

DEFINITIONS FOR “CREATING FIRE-ADAPTED COMMUNITIES”

Aspect: The direction toward which a slope faces. Southwest-facing slopes usually see the highest fire activity due to the sun’s drying effect on the vegetation.

Backfire: A fire set along the inner edge of a fireline to consume fuels in the path of a wildfire and/or change the direction or force of the fire's column of heat and smoke.

Backpack Pump/Bladder Bag: A firefighting tool consisting of a 5-gallon water bladder and a hand pump with sprayer, with the bladder worn like a backpack. Used when water is scarce or water supply is far away.

Biomass: Any organic matter that is available on a renewable or recurring basis, including trees and plants.

Blowdown: Trees knocked down during a windstorm. Windthrown timber can create a fire hazard and habitat conditions that increase the risk of insect epidemics.

Brush: A collective term that refers to stands of vegetation dominated by shrubby, woody plants or low-growing trees, usually of a type undesirable for either livestock or timber management.

Buffer Zone: An area of reduced vegetation that separates wildland areas from vulnerable residential or business developments. This barrier is often used for agriculture, recreation, parks, or golf courses.

Burnout: A fire set inside a control line to widen it or consume fuel between the fire and the control line. Burnouts frequently add significant acreage to a fire.

Cohesive Strategy: The new National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. Its vision is *“to safely and effectively extinguish fire, when needed; use fire where allowable; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire.”* The Strategy contains three elements: building resilient landscapes, creating fire-adapted communities, and improving fire response, all based on the latest science.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP): A local fire preparedness plan called for by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. A CWPP must be collaboratively developed, prioritize areas needing hazard fuels reduction, recommend ways to reduce structure ignitions, and be approved by local and state fire/forestry agencies.

Defensible Space: A term used to describe the area around a home where flammable materials such as vegetation or other fuels have been cleared, reduced, or altered so the space acts as a barrier between an advancing wildland fire and lives or resources at risk. It usually extends at least 30 feet from the structure.

Duff: A layer of decomposing organic materials such as freshly fallen twigs, needles, and leaves.

Embers or Firebrands: Burning materials such as leaves, pine needles, and even shakes from wooden roofs which are carried by wind in a fire. Embers often land in leaf litter on roofs, in gutters, and on or under decks. They also often penetrate attic vents, causing fires which remain undetected until the whole roof is in flames. *Research by the USFS's Jack Cohen and others has shown that airborne embers, rather than flame fronts, are by far the greatest source of structure ignitions in wildland fires.*

Escape Route: A pre-planned route persons can take to move to a safety zone or other low-risk area in a fire.

Firewise: A project of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) which encourages homeowners to take responsibility for preparing their homes to survive wildfires. See Firewise.org for free materials.

Fire-Adapted Community: A human community of any size which takes responsibility for its wildfire risks and prepares to meet them. A truly fire-adapted community is so well prepared for the next wildfire that few, if any, firefighting resources will be needed to protect it as a fire passes through. “Creating Fire-Adapted Communities” is one of the three elements of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Fire-Adapted Communities Learning Network: A project of The Nature Conservancy and The Watershed Research and Training Center addressing current knowledge gaps and helping local communities to become fire-adapted.

Fuel: Anything that can burn, including live and dead vegetation, wood piles, fences, decks – and homes.

Ground Fuels: All combustible materials below the surface litter, including duff, roots, peat, and other materials that can support glowing combustion.

Hazard Fuel Reduction: Removal of excessive live or dead vegetative fuels for the strict objectives of (1) reducing the potential for uncharacteristically intense wildland fire and (2) increasing capabilities to protect life and property, water supplies, sensitive natural resources, etc.

Heavy Fuels: Fuels of large diameter that ignite and burn slowly, such as snags, logs, and tree trunks.

Ladder Fuels: Fuels such as dry grass and shrubs which provide vertical continuity, allowing fire to easily climb from surface fuels into the crowns of trees or shrubs. Ladder fuels within 30 feet of structures should be thinned, trimmed, or removed to prevent this fire spread.

Land Use Planning: The process, usually at the local or county level, of deciding where structures may be built. *The Wildland/Urban Interface fire problem is largely the result of poor planning decisions which allow homes, →*

businesses, and subdivisions to be built in wildland areas which historically burned – and are likely to burn again.

Light Fuels: Fast-drying fuels less than ¼” in diameter, such as grass, leaves, pine needles, and twigs. These fuels ignite readily, burn quickly, and pose high danger to firefighters and residents. Often called “flashy” fuels.

Litter: The top layer of a forest, scrubland, or grassland floor, directly above the fermentation layer. Composed of loose debris such as sticks, branches, twigs, and recently fallen leaves or needles little altered by decomposition.

McLeod (pronounced *McCloud*): A wildland firefighting tool with a two-sided blade attached to a wooden handle.

Mineral Soil: Soil layers below the predominantly organic layers, containing little or no combustible material.

Nomex®: The trade name for a fire-resistant synthetic material used in protective clothing worn by firefighters.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Protective equipment for wildland firefighters, including leather lace-up boots with lug soles, hard hat with chin strap and ear/neck protection, goggles, Nomex® shirt and trousers, leather gloves, and fire shelter. Residents confronted with fire should wear sturdy shoes, cotton jeans, and a long-sleeved cotton shirt to protect themselves.

Prepare, Stay and Defend – or Leave Early: A term describing the option of allowing residents to stay and defend their homes during a fire, rather than evacuating. This option may be appropriate for able-bodied residents of remote or difficult-to-access areas. It requires serious preparation, training, and equipment, and should be done in cooperation with fire agencies. *A key advantage of this option is that residents can quickly detect and extinguish burning embers in the attic, on the roof, or elsewhere.*

Prescribed Fire: A fire purposefully ignited to meet specific objectives related to hazard fuels reduction or wildlife habitat improvement. Such fires are set within a “window” or “prescription” of very specific conditions of winds, temperature, humidity, and other factors affecting fire behavior. Also called “controlled burns.”

Prevention: Educational or physical activities directed at reducing the occurrence of human-caused fires.

Pulaski: A firefighting tool that combines an axe blade with a narrow trenching blade, fitted to a wooden handle.

Rate of Spread: The relative activity of a fire in extending its horizontal dimensions. Usually expressed in chains (66 linear feet) or acres per hour for a specific period of time.

Red Flag Warning: An alert issued by fire weather forecasters to warn of critical fire weather conditions.

Rehabilitation or “rehab”: Work necessary to repair damage caused by wildland fire or firefighting activity.

Can include restoration of bulldozed fire lines, erosion control, installation of water bars, and re-seeding.

Relative Humidity (RH): The ratio of the amount of moisture in the air to the maximum amount of moisture the air would contain if it were saturated. Low relative humidity contributes significantly to high fire danger.

Resilience: The capacity of any kind of community or landscape to recover quickly from disturbances such as wildland fires.

Resources: 1) Personnel, equipment, services, and supplies available for assignment to fires. 2) The natural resources of an area, such as timber, wildlife habitat, grasslands, watersheds, and recreational values.

Safety Zone: An area clear of flammable materials and used to escape from a fire. Examples are areas which already burned (called “the black”), a moist meadow or riparian area, a previously-cleared area, a natural rock formation, a parking lot or horse arena, or any area large enough to provide refuge from heat and flames. A very well-prepared house can also be a safety zone.

Shelter in Place: The act of remaining in one’s home during a fire, using the home as a shelter, because one cannot evacuate safely. This is a passive action, as opposed to Prepare, Stay and Defend, which is proactive.

Slash: Woody and other vegetative debris left after logging, pruning, thinning, or brush cutting.

Smoldering Fire: A fire burning without flame (“glowing combustion”) and spreading very slowly.

Snag: A standing dead tree or part of a dead tree. Snags provide extremely valuable habitat for wildlife but can be hazardous to firefighters during or after a fire.

Stewardship Contracting: A process which allows local entities to remove forest products in return for performing work to restore healthy forest ecosystems.

Surface Fuels: Loose litter on the soil surface: fallen leaves or needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches; also grasses, low shrubs, tree seedlings, and stumps.

Wildland Fire Use: The management of naturally ignited (by lightning) wildland fires to accomplish specific pre-stated resource management objectives such as reducing vegetative fuels and restoring habitat for wildlife.

Wildland/Urban Interface or Intermix (WUI): The line, area, or zone where homes, businesses, and other human developments meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland vegetative fuels.

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