

NWCG Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team 2005-2009 Strategic Plan

Prepared for



National Wildfire Coordinating Group
Wildland/Urban Interface
Working Team

by

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Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team 2005-2009 Strategic Plan

This report contains the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for the Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team. The plan refines the Working Team's vision and is intended to serve as a framework for the development of annual work plans and budgets.

BACKGROUND

In 1974, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was formed to expand operational cooperation and coordination of the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior and the various member agencies within these departments and the National Association of State Foresters.¹ Working Teams were established by the NWCG to examine specific problem areas in fire management and recommend solutions. It was deemed necessary to develop a team to address the Wildland/Urban Interface issues. In 1994, the NWCG tapped the existing Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Advisory Group to form the basis of the Working Team and added member entities with an interest in this issue.²

The Wildland/Urban Interface Advisory Group grew from a partnership developed in 1986 between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association following the catastrophic fire season of 1985. The group's initial goal was to promote firefighter and homeowner safety in the wildland/urban interface.³

As the Working Team evolved, it became clear that it would benefit from a five-year strategic plan. In Fall of 2003, the Working Team hired ECONorthwest to assist in the development of a strategic plan that includes priorities to make the team an effective and viable group well positioned to address the complex issues surrounding Wildland/Urban Interface Fire, now and into the foreseeable future.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN MATRIX

The strategic plan matrix (next page) is intended to serve as an easy reference guide to the strategic plan. The matrix includes the strategies and actions for each

¹ Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002.

² See the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002, for a full list of member entities.

³ The current National WUI Fire Program is funded by the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior (BLM, BIA, NPS, and FWL), and the National Fire Protection Association, and is managed through a cooperative agreement between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association.

goal. It also includes a brief description of each strategy, the target timeline, and how each action aligns with core Working Team program activities. The actions are generally classified as short-term (1-2 years) or mid-term (3-5 years). Some actions are ongoing throughout the plan implementation period. The matrix is intended to serve as a tool to review the annual work plan. Staff will be responsible for monitoring progress towards strategic plan goals.

IMPLEMENTATION

The strategic plan provides the framework for activities the Working Team will focus on over the next five years. The Working Team already develops annual work programs that are reviewed by the USDA Forest Service as part of the funding requirements. The annual work programs provide considerable detail about what tasks staff will focus efforts on during the next 12-month period. Moreover, the annual work plan ties tasks to budget figures.

Because the cost of desired tasks almost always exceeds resources, the annual work program requires the Working Team to make difficult decisions regarding what tasks to prioritize and how to spend limited financial resources. The strategic plan provides a tool that can help the Working Team make decisions regarding the annual work program. Every task in the annual work program should relate to at least one action, strategy, and goal in the strategic plan.

In summary, the strategic plan provides guidance for the annual work program, but does not identify annual priorities. This architecture is intentional: the Working Team developed the strategic plan in a manner that allows flexibility to respond to emerging issues and redirect resources on an annual basis as necessary.

The annual work program generates outputs (i.e., number of meetings, etc.) and outcomes (i.e., changes in landowner behavior, etc.). The outputs and outcomes can then be compared to the vision, mission, and goals to assess how well the Working Team is implementing the plan.

Table 1. WUI Working Team five-year strategic plan

Strategy	Action Item
Goal 1: Promote community solutions to prevent or reduce the impact of WUI fires.	
Strategy 1.1. Provide information, educational materials, and technical assistance that promote societal and individual behavior change relative to the linkage between natural systems and the built environment.	
Strategy 1.1.	Action 1.1.1. Provide Firewise Community outreach and support.
Strategy 1.1.	Action 1.1.2. Reduce ignition vulnerability of structures by developing and disseminating targeted educational and outreach materials.
Strategy 1.1.	Action 1.1.3. Identify critical communication points and develop strategies that exploit these communication points.
Strategy 1.2. Promote community specific solutions that advocate for local ownership and responsibility of WUI problems and outcomes.	
Strategy 1.2.	Action 1.2.1. Develop resources and tools that help communities identify and implement local solutions.
Strategy 1.2.	Action 1.2.2. Provide technical assistance outreach (both passive, such as handbooks, or active, such as trainings) that support community actions to address WUI issues.
Strategy 1.2.	Action 1.2.3. Promote the adoption of Firewise Communities/USA recognition status by small communities and neighborhoods in fire prone areas.
Strategy 1.2.	Action 1.2.4. Develop and disseminate media messages that focus on individual community responsibility for wildfire safety.
Goal 2: Develop and promote effective practices on the part of agencies and homeowners during WUI events.	
Strategy 2.1. Raise community awareness and encourage effective actions during WUI events	
Strategy 2.1.	Action 2.1.1. Collaborate with life safety specialists to develop a “WUI Advance Warning System” aimed at communicating actions residents can take prior to a WUI event.
Strategy 2.1.	Action 2.1.2. Develop Working Team protocols and communication strategies for supporting National and Regional agencies and Tribes needs during large WUI events.
Strategy 2.1.	Action 2.1.3. As part of a WUI press release packet, prepare success stories about structures that did not burn during WUI events. Explain why they did not burn and how property owners can find out how to protect their property.
Strategy 2.2. Advocate policy and practices of fire management and suppression activities to reduce risk to lives and property in the WUI.	
Strategy 2.2.	Action 2.2.1. Develop an outreach campaign that promotes effective practices, and on the ground activities to ensure firefighter safety.

Strategy	Action Item
Strategy 2.2.	Action 2.2.2. Develop information kit that can be distributed to elected official and community decision makers. The kit should include pertinent information regarding the WUI team and its activities as well as facts and figures on the problem the WUI has.
GOAL 3. Provide leadership and coordination among agencies, organizations, and partners for implementing WUI strategies.	
Strategy 3.1. Pursue active participation and encourage support of WUI Working Team goals and strategies among Working Team organizations.	
Strategy 3.1.	Action 3.1.1. Develop and implement internal communication plans for each Working Team Member organization.
Strategy 3.1.	Action 3.1.2. Seek opportunities to present information about National WUI Fire Program activities to member organization leaders, line staff and field staff.
Strategy 3.1.	Action 3.1.3. Develop descriptive information about the benefits of National WUI Fire Program activities.
Strategy 3.2. Strengthen communication and coordination among WUI Working Team agencies, other NWCG working teams, non-profit organizations, and private sector partners to effectively deliver wildland urban interface programs and messages.	
Strategy 3.2.	Action 3.2.1. Coordinate with other NWCG working teams to communicate with local property owners (either directly or through local agencies) to reduce the vulnerability of homes.
Strategy 3.2.	Action 3.2.2. Where appropriate, develop formal agreements with partner agencies and stakeholder organizations.
Strategy 3.2.	Action 3.2.3. Establish consistent and frequent communication with all WUI players using appropriate conduits and delivery mechanisms (Working Team member agencies, NCWG agencies, Tribes, and stakeholders).
Strategy 3.3. Develop and support partnerships among non-member agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector that assist NWCG member agencies and organizations in addressing wildland urban interface issues.	
Strategy 3.3.	Action 3.3.1. Review existing programs and develop strategies to broaden distribution of key messages among stakeholders and other groups.
Strategy 3.3.	Action 3.3.2. Define stakeholders and their role. Document guidelines and expectations for how the Working Team will interact with stakeholders. Develop stakeholder communication tools.
Strategy 3.3.	Action 3.3.3. Working with state and local agencies, develop email listserv to communicate key messages to career and volunteer fire departments.

This report presents the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for the Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team. The report provides background information on how the Strategic Plan was developed and how it will be implemented.

BACKGROUND

Since 1970, more than 10,000 homes and 20,000 other structures have been lost to wildland fire. The cost of suppressing wildland fires is staggering: government agencies have spent more than \$20 billion on fire suppression in the past three decades.⁴ The 2002 fire season was one of the worst wildfire seasons in history—a total of 64,433 fires consumed a total of 6.4 million acres. The 10-year average for the years between 1993 and 2003 was 3.8 million acres.⁵ The 2003 fire season was more typical; as of September 10, a total of 47,082 fires consumed 3.1 million acres.

In 1994, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group tapped the existing Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Advisory Group to form the basis of the Working Team and added member entities with an interest in this issue.⁶ The Wildland/Urban Interface Advisory Group grew from a partnership developed in 1986 between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association following the catastrophic fire season of 1985. The group's initial goal was to promote firefighter and homeowner safety in the wildland/urban interface.⁷ According to the charter the Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Working Team's (WT) purpose is:

- To provide a forum to increase the public awareness of the wildland/urban interface fire problem, to develop local solutions to the issue, to form partnerships among problem solvers and interest groups, and to promote safety for firefighters and the public in the wildland/urban interface.
- To provide coordinated leadership for national interest groups, and Federal and State fire agencies in addressing issues regarding fire activity and potential vulnerability to disastrous fire activity in wildland/urban interface areas. These can include quality of programs, standards of development, information flow, operational continuity, training,

⁴ Firewise Communities web site: <http://www.firewise.org/communities/overview.html>

⁵ *National Fire News*, National Interagency Fire Center, September 10, 2003.

⁶ See the WUI Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002, for a full list of member entities.

⁷ The current National WUI Fire Program is funded by the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior (BLM, BIA, NPS, and FWL), and the National Fire Protection Association, and is managed through a cooperative agreement between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association.

implementation of technical changes, coordination with research, problem identification and/or needed system changes.

- To provide technical support, advice, information, and recommendations to NWCG on all matters concerning wildland/urban interface issues, activities, and programs.⁸

Additionally, the Working Team's responsibilities include preparing and submitting annual work plans to the USDA Forest Service that describe proposed projects and activities as well as the cost and timing of those activities. The Working Team is also responsible for coordination of wildfire/urban interface issues with other NWCG Working teams. The Working Team documents the activities and status of all projects and expenditures in an annual report.

As the Working Team evolved, it became clear that longer-term thinking was necessary to develop effective implementation strategies. Long-term strategies should address the broad array of issues related to the wildland/urban interface ranging from education to land use planning. A common organizational approach is to develop a strategic plan that outlines goals, strategies, and actions.

The Working Team initiated a strategic planning process in 2002. That process, facilitated by the Brookings Institute, led to the development of a set of alternative futures, but stopped short of identifying organizational goals, strategies, and actions. In fall of 2003, the Working Team contracted with ECONorthwest (ECO) to assist in the development of a strategic plan that includes priorities to make the team an effective and viable group well positioned to address the complex issues surrounding Wildland/Urban Interface Fire, now and into the foreseeable future.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan is to provide a framework for the types of projects and activities the Working Team will focus on over the next five years. The plan establishes goals, strategies, and actions that are intended to guide the Working Team's activities and help establish priorities. The strategic plan is implemented through the annual work plans that are developed by staff and reviewed and approved by the Working Team.

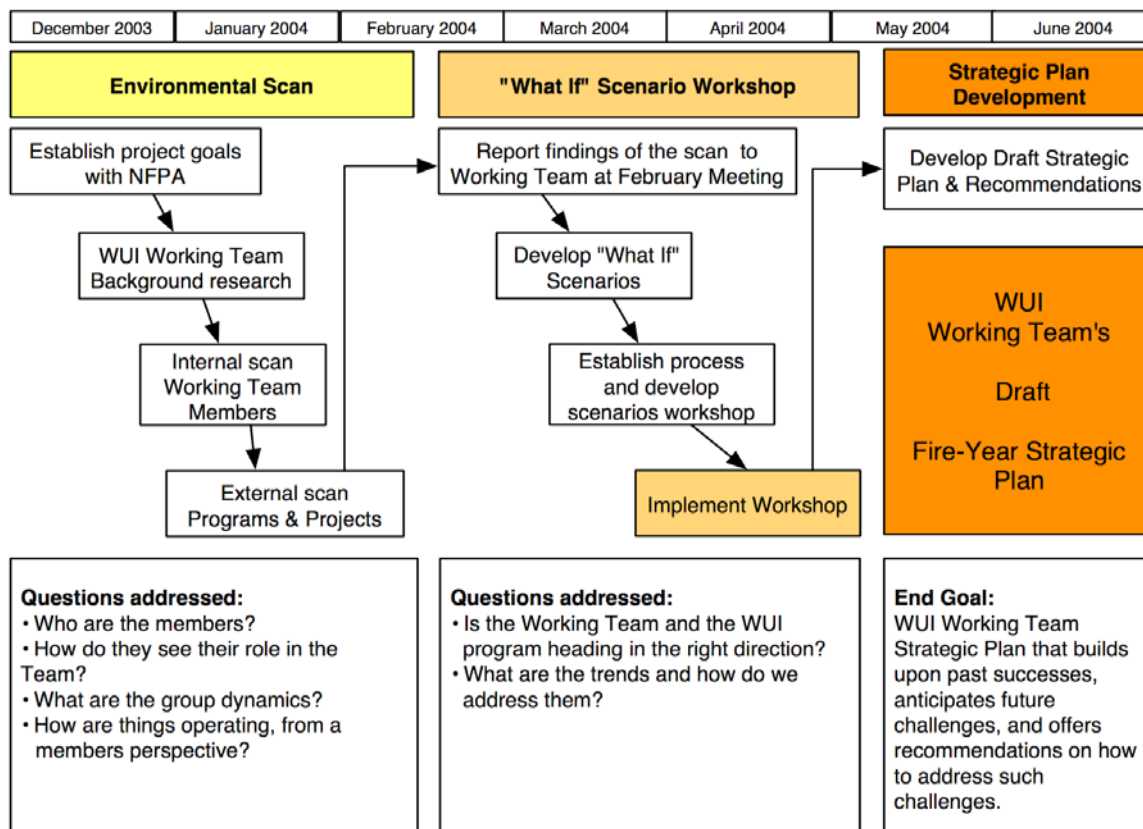
METHODS

Figure 1-1 provides a conceptual overview of the strategic planning process. The process began with a planning and data collection phase that included an environmental scan, operating assumptions (or scenarios), and priorities. The environmental scan phase answered the question "where are we now?" The second phase developed a vision of where the organization wants to be. The Working Team accomplished this by developing and discussing a set of

⁸ Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002.

operational scenarios based on the environmental scan. The third phase identified strategies for achieving the organization’s vision (the “strategic vision”).

Figure 1-1. Project approach



As shown in Figure 1-1, the strategic planning process was divided into three interrelated phases:

- *Phase I: Program Description and Environmental Scan* – ECO initiated the project by developing a program description that summarizes the Working Team’s historical goals, objectives, and activities. ECO also completed an environmental scan of the Working Team’s members and stakeholders to gain a further understanding of the relationships between internal and external partners.
- *Phase II: WUI Working Team Strategic Planning Workshops* – ECO worked with the WUI Working Team Strategic Planning Committee to develop and implement two Working Team strategic planning workshops. The first workshop was held in February 2004. ECO presented findings from the environmental scan to the Working Team and assisted the team through the process of reaffirming their mission statement and objectives. The second workshop was held in March of 2004. This workshop included the discussion of several operational scenarios that could affect the ability of the working team to meet its objectives. This part of the project evaluated trends and asked “what if” questions. It also built from the data

collected in the environmental scan to move the Working Team toward formulating and testing the team's strategic vision.

- *Phase III: Development of Strategic Plan* – The strategic plan documents the outcomes of the strategic planning process including an environmental scan, workshops, and team member and stakeholder interviews. The outcomes were used to develop the WUI Working Team strategic vision and plan for the next five years.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The strategic plan is presented at the beginning of this document. The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

Chapter 2: How to Use This Plan provides an overview of how the Working Team will use the strategic plan to implement its mission through development of annual work plans and ongoing monitoring.

Chapter 3: Environmental Scan and Strategic Issues describes the results of the evaluation of factors that are likely to affect the Working Team's activities over the 2005-2009 period and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that face the team.

Chapter 4: Monitoring and Evaluation describes approaches the Working Team can use to monitor implementation of the actions in the strategic plan and evaluate progress.

This report also includes two Appendices:

Appendix A: Surveys and Worksheets presents summaries of the data collection tools and strategic planning workshops.

Appendix B: Strategic Planning and Scenarios presents notes from the discussion of the six strategic planning scenarios.