

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

Public Meeting - Central OK County

Okanogan County Fairgrounds-Agriplex

03/19/2024 | 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 to the second of five CWPP community meetings take place across the county. We opened with ground rules, meetings goals, and the proposed meeting structure. There were 66 people in attendance.

The CWPP partners in attendance included various agencies such as the Okanogan Conservation, Okanogan County Emergency Management, OK County Long Term Recovery Group, OK County Commissioner-Chris Branch, OK County Sheriff-Budrow, USFS-Tonasket, WADNR representatives, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation representatives, City of Omak Mayor-Cindy Gagne, City of Omak Public Works, OK County Public Works-Landfill, City of Okanogan and City of Omak, Fire District #3 (Omak and Okanogan Fire), Fire District #8, Fire District #9, OK County Noxious Weed Board representatives, OK County Public Health, Fish and Wildlife, Conservation NW, and Economic Alliance.

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.

Due to the larger group of participants, the group was asked to hold off on questions until later in the meeting. Emmy Engle with the Okanogan Conservation District announced the participatory activity as everyone received sticky dots to map their values at risk.

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 Central Okanogan County were located. These maps were broken down into the NW, NE, SW, and SE quadrants (see image on the last page). After everyone had the opportunity to place their dots, the community was asked how they determined their priorities. Going map by map, Jessica Farmer and Maurice Goodall discussed values at risk and asked participants to share why they marked an area as one of their values at risk and how they based that priority.

A few of the values at risk were as follows:

NE & NW Map:

Concerns in this area included Lightening Creek mud slide movement, Tunk Creek, access, ingress/egress, communication towers, and Paterson creek, three homes with only one way in and out. Also, state route 155, ingress/egress, and access. Highways 155, 97, and 20 to highlight access issues and improving coordination with the fire personnel and communities. There were values at risk identified in Riverside, a dead-end road (old Tunk Creek Rd), issues of traveling during emergency events where there are strong winds, hazardous trees, and heavy fuel loads along the roadside. Also, an emphasis on values at risk at the Omak Airport, mill site, water towers, communication sites near riverside.

Green Lake and Salmon Creek were highlighted to point out access issues and the number of homes in the area, Pogue Rd, and the area on the flats for high density populations and access issues, Conconully Hwy and getting campers, fire and emergency personnel, and others in and out during emergency events, access near Pine Creek and Fish Lake area. An area was highlighted near the Sinlaheiken to share how this was an area treated through prescribed burning and has succeeded as a fire break, slowing, and stopping previous fire events. Further north, there was also values at risk near Horse Spring Coulee, Spur Rd, Swanson Mill Rd/face of the mountain, and Hwy 97 as well.

SE & SW Map:

Cache Creek Rd to identify access issues, the Nespelem community noting that the agency building is there, the Columbia River Rd, and Moses Mountain to emphasize communications. Omak Lake Rd was identified for access issues, noting there are homes in the area and the Paschal Sherman Indian School. Summit Lake, Coyote Canyon for the school. Another mention was along the pass and 6th grade camps; Omak Camp D, and Okanogan Camp P). There were also areas of risk mapped at Cameron Lake Road for access and access and homes around Cameron Lake Loop Road and Madd Mountain Rd. Other values at risk included Soap Lake, communications, infrastructure, and powerlines, foraging areas for huckleberries and mushrooms, and keeping rangelands and working lands in the County protected.

State Route 20, Leader Lake, and the Loup Pass were identified as areas at risk. This included access issues, concerns for communications and the Loup Loup Ski recreation area, and PUD infrastructure relating to the power grid. The Chiliwist community for ingress/egress concerns, traveling in or out with livestock, 3 Devils Road for ingress/egress, heavy fuel loads of downed fuels from previous fire events, also, a concern for needing to improve signage on the roads in the area. Coulee area to Salmon Creek, and the cut off at Spring Coulee and Glover Lane were mapped, noting that if these roads are cut off or closed the only way out is cross country. There was an emphasize on the importance of the OK Landfill for the community and ensuring that resource stays open and available.

A general summary for values at risk among the group included issues regarding ingress and egress, access, power grid, water resources, communications, and the OK Landfill.

6:05 – 6:15 Break

6:15 – 7:00 Project Actions in the CWPP

Eli Loftis discussed sample action projects and previous projects that were listed in the 2013 CWPP. The group reviewed a list of 9 action item categories to help brainstorm ideas for projects they would like to see in this CWPP update. Community members had the following project action ideas:

A participant stated that they could recall a couple major issues and concerns from back in 2014 & 2015 when attending long-term recovery group meetings, this was 1) the need for housing. They mentioned how our area faces limited housing already, and especially back when folks were needing to evacuate or lost homes, there wasn't anywhere for people to go and not enough housing options. It was proposed that a project for the CWPP could be to collaborate with the Housing Authority and think of this issue in advance, work on pre-planning, and to think about have something like Air B n B's or short-term housing in reserve. It was also emphasized that housing is also a need for fire fighters visiting the area to fight fire or other emergency responders as well. The other concern was for 2) water resources. The participant asked if fire fighters have enough water available and on hand when they need it? Someone pitched in that they utilize local water bodies when needed such as the lake, river, or water towers, and that water is typically available. The participant continued by offering that another project could be the need for strategic planning to identify locations where water towers exist or could be installed. With the eventual goal being to increase water resources especially where many people are living, and to allow for irrigation, fighting fire, or other emergency needs.

Others included project ideas such as more Prescribed Burn Associations and working along Hwy 20 and other highways where there is a lot of fuel downed. USFS discussed salvage logging projects that they perform, and emphasized a few complexities with the process including the barrier of timing of available resources yet needing to perform logging work when fuel is still green (when fuels start decaying then they can't be treated through the same process), and mentioned there are restrictions and policies with the federal government (NEPA) for treating downed fuels that have already begun to decay. The fuel treatment projects that the USFS performs was also emphasized as a way they work proactively on these issues. Another participant highlighted that the USFS does a good job of working through the complexities of forestry. A question was posed, where are our closest mills in Okanogan County that can handle this scale of fuel treatment? Someone chimed in that this would be over on the West side or in Colville, and while Oroville also has a mill, we have a great need for larger scale treatment options with a lack of milling resources. An action item could be funding and performing a feasibility study to learn more about how we can successfully expand the needed infrastructure in our area.

Another participant commented that they weren't sure if this is still an ongoing opportunity, but they remember people used to be able to pay a small fee to the Forest Service to pick up burnt fuels that were still usable as firewood. They wondered if people could still do this and if they need a permit. The USFS responded that yes and people can have the firewood for free (for more information contact USFS-Tonasket).

Another project idea included collaboration between land managers and entities to focus on highly utilized roads and highways and treat hazardous trees within the right-of-way. A comment being, there are issues of falling trees that should be dealt with before an incident, so it doesn't take away an escape route for someone. For instance, when a roadway closure occurs due to a tree falling and blocking the road, at the same time as an emergency incident and then someone's evacuation route is taken away. Another comment about prescribed burning and how it should be incorporated a lot more in areas, even areas that have already been burnt. Commenting that those areas already having a good fuel break in place after the burn, and we should take advantage of the opportunity to capitalize on that and treat the area fully.

A Noxious Weed Board representative commented on the issue of invasive and highly flammable grasses that take over during regrowth cycles. Mentioning that we need more fuel breaks in communities and along roads to control those invasives and reduce the fire hazard. They were asked to give an example of a type of control for this, to which they responded, well in Oregon, many partners have gathered to apply for grants to fund controls like reducing the invasive grasses through "Rejuvra" around the communities. Another participant included that in the areas of critical infrastructure managers should treat that infrastructure as if it's a home and incorporate home hardening techniques such as (ember resilient vents, gravel barriers, ember resilient screens, etc.). Someone commented that we really need more state and federal support and assistance to pay for infrastructure enhancements, especially in an area like ours with such a limited tax base. They shared an example of a major power line that went down with a past fire and commented that this was a big bill for the OK PUD and that the residents were impacted in their tax payments.

Further emphasis on infrastructure projects included, looking at other high desert states around the country to learn from how they are dealing with similar issues. For example, South Dakota had flash fires of grasses that drove through quickly with heavy winds. They implemented metal sleeves around the bottoms of wooden power poles which saved hundreds of powerlines. Something as simple as this could be done to help save infrastructure. Another participant chimed in to ask how many people in this county have bone yards on properties, where gathering up scrap metal wouldn't be a problem. Mentioning that while it may not look beautiful, it would do the job.

Another question was posed, what options are there for communications when the power goes down? It was mentioned that there is the OK County alerts system, but event that goes away when the power or communication towers go down. Another person emphasized the importance of having backup systems in place. Further discussion on infrastructure enhancements and hardening efforts continued with a participant commenting there's a lot of money out there for infrastructure improvements. Following this with, "with this I would like to see investments in a permanent fire camp out here somewhere that has the infrastructure and resources needed." WADNR was asked what's happening at Omak Airport? To which they responded, there is a facility being created up there to be able to house Type 3 teams and 5-6 acres in size. Also commenting that while it's taken a while, it will have housing for staff, water resource tower, equipment stored, and more, and that the goal is for the area to be in use in the next 4-5 years.

There was a comment for a project that aims to continue upgrading communications across the County. Further comments to say, this would be a longer-term project because these projects do take a lot of time and grant funds/applications to further these systems, but OK County is constantly looking for these opportunities to upgrade our communication systems. A representative of the Colville Tribes mentioned that CISA will be coming to Nespelem to share available resources and give a presentation. They can present to organizations and groups, if you are interested in learning more about this you can contact Taressa Marchand.

Another comment was made that there are two scenarios to consider in evacuation planning, will you stay, or will you go? This takes a lot of planning mentally,

physically, and logistically for how will you prepare for these options? Also, contingency plans for what if you plan to go but then you can't. Jessica Farmer with OCLTRG commented that these are things that we can come out to do with Long Term Recovery to talk about mapping your neighborhood and coming up with an emergency response plan. Another participant in the room asked, is anyone here a part of tourism and recreation? Perhaps evaluating our recreational spots to utilizing money brought from tourists to help pay for enhancements as well, especially in areas of high recreation and cultural significance.

As the meeting was ending, one last question was asked, "Were there any questions we should have asked you today?" Participants commented about enforcement of arson and fire prevention, commenting that every year there seems to be an arson on route 155 near Omak Lake Road. Another participant asked, "how many of us have neighbors who just don't care, they don't live there so they don't care." (Others around the room started discussing similar situations), the person continued that they went to report this to the county and learned it would be a large fine, however, nothing changed. Also emphasizing, I do have neighbors that care too but it's hard when you maintain your property and do your part then right at the end of your property line, you see hazards and grasses that are several feet high. Further comments were to encourage everyone to keep being a good neighbor, show them what a good neighbor is. One last comment by a participant was that we should have asked, "what are an individual's barriers to doing something different?"

7:00 – 7:05 Next Steps

Eli Loftis concluded by thanking everyone for sharing, their time, and discussed the next steps of CWPP, emphasizing to stay tuned for updates on our website at www.okanogancd.org/cwpp and public comment period coming in June. For those who have further questions or comments, these could be added to the basket at the sign-in table. [We received a few comments noting, 1) alerts FM, 2) the question of what are individual barriers to change? 3) We need a list of resources with grassroots support; volunteers and needs for elderly, disabled, out of state, those who have lost their spouse, and well pumps going out. 4) Redirecting funding and resources from fire

suppression to re-introduction of fire as a management tool to reduce fuel load, stem density, and forest health.]

Partners emphasized additional resources to community members and that these efforts and challenges will be ones we will continue to face now and for future generations to come. Let's do our best and be neighborly.

7:05 Adjournment

Mapping Activity:



Simulation Table:



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Okanogan, WA

March 19th, 2024

Name

Location

Name	Location
Emmy Engle	Okanogan
Dylan Street	Okanogan
M Goodall Em	OMK
Melvin & Lori Caylor	Tonasket
BILL VALLANCE	BREWSTER Okan Co Public Health
Pat Byrne	OKan
NAOMI NEAL] → Noxious Weed
MACHELLE HAWKINS	
DARLA DOLPH	
LARRY HUDSON	
Eli Ldti	OLD
Will Kowlen	OMK
Monty Archer	FDS
Red Scott	OKan
Judd McGeorgeck	FDS
Bruce Christy	Okanogan Fire
Jim BROWN	SALMON CREEK ROAD
David Gregush	Tonasket
Taressa Marchel	Nespelem

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Name	Location
Jessica Farmer, OCLTREG	Okanogan
Cindy Sagner	Omak
Daniel Montano WA DNR	
JEREMY PATRICK Omak Fire	Omak
Paul Budow Shells office	Okanogan
Kent Kovalenko Okemoss CO Public works	Okanogan
Gary + Kathy Johnson	Riverside
Gary Dobbins	RIVERSIDE
Chris Branch County Commissioner	Omak
WR	OMAK
Kathy Moses, Colville Tribes	Okanogan
John McCook	Omak
Mike Arrington	Salmon Creek
Boaz Clark	Chilwax Millott
Laren McKenzie	Okanogan
Mistina Hartung-Dearden	Omak
Chris Dearden	Omak
Sue Jorgensen	Tunk Creek
Lin Cogwell	Okanogan EM
Maurice Goodall	Okanogan EM

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Name	Location
Dianna Osborne	Omak, WA
Kit ARBUCKLE	POQUEFLAT (OKANOGAN)
Carey Hunter	Disautel
SARAH SPENCER	Omet
Nancy Strong & Michael Smart	Omak Lake
Terri Williams	omak Flats
Mason Duke	Okanogan
Tim Tuzaw	Okanogan District
Ruth Hall	Chilwist/Malott
Brent Smith	Omak, WA
Elli Rosenthal	Omak, WA
CHRIS FISHER	RIVERSIDE, WA
Rachel McClure	Nespelem, WA
Graig Nelson	Okanogan
Pam Johnson	okanogan
Matthew Davidson	Omak
Steve & Jill Streeter	Okanogan
Karen Schimpf	Tonasket