

5. Planning Process and Community Collaboration

The CWPP Planning Process

The HFRA designed the CWPP to incorporate a flexible process that can accommodate a wide variety of community needs. This CWPP is tailored to meet specific goals identified by the planning team, following the standardized steps for developing a CWPP as outlined in *Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan: A Handbook for Wildland-Urban Interface Communities*, (Communities Committee et al. 2004) and the Colorado State Forest Service Minimum Standards for Community Wildfire Protection Plans, (CSFS 2009). Table 2 outlines the CWPP development process.

Table 3: CWPP Development Process

Step	Task	Explanation
One	Convene Decision Makers	Form a Core Team made up of representatives from local governments, fire authorities, and the CSFS.
Two	Involve Federal Agencies	Engage local representatives of the BLM, USFS and other land management agencies as appropriate.
Three	Engage Interested Parties	Contact and encourage participation from a broad range of interested organizations and stakeholders.
Four	Establish a Community Base Map	Develop a base map of the County that provides a better understanding of communities, critical infrastructure, and forest/open space at risk.
Five	Develop a Community Risk Assessment	Develop a risk assessment that considers fuel hazards, community and commercial infrastructure, resources, and preparedness capability. Rate the level of risk and incorporate into the base map as appropriate.
Six	Establish Community Priorities and Recommendations	Use the risk assessment and base map to facilitate a collaborative public discussion that prioritizes fuel treatments and non-fuel mitigation practices to reduce fire risk and structural ignitability.
Seven	Develop an Action Plan and Assessment Strategy	Develop a detailed implementation strategy and a monitoring plan that will ensure long-term success.
Eight	Finalize the CWPP	Finalize the County CWPP and communicate the results to interested parties and stakeholders.

Source: Communities Committee et al, 2004

Core Planning Team

The initial step in the development of the CWPP is to organize a core planning team that serves as the decision-making committee (Table 3). The Garfield County CWPP core planning team consisted of representatives from local governments, local fire authorities, BLM, USFS, and the CSFS.

The planning team must mutually agree on the plan’s final contents. The planning team should collaborate closely with relevant affected land management agencies and active community stakeholders as the plan is implemented. Active collaboration between agencies and communities is an important CWPP component to promote sharing of perspectives, plans, priorities, and other information useful in fuels and land management activities.

The CWPP planning team was composed of representatives from the FPDs, federal agencies, state agencies, county agencies, and communities as appropriate. Contacts from various governmental agencies, communities, and other organizations were invited to participate on the CWPP planning team and attend planning meetings via email.

Collaborative planning team meetings were convened throughout the course of the CWPP development. The purpose of each meeting focused on a specific aspect of the CWPP planning process. Meetings were convened on March 1st, 2021; July 16, 2021; and October 18, 2021, virtually and in-person at the Rifle Sheriff’s Annex.

Table 4: Garfield County CWPP Core Planning Team Members

Name	Agency/Jurisdiction
Chad Whiting	Garfield County Emergency Management
Levi Burris	Garfield County Sheriff’s Department
Chris Bornholdt	Garfield County Emergency Management
Orrin Moon	Colorado River Fire Rescue
Greg Bak	Glenwood Springs Fire Department
Gary Tillotson	Glenwood Springs Fire Department
Chris Jackson	Grand Valley Fire Protection District
Bill Gavette	Carbondale & Rural Fire Protection District
Dan Nielsen	Upper Colorado River Fire Management
Patrick Kieran	Upper Colorado River Fire Management
Ron Rousineau	Colorado Forest Service
Stefan Brune	Colorado Forest Service
Kamie Long	Colorado Forest Service
Louisa Morrisey	Mountain Springs Ranch

As a strategic plan, the real success of this CWPP hinges on effective and long-term implementation. The CWPP planning and development process must include efforts to identify a core planning team that serves as the implementation organization and will oversee the execution of prioritized recommendations and maintain the CWPP as the characteristics of the WUIs change over time. Specific projects may be undertaken by individual Fire Protection Districts (FPDs), while larger-scale treatments may require collaboration among federal, county agencies, community, and private landowners. Original CWPP core planning team representatives may, but are not required to, assist in the implementation of

the CWPP action plan. Continued public meetings and online engagement are recommended as means to generate additional support and maintain momentum.

CWPP vegetation-fuel treatment recommendations were prioritized through an open and collaborative effort with the planning team. Prioritized treatments target wildfire hazard reduction in the WUI, including structural ignitability and critical supporting infrastructure. An action plan guides treatment implementation for high-priority projects over the span of several years.

The finalized CWPP represents a strategic plan with planning team consensus that provides prioritized wildfire hazard reduction treatment projects, preferred treatment methods, a base map of the WUI, and defensible space recommendations.

Fire Authority Meetings

Fire authorities in Garfield County include the FPDs, Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire, Colorado Interagency Fire Management Unit, and Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control. These agencies coordinate and collaborate to provide protection to human welfare, infrastructure, and other values from wildfire loss. Meetings were held with each of the fire authorities to identify current resource capacity, potential vegetation-fuel projects, and resource needs to improve response capabilities.

Community Outreach

The success of any CWPP is dependent upon community involvement for both strategic input and long-term ownership and implementation. The CWPP needs to accurately reflect the county's interests, concerns, and priorities to promote legitimacy and long-term success. The community outreach strategy employed was a multi-tiered approach to engage interested parties, raise public awareness, and generate public input for mitigation recommendations through:

- Survey;
- Social Media;
- Radio;
- Virtual open house;
- County web site postings.

The goal of the community involvement activities for the Garfield County CWPP was two-fold: 1) to inform the community of the CWPP project and proposed actions to reduce hazardous vegetation-fuels and improve wildfire response capacity; and 2) to stress the value of public input during the development of the CWPP. Because this is a community-based plan, it was essential to obtain as much information as possible about the perceptions, concerns, and issues of residents and landowners in the WUI areas, as well as other watershed stakeholders.

Public Survey

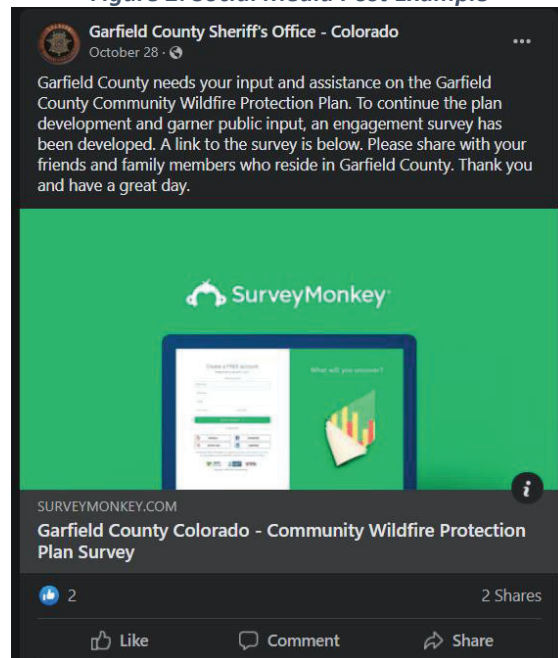
As a method to engage the general public and receive more local input on wildfire risks and concerns in the county, a public survey was developed by Garfield County. The goal was to capture local concerns, priorities, and ideas.

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As noted by the local planning team and fire officials, finding effective ways to engage the public and gain feedback can be challenging CWPPs are complex planning tools. The plan addresses issues that community members may be unaware of and identifies potential impacts that people may not have dealt with. In addition, the CWPP showcases numerous solutions to local wildfire concerns or problem areas which emphasize the need to successfully engage the public.

Social media posts were created and shared by Garfield County and local fire officials which linked to the project survey. The survey was also sent directly to all planning officials engaged throughout the CWPP process who were also encouraged to share the survey with their teams, departments, and local stakeholders.

Figure 2: Social Media Post Example



Questions about prior knowledge of the Wildland Urban Interface, evacuation protocols, communication types, and what community members would like to see done locally were asked through the survey. In total, 42 survey responses were collected. Specific areas represented in the survey are listed in the table below.

Table 5: Areas Represented in CWPP Survey

Represented Area	Number of Responses	Percentage
Battlement Mesa	3	8%
Carbondale	2	5%
Glenwood Springs	9	23%
Missouri Heights	1	3%
New Castle	3	8%
Other	4	10%
Rifle	7	18%
Silt	8	20%
Unincorporated County	3	8%

The first questions in the survey asked residents about the WUI – both if they were familiar with the term and, if so, did they live in the WUI or other fire prone areas. In response, only half of respondents were familiar with the WUI and of those 40% noted they lived within the WUI. These responses indicate a need for additional education outreach from local fire officials to residents to help identify where WUI zones or fire prone areas are.

Table 6: Survey Responses – WUI Questions

Do you know what the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is?	
Response	Percentage
Yes	50%
No	50%
Do you currently live in a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) zone or fire prone area?	
Yes	40%
No	18%
Unknown	43%

Wildfires are becoming a more common and severe local event in the county with several contributing factors affecting frequency and magnitude of each fire. Respondents were asked, *“To the best of your knowledge, what are the greatest contributing factors to wildfires starting or spreading in your area?”* with answers ranked high to low listed below:

1. Weather conditions (temperature, wind speed, lightning strikes)
2. Human-started fires
3. Climate conditions (periods of drought or extreme heat)
4. Dead vegetation buildup
5. Tree density
6. Housing density and/or building materials types
7. Dilapidated structures
8. Other: powerlines and new home construction amongst non-mitigated areas with dense fuel loads; burning coal seam fires

An additional key component and goal of the survey was to ask about evacuation experiences and barriers for residents. Due to the unique geographic footprint of the County, evacuation protocols are a challenge to develop. Each wildfire event spreads in a unique matter and may block various transportation corridors at different periods of time, thus limiting the ability of local emergency managers and fire responders from pre-identifying specific evacuation corridors. The following table summarizes evacuation related questions.

Table 7: Survey Responses – Evacuation Questions

Are you prepared to evacuate if provided information on where and how to evacuate?	
Response	Percentage
Yes	85%
No	13%
Unknown	3%
What would be your most serious obstacle if you needed to evacuate?	
Blocked roads from debris	5%

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Are you prepared to evacuate if provided information on where and how to evacuate?	
Flames interrupting evacuation route	22%
Inability to evacuate (no vehicle, funds to evacuate, pets)	7%
Lack of information on where to evacuate to	24%
Smoke	2%
Not enough egress routes	2%
Traffic	37%

Lack of information about evacuation routes or instructions was noted as a primary barrier to local residents. The majority of respondents indicated the best way to share information about preparing for a disaster is through emergency text alerts (36 votes), County/Community website posts (14 votes), social media posts (13 votes), and then local news stations (6 votes). Other unique communication methods which may be used to share information can include: sharing information at social events, public meetings, flyers/brochures from schools, email, local nonprofits and community groups, and YouTube videos.

Oftentimes implementing household mitigation actions can be a challenge for homeowners due to a variety of factors. To best tailor outreach strategies in the future, the survey asked what these primary challenges were.

Table 8: Household Wildfire Mitigation Question

What measures have you taken to protect your home or property from wildfire?				
	Have Done	Plan to Do	Not Done	Unable to Do
Built structures or home with fire resistant materials	18%	0%	41%	41%
Retrofitted home with fire-resistant building or roofing materials	31%	0%	38%	31%
Cleared litter/debris/vegetation/combustible materials from around your home	78%	8%	8%	8%
Signed up for emergency notifications system through county dispatch	85%	8%	5%	3%
Install sprinklers/fire suppression resources	18%	0%	56%	26%
Identified possible evacuation options from your neighborhood	79%	15%	5%	0%
Made preparations to evacuate from your home if needed	64%	33%	3%	0%
Built structures or home with fire resistant materials	18%	0%	41%	41%
Retrofitted home with fire-resistant building or roofing materials	31%	0%	38%	31%
Cleared litter/debris/vegetation/combustible materials from around your home	78%	8%	8%	8%
Signed up for emergency notifications system through county dispatch	85%	8%	5%	3%

For survey respondents who noted they had not taken measures to protect their homes or properties from wildfire, the following reasons were ranked from greatest to least hindrance:

1. Cost or lack of financial resources
2. Lack of direction/knowledge
3. Lack of home ownership/rent properties
4. Surrounding areas/neighbors pose greater risk
5. Age of home
6. Limited opportunity for mitigation projects

One of the most common and effective strategies to address wildfire risk at the local level is through adopting and enforcing building codes. Respondents were asked how they felt about the current building codes established in Garfield County. The majority of responses indicated *Codes should be stronger (36% of responses)* or that the current codes were *Unknown (38% of responses)*. The following table lists responses provided as to why they chose their responses.

Table 9: Survey Responses – Building Code Questions

How do you feel about current building codes and wildfire prevention ordinances in place?	
Response	Percentage
Codes are too strong	3%
Codes are strong enough	13%
Codes should be stronger	36%
Indifferent	10%
Unknown	38%

Why did you make this selection?	Number of Votes
Need for healthy balance between development and restrictive codes	1
Local leaders should be doing more to address and enforce codes.	3
There is a lack of accountability	2
Lack of knowledge of current codes/residents don't know what codes are in place	8

Lastly, respondents were asked what they would like to see the County and local fire districts do in the future to protect people and infrastructure from future wildfires. Specific suggestions and common themes are listed below.

- Increase local fire department funds to adequate staff departments and pursue projects
- Provide financial assistance for hazardous fuels mitigation/removal
- Remove hazardous fuels from public spaces and roadways
- Improve evacuation or other transportation routes
- Increase local education and encourage residents to identify evacuation routes, pursue household mitigation, and utilize emergency alert systems
 - Utilize local school districts for education to youth
- Assist with home wildfire risk assessments
- Implement and enforce fire ban ordinances and fire-resistant building codes
- Ban the sale of or use of fireworks during wildfire season
- Check vulnerable areas for safe fire practices (campers, campgrounds, national forests, etc)
- Establish a regional/community WildFire Council to coordinate local resources and identify community risk areas