

# IDEAS TO ACTION

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## REDUCING WILDFIRE RISK IN SOUTHWEST CURRY COUNTY, OREGON



Submitted by the Community Mitigation Assistance Team



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and the community invited the U.S. Forest Service Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) to work with the Gold Beach Ranger District and community partners impacted by the Chetco Bar Fire. The fire started on July 12 in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness in the Chetco River corridor in the Illinois River Valley near the 2002 Biscuit Fire, which burned about 500,000 acres. As of the end of September the Chetco Bar fire had burned over 191,000 acres in and around the National Forest, cost about \$60 million and destroyed 30 structures including 11 homes.

The CMAT was asked to 1) reinvigorate a community-wide wildfire risk reduction partnership focused on wildfire risk reduction, 2) help build community engagement, and 3) share best practices for wildfire risk mitigation.

The Gold Beach Ranger District is in Curry County, which hugs the southwestern Oregon coast. Curry County has 1,627 square miles of land. Most of the county's 23,000 residents live along the coast or a short distance inland (Port Orford has 1,200, the county seat of Gold Beach has 2,305, Brookings has 6,400). Most of the county is heavily forested with spruce, cedar and Hemlock dominating the lower, coastal slopes. The upper slopes are typically mixed cedar, hemlock and Douglas fir and access off the major roads is difficult or impossible.

The Team arrived in Gold Beach on September 18, nearly two months after the fire started, and focused on working with local fire departments and rural protection districts, city and county government, local nonprofits, and other stakeholder

organizations in the coastal communities of Gold Beach, Cape Ferrelo, Brookings, Harbor, and inland to Agness. Through a series of meetings, one-on-one discussions with community wildfire risk reduction stakeholders and natural resource professionals, research on local coalitions and conditions, a workshop and a training session, and analysis of that information, CMAT and partners developed an array of recommendations to help communities along the coast work more collaboratively using effective mitigation methods.

The CMAT found that the community is highly independent and accustomed to solving its issues and challenges using local expertise and initiative. Curry County has a good Community



Chetco Bar Fire 2017

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Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) created in 2008, which lays out many mitigation goals and objectives. Many of the CWPP recommendations were not implemented and the efforts that did result were short-lived, largely, the Team concluded, because large destructive fires are not frequent enough along the coast to alert residents to the continuing need to reduce wildfire risk. However, because of heavy fuel loads on public and private property, building in the interface, and difficult access there is significant risk.

The CMAT facilitated a community workshop, *“Ideas to Action: Reducing wildfire risk in southwestern Curry County, OR”* on Sept 29 which was the culmination of Team/ Community / Forest engagement and problem solving. The workshop generated ideas on how local community members can weave a strong mitigation partnership, improve communications, and work collaboratively to prioritize and implement projects. It also allowed CMAT to share wildfire mitigation best practices. Workshop participants were Stacy Savona (Oregon Dept. of Forestry), Liesl Coleman (Curry Soil and Water Conservation District), Sherrie Ward (Curry County Dept. of Public Health), Russell Wilstead (US Forest Service, Gold Beach Ranger District), John Brazil (Harbor Rural Fire Protection District), Eric Hensel (USDA Forest Service, Rogue -Siskiyou National Forest), Kathy Westenskow (Bureau of Land Management, Coos Bay), Gary Milliman (City of Brookings), Jim Watson (Brookings Fire), Tina Lanier (US Forest Service, Gold Beach Ranger District), Beth Barker-Hidalgo (Oregon Coastal Community Action, Curry Homeless Coalition), Kathleen Dickson (Wild Rivers Connect), Court Boice (Curry County Board of County Commissioners), Alex Campbell (Governor's Office - Oregon Solutions), David Brock Smith (State Representative) and Georgia Nowlin (Wild

Rivers Connect), Rob MacWhorter (US Forest Service, Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest) Craig Trulock (US Forest Service, Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest).

This report outlines recommendations gleaned from meetings, individual interviews and discussion, workshops, training, and research and other information that can help the communities along Curry County’s coast work together to increase effective mitigation actions and reduce wildfire risk. The primary recommendation is that communities, fire departments, and other groups can accomplish significantly more if they work collaboratively, share resources and opportunities, and look at cross-boundary projects focused on hazardous fuel reduction, home hardening, creation of defensible space, and strengthening local fire department capacity. This report goes into more detail about those recommendations.

Submitted by the Chetco Bar CMAT  
September 29, 2017





# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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Sustainable wildfire risk reduction doesn't normally happen by engaging with a homeowner one time through an assessment, providing funding for a project, handing out brochures, sending postcards, or creating a website. In fact, each of those things alone is fairly unproductive and usually results in frustration. Engaging homeowners to the point that they will reduce risk takes planning, engagement, time, a strategy, and most importantly, patience and persistence. Consider these guiding principles when developing a wildfire risk reduction strategy and the projects that comprise it; they will make your efforts more effective. These guiding principles apply to wildfire risk reduction efforts across the board in every community.



CMAT members sharing Home Hardening Concepts at Cape Ferrelo

Work together. A group of people who share the same goals can get more done together than separately. They plan together, piggyback on strengths, share resources and staff, and share the work. A collaborative group of folks is also more likely to get supporting funding than a single organization. And remember, many hands make light work.

Think no-boundaries. Wildfires don't stop at the boundary of a property so think about linking fuel reduction and defensible space projects to form a fuel break. Work with other jurisdictions to do work on abutting properties.

Personal face-to-face engagement is critical to create behavior change that leads to risk reduction actions. Start with a discussion, then a home assessment, then follow-up to help folks take the next steps to create defensible space and [harden homes](#) -- steps you can take to make your home less vulnerable to ignition from wildfire. The two most trusted local authorities to engage residents in wildfire mitigation are fire department personnel and neighbors. Discussion about how fire impacts the structure, why mitigation works, and the trust between neighbors leads to risk reduction. Often this discussion has to take place many times before someone takes action.

Use messaging to raise awareness of wildfire risk and share successes but don't expect it to result in action on the ground. That takes face-to-face engagement over time. Similarly brochures, websites, blogs, and other social media are tools to share information but should not replace the critical face-to-face engagement that leads to action. A brochure that

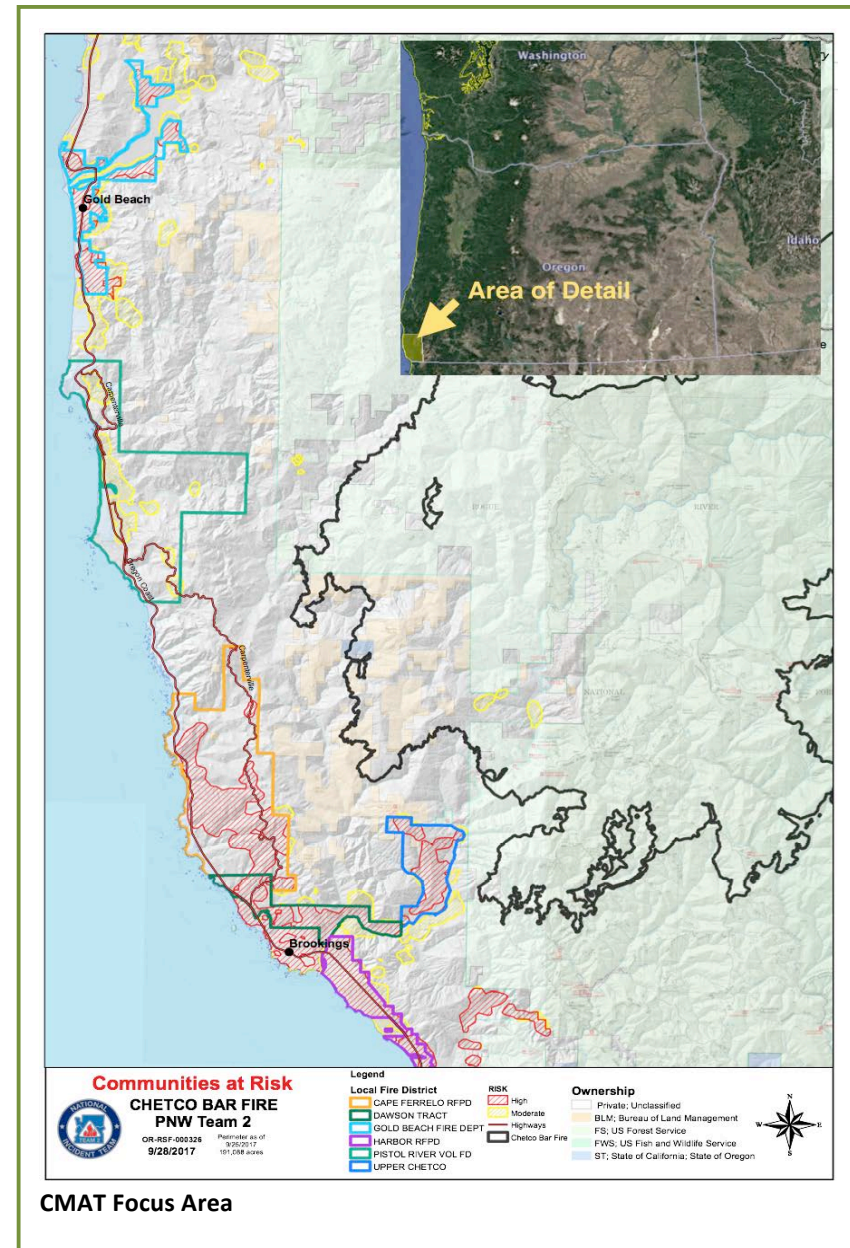
illustrates defensible space can be a tool during a one-on-one discussion, but handing out brochures at an event, leaving door hangers, or placing news release in the local paper asking folks to create defensible space has little value. Websites, Facebook, and blogs are no substitute for one-on-one engagement with residents and they are time consuming to create, update, and maintain.

Stretch project funds by requiring homeowners to cover (either in cash or sweat equity) half the cost of the project. A homeowner who invests in the project is more likely to maintain it over time. This also empowers homeowners to take responsibility for what's theirs.

Help vulnerable populations like low-income, elderly, and disabled residents get risk reduction done.

Focus on home hardening, defensible space, and hazardous fuels treatments.

Invest most of your time and resources on risk reduction actions, not meetings, recognition programs, news releases, or going to events. Make meetings short and strategic and spend time reducing risk on the ground.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## USE THE COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN AS A TOOL

The Curry County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, which was created in 2008, has a fairly comprehensive list of actions. There is no need to reprint the CWPP here but there is value in revisiting its recommendations as a guide to tasks. And it's important that the document is shared widely with residents in Curry County as a means of raising awareness and outlining actions that individuals and organizations can take to reduce wildfire risk. The *Action Plan Matrix* on pages 2-2 and 2-3 of the Curry County CWPP lists valuable, but mainly unaccomplished, tasks that can still help reduce risk. Many components of that plan are still relevant but the ones listed below are not.

**Goal 1.3** Research has shown that disseminating information to homeowners may make them more aware of risk, which is important, but, in general, does not lead to risk reduction actions on the ground which normally results from repeated discussions and guidance from a trusted local authority like a fire department member. In addition, there is no evidence that a small financial incentive such as a discount on insurance leads to risk reduction around the home. In terms of overall risk exposure to the home insurance industry, home loss to wildfire represents a miniscule proportion when compared with other risk exposures like floods, hurricanes, tornados and hail damage. A homeowner discount of \$10-\$50 is not enough to motivate action.

**Goal 6.2** Partnering with schools to raise awareness of wildfire risk is a good idea if the message is targeted at parents. However, there should not be an expectation of action on the ground as a result of messaging; research shows that it has little impact on risk reduction action.

**Goal 2-7** Realize it's not necessary to achieve Firewise recognition to get risk reduction done. The priority is risk reduction around homes and spending time on the recognition, in some cases, takes time away from those actions. Consider this as you plan a mitigation strategy.

Find the CWPP here: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/Documents/Fire/CWPP/CurryCounty.pdf>

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These recommendations are based on the collaborative work of local partners, the Ranger District, and the CMAT over the duration of the assignment.

#1  
**REINVIGORATE A COMMUNITY-WIDE WILDFIRE RISK  
REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP**

*Commit to risk reduction.* Curry County partners must ask one another for a commitment to work together toward risk reduction. It doesn't mean everyone will agree on everything but it does mean everyone will put their best effort to reducing risk in Curry County. This semi-formal handshake sets the tone for the next phases of a successful collaboration.

*Take the long view.* There are many partnerships, collaboratives, cooperatives, and associations in Curry County. Some are successful. The original mitigation team that grew out of the 2008 CWPP effort was successful for a time. Eventually, it morphed into an invasive species eradication group. Chances are the lack of frequent large scale and threatening wildfire on the landscape was one challenge to maintaining momentum. The area doesn't see a lot of wildfire on an annual basis; but when it hits, it's big – the Silver, the Biscuit, and the Chetco Bar.

*All hands approach.* People working together get more done.

- Wildfire risk is everyone's responsibility; bring in more partners and individuals to "ring the bell" and get the work done.
- There are 13 volunteer fire departments in Curry County. They are the trusted local authority on

mitigation action. Empower them to lead mitigation work in their jurisdictions by doing home assessments, engage homeowners to act, identifying high priority projects, and coordinating volunteer work parties.

- Use other volunteers to help do mitigation work. Consider Trash Dogs, Community Emergency Response Teams, prison crews, Youth Corps and others.

**SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS IN CURRY  
COUNTY HAVE THESE CHARACTERISTICS:**

- They have a clear mission statement; agree on the goals; have a unified force to accomplish tasks; set annual targets; and hold people accountable.
- They commit to being *a working partner* and accept responsibility to *DO*, not just talk.
- They meet when they need to, plan agendas that focus on action and immediate decisions, and then take action.
- They recognize that most people have "day jobs" and have realistic expectations of engagement. Like most small communities, the "doers" in Curry County are engaged with many efforts, which means they are spread thin.





- Fire departments and Coos Forest Protective Association (CFPA) should work together on larger fuel reduction projects.
- The U.S. Forest Service, CFPA, South Coast Lumber, fire departments, Curry Fire Chief's Association Training Group, and others should provide community wide training on how to do home assessments and ways to mitigate.
- The U.S Forest Service, Gold Beach RD, should work with fire districts to provide training opportunities.

**#2  
IMPROVE COMMUNICATION**

*Internal communications between partners:* Develop a process to communicate with each other in person, remotely, and electronically at consistent intervals. Mass emails are a time-efficient method for distributing information and inviting partners to meetings. A personal phone call can make a huge difference.

- Set up mini-meetings over coffee to share current issues, projects, or updates.
- Schedule meetings when there are issues to discuss but plan them well so they are valuable for everyone and lead to action.
- Share project information, progress, status, and success with partners to allow them to learn what

you're doing and provide the opportunity for collaboration with you to get the work done.

*Communications with the public:* Remember that face-to-face engagement is the best way to achieve mitigation action. Share the "why" and "how" of risk reduction. Many people don't see the connection between wildfires and specific actions that reduce risk. A site visit to the property, a risk

**IDEAS TO ACTION WORKSHOP  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REINVIGORATE A COMMUNITY-WIDE WILDFIRE RISK  
REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP**

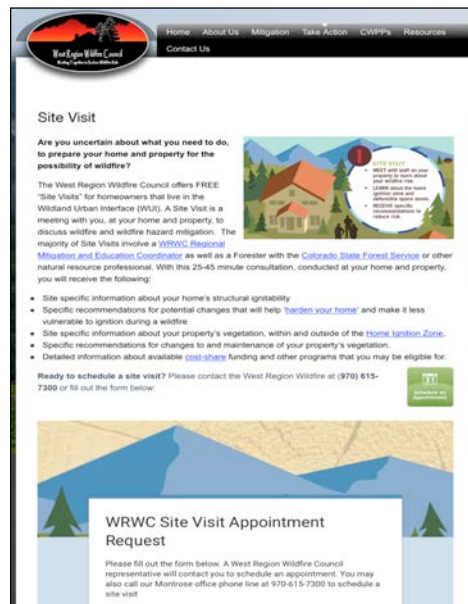
- Develop clear expectations, set achievable goals and timelines, and provide for accountability
- Identify roles and responsibilities
- Identify and engage partners who have interest in the whole picture
- If you say you're going to be involved, BE INVOLVED
- Develop and coordinate cross boundary projects with multiple funding sources
- Find skilled facilitation and coordination
- Re-establish Curry County Wildfire Preparation Team (CWPT)
- Coordinate with existing coalitions
- Identify and resolve barriers to action



assessment, and a discussion about wildfire behavior and ember intrusion will help move residents to take action. Risk reduction is more likely to occur after an experienced mitigation specialist meets with a landowner to explain what mitigation actions are needed, why it is important and specifically how defensible space will impact fire behavior, emergency response, and life safety.

Work with partners, including CFPA, to give residents up to 8 weeks notice of public use restriction deadlines so they can mitigate before fire season closures take effect. (Restrictions began on July 24th in 2017).

Use existing community information sharing sites to let people know about risk and resources. Don't create new websites or facebook pages, point people to good and useful existing sites and post information there. Make sure there is a way for property owners to contact partners who can discuss mitigation with them and help them mitigate.



Example website offering home assessments ([cowildfire.org/site-visit](http://cowildfire.org/site-visit))

## IDEAS TO ACTION WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

### COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARTNERS

- Assume positive intent
- Create a mission statement
- Speak in common terminology
- Develop communication protocols (when, how, and with whom to communicate)
- Share information about ongoing and planned projects
- Listen with an open mind
- Education: expertise, awareness, educate internally and externally

### COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

- “Ring the bell, tell the story!”
- Focus on face-to-face engagement with community members
- Create a phone tree for people without e-mail or internet
- Develop a communication protocol
- Use available communication channels

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**#3**  
**PRIORITIZE AND IMPLEMENT ON-THE-GROUND  
PROJECTS**

Identify and prioritize high-risk reduction projects including number/location of homes that need defensible space and home hardening and number/location of acres on public and private land that need to be treated. This is about setting targets, measuring progress toward targets, and moving forward.

Jump on the bandwagon.

- Cape Ferrelo Fire Department will work on risk reduction projects on the first Saturday of each month. Other County departments could initiate similar programs or could partner with Cape Ferrelo to widen the scope.
- Harbor Fire Department and Curry Soil and Water Conservation District have initiated an invasive species control program specifically aimed at highly flammable species.

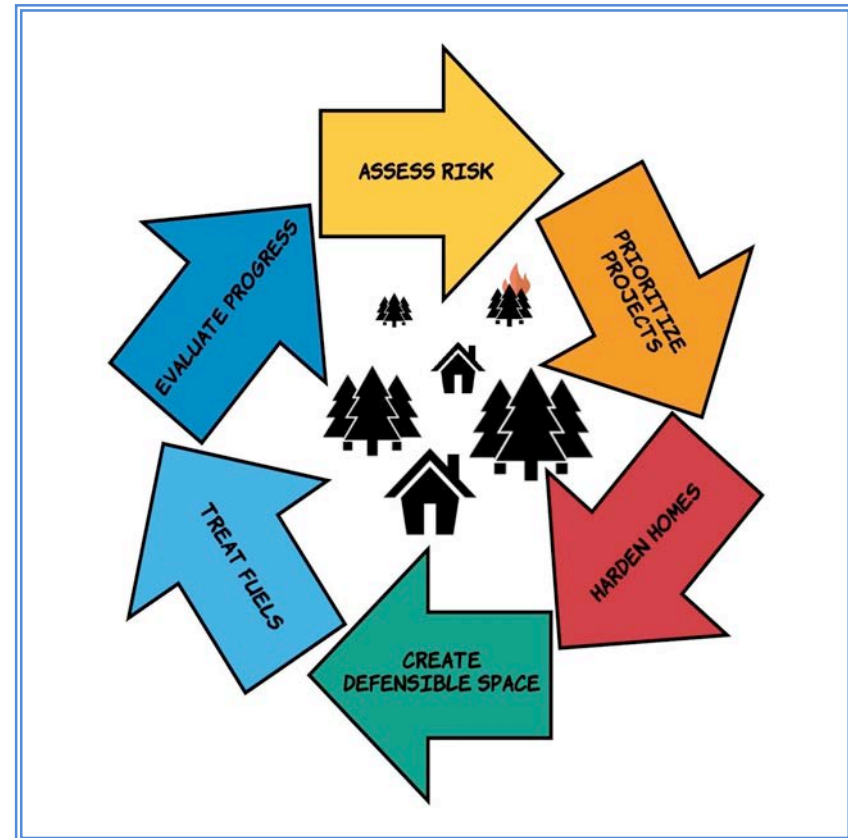
**IDEAS TO ACTION WORKSHOP  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PRIORITIZE AND IMPLEMENT ON THE GROUND  
PROJECTS**

- Focus on action; get the work done
- Create defensible space and home hardening
- Engage representatives from pertinent agencies
- Implement the CWPP; update as necessary
- Prioritize projects that meet multiple goals
- Get community buy-in for hazardous fuel reduction projects
- Identify early adopters and set priority to use them as examples
- Support fuel reduction programs on U.S. Forest Service lands
- Seek secure funding sources
- Federal, state, county, and South Coast lumber should develop a wood waste to energy economy
- Regularly schedule combined workdays on collaborative projects
- Get state and local elected officials involved to foster action and funding
- Help those who need help

Joint funding requests with partners or coalitions are more likely to be successful. These are some sources.

- Ask Curry County if Title III funds are still available. Title III funds can only be used to *create defensible space around homes in fire-sensitive ecosystems to increase the protection of people and property from wildfires, reimburse the county for search and rescue and other emergency services paid for by the county and performed on national forests, and develop or update community wildfire protection plans in coordination with the Forest Service.*
- FEMA funds pre-disaster mitigation grant. The process is time-consuming and a grant writer is recommended but funds are available for high priority projects. <https://www.fema.gov/pre-disaster-mitigation-grant-program>
- FEMA also has Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG). <https://www.fema.gov/welcome-assistance-firefighters-grant-program>
- All states receive federal State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) funds, some of which is designed to help communities reduce wildfire risk. Learn more at: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/AboutODF/Pages/GrantsIncentives.aspx>



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

*Oregon Solutions*, a program of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University, seeks to develop sustainable solutions to community-based problems through the collaborative efforts of businesses, government, and nonprofit organizations.

<http://orsolutions.org>

*The State of Oregon, Regional Solutions*, program works with local stakeholders to identify areas of need, solve problems, and seize opportunities to get projects done. Regional Solutions integrates state agency work and funding to ensure that projects are finished as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. <http://www.oregon.gov/gov/admin/regional-solutions/Pages/default.aspx>

*Wild Rivers Connect* provides a website forum where partners can share information about events, activities and learn together. Their mission, “Nurturing vital community growth through collaboration, education and networking” could be helpful as a mitigation partnership is developed.

<http://www.wildriversconnect.org/meet-wrc/>

*Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative* represents a diverse group of stakeholders that work to protect watersheds, forests and communities. They are currently working on the

Shasta-Agness Landscape Restoration Project.

<https://www.wrcfc.org>

*Oregon Ready Set Go! Interactive Risk Mapping* ([www.OregonRSG.org](http://www.OregonRSG.org)) offers a free parcel level risk-mapping interface under its user licenses within the state of Oregon. Currently, Oregon RSG provides data to residents of 14 local fire protection districts and 1 ODF management unit. The interactive mapping interface also provides a significant number of response capabilities and tools for incident related planning, operations and other tactical purposes. The Keno Fire Protection District is the lead coordinating entity of this program. Contact Chief John Ketchum at 541-883-3062 or [firechief@kenofire.com](mailto:firechief@kenofire.com) for more information and to potentially involve your fire protection district in this resource.

## CURRY COUNTY TOOLBOX

The CMAT Team has created a Google toolbox containing resources, contact list, this report, and other helpful information for you.

To access the Curry County Toolbox go to:

<https://goo.gl/58x5Up>

Additional CMAT resources available at:

<https://goo.gl/rZ39sh>





# THANK YOU

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The Community Mitigation Assistance Team would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance with our efforts:

## **USFS ROGUE-SISKIYOU NF**

Eric Hensel  
Rob MacWhorter  
Craig Trulock  
Tina Lanier  
Matt Paciorek  
Russell Wilstead  
Kim Hunter  
Barbara Cisneros

## **FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICTS**

Bill Scherbarth – Agness Volunteer Fire Department  
Jim Watson – City of Brookings Fire Department  
Aaron Michelle – Cape Ferrelo Rural Fire Protection District  
Hill Duchar – Cape Ferrelo Rural Fire Protection District  
John Brazil - Harbor Rural Fire Protection District  
John Ketchum - Keno Fire Protection District

## **CURRY COUNTY**

Court Boice – Commissioner,  
Sue Gold - Commissioner  
Sherrie Ward – Community Health  
John Ward - Sheriff's Office

## **OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE**

David Brock Smith - Representative for Oregon's District 1

## **OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY**

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Alex Campbell – Governor's Office, Oregon Regional Solutions

## **OTHER ACTIVE AND ENGAGED RESIDENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Dave Lacey – Oregon Coast Visitors Association  
Eric Moeggenberg - Natural Resource Conservation Service  
Gary Grotrian – Agness U.S. Postmaster  
Kathleen Dickson - Wild Rivers Connect  
Georgia Nowlin - Wild Rivers Connect  
Beth Hidalgo - Curry Homeless Coalition, Oregon Coastal Community Action  
Ted Fitzgerald – Concerned resident  
Kendal Martel – Sustainable Northwest, Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative  
Derwin Boggs - Coos Forest Protective Association.



# THE TEAM

The Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service to assist communities impacted by wildfire. CMATs are comprised of public and private wildland-urban interface (WUI) mitigation professionals from across the country. The Team provides technical and strategic mitigation support to build and strengthen sustainable mitigation programs. The team mentors organizations, helps to identify and provide tools, advises on the highest priorities for risk reduction, and shares best management practices for mitigation.



Left to right: Jaime Gomez, Gwen Beavans , Russell Wilstead, Jonathan Bruno, Pam Leschak

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# IDEAS TO ACTION PLAN

<i>Reinvigorate a Community-Wide Wildfire Risk Reduction Partnership</i>		
<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT</b>
Schedule and hold wildfire risk reduction planning meeting.	Before January 1, 2018	All partners participate and one person will need to step up and coordinate a date, time and location.
Gain commitment from initial partners to engage, participate and be an active member in a partnership focused on wildfire mitigation	At planning meeting before Jan 1, 2018	All partners
Designate a temporary chair and secretary of the partnership	At planning meeting before Jan 1, 2018	All partners
Draft partnership priority goals	At planning meeting before Jan 1, 2018	All partners
Share CWPP with everyone	Immediately	All partners
Reach out to engage additional partners	At planning meeting, develop a list of additional partners to engage and a plan for contacting them. Phone calls work better than emails.	Partnership outreach committee, designated at planning meeting
Host cooperative, cross jurisdictional trainings	As soon as possible	USFS, Fire Districts



# IDEAS TO ACTION PLAN

<i>Improve Communications</i>		
<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT</b>
Coordinate with Wild Rivers Connect to develop information sharing methods and any other resources/services that they are able to provide.	As soon as possible	Kathleen Dickson is the Outreach Coordinator for Wild Rivers Connect. Review the contact list for her information.
Integrate "wildfire mitigation" as a topic into OR-CAL Fire Chiefs Association meeting agendas - utilize this venue for sharing information about risk reduction activities	All future OR-CAL Fire Chiefs Association	Chief Jim Watson
Update existing websites/social media to include information about the availability of staff, personnel and/or volunteers to meet with homeowners and landowners, on site, to provide detailed wildfire risk reduction recommendations. Include contact information for whomever is available for these kinds of visits, including phone and email. Make it user friendly. Example: <a href="http://www.COwildfire.org/site-visit">www.COwildfire.org/site-visit</a>	As soon as possible	Coos Forest Protective Association & Fire Districts
Draft a partnership media release (print & radio) to raise awareness of the existence of the partnership while highlighting a success of one of the partners.	After second meeting	The partnership outreach committee, designated at a planning meeting

# IDEAS TO ACTION PLAN

<i>Prioritize and Implement on-the-ground projects</i>		
<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT</b>
Review CWPP and choose one or two projects to consider focusing on	At planning meeting before Jan 1, 2018	All participants
Print a large map depicting one or two high risk WUI communities (e.g. Cape Ferrelo) as well as land ownership boundaries and begin looking at potential landscape scale fuels treatment options.	At planning meeting before Jan 1, 2018	USFS
Support Cape Ferrelo Fire Department's "First Saturday Wildfire Risk Reduction Volunteer Work Party" events by providing resources, spreading the word and volunteering to help those in need.	October 7th, 2017 (and future first saturday's of each month)	Chief Aaron Michelle is coordinating this event. Contact for Chief Michelle is on the Contact List.
Designate several vulnerable population projects where work can occur immediately.	As soon as possible	All participants

