

CWPP Rapid Assessment Solution



Association of Oregon & California Counties

Community-based forest planning and prioritization is not new, but communities were given an unprecedented opportunity to engage in comprehensive forest planning and project prioritization by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) in 2003. This landmark legislation is the first to include meaningful statutory incentives for the Forest Service and BLM to give preference to the priorities of communities when it comes to managing the forested landscapes around them. But in order for a community to take advantage of this new approach, it must first prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Overview

In an effort to help communities create a CWPP, Healthy Forest Info has created an Internet solution that can help facilitate this process; the CWPP Rapid Assessment Solution, or CWPP RAS.

The key elements of this Internet solution are:

- Database Technology
- Bulletin Board Service (BBS) technology (for both secure and public BBS use)
- A website (with live wildfire event broadcast capabilities)

The Process

Using the Healthy Forest Info Internet solution, the process of initiating preparation of a CWPP is straightforward. A county begins by acquiring access rights to the system for its communities. A Committee is then formed by the county, consisting of county designees from its emergency services department, its planning department, and the fire

chief for the relevant geographic area, and a representative from the State forest management agency. A representative from the applicable federal land management agency is included by the county as an ex officio member of Committee. Upon formation, the Committee can then put into use the Healthy Forest Info Internet solution.

Upon signing on to the CWPP RAS, the Committee uses the computerized risk assessment criteria, the online mapping system and the secure BBS to identify and prioritize Communities At Risk (CARs) within the county. Once the initial CARs have been identified, the Committee prioritizes using the CWPP RAS database tool to input information from these communities that is needed to determine the 'risk' level (low...moderate...high) for each. The system will then generate a summary report for each CAR. Each CAR summary includes measures proposed by the Committee to address the conditions that are causing the community to be at risk of wildfire. The CAR summary is, in effect, a short form, draft CWPP.

The BBS is then used to gather public input on the CAR summaries, which are posted to a website provided by the CWPP RAS. Once this information is on the website, the Committee uses the Press Release tool provided in the CWPP RAS to alert members of the media (local newspapers, television and radio stations...etc.), that the CAR summaries are available 'online' for review and comment by the public, and when and where regular public hearings are scheduled for these CAR summaries.

After the press release has been sent out, key stakeholders and the general public can go to the county CWPP website and use the public BBS to post their comments and suggestions regarding the information and recommendations provided in the CAR summary. Each CAR will have an individual BBS assigned to it so the stakeholders of that particular community will have a voice specific to the issues unique to their area. Also, the Committee can determine the length of time the community can have access to this public BBS for commenting (similar to any other regulatory hearings) and will have administrative control to remove any comments or messages that are inappropriate for the public BBS.

After collecting BBS comments and data in the CWPP RAS database, and the public comment period is complete, the Committee can then use this information to revise its initial recommendations and develop the full CWPP for the CAR. Final CWPP development includes submission to the applicable federal land management agency for consultation with

respect to federal resources implicated in the CWPP. The federal consultation step of the process will already be streamlined by having the federal agency represented as an ex officio member of the Committee that prepared the CWPP.

Once the CWPP is complete, it is posed as a PDF file to the county website area provided by the CWPP RAS for people to review and use. In the event that the CWPP later needs revisions, the Committee has access and can undertake an amendment process to stay current with changing circumstances.

Other Features

Two other key features of the CWPP RAS are the Wildfire Event Alerting System (WEAS) and the Wildfire Event Notification System (WENS).

The WEAS is a 'real time' wildfire event alerting system that is built into the website. Its function is straightforward and simple. Using green, orange and red alerting buttons, the system allows the committee to let the public know if there are any wildfire events either in, or around their county.

The green button means there are no wildfire events in or around the county. The orange button means there is a wildfire event in a surrounding county. The red button means there is a wildfire event in the county, and the scrolling text below these buttons allows the committee to inform members of the community, in real time, the status and location of the wildfire. It also allows the committee to let the public know the best escape routes to use depending on where the fire is located and moving to. All of this is done on the Internet and accomplished in real time.

The WENS, to be included in the next generation of the CWPP RAS, will allow e-mails to be sent to any member of the public, or the press, who wish to be notified of a wildfire event in their community. Emails can be sent to home computers, PDAs or cell phones.

Funding

The cost of participating in the CWPP RAS is modest compared to the cost of developing a CWPP by other means. The CWPP RAS is also designed so that the costs associated with participation qualify for funding by counties using funds supplied under Section 302(b)(5) of

Title III of PL 106-393 (The Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act of 2000).

Summary

The CWPP RAS is an Internet based solution that will help counties across the country to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans for their communities. The CWPP RAS engages the public living in the communities at risk of a catastrophic wildfire in the planning process, and keeps the public informed of wildfire danger through the real time WEAS emergency broadcast tool. The CWPP RAS is a complete set of tools to help counties efficiently protect their communities from wildfire, and the modest cost of participating can be funded out of monies made available under Title III of PL 106-393.