

Caribou County Wildland Urban Interface Assessment

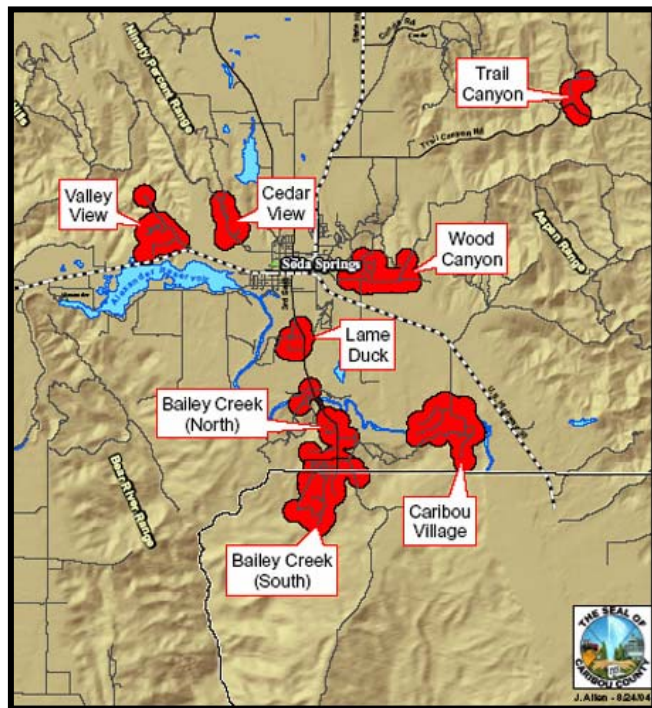
During the summers of 2003 and 2004, the Caribou County Fire Department located in Soda Springs, Idaho, developed a wildland urban interface assessment model to determine the risk to communities from wildfire. The model uses weighted factors such as ingress-egress, water supply, vegetative fuels, building construction, topography and fire suppression response.

Thirteen wildland urban interface areas were identified in the county and all 376 homes were assessed and mapped using the model. Each home was located using geographic positioning system coordinates, assessed using a weighted model and assigned a risk rating which ranged from very low to high. The data was then collected in geographic information systems format and detailed maps for each wildland urban interface area were created showing location and relative risk rating for each home, locations of known water supply, inventory of the road systems, and location of potential safety zones for use by residents and fire suppression resources.

The data is displayed in map books with maps produced on orthophotos with topographic overlays which visually display vegetative fuel types in relation to the structures. The survey was conducted by Caribou County Fire Chief Dennis Godfrey and Josse Allen, Caribou County Fire Department Training Officer who is also a specialist in geographic information systems.

It is estimated the survey took approximately 400 hours of mostly volunteer time to accomplish. The project was done in conjunction with preparation of the Caribou County Community Wildfire Protection Plan funded by the BLM Community at Risk program. Map books will be used by the county and federal wildland fire cooperators to prepare pre-attack and evacuation plans for communities as a result of wildfire or other emergency incidents.

Dennis Godfrey said “The result of this product will greatly increase the response capability of the emergency services departments within the county by providing detailed maps of the wildland urban interface.”



Identified wildland urban interface areas in Caribou County. A map book complete with aerial photos of each area was created, and an 18 x 24 version can be printed for use in fire trucks or by incident command teams.



BLM fire mitigation specialist Kevin Conran in Idaho Falls said, “This will also provide for an increase in public and firefighter safety and has provided us with the opportunity to meet with homeowners, increase their awareness and provide public education to reduce the danger from wildfires in the wildland urban interface.” He added, “ Because the data is being shared with the BLM and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, this will further foster strong interagency relationships during unified command wildfire incidents and will greatly facilitate the transition of incidents to national and/or regional incident management teams should the need arise.”

The assessment will also be used in conjunction with the wildfire protection plan for the county in order to identify and prioritize fuels reduction and other hazard mitigation projects. This product is being looked at by adjacent fire departments and counties as a model for their jurisdictions. The Caribou County Fire Department has offered technical assistance to neighboring fire departments to produce similar products for fire protection districts.

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