**WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE**

**December 18, 2023**

Following the catastrophic fire season of 2000, Congress directed the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to identify communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire and publish a list of these communities in the Federal Register. The list for Montana is detailed including even the smallest communities like Saltese, De Borgia, Paradise, and others.

This notice also provides the Federal Governments initial definition of an Urban Wildland Interface (obviously changed at some point to Wildland Urban Interface). A copy of the Forests service definition of the areas to be included in the WUI is attached.

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is the culmination point where State, Federal and local land management plans and programs must merge in an equitable and functional manner. An area where resource management activities on agency lands including timber, recreation, fish and wildlife, roads and access, and most importantly forest health and public safety, is coordinated with management activities by private property owners, businesses, farmers, ranchers, law enforcement, and local government bodies. An area where activities on both agency and privately owned lands can either positively or negatively affect adjacent lands or lands in close proximity. Examples that impact locally regulated actions are burning, heath and sanitation and sub division and zoning which includes strategies or mitigation conditions affecting water quality, wildlife habitat, forest health and wildfire, and where roads and access are a shared responsibility. The WUI is the hub where homes and business activities are located, local government bodies are located and other critical infrastructure operates there from.

All of the Mineral County communities are located in or near the WUI so fire hazards pose a significant threat to life and property, therefore public and private property and firefighter safety are the first priority for this MA.

The Mineral County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) seeks to increase tree and crown spacing and substantially reduce hazardous Fuels within these high-risk areas to limit the likelihood of damage to life and property in the event of a wildfire. There are approximately 450 private parcels of land with structures that adjoin National Forest System (NFS) lands with 150 miles of common boundary. The 200 private parcels with structures that adjoins Montana Sate Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and Montana State Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) lands also results in 56 miles of common boundary.

The natural resources on NFS, DNRC, and FWP lands within the WUI are managed for multiple use purposes through an **Integrated Forest Management (IFM)** program. Through the IFM process, local resources, knowledge, and expertise will be used to help develop preemptive management strategies for these agency lands to protect fish and wildlife habitat, preserve corridors, develop and preserve access for diverse recreational opportunities, and substantially reduce crown density and hazardous fuels that will support good public health, welfare, and safety and provide safe ingress and egress for first responders. Local resources, knowledge, and expertise will include; 1) Local Government, 2) County Extension Agencies, 3) Fire Departments and Districts, 4) Police Departments 5) Fire Marshals, 6) local Forest Service Districts, 7) Livestock Grazing Permittees, 8) County Resource Use Plans, 9) Montana DNRC, 10) Montana FWP, and 11) Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Lands generally suitable for timber harvest includes: 1) lands where timber production is compatible with the achievement of desired conditions and objectives established by the plan and 2) other lands where salvage sales or other harvest necessary for multiple-use objectives other than timber production may take place, which includes hazard reduction and public safety concerns and ongoing WUI management objectives.

Numerous open roads provide access to private lands and adjacent agency lands, and to roaded recreational and motorized opportunities on designated roads and trails. Motorized transportation is common. If access through adjacent private lands is not available, roads will be built on agency lands to provide safe connectivity throughout this MA. Local regulation of development may also provide a tool for access to WUI lands. Ongoing use of the area by large carnivores (grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, and mountain lions) is generally discouraged, except transient movement through connective corroders. Roaded access provides multiple use opportunities where the sights and sounds of people is predominant and the scenery reflects a high intensity of management where human influences are highly evident. This is an area where large carnivores are an unwelcome visitor that should not remain in the immediate vicinity.

1. **GOAL:** Utilizing the IFM program, provide a buffer around residential areas and communities to slow fire spread, reduce sustainedfire intensity, and reduce the threat to life and property.

**Objective 1:** Improve the success rate and safety of residence, visitors, and first responders during fire suppression efforts.

**Objective 2:** Implement forest management activities that open forested canopies and provide regularly scheduled hazardous fuels reduction activities to reduce risks to life and property now and into the future, including, thinning, grazing, pruning, and other activities.

**Objective 3:** Prevent epidemic insect and disease infestations and the inevitable ensuing forest fires by implementing positive forest management treatments.

**Objective 4:** Encourage and implement strategies and activities similar to those discussed in “Living With Fire” publication from 2009 and the referenced or related sited resource materials.

*Policy 1: Work with Agency land managers to develop and Utilize preemptive management prescriptions and strategies, i.e., reduce stand density to 40 sq. ft. of basal area per acre within one quarter mile of adjacent private property then gradually blended to match surrounding forests, increase grazing allotments (emphasize browsers such as Scottish Highland Cattle and goats), post mechanical fuels reduction and eco burning.*

*Policy 2: Work with Agency land managers to develop and maintain a safe network of open roads that provides safe ingress and egress to the public and first responders.*

*Policy 3: Develop policies that ensure regular scheduled hazardous fuels reduction strategies are planned into the future.*

*Policy 4: Work with agencies to develop relationships with private land owners and encourage fire wise landscapes in the home ignition zone.*

*Policy 5: Protect old growth forests to the greatest extent possible while continuing to emphasize public and firefighter safety, health and welfare.*

*Policy 6: Encourage ancillary use of materials produced or harvested In the management process. This may include an emphasis on seasonal activities such as livestock grazing, harvesting Christmas trees, boughs for wreaths or plants for transplant. Additionally, large material should go to mills for lumber production including small local mills or larger regional facilities.*

1. **GOAL:** Protect Other Critical Infrastructure. The BNSF Railroad, 500kv BPA Power Line, highway 135 connector and I-90 Corridor all run the full length of Mineral County mostly within the WUI, not to forget Fish Creek State Park, the largest State Park in Montana. Interruption of service of these facilities can have the potential to affect business nationally and certainly in the intermountain region. Additionally, these facilities are and can be the source of wildfire ignition as well.

**Objective 1:** Utilizing the **IFM** program, reduce the risks of interruptions from wildfire to and from these facilities.

***Policy 1:*** *Mineral County will review existing MRL/BNSF, BPA, DOT, and FWP plans to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive approach is being utilized with preemptive management strategies to provide the same protections outlined in* ***1. GOAL*** *above to protect these critical resources and provide the highest level of public Safety, health, welfare, economic stability, and reliability of these facilities.*

***Policy 2:*** *Mineral County will work with State and Federal land management agencies and MRL/BNSF, BPA, and DOT administrators to provide essential safe ingress and egress through an open road system to improve the effectiveness of first responders and provide public safety and natural resource preservation in the event of a fire.*

1. **GOAL:** Ensure management within the WUI is accomplished to preserve and protect the interests of Mineral County, its citizens, and local county bodies, and to provide the best results for the forest and its multiple resources.

**Objective 1:** Utilize local resources, knowledge, and expertise to develop management strategies that are innovative, balanced and sustainable while encouraging multiple use of land and resources.

*Policy 1: Work with local Forest Service land managers to develop a cooperative strategy to work together utilizing local knowledge and expertise.*

1. **GOAL:** Utilize the Multiple-Sustained Yield Act of 1960 in management of and planning efforts regarding the WUI.

**Objective 1:** The WUI provides the gateway by which most natural resource uses on agency lands are accessed. Agency lands within and adjacent to the WUI should be managed and administered for outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, timber harvest and management, watershed protection, public access, and wildlife habitat in the best interest of the American people.

*Policy 1: Work with agencies to reestablish and emphasize the important role this Act should play in development of plans and projects on agency lands within and adjacent to the WUI and other surrounding lands.*

*Policy 2: Acknowledge and encourage more intense management activity within the WUI because of its Interactive/interrelated nature with adjacent lands. We have a unique opportunity on the Lolo during planning and project development, to create and implement a Management Area (MA) specific to the WUI that acknowledges and encourages the need for more aggressive management prescriptions and strategies that help reduce the risks to life and property from the effects of wildfire, while providing economic benefits, preserving wildlife habitat and corroders, and limiting conflicts between people and wildlife. Mineral County will work with agency land managers to help raise awareness of the critical need for more frequent and aggressive management strategies within the WUI that are sustainable for decades to come.*

1. **GOAL:** Protect Water Quality.

**Objective 1:** Manage chemical and fertilizer use and soil disturbances on privately owned and agency managed lands within 100 feet of a water bodies in Mineral County.

*Policy 1: Work with agencies to develop County Ordinances to control the use of chemicals and fertilizers within 100 feet of bodies of water similar to the existing regulations on sewers.*

*Policy 2: Work with all land owners, managers and users to preserve water quality as it relates to roads and road use and maintenance, including culverts, drains and swales.*

1. **GOAL:** Utilize commercial and noncommercial products.

**Objective 1:** Hazard trees cut or thinned along all county and state highways should be used to provide free use firewood to Mineral County residents and others in need of assistance, down to 4 inches in diameter, with larger trees going to lumber if appropriated.

**Objective 2:** Support local contractors through restoration programs and projects within the WUI that includes the use of small local contractors.

**Objective 3:** Make provisions where possible for ongoing management activities on a plan rotational basis so consistent management over a period of years occurs. This provides sustainable economic opportunities for contractors while also providing for ongoing monitoring and maintenance of management activities on a routine basis that involves intermittent activities on various tracts of land. The success or failure of various management actions will greatly increase the knowledge base of local government the Forest Service and other land management agencies.

*Policy 1: Work with State, Federal, and County road maintenance crews to develop programs that utilize forest products removed along road sides.*

*Policy 2: Work with local firewood yards to establish delivery points and provide processing services for this material, with onsite processing where reasonably possible as mention in policy 4.*

*Policy 3: Recognize that the WUI is a large landscape that will require large landscape restoration efforts as well as small projects that can be tailored for local small businesses, with ongoing monitoring and maintenance efforts and activities.*

*Policy 4. Work with local individuals and or contractors for onsite processing of these materials to lesson the cost of transportation to processing and provide biologic material for soil improvement or carbon sequestration where management activities occur.*

1. **GOAL:** Large carnivore management.

**Objective 1:** Discourage occupancy by large carnivores within the WUI, to minimize conflict.

**Objective 2:** Specific to grizzly bears, acknowledge that they are and will continue to move through the WUI, probably at an increasing rate. Develop preemptive management strategies to manage risks to humans, property, and grizzlies

*Policy 1: Work with agencies to implement strategies developed specifically for managing vegetation and infrastructure within the WUI that will reduce risks to life and property and preserve recreational access and human occupancy opportunities.*

*Policy 2: Work with agencies to implement preemptive management strategies. Install (electric) or other fence exclosures around Garbage dumps, camp grounds, trail heads, compost piles, hobby farms, poultry pens, bee hives, and other high use recreation areas.*

*Policy 3: Work with agencies to develop and implement bear awareness training programs and brochures for their employees and the public, to include a certification program.*

1. **GOAL:** Fire management and rehabilitation.

**Objective 1:** Develop proactive management strategies.

**Objective 2:** Develop policies and procedures to guide post fire recovery efforts.

**Objective 3:** develop teams or businesses capable of coping with wildfire rehabilitation or providing those services as part of seasonal tasks or jobs. This will provide economic sustainability and long-term habitat and environmental restoration and preservation after damage by wildfire that was not a planned activity.

*Policy 1: Apply mitigation strategies as defined on page 62 of the Resource Use Plan 40 C.F.R. Section 1508.20(e).*

*Policy 2: Unless created as part of a management activity, all fires natural or man-made must be immediately suppressed.*

*Policy 3: Salvage and restoration efforts must be implemented within 3 months of ignition or as soon as safely possible.*

*Policy 4: Commercial products will be recovered using BMP’s and will be sold to recover highest economic value.*

*Policy 5: Noncommercial products that have little or no value, may be utilized for free use firewood in the same fashion as roadside hazardous removal trees discussed above under number 5 Utilize Commercial and Noncommercial products, or may be used as part of mitigation activities such as ground cover or biologic material replacement where soil sterilization from fire has occured.*

The WUI is suitable for multiple use opportunities and is typically classified as having a roaded setting with current and past vegetation management activities visible across the landscape. It is suitable for commercial and noncommercial resource extraction, with winter and summer motorized and nonmotorized use as prescribed by local forest managers utilizing the IFM strategy which includes local government, local knowledge, and local expertise in the decision making process. Considerations and adjustments will be made to accommodate local variations such as critical winter range, migration patterns, critical connectivity zones (grizzly bears) and other local conditions that may arise. The agency should encourage and acknowledge local control of certain activities on surrounding lands that impact the management area identified as the WUI. This may include burning season, health and sanitation, control of refuse, wildlife attractants, fruit trees and other similar activities.