



League of California Cities
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**Wildland Urban Interface Fires
A Collaborative Plan to Decrease Impacts on
Public Health and Safety**

(Adopted February 2004)

The League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties recognize the need for multi-jurisdictional and multi-agency coordination, collaboration and communication to standardize and improve pre-fire mitigations, prevention and response to any fire hazard in the forest, rangeland, watershed, wildland urban interface/intermix and open space in the State of California.

The League and CSAC will aggressively work with all levels of government by: a) acting as a clearinghouse for local government regarding their experiences in dealing with conflicting government regulations that have made wildland mitigation efforts difficult or impossible, and to forward said information to our State legislature so they may begin to understand the problem; b) consider legislation that will expedite the adoption of state-wide wildland urban interface construction development standards; and c) co-sponsor public forums to discuss the adoption of future legislation, such as Oregon's Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act. The ultimate goal will be a systemic solution to California wildland fires and to ensure that the devastation created by past fires will remain a part of California's history, rather than its future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ron Loveridge".

Ron Loveridge, Mayor, Riverside
President, League of California Cities

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul Stein".

Paul Stein, Supervisor, Calaveras County
President, California State Association of
Counties

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Chris McKenzie".

Chris McKenzie, Executive Director
League of California Cities

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Steven C. Szalay".

Steven C. Szalay, Executive Director
California State Association of Counties

Supporting Documentation

I. League and CSAC Objectives

A call to action: Catastrophic wildfires are one of the most significant threats to communities, forests, and wildlands in California today. To address this threat, we propose the formation of a partnership between the League of California Cities (League), California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the State and federal governments to cooperate, collaborate, and communicate in the development of better land use policies and wildland fuel management programs to resolve issues associated with wildland urban interface fires. Adoption of this Policy Statement indicates CSAC's and the League's desire to join a Task Team of City, County and State representatives that will develop strategy and call for action to create better local ordinances to improve land use regulation and fuels management policies for wildland fire protection concerns in and around cities and urbanized rural communities.

II. The Problems We Face

Californians are all too familiar with the serious impacts and devastating effects of fire in the forest, rangeland, watershed and open space in and near urban settings. The recent catastrophic fires that burned throughout Southern California in October and November 2003 provide a sobering look at the impacts fires have on public health and safety – jobs are lost, businesses and schools are impacted, infrastructure and environmental damages occur, and in the wildland intermix/interface (suburbs to the wildland) areas, lives, property and natural resources are threatened and often destroyed. These impacts leave citizens and government agencies faced with growing costs and losses from fire in the intermix and interface (see definitions on last page). Four key factors contribute to this major problem:

- A. Population Growth.** California's population growth continues to migrate into highly flammable (wildland interface or intermix) and high fire hazard zones. Homes are built on fuel-loaded (trees and vegetation) slopes with minimum defensible space against wild fires. Local government must ensure that growth is prudent, responsible and limits risk, to an acceptable level, and that development meets Fire Safe Standards for both residents and the fire service.
- B. Increased Fuels.** Continued wildland fuel loading, higher tree density, and dead and dying trees due to insects and disease make fuel issues massive in scale. According to fire professionals and land managers, about 4 million acres of private land and 39 million acres of federal land are at risk and have the potential to burn catastrophically.
- C. Vegetation Management.** To comply with environmental and regulatory agency requirements, fire professionals and land managers have increasing difficulty in conducting vegetation, watershed and forest management activities and programs. A large aspect of this is the decreased use of mechanical methods and prescribed fires for the removal of wildland fuels. The fire service and local, state and federal agencies must work together on responsible and effective vegetation management plans.

D. Increased Costs Associated with Fire Suppression. Both the increasing frequency of large damaging catastrophic wildland fires and the ever-increasing suppression costs and damages caused by these fires can be significantly reduced by: a) local government policies, zoning, land use controls and building construction methods consistent with the tenets of the International Urban Wildland Interface Code; and b) with an aggressive vegetation fuels management program in these high-risk wildland fire areas.

III. Definitions

Catastrophic Fire – A wildland or wildland urban interface fire with a fast moving front, extending over a large area (300+ acres) and/or highly destructive to lives, property or natural resources.

Defensible Space – That area which lies between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat, and in which firefighters can safely establish themselves to defend a structure.

Fuel – Combustible structures and wildland vegetative materials. Includes dead plants, parts of living plants, duff, and other accumulations of flammable vegetation.

Fuels Management – The practice of planning and executive manipulation or reduction of fuels to obtain conditions which permit protection forces to meet fire suppression objectives.

Highly Flammable Fuels – Zones designated by CDF (or other fire agencies) as having specific characteristics – e.g., fuel loading, slope and topography, fire weather, and other relevant factors – that would allow a fire to become uncontrollable.

Natural Resources – A necessary or beneficial material source – such as timber, minerals, water, and grazing area – occurring in nature that has a value in human commerce.

Pre-Fire Mitigation – Prior to wildland fire ignition a systematic application of risk assessment, fire safety, fire prevention, and fire hazard reduction techniques to reduce wildland fires, damages and cost of suppression.

Prescribed Fire – a fire with a “prescription,” burning within a range of predetermined conditions (such as fuel moisture content, weather conditions, etc.) that will keep it controllable, at low intensity, and able to achieve its stated objectives.

Slope – A piece of ground that is not flat or level, it may rise or fall in percent; where one percent of slope means a rise or fall of one foot of elevation within a distance of 100 feet, thus 45% would equal 45 feet of rise in 100 feet.

Risk – the likelihood of wildfire ignition normally the result or activities of people.

Wildland – An area in which development is essentially non-existent, except for power lines, roads, railroads, and similar transportation facilities. Structures, if any, are widely scattered and are primarily for recreational purposes. Includes large cattle ranches and forests managed for timber production.

Wildland Interface – The geographical meeting point of two diverse systems, wildland and structures. At this interface, structures and vegetation are sufficiently close that a wildland fire could spread to structures or a structure fire could ignite vegetation.

Wildland Intermix – Interspersing of developed land with wildland, where there are no easily discernible boundaries between the two systems. Poses more problems in wildland fire management than *interface*.