

## **2024 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) - Kickoff Meeting**

**January 31, 2024**

**Commissioners Hearing Room**

**Session 2: 10:40am – 12:00pm**

### **Purpose and Overview:**

The Okanogan Conservation District hosted the official 2024 CWPP Kickoff Meeting where various partners involved with wildfire preparedness in Okanogan County were invited to attend to learn about the CWPP process and collaborate on efforts throughout the year.

The meeting was offered as a hybrid option and 48 people attended; 32 attended in person and 16 attended remotely. There were two sessions, following session one was a planning committee session. All attendees were invited to stick around to listen in, but were informed that session two is intended to be a working session with the core planning committee.

Agencies involved in the core team planning at this time include, the Okanogan Conservation District, Okanogan County Emergency Management, WA State Dept of Natural Resources, The US Forest Service (Methow Ranger District and Tonasket Ranger District), Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mt. Tolman Fire District, The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Okanogan County Building Department, Okanogan Public Utility District (PUD), and representatives for Fire Districts, the Okanogan County Commissioners, and the incorporated cities and towns in Okanogan County. All other partners are a part of the larger general group and will also be involved throughout this process.

The planning session was led by Eli Loftis of Okanogan Conservation District, Emmy Engle, and Dylan Streeter. Session two focused on a more in-depth discussion on the goals, needs, and action steps for updating the Okanogan County CWPP, specific tasks and events that would occur in the next couple months, working through action items, and aligning into committees.

### **Agenda Items:**

#### **10:40 – 11:00 Designate tasks and committee roles**

(Slides 30-35) Continuing with the PowerPoint presentation there were additional slides to facilitate further thought on the status of this process. Many facilitation questions were posed for discussion: Is there anyone missing from the CWPP planning committee and general planning group? Do these groups currently represent the diversity and full representation of our County? In terms of CWPP Fire Risk Assessment Components, what is a fire risk assessment

that is valuable to your agency and to the context of planning? Community values will be hard to define because each community has different values. What is a value? Are we talking about infrastructure vs. aesthetics? In the mind of the folks here in the room for the core committee, which of these criteria is the most important to you in terms of having a risk assessment in the CWPP that is valuable?

**WADNR emphasized**, we should prioritize *risk to community values*. County Commissioner and others agreed.

**Eli asked**, “in your mind, for your side of things either personally or professionally, what is a community value?”

**Responses included**, the Methow comes to mind, the esthetics of the land they live on, their house, kind of their day-to-day values, how wildfire would impact what they do day to day in the community.

**County Commissioner responded**, you also have wildlife, human life, and there is potential for risk there.

**Eli asked**, “what form does that take? This is something as we go through the planning process and discuss, we are going to need elements from Dept of Fish and Wildlife and other partners, how we are going to manage wildfire in this landscape for the benefit of wildlife or at least the neutral impact on wildlife but also human life, that would be the fire districts through our valleys.”

**WADNR stated**, The Dept. of Natural Resources already has some maps for risk and fire behavior, if other agencies have that, I’m assuming there is something similar, is that something we want to use as a template or start from scratch?

**USFS**, I agree, I think developing that relative risk is a good spot to begin, and that would lead to your risk associated communities, those two go hand and hand. Just to add to that, the CWPP is something we refer to when planning projects and use as justification when responding to questions about why we are doing a certain fuels treatment or treatment on the landscape, so that relative risk piece is important, it’s something we can refer back to and help justify why we want to do a certain project or why we need to fund it a certain way. With the description of historic fire regimes and changes in fuel over time being able to refer to that as part of the CWPP would be helpful along with what has already been mentioned.

**Eli said**, “to summarize, DNR has resources to utilize active templates, and hearing from the Forest Service staff, the value of the CWPP can be found in the fire risk assessment.”

**USFS**, I would say so, I will add that I don’t know if they are the same tools as DNR, but we also have access to products that characterize relative fire risk, fire behavior across the land, and it’s all based on land fire data. A good starting point to start looking at some of those things as a template.

**Eli emphasized**, “we don’t need to reinvent the wheel. That’s great. We are updating a document from 11 years ago, the landscape has changed drastically over those 11 years, the 2013 edition was not as heavily updated from the 2009 edition as you would think. So we have to find a way to adequately express those changes throughout the landscape since then and what we are going to be seeing. A big part of the work for fire agencies will be describing fire

behavior and fire regime. Much of this already exists, it's how to incorporate them all. We have a tremendous number of resources; I believe the most valuable ones are sitting here in this room today."

(Slide 36) Prioritization, as we were reviewing the 2013 CWPP, the expectation of priorities was not very coherent, everything that was a forest health treatment was listed as high priority, that list was 49 treatments long. A significant amount of these treatments was then burnt over in the Carlton and Okanogan Complex fires. Using the information from DNR Service Forestry, other elements of DNR, and Forest Service, deciding what can be done in 2 years, what could be done this year, what can be done throughout this process? Also, what is high priority, what is mid priority in Okanogan County? (refers to slide 17).

There is no coherent definition for that, it is a judgement of values, needs, and financial judgement, we will have to balance. A question to anyone here in the room, are there any other specific criteria's that are used by your agencies or your divisions for setting priorities when it comes to this kind of thing?

**USFS**, The WUI delineation is going to be very important, the forest service refers to the CWPP so that's where the tiering will identify communities at risk and the WUI designation.

**Municipality Representative**, in terms of prioritizing, the important things are building bridges between different entities' areas where we get the most bang for our buck and have the most impact, if there are easy and visible projects that can be done that help demonstrate the broader need, I believe those are low priorities or low hanging fruit.

**Eli**, "the low hanging fruit will be the low priorities that can be tackled in the first year."

### **Action items - WUI**

WUI of Okanogan County is defined by the state. This is just stamping out where there are structures, not much more to it. The question is for our WUI delineation, is this enough? The reality is that if this is what we simply define the WUI as we are severely underestimating the amount of area that is a priority for us. Forest Service do you have anything on this?

**USFS**, I would say the way it is mapped right now is under serving our needs. A population density threshold, an infrastructure density threshold, and combine that with some thoughts on how far and how fast buyers move in today's day and age. Then buffer that based on how far we think fires move within a day or couple days and that give us an easier way to justify some of the projects that we would like to do and makes it relevant that we aren't just treating structures but the land adjacent to these structures.

**WADNR**, for northeast county fire management, we consider 3 miles, if there is a fire within 3 miles of our land borders we will go start consulting with fire staff and vice versa if we have a fire on our land and it gets within 3 miles of any other agency they will begin consulting with

DNR. Gives you roughly 2 operational shifts before the fire is on you.

**USFS Methow Ranger District**, 3 miles, POD boundary delineations - Potential Operational Delineation. The further we can push that into the forest the more it opens ways for us to be able to do fuels reduction projects.

**WADNR**, if it is in an organized fire district DNR has FRA's with every fire district, if there is a fire in the wildland that may run away which typically do in August-September, DNR sets a response to that and that may help fill in the gaps in the WUI.

'No mans land' isn't a relevant term because everyone is under protection in Okanogan County.

\*For wildland but not structural, for instance fire district 8 here in the county only does wildland they don't do structural protection.

**Okanogan County Emergency Management**, so we are trying to figure out what the WUI map should look like? Is this map sufficient?

**Eli**, Motion on the floor is, is this map enough?

**USFS Methow Ranger District**, I would have to look at POD boundary lines, and consult with the fire management officer, because the logic behind that is if we incorporate the POD boundary lines, that is where we can potentially stop the fire from coming into the towns. If we just use the 3-mile buffer, well maybe that's mid slope and that isn't a good spot. POD boundary lines are just an advantageous place to stop a fire.

**Mt. Tolman**, something we might be missing here is those areas that may create opportunities to do additional work to guide fires, WUI would likely fall under access egress protection. There is a POD layer already out there.

**Okanogan County Emergency Management**, so how do we move forward with this? Do we ask each forest and DNR for their delineations?

**WADNR**, if I went more than 3 miles, I would be redefining protection for the whole state of Washington. I am on firm ground that 3 miles is our buffer.

It is mentioned that for planning purposes in the CWPP, we would be able to adjust the WUI delineation for planning purposes only and would not be legally binding (meaning this wouldn't alter the official state map but would allow us to focus the WUI on a greater area, if that were to be decided as needed for the CWPP).

**WADNR**, WUI is where Urban meets Wildlife. This map is accurate for DNR, if you start filling in donut holes someone then must determine if there are even structures on the land. There is also importance in having those gaps available so we can identify those. For protection purposes, all of Okanogan County is covered. # miles is just a slight number, look at what Cold Springs did it ran 10 miles in 1 day and jumped a river. It's 100% protected but for the WUI piece it's a concern to push the envelope too much.

**Mt. Tolman**, the question I would have is along the same relation to DNR and the POD definitions, its fairly new to us but it does enable work to be completed in those areas, and we are not sure if there is direction coming down to the DNR.

**WADNR**, A POD is where we can stop a fire. It is based on PCL's (Potential Control Lines) which then defines those operational delineations. It really is about stopping a fire on a ridge, road, or river. It's about where we can stop a fire not about what the values are at risk inside the box, there is a component to that don't get me wrong, but really it comes down to being able to draw a line on a map and believe that is where we can stop the fire. Speaking for the DNR, we really don't want to go down that road.

**USFS**, In alignment with WADNR, having worked in other areas and worked with other CWPP's, the 3 mile buffer seems to be pretty consistent.

**Mt. Tolman**, what is the definition to go by for WUI? I know in 2015 the North Star fire, we had a lot of issues because the reservation doesn't have the same definition as the state WUI definition, we have a lot of houses, but they are not condensed, we were hard pressed to get any resources because of the WUI definition.

**Eli**, we will have to have Dylan sit down with Mt. Tolman to map out the Tribes' definition of the WUI.

**Eli**, to summarize we don't need to paint the WUI map with as broad of a brush to fill in the donut holes, we just need to just take a finer brush with the agencies and stay open to where we could adjust those boundaries if needed. POD boundary layer is a helpful addition, but not to combine the boundaries with the WUI.

#### **WUI DECISION:**

At this time, the WUI map will also include a 3-mile buffer, we will also have the POD layer available, we discussed adding a layer to include fire protection districts and what areas of the County they cover. There will still be gaps in coverage, however, all of Okanogan County is protected when it comes to wildland fire. When it comes to treatment projects, we can consider adjusting this boundary as needed (for example, if a treatment would need to take place but the boundary is on a slope and it wouldn't be a possible treatment in that location, bumping the boundary out a bit, etc.)

#### **Action items Continued...**

**Conflict resolution** - If conflict occurs how would we like to address that? Specifically, if there is disagreement of opinion or of action when it comes to the content of the CWPP, is there a need for a formal process for addressing that?

**Emergency Management**, I say we deal with it when it comes, another thing we need to think about when we hold these community meetings, how do we deal with conflict if it were to occur then?

Eli, we will do our best to make sure individuals that attend these meetings abide by the guidelines we have set, Okanogan CD does have experience in hosting public meetings and hope people can feel open to offering questions and feedback while still abiding by guidelines.

**Conflict Resolution DECISION:** The core committee was comfortable handling conflict as it evolves, however, if it a larger issue arises where legal recourse were to occur, the matter will be handled by Okanogan County, as this is the County's document.

**Community meetings** - The central locations of Twisp, Omak, Tonasket, Brewster, and Nespelem sound like a good plan. Coulee Dam was also proposed, but core members stated that Nespelem is more central. For considering times for meetings, it was advised to schedule them on a weekday between Tuesday and Thursday in the evening. There was also discussion around the possibility of holding these meetings virtually as well. Eli mentioned we will try our best to make that happen, given the location allows for the set-up. It was decided to come back to this topic with specific dates and more planning details at the next planning session.

**DECISION TABLED.**

**Committees and designating tasks** - In-person attendees and remote attendees were asked to align with a committee if they so choose. This will assist with accelerated planning efforts over the next several months. All decisions that need to be made from tasks within the committees will still be brought to the larger core planning team for discussion and approval. Core members are welcome to join and/or step down from a committee at any time.

The committees are broken down by the main components of the CWPP process; 1) community engagement, 2) hazard and risk data analysis, 3) prioritization and capacity, and 4) document generation. Community engagement tasks include, but are not limited to, planning for public meetings, gathering and assessing community feedback, developing, and sharing outreach materials, and any other public meetings. Hazard and risk data analysis tasks include, but are not limited to, mapping, gathering and assessing fire behavior data, and understanding vulnerability and risk to values. Prioritization and capacity tasks include, but are not limited to, identifying gaps and needs for emergency response, compiling and assessing feedback on project priorities, goals, and values, determining long-term vs short-term goals, and recommended actions. **NO DECISION NEEDED.**

**11:45 – 12:00 Closing discussion and next steps**

**Future meetings** – We discussed scheduling future meetings, proposed two Wednesdays a month for 1-2 hours, these will be core group meetings, held at the Okanogan Conservation District office with a virtually option to attend as well. There isn't an expectation to make every

single session, but hopefully the agency can do their best to have a representative for each session. There will also be agendas prior to the meetings and summaries for core members, additional partners, and the general public to review and share feedback to present and discuss at the next session.

**Emergency Management asked**, will this work? Is this too much? Are we going to get participation?

**USFS stated**, let's set these meetings now so everyone can at least plan to have a representative attend.

**Eli**, yes, we should have a point of contact for each agency, and if not, let me know who you would like to make the point of contact for the CWPP planning process. Our next meeting is set for Valentine's Day February 14<sup>th</sup> from 9am-11am at the Okanogan CD office.

**DECISION:** Meetings will occur from 9am-11am, every other Wednesday following 2/14/2024. Subject to change. Meeting dates, agendas, and summaries will be available on the Okanogan Conservation District's website at [okanogancd.org/cwpp](http://okanogancd.org/cwpp) and on the upcoming event page. CWPP updates will also be provided to the larger general partner group and the members of the public who opted-in to receive CWPP updates.

**NO OTHER DECISIONS AT THIS TIME.**

#### **NEXT STEPS –**

Dylan to get the POD boundary layer and incorporate it into maps, hold individual meetings with agencies, prepare a draft WUI map and then have that map ready to be examined by the next core group meeting.

Emmy to compile kickoff meeting details and create a summary. Continue working on community meeting details to have ready for next planning session.

Eli, Emmy, and Dylan, to prepare action steps and agenda for next planning session.

**12:00            Adjournment**