

## **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)**

### **Public Meeting - North OK County**

Tonasket High School

03/12/2024 | 5pm-7pm

#### **5:00 – 5:30 Welcome, Introductions, & CWPP Overview**

Eli Loftis with the Okanogan Conservation District and Maurice Goodall with Okanogan County Emergency Management welcomed everyone, went over the ground rules, meetings goals, and meeting structure. There were 44 people in attendance. It was noted that this is the first of five community meetings that will take place.

25 of the participants were various agencies and CWPP partners who introduced themselves. Partners in attendance included Okanogan Conservation District - Executive Director, Wildfire Lead, Wildfire Planner, Program Planner, and Communication and Outreach Specialist, USFS-Tonasket District Ranger, Fuels Specialist, and FMO, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), WADNR – Fuels, Community Resiliency, Fire liaison, and Highlands FMO, Fire District #4, Fire District #10, Fire District #11, Fire District #12, Okanogan County – Emergency Management, County Commissioner, and County Sheriff, and Okanogan County Long Term Recovery Group.

Eli Loftis continued with the CWPP overview, we looked at a map that showed previously burned areas from 1985-2013 and compared that to another fire map that showed burned areas in just in the last 10 years. The red on the map nearly doubled, concluding that the landscape has drastically over the last 10 years and since 2013, when the CWPP was last updated. Eli emphasized the importance of the CWPP and continued the presentation.

Before shifting into the activity, a community member asked a question, “is there consequences to those that burn during a burn ban and what can be done about illegal burning?” Okanogan County Emergency Management addressed this mentioning that the County is slowly moving forward and increasing engagement with the sheriff’s office. The Okanogan County Sheriff followed up on this to say, when that call is made they first dispatch fire fighters and then law enforcement if needed. The first time this occurs may be a warning to provide education, the fire would be distinguished, and if

there's a second call, this would mean ramifications. No other questions came about at this time and the group moved onto the activity.

### **5:30 – 6:00                    Mapping Activity – Community Values at Risk**

Community members and partners all participated in a mapping activity where everyone got three dots to rank their values at risk. Pink dots represented the highest priority, green dots were a mid-priority, and yellow dots were lower priority. Discussions broke out around the tables where four different maps for Northern Okanogan County were located. These maps were broken down into the NW, NE, SW, and SE quadrants (see image on the last page). After twenty minutes and everyone had the opportunity to place their dots, the community was asked how they determined their priorities. Going table by table, participants volunteered to share why they marked an area as one of their values at risk and how they based their priority. Many members emphasized wishing they had more pink dots to label additional values as high priority. A few of the values at risk were as follows:

#### NW Map:

Values included - highway 97 to the North and South noting that evacuations can be challenging, a property owner in Havillah emphasized a lot of fuel; needles and debris on the forest floor, Ellemeham Mountain area, a local boy scout leader mentioned Bonaparte Lake where the boy scout camp is located, emphasizing evacuation and how to keep kids safe in emergency events, Molson-Chesaw Road and Pickens Mountain for the radio transmitter, Siwash to East Rhemke and to the south that this is a key spot for lightening strikes, Town of Molson where there are 3 historical sites and groups of homes, also the Molson Repeater, NE corner where many people are moving in and there's heavy brush in the area, Beaver Canyon and Swanson Mill having a lot of fuel, and Mt. Hull access point off of O' Neil.

#### NE Map:

Values included – Access points around Wannacut Lake and where there is only one way in and out, Palmer Mountain to Whiskey Mountain and Aeneas Mountain all have heavy timber, Ellemehem Mountain where homes are located and only 2 ways in or out, Highway 97 to North Pine Creek Road where there is concern about access.

#### SW Map:

Values included – Conconully where many people live and have cabins and an area of cultural significance, Crumbacher area and access to and from homes, and other concerns in this area regarding egress and ingress routes.

SE Map: Values included – Tunk Mountain where there is a repeater and a friend who is disabled and would have trouble evacuating, another concern for repeaters in this area and on Omak Mountain, this area being an electrical system backbone, Bluebell Rd having only one lane for evacuation, and over 3,000 people living in Aeneas Valley.

A general consensus for values at risk among the group included concerns regarding ingress/egress evacuation routes, HWY 97 and HWY 20 specifically being important routes, and infrastructure relating to communications and the powergrid. There were also many comments about so many areas being a high priority and that it was hard to know where not to place a stick dot.

**6:00 – 6:10**                      **Break**

**6:10 – 6:45**                      **Project Actions in the CWPP**

Eli Loftis discussed sample action projects and displayed examples from the 2013 CWPP. The group reviewed the 9 working action item categories (see the 2/28 planning session summary and “Planning Action Table” section for these categories) and participants were asked to share ideas for any projects they would like to see in the updated CWPP.

Community members had the following project action ideas -

Start logging right away after a fire and use the timber that is still good (salvage logging), with this, bringing local mills back or other infrastructure upgrades to treat the heavy fuel loads and having a place to take materials. Then, being able to re-use our local resources rather than these materials that go to mills being transferred out of the county. Pushing for this support at the state level. Other ideas were enforcement and ramifications for illegal burns, pre-work in lines of communication to better navigate emergency incidents, well thought out evacuation routes and notifications for where to go, refuge sites for sheltering in place, and training for law enforcement, fire responders, even local landowners, and others who may respond in wildfire incidents.

Also, education for fire prevention and mitigation efforts, education on ember awareness and actions to reduce fuels around the home especially within the inner zone (0-5 feet from the structure), fuel reduction from grazing and other tactics, highway 20

right-of-way fuel reduction along lanes on the highways as well as other roads in the county, community outreach with schools (like Smokey the Bear) and emphasizing the need for staffing volunteer firefighters, expanding infrastructure for additional cell towers, and more prescribed burning treatments and education on importance.

There were questions about incentive opportunities for people to take defensible space measures, also if insurance companies could be encouraged to give discounts for good wildfire resilient practices. There were additional specific project ideas including a possible mapping network for what size equipment can get down roadways (i.e. providing a scale of 1-5, one being that you could land a 737 and 5 for only a single person), also, evacuation maps that identify where and how to evacuate from an area. A few people had similar requests for assistance in the Bonaparte Creek area and how to plan and deal with the issues of flash flooding, blowouts, and other post-fire recovery options.

**6:45 – 6:55                      Next Steps**

Partners emphasized additional resources to community members. Jessica Farmer noted that people can contact her at Okanogan County Long Term Recovery Group (OCLTRG) for a free tool to map your neighborhood and to develop a specific emergency plan for your family and community. Also, for free reflective signs to mark your address and to help if you would like to be found by emergency responders during wildfire incidents. WADNR, the Okanogan Conservation District, OCLTRG offer free home risk assessments for community members to request a site visit to assess their wildfire risk and address questions and concerns.

**6:55 – 7:00                      Additional Comments & Questions**

Community members were asked for feedback on how they heard about the meeting tonight and how we could improve getting the word out. Members mentioned hearing about the meeting through mixed communication methods, the radio, the paper, a flyer in town, OK County Alerts, Facebook, and more. Participants thanked the many wildfire partners in the room for being here, voiced that their concerns were heard, and a few stated that they enjoyed the participatory activity.

**7:00                                      Adjournment**

**Mapping Activity:**



**Simulation Table:**

