



# FACT SHEET



United States Department of Agriculture  
Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

United States Department of Interior  
Web: <http://www.doi.gov>

## Community Wildfire Protection Plan Wasco County - Oregon

It's August 1974. It's hot and the wind is predicted to blow hard all day. Its 9:00 am and we are going about our daily business of living in a subdivision in the woods. Then I start to smell smoke, just a little at first and then it gets stronger. The wind is starting to blow harder and ash starts to fall. There is a fire and me and the other 80 homeowners are down wind of it. Thanks to a heroic effort by the Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry and local fire departments, my home is saved, but the forest right up to my back porch is gone, leaving nothing but a blackened vista.

Now fast forward to 2005. That blackened vista is now the green of 15 to 20-foot tall brush and pine trees. There are 180 homes in my subdivision. Many of the same people that lived through the Rocky Fire are still here, and we still worry about fire. We often question the Forest Service and ask that something be done about the brush. In the past few years the only answer the Forest Service could give us was, "Due to lack of funds, we can't treat the brush."

Then we got a letter from the Forest Service, asking us to come and collaborate with them on a fuels reduction project around our subdivision. What did that mean-- collaborate? Were they finally going to do some thing, or was this just another meeting and nothing would get done?

Well I went to the first meeting. A lot of folks were there: homeowners from the subdivision, the fire chief, and his side kicks, the past fire chief, the head of the Homeowners association and a lot of the old timers, who still like to talk about the Rocky burn. One of the Wasco County Commissioners was there, too, as well as people from the Oregon Department of Forestry. There was even some people from Portland who don't even live out here, but are interested in the ecology of the area.



Photo 1; Sportsman's Park Collaborative Group

The Forest Service gave us lots of information during that first meeting. They talked about the different kinds of wildlife that live in the area; they talked about fire risk and 'fire regimes, condition class and fuels loading'. They also were very clear on why we were meeting, "goals and objectives" they said for having these meetings were: Reduce fuels, reduce fire intensity and protect homes.

The Ranger was very clear, too, that we, the people that live here, had to come up with recommendations on what we wanted to see accomplished. He didn't want recommendations on what to do with the one acre behind my house, but what to do with large chunks of vegetation. Of course the group had to argue about this a little. And get out of the "In my back yard I want to see" mentality.

A big discussion came when we asked how the Forest Service was going to fund all the things we were proposing, when there hadn't been money enough before. That's when we got the information about the Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI), where communities like ours could work with the State Forestry and the Forest Service and draw a line around our community and call it the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). How, along with the county, the fire department we could develop a Community Action Plan. With this plan in place, the Forest Service and Oregon Department of Forestry together could treat fuels in this area and work with us to treat our fuels because the Forest Service and State Forestry now put more emphasis on treating the lands closer to communities. Oh sure, there might not be enough money to treat it all, and we'd have to make some choices about what to do first, but it's a start.

During the next three meetings, we came up with two priority areas, the area immediately adjacent to the subdivision, and an area of dispersed camping with lots of Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use. There was a lot of discussion about road closures, and what kind of timber stands need treatment, and what treatment would reduce the risk of fire while still maintaining the wildlife habitat for deer, elk and the spotted owls. The Forest Service always had someone there to answer our questions.

Another point of discussion was about what was going to be done in the draws that run from National Forest land through the subdivision. The well and storage tank for our water supply is up Wildcat Draw, the small creek that runs through the subdivision, and down to the reservoir. Rock Creek runs from the reservoir down off the forest, and we worry that if a fire got started away from the subdivision, it would burn right up the draws, bringing fire into the subdivision.

We asked about all the land away from our priority areas? We looked at the WUI lines, and enlarged the WUI's, not once, but twice! Having the County Commissioner here during these discussions was good, because that information will be incorporated into the Wasco County Community Action plan. The consultant for the action plan came to our last meeting. He will use our WUI lines to work with the adjacent communities WUI's

and blend our proposals in with theirs. The Forest Service came back to us with a plan on how they would treat the area we had designated as high priorities. They even added about 280 acres of underburn that would reduce the risk of a fire from the East. They propose to thin about 600 acres of young ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands that lie to the south and west of the Park, reduce the brush on about 300 acres of the Rocky Fire that lie to the north, approximately 100 acres of creek drainages that run east and west of the Park. And they are confident they can get it done this summer, which will be a relief, given how dry our winter has been. We also talked with the Oregon State Forestry people who were at our meetings to see what we could do on our own property to protect our homes.

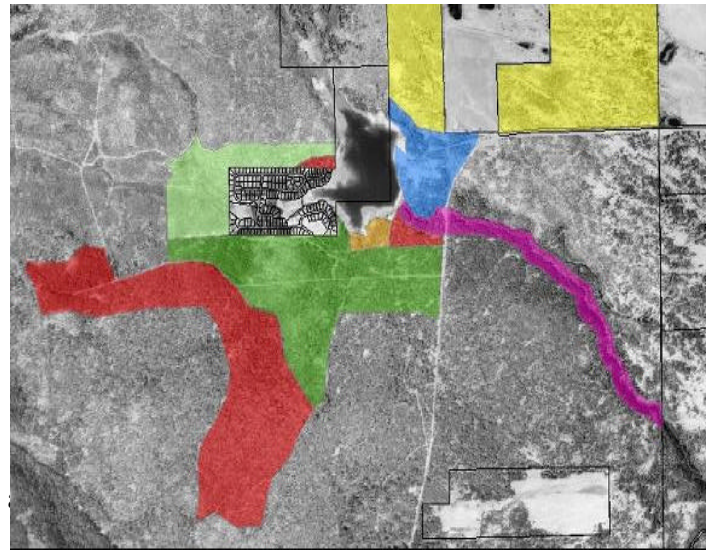


Photo 2, Proposed Treatment around Sportsman's Park

And as for the rest of the area, during our next meeting we took a field trip and looked at different parts of WUI, the part that's not in our back yard, but still in our neighborhood. We looked at some timber sale units and think what was done to those stands will help reduce fire intensity right around our community. We stopped at private land and talked about what needs to be done to protect private property. The Ranger says that the next project to treat this area will be an Environmental Assessment (EA) and it will take most of a year. And that means we have to keep having these collaborative meeting, but that's OK. Someone always brings cookies.



Photo 3 Collaborative Group on Tour, in a stand scheduled for treatment.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>