

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

Public Meeting - South OK County

Pateros Fire Hall

04/09/2024 | 5pm-7pm

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

Eli Loftis with Okanogan Conservation District and Maurice Goodall with Okanogan County Emergency Management (OCEM) welcomed everyone to the final of five CWPP community meetings. We opened with ground rules, meetings goals, and the proposed meeting structure. There were 38 people in attendance.

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, WDFW, Okanogan County Public Health, Pateros Public Works, Pateros Fire, Fire District #15, the City of Pateros, and Mayor of Pateros.

We went around the room and everyone introduced themselves, shared where they were from, and what brought them here tonight. 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 (the full presentation can be found under “CWPP Resources” on the website www.okanogand.org/cwpp).

Eli mentioned that in our survey that went out a few months ago, there were over 707 responses received and we discussed a few of the findings. This included 20% of residents not having an evacuation plan, 70% of residents identifying as full-time residents, top concerns for folks included 450 people who were highly concerned about receiving timely and accurate communication during a wildfire event, and another 420+ people who were concerned about loss of insurance coverage due to wildfire risk.

Participants were asked how they heard about tonight’s meeting, most said email, neighbors, and the alert from the OK County Emergency system. Maurice Goodall emphasized if you are not already signed up for OK County Emergency alerts, make sure to do so and tell your neighbors as well. This system has taken off since 2014 and

it's important to be signed up to know when an emergency event is happening in your area and when to get out.

Additional resources available were announced such as free home risk assessments from WADNR and Okanogan CD, and Okanogan County Long Term Recovery Group's map your neighborhood tool and free reflective blue signs. It was mentioned there is a drop box at the sign in table to leave additional comments and feedback that come to mind throughout the meeting. Eli Loftis continued to announce the participatory activity as everyone received sticky dots to map their values at risk.

5:30 – 6:45 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 of Southern Okanogan County were located. These maps were broken down into the NW, NE, SW, and SE quadrants. 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, how they based that priority, and what barriers stand in the way. A few of the values at risk were as follows:

Mapped Values at Risk:

An area near Stehekin where a community member recreates, and visits often was marked as a value. Sawtooth Ridge was marked as a value at risk, and the community member commented that around the time of the Carlton Complex fires the trails were not maintained. It was mentioned that this maintenance would help open up the trails and could help with having more eyes on the area to report concerning events. Another value at risk was near the area where there are a lot of older structures and trees, this is someone's property where they have worked to maintain fuel loads but there's not much else that they can do on their own. They mentioned that Methow Home has helped with fuels reduction work.

Twisp area, mentioning that this is a tourist area that is important to maintain, there could be more educational handouts around the hotels in the area and available to

tourists. Also, to have a visual board that shows the fire danger in that area, whether it's low, medium, high, or extreme. Another idea was for an information board along the highway for visitors to pick up the most up-to-date fire information as they travel into or out of the area. Other community members mentioned the need for education for people who do live here as well, they see just a lot of people with fuel hazards such as firewood stacked against their home.

Hwy 20 is a major ingress/egress route, along this path to get over the loop, there has been a lot of work cleaning up along the hwy., and it's important to keep this up and continue maintaining the roadway for access. It was encouraged to also consider the thought that just because a roadway might get closed down, there are still safe areas you can go to. We should avoid panicking and feeling that we are trapped because that's not always the case and we don't always need to leave. It's important to have a plan in mind and we need to know the safe areas to go to or where to shelter in place. It was asked, in that example, how do you get out of Alta Lake or what do you do if the road is closed? They responded, with one way in and out, having an evacuation plan is important, and personally if they couldn't get out, they might hunker down at the golf course, irrigated spaces near orchards or fields, and even the lake. Another person commented that these could be safer options, however, during the Carlton Complex Fire they saw the fire get through the green irrigated pasture about six times.

A comment by a community member was that the Fire Department could have a map of local water resources such in the Alta Lake area such as all of the swimming pools. Another community member emphasized the impact of being a Firewise USA® community and that in doing so, they know where the water resources are, where the elders and children are, who will contact who in an emergency, and more. A community member commented about emergency sirens going off in town. This has been helpful in alerting people when something is going on.

In the area of Conconully, someone marked an area to inform the group that there are water resources available there. WADNR was asked if they are aware of where water resources are for each area. They responded that they usually are familiar with where water resources are and have a map of that. Aircraft support units do as well. The Chiliwist area was prioritized to mention the importance of access and ingress/egress

near Davis Canyon. It was mentioned that the 3 Devils Road was the best route but is no longer available. It was again emphasized, to have an evacuation plan and alternative routes in or out.

A community member commented that the Carlton Complex fire almost got them, but because the Indian Dan Road was available to get in and out of and they had help from neighbors, they were saved. The conversation went back to evacuation and it was mentioned that Washington is non-mandatory evacuation state so no one can be forced to leave. They also commented on levels of evacuation; from 1-3 and one being a notice and three being the highest danger to get out. It was also urged to keep in mind that if and once you're notified, someone might not be able to come back again so when that happens be ready to activate your evacuation plan. Someone asked what does three ribbons on a gate mean? It was mentioned that the meaning of the 1, 2, or 3 ribbons have changed, and there was no standard previously or currently, and agencies have moved away from using them in many situations. Ribbons were/are meant for internal communication by first responders and fire suppression personnel rather than for public direction or advisement.

A question about locked gates was asked. "If they are locked, they are locked". One person gave an example that a landowner has a plaque stating that "in the case of emergency, firefighters can cut the lock."

Another person asked what does it mean to be defensible? This includes preparing your home ignition zones to reduce fuels, building or preparing your home with non-flammable materials for siding, doors, or barricades within the first five feet of your home, etc. These measures help your home stand a chance on its own against wildfire. Various resources are out there and more can be found on the Okanogan CD website as well. It was again mentioned that if you are notified to evacuate, be ready to activate your evacuation plan.

Another value at risk was a property that was burned heavily in Texas Creek during the Carlton Complex Fire. The landowner and family have done a lot of work to reduce remaining fuel within 100 feet of the home. They wanted to know how they should flag their water resources so the fire department or WADNR knows it's available. They were

advised to contact the fire department if they are under their protection or WADNR. Hunter Mt. was also labeled as a value at risk due to the cell and radio towers being there. Another comment on communication towers, someone recalled back in 2014 the information was broadcasted through the AM/FM radio. OCEM mentioned a program they found called Alert FM that is expensive but would allow communities to have a radio box outside of their home to be informed in emergency events. This is an aspirational project that might go into the CWPP document.

Black Canyon area that is a pine forest with a lot of fuels. The resident needs help clearing this space to be defensible due to being an elder. A question was brought up, how can this neighborhood go about addressing mitigation and fuel load issues when it includes riparian buffer zones, without being in trouble with the Department of Ecology? Indian Dan area, a community member has a neighbor and their property is an "absolute disaster area," it makes them nervous due to the fire risk. What can be done? Someone asked could you leave a gentle note that explains how to improve defensible space and Firewise USA® information? Another comment was that we can't make anyone do something on their property, but trying to get to know neighbors, and trying to reach out to them and offer help. It was also advised to have a fire watch community meeting and trying to get those neighbors involved in that way. Another person said they would address the statute that says a property owner would be held liable if a fire starts or gets through their property due to negligence. They followed up stating that they would get a letter from a lawyer and inform that they might sue them if an event were to happen due to their negligence. Another resident commented that they were involved in starting the Alta fire protection group to perform defensible preparedness measures, and that this was because back during the 2014/2015 fires, there was no one there to protect Alta Lake. The community member said no one knew they were there due to being on the edge of Okanogan County. It was asked if Alta Lake area is under the protection of the fire district? The fire department commented that parts of the area is, other areas are no man's land, but continued with saying that although areas are not in the district boundary, "if we are called, we go."

Pateros has important reader boards and information for the public to provide educational materials that helps inform tourists and visitors of what is going on as well. To also inform them of safe spaces that they can go to, that they are allowed to stay at

the city parks in case of emergencies, and more. A value at risk was in Pateros where a community member's father's life, they also mentioned the importance of the alerts system and in 2014, they didn't think they needed to evacuate because they weren't officially informed. It was emphasized that people out there think, "well I haven't been told to evacuate yet so I don't need to, it was advised that if it's bad in your eyes and you think you should evacuate, you probably should. Also, know that just because you are in a town and you think you will be safe, that's not always the case either. "

Someone said that they noticed many houses in Pateros that had arborvitae around them were the ones that needed to be rebuilt after 2014 & 2015 fires. Suggesting that building codes should better reflect how homeowners could build their homes to be defensible. Not in a way that requires all of the home hardening requirements, but instead provides suggested check boxes that people can refer to and to be informed about creating a defensible home. Especially as people are coming from out of town to develop homes in the area. The Chiliwist community emphasized the importance of their phone tree during the 2014 fire, commenting that 26 people said they might not have made it if they didn't get the call that day. Another person commented about having a wired phone at your home so even if you don't have a landline, plugging a phone into the plug in jack allows you to call out for emergency services if needed. Another value at risk was for Aswell Dam, to touch on the importance of power and how that connects to everything as well as water resources. Learning from 2014, and if the power goes out, someone also commented that their homeowners' insurance did help pay for gasoline to operate generators in emergency events.

No Break and straight into project actions.

6:40 – 7:00

Project Actions in the CWPP

Eli Loftis shared that we are fortunate tonight that we all get to go home. We are not in the heat of a disaster, and it helps in having these conversations. He 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 community member mentioned they would like to see a designated helicopter aircraft to respond quickly to fires that start, to help avoid something like the Carlton Complex. Another community member followed up with the importance of quick and prompt response time to keep the fire from growing. Another person wanted a command-and-control center here in Okanogan County, which would also help house hundreds of WADNR and USFS personnel through the summer. Further emphasizing that this would be appropriate and the State should understand the need for a full-sized command center to be built on this east side of our state, to better control fire events and also to help mitigate other issues as well such as the spike in homeowners insurance and more.

It was emphasized to remember that this document isn't necessarily a firefighting document and won't determine how we fight fire, but it is about how we mitigate fire and how we get prepared to be resilient in our wildfire landscape. Another comment mentioned a relief building to be built, refrigeration for food and medications, power, water resources, and more. The big hill above Pateros, if this hill was grazed off, a shade block was added, that maybe this could be made more resilient to put semi-permanent or permanent site like this. Also, maybe this plan could ask for funds to help with targeted grazing to help pay for bringing goats, sheep, cattle, or more to graze hillsides and properties. Another community member emphasized the need for targeted grazing and irrigation. Also, the need for additional power and water resources. A community member mentioned that they have a gravity-fed system and maybe others can to, also, having dry hydrants, and that areas need water tanks.

It was asked how can we help educate and connect the youth in this line of work and to keep them in Okanogan County? Someone emphasized the need for work opportunities to hire local youth such as juniors and seniors, and those who have a driver's license, that is not just physical labor but meaningful labor. Right now, there's not a lot out there, it's only possible to get work for kids through jobs that are off the books. It's important to teach kids and have more opportunities where they can feel connected to the land and the area. Community reader boards to help people who might not be paying attention or who don't get the alerts, this might also be tourists. Another community member emphasized that they encountered a few visitors who had no idea

what to do with themselves once they made it to town, so those types of resources and information sharing would be helpful and important.

One last question was asked, if there was anything we didn't ask tonight. One specific question was asked, "where can I get my fire hydrant approved?" Also, where can we find a transcript of everything that was covered tonight? This is available on the Okanogan CD website.

7:00 Adjournment

Eli Loftis concluded by thanking everyone for their time and for sharing concerns. He shared the next steps of this CWPP process, 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 or contact us further at the Okanogan Conservation District.

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Pateros, WA

April 9th, 2024

Name	Location
Emmy Engle	OCD - Okanogan
Jessica Farmer	OCLTRG
Dylan Street	OCD
Bill Vallarica	OCPHO / FOIS
Lori Caswell	Okanogan EM
Maurice Goodall	Okanogan EM
Patti Cockfield	Chilworth Firewise
Len & Betsy Baron	Alta Lake
Cindy Larson	Alta Lake
Jord Wilson	Pateros
Ray Sandy	Pateros
Kelly Hoff	"
DAWN + MORIS Shook	Brewster
Warren Smethers	Pateros
Blayne Harney	Pateros / DNR
MIKE MACKAY	Cowan Res.
Angela Kayrin	Foster Creek CD
Jon Dign	Alta Lake
Steve Mapp	" "
Lee Orchard	" "

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Name

Location

Whitney Reidy

Pateros/Altak

Holly Bange

Pateros

Multiple horizontal lines provided for additional entries.