

Executive Summary

Wildland fires are a natural part of the ecosystems of Southwest Utah and over the years have shaped the forests and rangelands. However, the forests and rangelands in Southwest Utah have been significantly altered, especially in the last 50 years or so, resulting in increased forest fuels and more closed forests that tend to burn more intensely than in the past. In addition, population growth has led to residential development occurring close to the forests and rangelands in what is called a wildland-urban interface area or "WUI".

To address these issues, a multi jurisdictional group of agencies, organizations, and individuals have collaborated to develop the Southwest Utah Regional Wildfire Protection Plan, hereinafter referred to as "SURWPP".

The purpose of the SURWPP is to be a tool in the effort to protect human life and reduce property loss due to catastrophic wildland fires in the communities and surrounding areas located in the southwest Utah counties of Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington.

This plan has been created in recognition of firefighter safety and the existing potential for personal harm and property damage to residents living in the WUI areas of Southwest Utah. Although reducing the threat of wildland fires is the primary motivation behind this plan, managing the forests and rangelands for hazardous fuel reduction and fire resilience is a part of the larger picture.

Residents and visitors alike want healthy, fire resilient forests that provide habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty. As communities grow and as new communities are developed, urban areas encroach upon wildland ecosystems to create a situation where flammable wildland fuels are in close proximity to houses and community structures. This problem creates conflicts between a community and its wildland surroundings.

This planning process represents a portion of the long term investment that local, state and federal agencies are making to help protect natural resources, critical infrastructure,

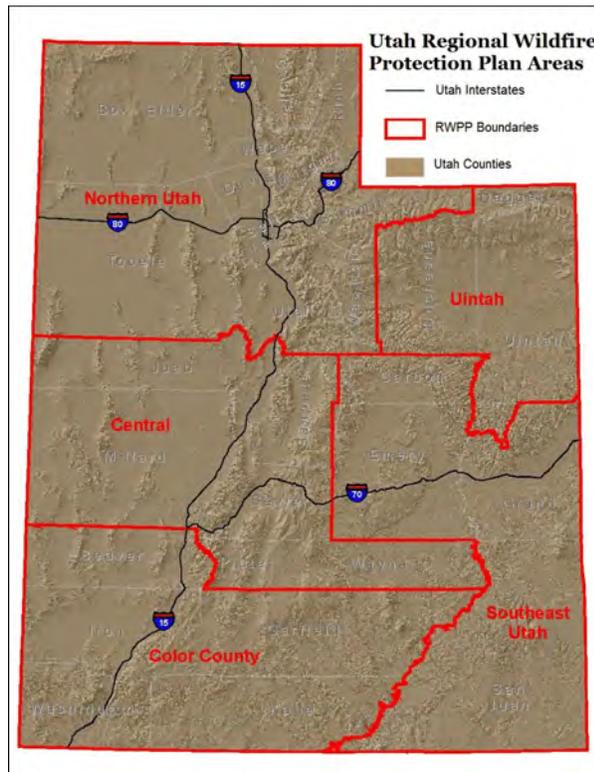


Recent wildland-urban interface fire near the town of New Harmony in northern Washington County. Photo source: Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands.

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Illustration showing the state of Utah with the general area of southwest Utah highlighted.



Map of Utah illustrating the five geographical areas of the state where regional wildfire protection plans have been prepared.

community facilities, businesses and residential structures, and most importantly the lives of firefighters and the public.

This plan epitomizes a long-term commitment based on cooperation and communication between the state of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, federal agencies, local governments, and the interested public.

The SURWPP begins with an overview that includes the forests and associated lands at risk. This also includes the people, the Community Assistance Program, and the principles advocated in this plan. Each county in

Southwest Utah is analyzed, together with current fuel hazard reduction efforts.

The serious problem of invasive cheatgrass is discussed in detail in a report by Scott Tobler which is presented in its entirety in Appendix C.

The planning process includes convening of the decision makers, development of a "core" team of professionals, establishment of regional base maps, with comprehensive community risk assessments that include communities at risk, and local firefighting capabilities. The Plan concludes with an action plan and assessment strategies.

The most recent authority for community fire planning comes under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). Title III of HFRA provides guidance for developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP's). This project is developing a regionally-based plan we are calling a regional wildfire protection plan, or RWPP.

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Utah regions with a RWPP in place may receive significant benefits in the future should funding be appropriated through HFRA for fuels reduction and fire prevention. HFRA provides clear guidance for what should be developed in a Wildfire Protection Plan. The SURWPP is designed to address the CWPP requirements, along with guidelines and requirements in the FEMA Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, the National Fire Plan, and other state and federal programs.

The SURWPP identifies and prioritizes issues related to wildfire prevention and fuel mitigation in the Wildland-Urban Interface areas of southwestern Utah on a large scale. The intent of this plan is to capture landscape level information. This plan is not intended to interfere with or take the place of state of Utah Community Fire Plan's process and results.

The SURWPP will result in defensible space reduction planning at a landscaping level. In addition to providing oversight and guidance in planning objectives, the heart of this plan is a collaborative effort to promote the interest, education, and long-term involvement within the residents of Southwest Utah in realizing the danger of wildfire and identifying strategies that will reduce the risk around their homes and in their communities.