Unit Chief Summary

Overview

This Fire Management Plan is a product of the implementation of the State Fire Plan. The State Fire Plan provides an analysis procedure utilizing, in part, computer based geographical information data that is validated by experienced fire managers to assess fire fuel hazards and risks in order to design and implement mitigating activities. The Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit (NYP) Fire Management Plan provides background information, fuels and fire data, proposed projects, and individual Battalion reports outlining mitigating activities commonly carried out each year.

The State of CA did not require a Fire Plan update for 2006. However, due to the number of projects in our local unit and the amount of Grant dollars processed through those projects, NYP is providing this update to the 2005 plan as a means of documentation of our successes.

The 2005 Fire Plan is compliant with the requirements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), signed into law in December of 2003, as a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Those agencies represented on the signature page agreed to the contents of this plan as part of a collaborative effort to identify projects and possibly influence how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on non federal lands.

NYP is one of 21 administrative Units within the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. NYP faces many challenges, not the least of which is two of its counties, Placer and Nevada, are two of the fastest growing counties within the state. According to the 2000 National Census, Placer County is the 20th fastest growing county within the nation. Many of the people moving to these mid Sierra Nevada rural counties are coming from urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay, Los Angeles, and Sacramento. This has directly led to the urbanization of fire adapted vegetation types and ecosystems.

The biggest challenge facing NYP is one of education. Most of the new residents, and many of the existing ones, do not realize what building houses in the middle of fire adapted ecosystems means. The fire adapted forest types where most of the population exists within NYP are Mixed Conifer, Ponderosa/Shrub, Montane Chaparral, and California Oak Woodlands. According to research from Barbour and Majors (1977), pre-European settlement fire return intervals in these forest types ranged from 2 to 8 years in California Oak Woodlands and 5 to 16 years in the remaining forest types. This equated to low intensity fires at frequent intervals. As of 1900 to 1920, wildfires have been suppressed in these vegetation types. As a result, over the last 80 - 100 years vegetative fuels have increased significantly in tons per acre. Unnaturally high fuel loads have resulted. But, most of the public does not realize this, nor do they understand what this means in terms of fire intensity and their safety. They have come to believe what they see now is "natural." Wildfires in this unnatural fuel load condition are very intense and more difficult to suppress. Overlay the mix of homes and personal property in these areas and suppression is even more difficult. The task at hand is to educate the citizens within these areas as to the dangers of living in these fuels and to induce the public into taking an active role in becoming an informed

and appropriate land steward and taking it upon themselves to manage the fuels around their structures. Creating "defensible space" around these structures is the single best thing a resident can accomplish to protect their property. Secondary to the effort of creating the defensible space around their homes is a landowner's responsibility to apply his or her stewardship responsibility across their entire ownership. The overall effect of each property owner properly managing wildland fuels results in a landscape level fuel reduction and a commensurate reduction in fire intensity. Once this is achieved, the goal of reducing costs and losses to human lives, property and natural resources will be reached.

Pre-fire Management Development

Since the implementation of the State Fire Plan in 1996 and its evolution into the NYP Fire Management Plan, interest by local community based groups (stakeholders) has resulted in a groundswell of grassroots organizations developing in an effort to promote community safety. These groups, including the American River Watershed Group, Tahoe Re-Green, FireSafe Council of Nevada County, Placer County Fire Safe Alliance, and the Yuba County FireSafe and Watershed Council have taken the lead in promoting fire safe activities. Through these groups, and our own NYP CDF personnel, we have a number of fuel reduction projects, either completed or in various levels of completion throughout the Unit. Hopefully we will never have the opportunity to put these projects to the test; however, it is more than likely that one of these projects will help reduce the overall government costs and citizen losses resulting from a costly and damaging fire. We continuously encounter new obstacles in the project implementation stage: agency spending procedures, grant requirements, environmental documentation, etc… However, through the continued effort of our CDF staff and the other stakeholders, fuel reduction and education projects will continue.

Goals and Objectives

The Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit took the stated goals and objectives of the State Fire Plan and applied them to the Unit. They are:

Goals:

1. To Reduce the Risks to Citizens and Firefighters from Wildland Fire.

2. Develop a "land stewardship" ethic in the residents of the wildland areas within the Unit

Objectives:

1. Implement Specific and Landscape Level Projects and Programs that Increase the Potential for Success on Initial Attack.
2. Raise Citizen and Stakeholder Awareness of Fire Risks and Hazards and enlist their help and participation in the Reduction of Risks and Hazards.
3. Create a Fire Mitigation Framework to assist local government in the development of standards, policies, and plans which will result in community and landscape level fuel modifications.

4. Provide recommendations that individuals and the community can take to reduce the ignitability of homes and other structures in the Wildland Urban Interface.

An undertaking of this sort is more than a single agency can accomplish alone. For this reason, stakeholder involvement was encouraged early on and has become an integral part of the process. We immediately recognized that NYP could develop some very sophisticated and efficient projects; but without the help of other stakeholders the projects would never get past the planning stage. NYP considers the task of meeting these objectives as a collective assignment for all stakeholders within the Unit. The State Fire Plan was designed with the intent of local fire safe problems being solved by local entities. NYP is available for assistance to these local entities by providing data, guidance, technical support, and standards. This year, Unit staff will revisit some of the stakeholder groups in an effort to update and revise the plan where needed.

Recommendations

NYP has found that the most effective method of spreading fire prevention information to educate the public is to make personal "one-on one" contact with the public. It is the Unit's view that the single most effective method to protect personal and real property from wildland fires is for each individual landowner or resident to meet the mandates of Public Resources Code 4291 (defensible space standards –see Appendix 4). NYP also encourages the public to extend hazardous fuel reduction beyond the PRC 4291 mandated defensible zone into the adjacent "Defensible Landscape" zone (area beyond the required 100'). This is the area outside the Defensible space zone where a property owner can continue their "Reduced Fuel Zone" treatments and effectively add to the protection of the property. It is the Unit's recommendation for its cooperating stakeholders that do not own or manage large tracts of wildland direct their efforts as follows:

1. **Direct 85% of their effort to defensible space and defensible landscape**: produce and provide fire safe information to landowners; conduct informational workshops; conduct one-on-one meetings with landowners providing individualized fire safe guidance; reduce structural ignitability where possible, support a citizen or public chipper crew/assistance; outreach to homeowner associations, etc; develop a property addressing program.

2. **Direct 10% of their effort to Ingress/Egress issues**: Identify and prioritize evacuation problem areas; when appropriate, encourage roadside fuel modification and maintenance; as needed, develop signage for exit routes.

3. **Direct 5% of their effort to Strategic Fuel Modification outside the defensible space zone:** construction of new shaded fuel breaks only if continuous maintenance is also funded; maintenance of existing fuel breaks; large scale vegetation management projects. Large scale vegetation management projects will normally only be completed by entities charged with managing large areas of

wildland such as the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, CDF, timber companies, and large ranches.

NYP particularly recommends that the target areas for fuel reduction and education projects be within the High and Very High Fuels Hazard rating areas mapped out in this Fire Management Plan (see fuels section). The Unit also seeks to treat large amounts of wildland acreage throughout the Unit's intermix and interface (I-Zone) areas in high hazard locations. However, adequate Unit funds and staff are not currently available to attain this. If funds and/or staff were to become available, the Unit would target I-Zone areas and landscape scale wildland areas that threaten the I-Zone for fuel modification.
One other target area for fuel reduction projects not specifically mentioned in previous plans are those areas with High ranked Watersheds at Risk. Due to the recent availability of Proposition 40 funding there has been an overwhelming interest by the public in fuel reduction projects in areas that have both a High Total Asset score and a High Watershed Score. By supporting these projects, not only is the Unit meeting the goals of Proposition 40, but also reducing fuel loads in near proximity to watershed areas that are recreational, residential, or both.
(See Prop 40/CFIP/CAG summary)

Re-evaluation

As project implementation continues, NYP will continue to re-evaluate the Unit using the pre-fire planning process to determine if attention should be refocused to new project areas or continue with those currently identified. Whenever a fire occurs in or around a project area, we will evaluate the success of any completed project work to determine its effectiveness in protecting the assets in the area.