, an item number for reference, a project title, project description, a lead organization(s), additional project partners, relation to CWPP objectives, and an anticipated timeline.

Next steps to the CWPP process will include making revisions to the CWPP draft after the public comment period ends and reviewing the document for other final changes before giving it to the County government.

**Public comment and questions:**

Isabelle Spohn asked, “Will the Okanogan County Commissioners have a public hearing to have final say of the approval of this document?”

- A. Okanogan County Commissioners are monitoring the public comment process and are still make decision about how to conduct the approval process once the CWPP is submitted to the county by the CWPP core planning group. A final decision about a final public hearing conducted by the commissioners is yet to be made

Kat Heim had a procedural question, since the next update will be in 10 years, “will there be opportunities to comment on action items and make updates prior to the next official update?”

Eli Loftis answered yes, while there are no official requirements to do so, there is language in the CWPP that recommends partners meet annually to discuss the progress of the CWPP and discuss any needed adjustments.

Susan Davis asked, “Can another non-profit like Habitat for Humanity be used to reach marginal communities for forest fuels management, defensible space and home hardening?”

A. Yes.

Kat Heim said, “thank you guys,” it’s clear that a lot of hard work was put into the document and efforts to gain public participation. It’s appreciated that equity was emphasized in this process.

A. Thank you, Kat. We appreciate that comment. All partners had a part to play in this, especially, Jessica Farmer with the OCLTRG who ensured this was a critical part of the document and brought in essential data for our vulnerable populations.

Kat Heim commented that she has more comments and is taking time to mark up a document to submit those later. However, she was wondering, as she is currently serving a high school student in the Methow who is looking for work in the wildfire realm. She was wondering if there is an action item for something that can support something like this.

Eli Loftis commented this is a part of the objectives for the CWPP and encouraged Kat to send in any specific project action ideas she has regarding this.

Isabelle Spohn commented that she believes people may be overwhelmed by the short amount of time for public comment, especially as this is a 300-page document and there are only 14 days to submit comment. There are people she knows of specifically who are not here in the meeting but were interested in the document and had not yet had the time to review it.

Secondly, some of the objectives list many lead agencies as being responsible for a project, in my experience for instance if you send an email to 20 people, no one ends up responding. If you have more than one person listed as responsible, isn’t this kind of an invitation to where none of them may end up taking the lead? An example of this can be found on page 196, for item A16.

Jessica Farmer commented that this may mean that there are multiple agencies working on this project or have something in process that has to do with this action item, and we wanted to highlight that it was clear that multiple agencies are targeting that. Also, that those programs could be accessed by any of us.

Isabelle inquired further as to, over the next few years, how will each agency report or measure progress on working towards these items?

Jessica Farmer commented that agencies made a commitment that they would plan to meet at least annually to collaborate and partner to discuss progress, resources available, and also at the five year mark, identify areas to expand upon or adjustments project items.

Isabelle Spohn clarified, so each year one of these agencies would initiate a question as to have we made progress, and at five years, would ask if something has been achieved or not?

Jessica Farmer followed this by restating that partners would be collaborating annually, yes, and it really depends on the area in the CWPP for who's going to connect and at what level. This is our guide for who's going to connect going forward.

Kat Heim also commented "I actually see having multiple partners as a benefit - there's strength in collaboration."

Rocklynn Culp also commented in response, "Agree. Listing multiple agencies allows whoever has capacity to pick up the ball."

Isabelle Spohn also inquired about another project action item B6, regarding the development of cell towers for the public to stay connected to wildfire events. This is a great idea but is focused to take place in the Upper Methow and areas of Twisp and Winthrop, but what about the more remote areas such as Carlton, outside the town of Methow, Lost River, and others. Who is looking out for them in this regard?

Eli Loftis commented that this particular action item is centered around those areas likely because it was a project where the Town of Winthrop and Town of Twisp are identified as leads on this. While you are right, there is still a need for additional cell and other telecom enhancements in those areas, as well as, for



other communities throughout the County. There are other action items that allude to this, but there could be a more explicit recommendation.

Isabelle Spohn stated that she has lived in and spent time in the Lower Methow and she knows that they very often feel left out. Advisory committees exist for parts of the Methow but not in all areas of the Methow. She also stated that she would like to see more attention placed on places like McFarland, Walker, Black Canyon, Libby Creek, and those areas because they can use more communication.

Isabelle Spohn also commented that she couldn't find encouraged grounding of electric utilities anywhere in this document. That she may have missed it because she didn't have much time and the document is long, but that this was in the most recent community protection plan that she saw. She asked again, "so has it been removed or did I miss it?"

Eli Loftis commented he is unsure and does not have an answer. He said that we can ask partners from the PUD or another electrical company.

The question was asked to be repeated. Again, Eli Loftis commented that we are not sure, and we will follow up on the matter.

Isabelle Spohn said thank you and concluded by saying she will be submitting comments later and she knows of others who did not get the notice of the Zoom in time to prepare enough for tonight, and that she only got the notice yesterday so that might be why there are only a few individuals here.

Eli Loftis thanked Isabelle and asked if there were any other questions from those in the room or online.

Rocklynn Culp (Winthrop City Planner) commented she had an interest for getting involved with this because we are seeing wildfire start to reach not just the WUI but the actual interface between the towns/cities and wildland or habitation, and I think we will see over time more collaboration with agencies involved and the cities or towns involved to discuss how best to create a defensible situation there. That she talked about this in planning meetings but wanted to reiterate it tonight.

Kat Heim commented about the headings in the WUI area, that she likes that it shows transitions from wildland to rural to suburban to more residential then to urban. One comment is that more clarification can still be made for those like me who live in a rural intermixed area so there's not confusion or people don't think that certain areas don't apply to them.

This also led to another thought about typos. She noticed typos and where clarifications could be helpful. She emphasized that this is an excellent document and does not mean to be insulting but was wondering if there is someone who could look at this document with a fresh pair of eyes to help identify any grammatical errors and areas where there could be clarifications made throughout. This is already an outstanding document and you've worked very hard, but it would be even better and a benefit to the document to do that.

Eli Loftis commented first about the graphics that are included in the document, specifically the one about the breakdown of WUI areas is used in many publications and others were already created. To address this we may have to reiterate statements and clarifications in the body of the text or find a way to make edits to those.

Kat Heim clarified that it would be helpful and even defining what those terms mean for this document to avoid confusion and make it clearer as to what that means throughout the document.

Eli Loftis commented that yes, we can work to address that. Also, in response to the editing process. This is a good suggestion; we have been looking at this thing for about a year now and it can definitely use a fresh set of eyes. Further, that we can try to find someone else maybe in our office or the planning group who can have a look. It's a heavy task and we don't envy the person doing it but we appreciate them either way. Thanks, Kat.

Isabelle Spohn asked, I'm just curious, I'm online but how many members of the public are present?

Eli Loftis listed the people in the room and emphasized many here are partners with one member of the public. Someone else commented that they were also a

member of the public, and another comment was made, “we all live here.” In total there are 14 people in the room.

Isabelle Spohn also asked, what importance does the WUI have and size of the designation of the WUI? (See WUI map at [www.okanogancd.org/cwpp](http://www.okanogancd.org/cwpp) in resources)

Jessica Farmer commented that she was there in the core group when we defined what that WUI looks like. While the original dark pink area is where we interface between wildland and people, to the mark closer to each housing area, it was clear that there are also people and agricultural users especially who reach out of that are who are also important and need to be included in the designation. Just because an area is not 3 miles from a house, it doesn't mean that it doesn't have value to us.

Isabelle Spohn clarified that she wants to know how the WUI plays a role and affects specific restoration projects such as thinning, logging, etc.

The definition of the WUI plays a role in the implementation of projects by the USFS. We do not have the expertise to speak to how that exactly plays a role in their operation, but we can connect you to a representative of the USFS to explain that further.

Kat Heim commented in response to the extended WUI, “I am grateful for the extended WUI – for example some headgates for irrigation are out pretty far into the wildlands.”

Wren commented, “I deeply appreciate y'all's efforts and time in undertaking this project! Hats off to y'all. Really appreciate the great questions from the public. In regards to some community members not having enough resources for hardening of the homes, I am wondering---” Wren's message was cut off due to being online but he unmuted to continue to say, he was wondering if it is not too late to collaborate. That he knows there's amazing organizations involved in this project, and that he wanted to offer his assistance for the hardening of homes for those who cannot afford those resources. He would like to share his ideas.

Eli Loftis responded by thanking Wren and that he would prefer to keep his hat on because it is rather expensive. But we appreciate the support and that it's never too late to collaborate. We will be in touch soon. Eli's contact email was also dropped into the chat.

An online comment from Susan Davis appeared saying, “wilderness lands policy are not like urban units. The wilderness act and DNR or BLM wilderness policy describes the differences which present hazards to WUI.”

Also, “The policy differences impact suppression and prevention.”

Eli Loftis expressed his thanks and that he is grateful to the residents of Okanogan County and to those who attended the public meetings. The public involvement in the process was much higher than the last time this document was created in 2013.

No further comment.

#### **7:55 CWPP Next Steps**

The county’s process is yet to be determined. On our end, we cannot give a set timeline on how long it may take to make these edits and finalize the document. We would hope this could be ready at the end of October or early November, to then hand over to the County.

We will continue to keep you all updated on the process, and work to incorporate the comments from everyone here tonight and throughout the public comment period.

#### **7:58 Adjournment**

\*The virtual meeting was still available after adjournment, and at 7:59 Eric Barham joined. We apologized and stated that we just ended the meeting, and he said, “no problem, I was just stopping in to see how it was going.” Also, “Just to be fair I am not a resident, I am just learning about the CWPP. I run the defensible space program for 3 departments in Oregon. Have a good evening!”

Eli Loftis thanked him for stopping in.

#### **8:02 Virtual Meeting adjourned.**

## 2024 CWPP – Final Public Meeting

Okanogan PUD Auditorium

Okanogan, WA

September 25th, 2024

Name

Location

Kathy Moses

Nespelem

Emmy Engle

OCD

James Perron

Bazzard Lake Road

Jessica Farmer

Okanogan County TRG

Dylan Streeter

OCD

Eli Loftis

OCD

Rosalie Powell

OCD

Will Kneighton

WA DNR

Becky Deen

OCD

Lori Caswell

Okan. Co. Em

Maurice Gadell

Okan. Co. Em



