



## NORTHERN ROCKIES COORDINATING GROUP

### COMMUNITY AND STRUCTURE FIRE PROTECTION Guidelines for the Northern Rockies 2008

#### Background

Protection of structures and communities is a shared partnership between the home and landowners and their fire agencies. Structure and community protection is high risk and a large cost center for all fire agencies. Clarification on what, how and where we will accomplish our structure protection roles and responsibilities must be identified. There needs to be common expectations among all agencies and the public on how structure protection will be handled within the Northern Rockies.

With the increased growth in the wildland urban interface fire agencies do not have the capability to protect all structures. The goal is to support the creation of firewise communities and structures that can survive the effects of a wildland fire without intervention.

All fire agencies have primary responsibility for fire suppression within their respective protection areas. A strong initial attack commensurate with risk with suppression as the primary objective will occur on all wildfires. Fire agencies have a responsibility to attempt to prevent a wildland fire from spreading into areas where there are structures, and to assist local fire agencies in protecting communities and structures from the advancing wildland fire.

#### Leaders Intent

Our first and foremost intent is to keep our firefighters and the public safe. Secondly, once that safety can be ensured, then we will aggressively work towards keeping the wildland fire away from structures and communities. Our strategies and tactics will be based on that intent. Protecting structures from fire will not be possible in every situation. Risk to firefighters, fire behavior and availability of resources will dictate the strategies that will be used.

When there is a need to engage in structure protection, we will ensure that we are taking safe, appropriate, and reasonable tactical actions for which we are trained and equipped. Those actions will be cost effective. State and federal agencies will limit the use of tactics such as gelling, wrapping, extensive hazardous fuels modification, and utilization of Type 1 and 2 structure engines.

#### Unified Efforts

Fire agencies may have a shared responsibility for wildland fire and structure protection within the scope of their state laws, agreements and annual operating plans. Agency Administrators will discuss with their partners roles and responsibilities, what capabilities each party has, how the parties will interface with each other, and how responsibilities for costs will be addressed. Agency Administrators will provide leaders intent for structure fire protection. Incident management organizations will engage local government agencies (fire departments, law enforcement, disaster services, etc.) in the planning of strategies and tactics for community and structure protection.

State of Montana  
Montana Firewardens Association  
Montana Division of Disaster  
and Emergency Services  
MT Sheriffs and Peace Officers' Association

Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Bureau of Land Management  
National Park Service  
US Fish and Wildlife Service

USDA Forest Service  
State of Idaho  
North Dakota Forest Service  
Fire Chief's Association

There are areas in the Northern Rockies where there is no local fire agency. Through established agreements and authorities, the wildland fire protection agencies may have the responsibility to protect structures from wildland fire. Landowners have the responsibility to determine whether there is a local fire agency that provides structure fire protection.

It is important for NRCG members to:

- **Partner** with communities, home and landowners to identify what actions can be taken to mitigate potential wildland urban interface losses, and identify financial and technical assistance opportunities.
- **Identify** how the parties will work together when the wildland fire impacts another's protection or jurisdictional responsibility.
- **Establish** agreements and/or local operating plans to identify roles and responsibilities prior to the wildland fire.

### **Capabilities**

Wildland fire agencies have no capability or responsibility to do structure fire suppression.

Some local fire agencies may have limited capability within their own areas of jurisdiction to respond to a wildland fire. It is important to understand what capability they do have and if they have options to reach out to others, such as mutual aid, to enhance that capability.

### **Definitions**

The following are defined:

**Wildland Fire Protection:** Protecting natural resources and municipal watersheds from damage from any fire that occurs in the wildland. State, tribal and federal forestry or land management and some local government agencies normally provide wildland fire protection.

**Structure Protection:** Protecting a structure from the threat of damage from an advancing wildland fire. This involves the use of standard wildland protection tactics, control methods, and equipment, including fire control lines and the extinguishments of spot fires near or on the structure. The protection can be provided by both the rural and/or local government fire department and wildland fire protection agencies.

**Structure Fire Suppression:** Interior or exterior actions taken to suppress and extinguish a burning structure or improvement associated with standard fire protection equipment and training. This is the responsibility of local government entities; however there are areas where there is no structural fire agency in place.

***This supercedes any prior Community and Structure Fire Protection guidelines developed by NRCG.***

**IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF LANDS  
COMMUNITY AND STRUCTURE FIRE PROTECTION FROM WILDLAND FIRES IN IDAHO**

The question of who is responsible for protecting structures from wildland fires in Idaho is asked multiple times every fire season. Both the Great Basin (GBCG) and Northern Rockies (NRCG) Coordination Groups have published a document that does a good job discussing the shared responsibilities of homeowners, local fire service organizations (FSOs), and wildland fire agencies when wildland fires threaten homes and communities.

This document will provide additional clarification to Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) employees and agencies that provide protection for IDL on what is expected of the wildland fire agency and what is expected of the local FSO. This document is intended to add clarity to the Community and Structure Guidelines produced by NRCG and GBCG.

The direction provided is based on the fact that IDL is the State agency charged with protecting forest lands in Idaho, and local FSOs are primarily formed to provide structure suppression to the citizens within their boundary. IDL is trained and equipped to provide wildland fire suppression but not structure suppression. Local FSOs are trained and equipped to provide structure suppression, but typically do not have the training or equipment to suppress wildland fires, especially those that escape initial attack.

IDL expects its firefighters and fire managers to use standard wildland fire tactics to protect a structure or community from the threat of an advancing wildland fire. This would include the use of natural barriers, constructed firelines, wet lines, or retardant lines. When safe to do so, firelines should be reinforced by the wildland agency. This can be done by ground resources through the use of black lining, hose lays, or by aerial delivery of water or fire suppressants. IDL will bear the cost of these tactics as the protection agency on lands it protects under the Offset Agreement (Provision 32, 2007-2012 Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement).

Local FSOs are expected to provide direct suppression of fires in or on structures and protection of communities by the extinguishment of spot fires on or around the structure. They are also able to take internal suppression actions if needed to prevent the loss of a structure. The suppression of fire on or within a structure is their principal responsibility, and the local FSO should bear the cost of these tactics. Local FSOs may be able to acquire additional resources to assist with this responsibility, either through mutual aid or disaster declaration assistance.

Some local FSOs may have the resources, training, and experience to assist IDL with the wildland tactics being used to protect structures from the advancing wildland fire; however, it should not be expected. Only when the local FSO clearly communicates to IDL that they have excess resources that are properly trained in wildland tactics, and that their primary mission will not be compromised, should their assistance be accepted.

The use of tactics such as gelling, wrapping, and extensive fuels modifications around structures are not standard wildland fire tactics and should not be used by IDL. Fuel treatment should be done by homeowners and communities before fire threatens. IDL should encourage these activities to occur. If the local FSO determines these tactics are part of their effort to protect the structures, then they will be responsible for these tactics and the cost associated with them.

In summary, standard wildland fire tactics should be utilized by IDL to protect structures and communities, and the cost of these tactics will be IDL's responsibility. Standard structure suppression equipment and tactics should be utilized by the local FSO to protect structures and communities, and the cost of these tactics will be the local FSO's responsibility.