

A-7. Community at Risk: Multnomah County Structurally Unprotected Areas

In 2004, the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council convened a task force to discuss the issue of areas that are vulnerable to wildfire but are without publicly-funded structural fire protection. This is a major issue throughout the state because the number of unprotected homes in the Wildland Urban Interface continues to grow. State firefighting actions on these lands are made possible only after the Governor invokes the Conflagration Act. The task force agreed that protection should be provided only if the county is 1) completing a community wildfire protection plan; 2) has adopted the Department of Land Conservation and Development's Goal 4 requiring fire defense standards for new construction in forest zones; and 3) is changing property tax statement language for ODF assessment from "fire protection" to ODF "non-structural fire suppression" so homeowners and insurers are not lead to believe they have structural fire protection. This section of the Multnomah County CWPP addresses the unprotected areas, thereby meeting the provisions set forth by the task force.

There are approximately 92,864 acres of structurally unprotected lands in Multnomah County, with the majority (88,379 acres) is located in the eastern part of the county and includes the USFS Columbia River Gorge national Scenic Area and the Mount Hood National Forest. Government Island, located in central Multnomah County account for approximately 1,939 acres, and the remaining 2,546 is located in the western part of the county in Forest Park.

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and United States Forest Service provide wildland fire protection but their scope is limited to forest protection, not rescue or structure fire protection. In addition, it would take these wildland fire agencies over twenty minutes to respond to a wildland fire in this area. As a result, all homeowners and travelers are at risk of a long delay if fire were to occur.

East County Unprotected Areas

The unprotected areas in eastern Multnomah County include residential communities, Mount Hood National Forest land, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (USFS) and private industrial forest land, or undeveloped land.

Warrendale & Dodson are east county communities comprised of about 200 homes that are not covered by a structural fire department. This area is located along Interstate 84, which is the only East/ West Interstate Freeway in Oregon. It has some of the most extreme wildfire hazards due to the heavy fuels on adjacent USFS lands, steep slopes, east winds, and potential ignition sources from I-84 and the railroad.

The majority of homeowners in Warrendale and Dodson are aware of the increased risk to structure fires and wildfires, but only about 10% contract with Cascade Locks Fire & EMS in for structural fire protection. Cascade Locks Fire and Rescue has limited capacity to respond to a fire in this location. Many residents have voiced their concerns regarding the increased risk to life, property infrastructure due to their "unprotected" status and have been working towards establishing a Rural Fire Protection District here.

Eastern Multnomah County also features several State Parks, including two of the top ten most visited tourist attractions in the entire state: Multnomah Falls and The Bonneville Dam. Ainsworth and Eagle Creek are also popular State Parks that receive many visitors, especially during wildfire season. Potential ignition from recreators and their vehicles is a major concern in the Columbia River Gorge. Multnomah Falls Lodge is also highly vulnerable because it houses commercial

vendors that provide services to visitors. The Lodge currently has no structural fire protection. It also may be a potential resource if a fire were threatening the surrounding areas.

Thousand Acres (or the Sandy River Delta) is located just east of Troutdale, OR. This is a very popular off-leash dog park and equestrian area. There are many potential ignition sources as it is adjacent to Interstate 84 and the Rail Road, and is a well-known transient camp area. This area has high fuels comprised of invasive species including Himalayan Blackberry and Scotch Broom. The Columbia Gorge national Scenic Area recently embarked on restoration of native vegetation and eradication of the Himalayan Blackberry, and has used controlled burns to accomplish restoration goals. Thousand Acres is part of the USFS, who contracts with MCRFPD #14 for fire suppression. The current contract negotiations include adding Emergency Medical Services thru Multnomah County EMS.

Central County Unprotected Areas

Government Island (approximately 1,939 acres) is an unprotected area in central Multnomah County. Government Island is unique because it lies under the I-205 Bridge and is controlled by State Parks. Despite the fact that it can only be accessed by boat, many recreators use this area, and frequently have campfires and light fireworks. A wildfire here could potentially close the I-205/I-5 Bridge.

West County Unprotected Areas

In Western Multnomah County, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVF&R) is working with homeowners and elected officials to annex the unprotected areas (702 acres). There are 28 properties adjacent to Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue's border in Skyline that are unprotected. While the exact nature of the unprotected properties remains unclear, research was conducted with Multnomah and Washington Counties and it was confirmed that taxes have never been levied by TVF&R or any other fire department for structural fire protection and emergency medical services. TVF&R is currently working with Multnomah and Washington Counties to annex these properties.

The remaining 1,844 acres in west county are adjacent to the Scappoose Fire District. Although Scappoose would respond to an emergency in these areas, their ability to do so may be comprised due to the lack of a fee structure to support these services.

Unprotected Area Wildfire Hazards

The Multnomah County CWPP wildfire hazard assessment identifies areas that may be at higher risk to potential wildfires. Map #17 illustrates the overall wildfire hazard risk in the Multnomah County unprotected areas and will be used to help target areas for wildfire prevention activities.

Unprotected Communities at Risk

Communities that have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to wildfires are illustrated in Map #17 and listed in Table A-7.1. Local Fire Agency staff considered the following factors to determine the local CARs including:

- Need for defensible space
- Access limitations (narrow driveways, lack of address signage, one way in/one way out)
- Steep slopes that can hinder access and accelerate the spread of wildfire
- Lack of water available for wildland fire fighting
- Heavy fuels on adjacent public lands
- Potential ignition sources from recreationists and transients

- Agricultural and backyard burning
- Lack of community outreach programs to promote wildfire awareness
- Communications difficulties

Unprotected Areas Action Plan

Local Fire Agencies providing structural fire protection adjacent to these unprotected areas developed a list of actions to build capacity and assist in making the CARS more resilient to potential wildfires. The action plan for the Unprotected Areas is provided in Table A-7.2.



STRUCTURALLY UNPROTECTED COMMUNITIES AT RISK

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN - 2011 MAP #17

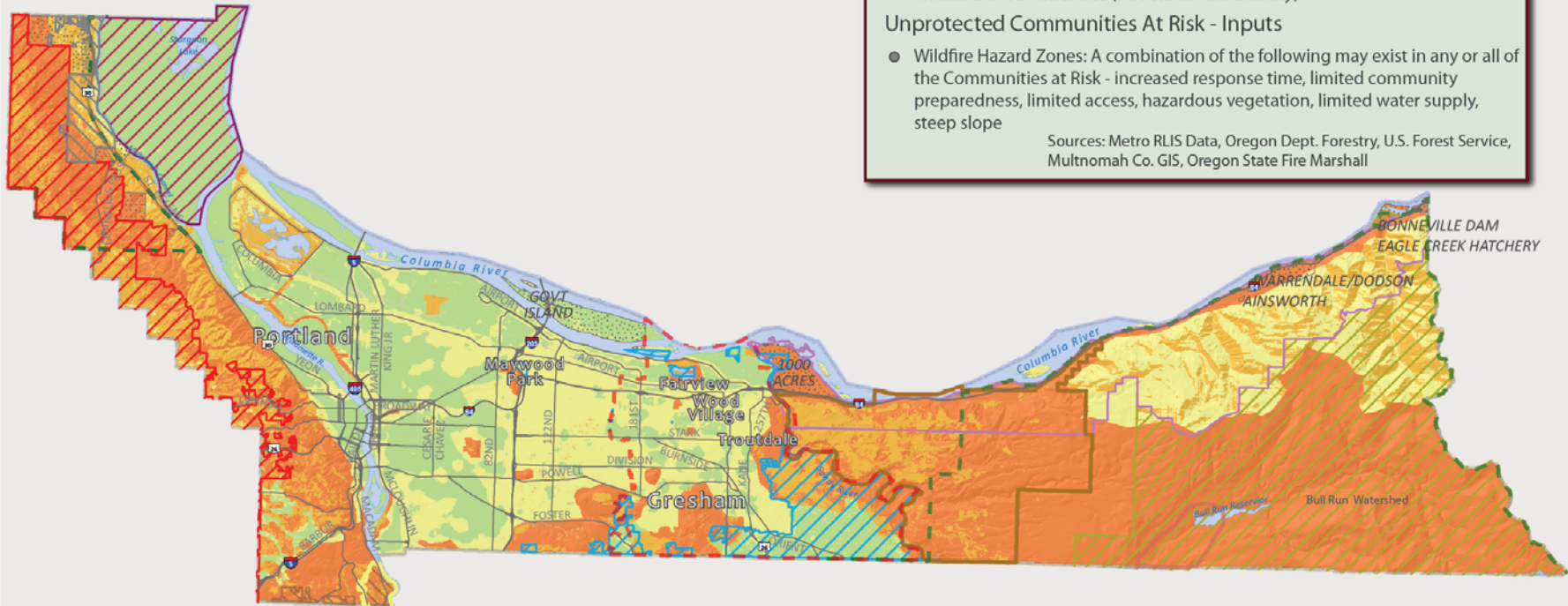
Overall Wildfire Risk - Inputs

- Risk, Values, Protection Capabilities, and Hazard Layers
Wildland Urban Interface (Structural Vulnerability)

Unprotected Communities At Risk - Inputs

- Wildfire Hazard Zones: A combination of the following may exist in any or all of the Communities at Risk - increased response time, limited community preparedness, limited access, hazardous vegetation, limited water supply, steep slope

Sources: Metro RLIS Data, Oregon Dept. Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, Multnomah Co. GIS, Oregon State Fire Marshall



Overall Rating

LOW

MEDIUM

HIGH

EXTREME

Communities at Risk

0 5 10 20
Miles



This map is provided for informational purposes only. Information used to develop this map has been obtained from many sources, and is not guaranteed to be accurate. Multnomah County assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of information appearing on this map.

Table A-7.1 Multnomah County Unprotected Area Communities at Risk

| Community At Risk | CAR Priority | Defensible Space | Access | Water | Public Lands | Private Lands | Recreators/ Transients | Protection Capabilities | Burning | Preparedness | Communications | Steep Slopes | Description |
|--|--------------|------------------|--------|-------|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--|
| Unprotected Areas Communities at Risk | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Warrendale & Dodson | High | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | Warrendale & Dodson are east county communities comprised of about 200 homes that are not covered by a structural fire department. This area is located along Interstate 84, which is the only East/ West Interstate Freeway in Oregon. It has some of the most extreme wildfire hazards due to the heavy fuels on adjacent USFS lands, steep slopes, east winds, and potential ignition sources from I-84 and the railroad. |
| Ainsworth State Park | High | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | Ainsworth is located between Corbett and Warrendale/Dodson. It is a campground for RV's and rustic campers. There is heavy vegetation here, lack of water supply, potential communications difficulties and difficult access. Recreators' campfires and vehicles provide a potential source of wildfire ignitions. |
| Bonneville Dam | High | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | Bonneville Dam is located 40 miles east of Portland, Oregon, near Cascade Locks, Or. Dam employees and visitors provide a potential source of ignition. There are many structures here that would benefit from defensible space. |
| Thousand Acres | High | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | | This area has high fuels comprised of invasive species including Himalayan Blackberry and Scotch Broom. There are many potential ignition sources as it is adjacent to Interstate 84 and the Rail Road, has an off leash dog park that has heavy recreational use, and is a well-known transient camp area. |
| Government Island | High | | X | X | X | | X | X | | | | | Government Island is unique because it lies under the I-205 bridge and is controlled by State Parks. Despite the fact that it can only be accessed by boat, many recreators use this area, and frequently have campfires and light fireworks. A wildfire here could potentially close the I-205/I-5 bridge. This is actually an unprotected area, but the Port would provide coverage here if necessary. |
| Unprotected Forest Park | High | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVF&R) is working with homeowners and elected officials to annex the unprotected areas. This area is characterized by steep slopes, heavy vegetation, windy, narrow roads, and poor water supply. |

Table A-7.2 Multnomah County Unprotected Area Communities At Risk Action Plan

| Action Item | Timeframe | Partners | CAR |
|---|-------------|---|---|
| Unprotected Areas Communities At Risk Action Plan | | | |
| Conduct a Community Meeting to educate community on defensible space, and measures that can be taken to reduce structural ignitability. Solicit feedback on wildfire prevention projects the community would support. | Spring 2012 | ODF, Cascade Locks Fire & Rescue , TVF&R, ODF | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Work with Warrendale & Dodson residents to champion a Rural Fire Protection District with appropriate boundaries to protect people and infrastructure from structural and wildland fires. | Spring 2013 | Warrendale & Dodson Residents, Cascade Locks Fire, RFPD #14, Multnomah County Commissioners, ODF, USFS | Warrendale & Dodson |
| Develop a local wildfire prevention campaign to promote defensible space and reduce structural ignitability within the Home Ignition Zone | Spring 2012 | Cascade Locks Fire & Rescue , TVF&R, ODF | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Obtain structural ignitability intelligence by conducting structural triage assessment data collection (including GPS points) for homes. | Long Term | ODF, Cascade Locks Fire & EMS, TVF&R | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Develop a community-driven pre-disaster plan including evacuation routes, telephone call down trees, and other strategies for strengthening community response. | Short Term | Cascade Locks Fire & Rescue | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Map all roads, bridges and driveways and prioritize homes that have dead-ends, and cannot support emergency service vehicles (grade, length, vegetation, turn-around) for defensible space and fuels reduction projects. | Long Term | BDS, ODOT, Multnomah County, TVF&R, ODF | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Implement road addressing (including length of driveways) and other signage for emergency response. | Short Term | Cascade Locks Fire & EMS, TVF&R, ODF | Warrendale & Dodson, Unprotected Forest Park |
| Seek grant funding to support fuels reduction and creation of defensible space around homes. Consider developing a cost-share program to support these activities. | Ongoing | ODF, Wildfire Technical Committee | All |
| Identify opportunities for community debris disposal collection sites that recycle or compost vegetative material vs. burning. | Ongoing | ODF, Wildfire Technical Committee | All |
| Partner with managers of forested areas to reduce hazardous fuels in natural areas surrounding communities at risk. | Ongoing | ODF, USFS, CRGNSA, State Parks, Bonneville Dam (USACE) | Ainsworth, Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Falls , 1,000 Acres |
| Work with Portland Police and Multnomah County Sheriffs office to patrol the area to reduce transient camps. | Ongoing | Multnomah County Sheriff's Office | Ainsworth, Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Falls, Govt. Island, 1,000 Acres |
| Increase public awareness of wildfire hazards by posting information on existing placards in recreational areas. | Long Term | ODF, USFS, CRGNSA, State Parks, Bonneville Dam (USACE) | Ainsworth, Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Falls, Govt. Island, 1,000 Acres |
| Work with USFS, RFPD #14 (Corbett Fire) and vendors in Multnomah Falls Lodge to obtain structural fire protection. | Short Term | USFS, CRGNSA, RFPD #14, Multnomah Falls Vendors | Multnomah Falls |
| Work with Multnomah Falls Lodge Vendors, USFS and Bonneville Dam to determine potential partnership opportunities for staging emergency response vehicles and other support role the Lodge and Dam could play in the event of a wildfire. | Short Term | Multnomah Falls Lodge Vendors, USFS, CRGNSA, Bonneville Dam (USACE), ODF, RFPD#14, Cascade Locks Fire & EMS | Multnomah Falls, Bonneville Dam, 1,000 Acres |
| Continue to support the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in restoration efforts by accessing additional grant funds made available through the CWPP. | Ongoing | Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, RFPD #14 | Ainsworth, Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Falls, Govt. Island, 1,000 Acres |