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STATE FORESTERS

BRIEFING PAPER

Implementation and Monitoring of Community Wildfire Protection Plans

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www.stateforesters.org

Introduction

Demonstrating the need for continued commitment for Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) development in today's competitive funding environment depends on a consistent and credible process for documenting reduced risk to communities and fire suppression costs. A survey conducted by NASF in 2007 found that the number of communities covered by a CWPP has increased from 3,264 to 4,762, a 46 percent increase from 2006.¹ However, this accounts for only 10 percent of the 56,374 communities at risk identified by the state foresters, which have been encouraged to develop CWPPs. This document describes the need for a consistent process for monitoring and reporting the progress made in implementing CWPPs to support the continued investment in their development.

Background

The 2005 *Community wildfire Protection Plans Briefing Paper*² published by the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition describes the need for a collaborative process including federal agencies and the public to identify actions to reduce wildfire risks and structural ignitability. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 provides communities, through the CWPP process, with an opportunity to influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction projects on federal land, as well as how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on non-federal lands.

Issue

CWPPs are a proven, successful tool to address the challenges of the wildland urban interface in a way that brings about comprehensive and locally supported solutions. The continued success of CWPPs requires dedicated and focused leadership along with meaningful collaboration by all partners. The plans by themselves do not reduce wildfire risk. It is important that agency and organizational leaders understand and demonstrate commitment to the unique roles they play in producing and implementing effective CWPPs. Long term financial commitment along with implementation and monitoring of CWPPs are critical to their continued success.

CWPP Reporting and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monitoring CWPPs is necessary to document their success in reducing wildfire risk in local communities while an effective reporting system will also document their progress in meeting state and national goals for wildfire risk reduction. A comprehensive process for a CWPP involves a cycle of collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring and adaptation. As partners learn from successes and challenges throughout the development and implementation of a CWPP, they may identify new actions or propose a shift in how decisions are made or actions are accomplished.

The 10 Year Strategy Implementation Plan³ performance measures for Goal Two (Reduce Hazardous Fuels) and Goal Four (Promote Community Assistance) establish national performance measures for CWPP implementation actions. The performance measures that are specific to CWPPs include:

- Number and percent of communities at risk covered by a CWPP or equivalent that are reducing their risk from wildland fire.
- Percent of at risk communities that report increased local suppression capacity.
- Number of green tons and/or volume of woody biomass from fuel reduction and restoration made available for utilization through permits, contracts, agreements, or equivalent.
- Number and percent of WUI treated that are identified in CWPPs or other applicable collaboratively developed plans, and the number and percent of non-WUI acres treated that are identified through collaboration consistent with the 10 Year Implementation Plan.

¹ National Association of State Foresters. 2007. Communities at Risk Report for FY 2007.

² Western Forestry Leadership Coalition. 2005. Community Wildfire Protection Plans Briefing Paper. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on May 11, 2008, from http://www.wflccenter.org/news_pdf/104_pdf.pdf

³ http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/plan/documents/10-YearStrategyFinal_Dec2006.pdf

- Number and percent of acres treated, through collaboration consistent with the 10 Year Implementation Plan, identified by treatment category (i.e., prescribed fire, mechanical, and wildland fire).

The National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS) tracks federally funded fuels treatments, community assistance, and restoration/rehabilitation work across all federal agencies and bureaus. NFPORS provides an inventory of NFP activities, with a heavy emphasis on projects accomplished by federal agencies on public lands. However, NFPORS does not capture the full breadth and range of activities accomplished under CWPPs, but not directly funded by the federal government. This creates a large gap in information about the success of CWPPs in accomplishing the goals of the national fire Plan.

Success stories provide another tool for evaluating CWPPs. A variety of success stories web sites track the progress of CWPPs at a regional and national basis. These efforts provide overlapping, duplicative, and sometimes conflicting information about the status of CWPP efforts. Success stories, narratives about CWPP and National Fire Plan activities, are collected on at least three national web sites by the federal government^{4,5,6}, and by the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition⁷. Regional success story repositories include the Pacific Northwest National Fire Plan web site⁸, Region 5 NFP Success Stories web site⁹. Firewise Communities also maintains a web site of community stories¹⁰. While each of these web sites may provide useful local information, taken together they are not helpful to portray the national scope of CWPP accomplishments.

The August 2008 *Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan* provides a framework for a comprehensive and consistent CWPP monitoring and evaluation process. This framework outlines a process for monitoring and evaluating accomplishments, challenges, and how well CWPP and NFP goals have been met. The Community Guide provides a template for evaluating CWPPs locally in a way that clearly links results to the national CWPP performance measures. The Community Guide framework assesses the extent of partnerships and collaboration, status of local risk assessments, fuel reduction and structural ignitability progress, as well as the status of education and outreach efforts. Implementation of this strategy, or a similar framework nationally would go a long way toward documenting and demonstrating the full range of CWPP success on a broad scale.

Conclusion

NFP Success stories have been a useful tool to highlight the success of individual community collaboration and projects. These stories do not integrate well to provide a comprehensive picture of CWPP accomplishments nationally. They tell many great achievements, but they do not provide upward reporting into the 10 Year Implementation Plan performance measures. The federal NFPORS reporting system tracks only federally funded fuel reduction on non-federal land. There is currently no consistent evaluation process for CWPPs that highlights the full range of collaborative successes such as improved communications between state, federal and local agencies and the public, increased local suppression capacity. To sustain CWPPs into the future there is a need for strong leadership in promoting a consistent process for reporting and monitoring CWPP implementation actions.

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⁴ <http://www.wildfireprograms.org>

⁵ <http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/>

⁶ <http://www.blm.gov/nifc/st/en/prog/fire/snapshots.html>

⁷ <http://www.wflccenter.org/success/index.php>

⁸ <http://www.nwfireplan.gov/Accomplishments.htm>

⁹ <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/fire/nfp/success/>

¹⁰ <http://www.firewise.org/usa/communities.htm>