

CLIMATEWISE IN MISSOULA COUNTY

STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING OUR LAND, WATER & COMMUNITY

*Developed by local stakeholders in a June 2011 ClimateWise workshop,
convened by the Clark Fork Coalition and its partners.*

RISK TWO - WILDFIRE SEVERITY TIED TO GROWTH IN THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM MORE SEVERE WILDFIRES AND AN INCREASED NUMBER OF HOMES IN THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE?

Climate models predict larger, more frequent, and severe wildfires. The reason? Spring will come earlier—lengthening the fire season. Higher average temperatures, drought, and beetle outbreaks may also contribute to severe fire conditions.

Despite the likely trend of increased severe wildfire, construction of new homes in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) continues. The WUI is defined here as private forestlands that are within 500 meters of public forestlands.

The percentage of homes built outside of towns in Missoula County rose from 16 to 37 percent during the period from 1970 to 2008. The total number of homes on 10 to 40 acre lots more than tripled in the same time period.

Past and current trends suggest people will continue to move to rural parts of the county, build homes on or close to fire-prone landscapes, and place more people and property in the path of wildfire.

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

EDUCATE RESIDENTS ABOUT WILDFIRE.

- **OFFER EDUCATION** that integrates all aspects of wildfire to improve understanding, and encourages informed action by residents. Education would include: exploring the topics of wildfire and the dynamic nature of ecosystems; and visiting demonstration projects that show forest restoration and partnerships

USE LAND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES THAT REDUCE FIRE SEVERITY.

- **FOLLOW AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH** to fire management, allowing some fires to burn.
- **THIN SOME FORESTS** according to fire risk, forest type, and past management.
- **INCREASE FOREST RESILIENCE** to fire by removing competition for water and nutrients.

LIMIT DEVELOPMENT IN THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE.

- **MAP THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE** and provide information on high-risk areas.
- **RAISE TAX RATES** in high-risk areas to discourage development.
- **CHARGE HIGHER INSURANCE RATES** and/or a fire surcharge on insurance plans.
- **IMPROVE BUILDING & SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS** to limit development in the wildland-urban interface.

TAKE PREVENTATIVE ACTION TO BETTER PROTECT EXISTING HOMES AND PROPERTY IN THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE.

- **MAKE SURE HOMES IN THE INTERFACE ARE FIRE RESISTANT AND DEFENSIBLE**, while maintaining wildlife habitat and visual qualities. Offer rebates to help with the costs. Monitor defensible spaces. Integrate the Firewise Communities program with local regulations.

IMPROVE FOREST MANAGEMENT.

- **MAINTAIN HABITAT DIVERSITY** to help forests be more resilient to fires and climate change.
- **CONDUCT WILDFIRE RESEARCH** and support the Missoula Fire Lab of the U.S. Forest Service.
- **INTEGRATE MANAGEMENT** of roaded and roadless areas.
- **STORE CARBON** by conserving large trees, and avoid converting forestlands to grass or to shrublands with lower carbon storage abilities.
- **REHABILITATE BURNED AREAS**, and provide additional habitat for wildlife species of concern or indicators that are displaced by severe wildfire.

LIMIT PEOPLE'S EXPOSURE TO SMOKE HEALTH HAZARDS.

- **IDENTIFY AND PROVIDE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** to indoor recreation centers and other places when wildfire smoke is high.
- **OFFER WORK AT HOME PROGRAMS** during some emergencies, and make sure air quality alerts are in place year-round.
- **CARRY OUT PRESCRIBED FIRES** to reduce fire risk on days when inversions are less common.

REDUCE OUR ECONOMIC RISKS FROM LARGE WILDFIRES.

- **PROMOTE FIRE-RELATED ECOTOURISM**, from tours of active forests to birdwatching in burns or restoration volunteer opportunities.
- **DEVELOP MARKETS AND EMPLOYMENT** for sustainable biomass energy; and for restoration products – like blue stain pine, biochar, and value-added materials from biomass, such as shavings for particleboard.

For more information on the 2011 workshop and strategies, please visit: www.clarkfork.org

