

CMAT Report Alpine Area



Alpine, Lincoln County, WY

Prepared by:
CMAT
USDA Forest Service
October 2019



Executive Summary

The town of Alpine, Wyoming is situated in the far northern portion of Lincoln County at the convergence of the Snake River, Greys River and Salt Rivers. The town is included in the Alpine Fire District that encompasses approximately 30 square miles of agricultural, residential and forest lands.

The Alpine Area Wildfire Protection Coalition (AAWPC) formed in July 2019 in response to the need to mitigate wildfire risk on public and private lands in the Alpine area. The Coalition is comprised of contractors, residents, private land owners, and public lands personnel from the Bridger-Teton National Forest, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and Wyoming Game and Fish.

In 2018, the Fire Trail Fire started five miles south of Alpine burning 30 acres. That same year, the Roosevelt Fire burned 61,511 acres 32 miles south of Jackson on Bridger-Teton National Forest land before moving onto private land. The fire was fast-moving, triggering evacuations of subdivisions in the Hoback Ranch area before destroying 55 homes. During the past decade, the population within the Alpine Fire District has approximately doubled, growing primarily into the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Hazardous fuel loads, diverse terrain, and continued development in and around forested areas mean dispersed homes and neighborhoods around the Alpine area are at high wildfire risk. This pattern of growth and the probability of a large wildfire lends urgency to the need for wildfire risk mitigation.

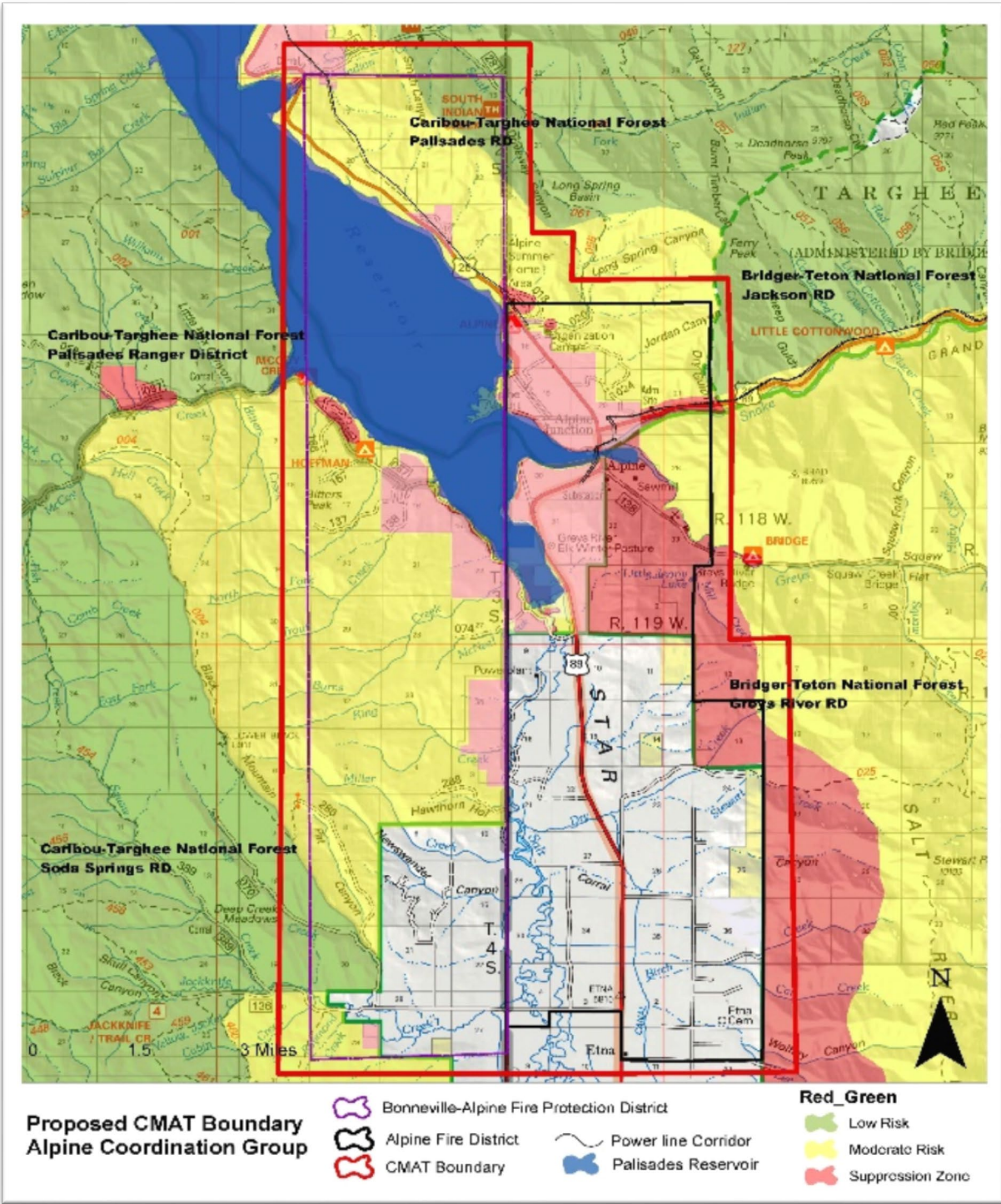
The Caribou-Targhee National Forest and AAWPC requested a Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) to work with local land management agencies and community partners within a specified boundary that includes the Alpine Fire District and lands managed by coalition partners. CMAT was asked to assist the coalition with community education and risk awareness, promote increased participation in mitigation actions, and identify resources available to assist with mitigation activities. CMAT worked with requesting partners to define needs, scope, enabling conditions, and dates for a deployment when partners could fully engage with CMAT. Forming AAWPC is a notable success and all participants should be extremely proud of this achievement, but aware that this is only the first step.

This report summarizes CMAT findings, provides Mitigation Guiding Principles and recommendations for the development of AAWPC.

CMAT has separated the activities into five categories with AAWPC at the foundation.

1. Building the Coalition
2. Outreach and Awareness
3. Capacity
4. Mitigation Practices
5. Policies and Regulations

CMAT has created a Community Toolbox (<http://bit.ly/2WpRNbg>) that contains research and reference documents relating to recommendations for the community.



CMAT work boundary outlined in red encompasses Alpine Fire District boundary and agency lands.

Mitigation Guiding Principles

Consider these guiding principles when developing a wildfire mitigation strategy and the projects that comprise it; they will make your efforts more effective. These guiding principles apply to mitigation efforts across the board in every community.

Be strategic – Focus on high-risk areas first. Be strategic by doing larger landscape fuel treatments and helping clusters of homes reduce risk. Scattered smaller treatments are not as effective.

No boundaries – Wildfires do not stop at jurisdictional boundaries. Link fuel reduction and defensible space projects to benefit cross-boundary areas. Engage with other neighborhoods and other jurisdictions to accomplish work on adjoining properties.

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, staff, and the work. A partnership is more likely to get supporting funding. Collaboratively planning, implementing, sharing successes and lessons learned is an essential first step in building a common vision and gaining broad community support.

Face-to-face engagement – Sharing with residents is best done face-to-face through a home assessment and conversations about the realities of living in a wildfire-prone environment. Often this discussion has to take place many times before someone takes action.

Employ messaging wisely – Messaging will help raise awareness of wildfire risk and share successes, but messaging alone does not result in mitigation on the ground. That takes face-to-face engagement that leads to action. A brochure that illustrates defensible space can be a tool during one-on-one discussion. Handing out brochures at an event, leaving door hangers, or placing a news release in the local paper asking folks to create defensible space has little value or lasting effects on behavior change.

Stretch project funds – Require homeowners to cover (either in cash or sweat equity) half the cost of a mitigation project. This investment empowers the homeowner to take responsibility for what's theirs and makes them more likely to maintain their project over time. Always engage local and regional partners that have something to lose or gain; these individuals and businesses may have financial resources to contribute.

Promote home hardening and defensible space – Having homeowners prepare their yard and structure for wildfire is the most important thing they can do to avoid loss and is always where work should begin.

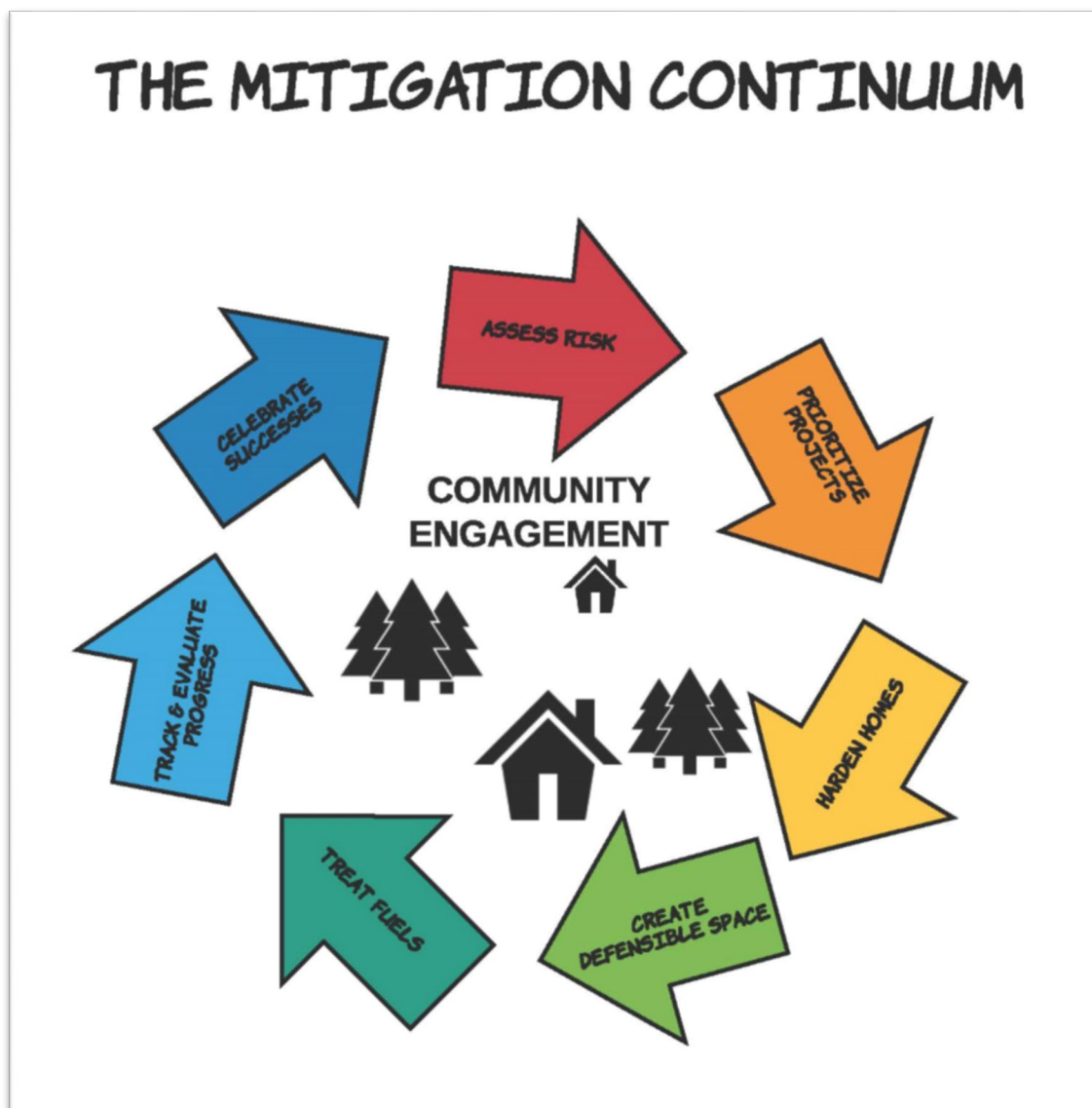
Invest most of your time and resources on risk reduction actions – Meetings, recognition programs, news releases, or going to events do not accomplish mitigation. Respect everyone's time. Do not hold additional meeting if wildfire mitigation discussions can be consolidated into existing forums. Remember, many hands make light work. Make meetings short and strategic. Spend time reducing risk on the ground. Ensure tasks and initiatives are clear at the end of each meeting and are moving the partnership forward.

Help vulnerable populations – Provide mitigation assistance for low-income, elderly, and disabled residents in high and medium risk areas who may be unable to accomplish this work on their own.

Celebrate success! – Sustained participation in any partnership will require frequent communication and recognition for volunteer contributions. Recognition does not have to be formal and can be as simple as a handwritten thank you. Recognition in the presence of peers and partners goes a long way toward retaining volunteers. Share accomplishments through media, presentations, yard signage, or site visits to build momentum for mitigation work. Stories, especially those from the perspective of the property owner, often have the biggest impact.

Mitigation is a continuum – The “mitigation continuum” is a way to visualize and describe the ongoing and adaptive process of fire adaptation activities.

1. The mitigation continuum never ends and is an ongoing process. It is not mutually exclusive.
2. It is not a checklist, rather a continuous process.
3. The continuum requires that all activities be undertaken to be successful.
4. Every community is unique and at a different place within the continuum.



Develop the Alpine Area Wildfire Protection Coalition (AAWPC)

Findings:

1. As a newly formed coalition, AAWPC has coalesced around wildfire related activities. During the CMAT assignment, several members of AAWPC met to develop a draft purpose and structure, committed to an agenda for the next coalition meeting, identified partners that need to be at the table, and prioritized activity areas.
2. The partners are engaged and willing to support each other's efforts through the sharing of training, technical skills, staff and additional resources.
3. The partnership is predominantly comprised of land management agency, fire department, emergency management, and county staff. However, recognizing the need for resident participation, AAWPC members reached out to some community "spark plugs" that did engage in the CMAT process.
4. Partners have acknowledged that barriers exist regarding resident outreach and awareness, capacity, and response.

***Coming together is
the beginning.
Keeping together is
progress. Working
together is success.***

Henry Ford

Recommendations:

Developing a coalition is no easy task and will require a commitment from all partners, but coalitions are critical to a sustainable mitigation program.

1. Develop your mission and vision.
 - a. What does AAWPC want the community's future to be? A common mission and vision will help provide a target for future goals and initiatives of AAWPC.
2. Develop and share AAWPC member's list.
 - a. Identify initial roles of partners.
 - b. Create a partner contact list and identify what each entity or individual can help with as well as their area of expertise and skills.
 - c. Ask who needs to be included and invite them to participate. Consider inviting:
 - i. Interested residents
 - ii. Neighborhood leaders
 - iii. People who are going to do the work (i.e. contractors)
 - iv. Special interest groups invested in aspects of mitigation
 - v. Fire departments
 - vi. Emergency managers
 - vii. Local, state, federal land managers
 - viii. Environmental & recreation groups

In the Alpine area, work together to provide awareness, resources, and mitigation to have safe, effective wildfire response.

*- Draft AAWPC Vision Statement,
2019*

3. Identify and prioritize wildfire risk areas and mitigation projects. Coalition partners identified initial priority areas and past mitigation projects (see map on page 8).



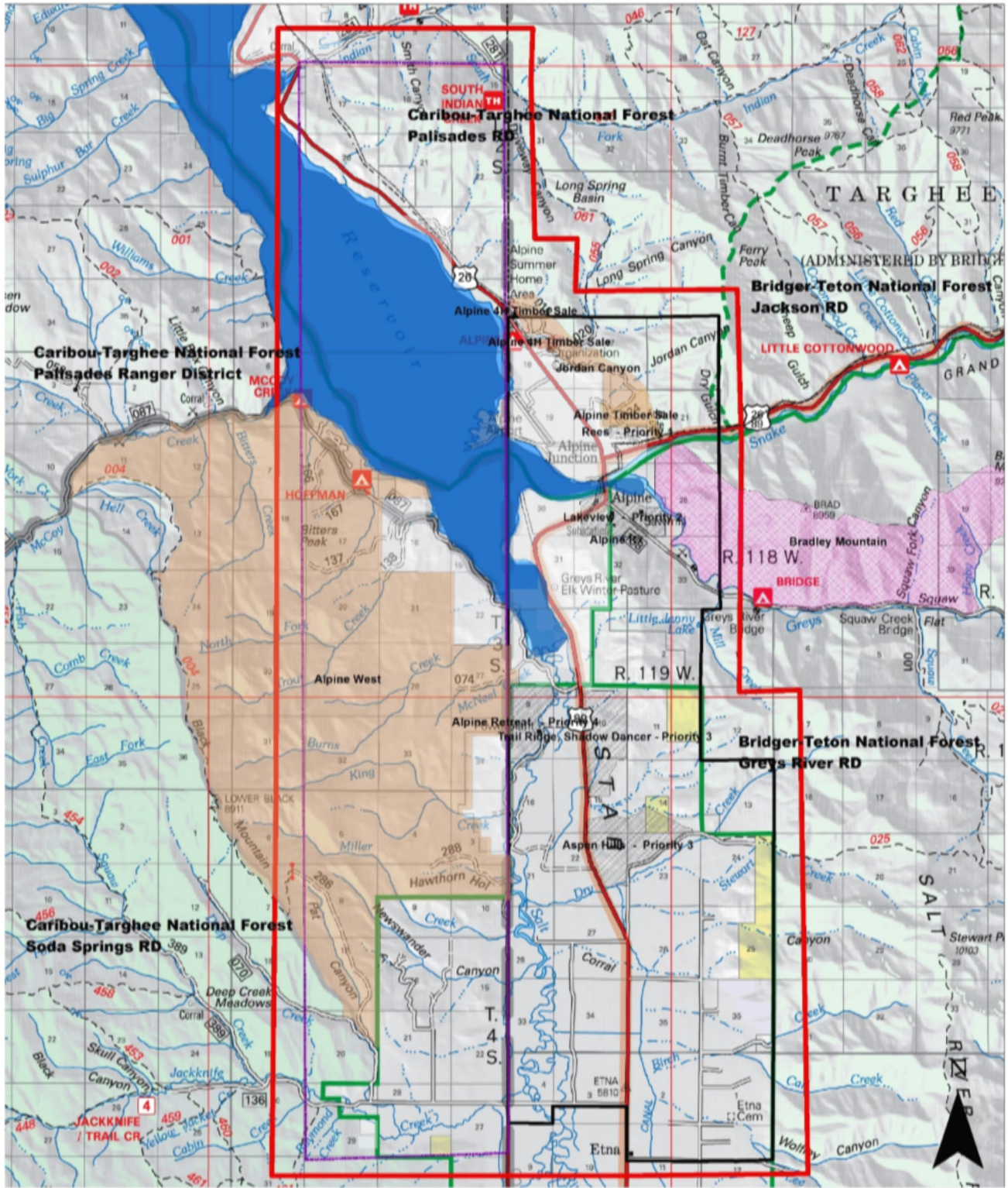
AAWPC partners.

- a. Develop an Alpine area focused mitigation plan (this may include a separate plan such as an Alpine CWPP or an addendum to the Lincoln County CWPP).
 - i. Establish a WUI boundary, put it on a map, and ensure it includes all the prioritized projects from coalition partners.
 - ii. Share the plans for current and future projects to ensure multiple benefits of risk reduction are being achieved and community engagement can be leveraged.
 - b. Plan mitigation actions together, looking for good cross-boundary projects and opportunities to share personnel, equipment, and possible funding.
4. Identify the goals and objectives of AAWPC. Remember that goals are broad, general and often abstract. A goal is an overarching principle that guides decision-making. Objectives are narrow, precise, and concrete. Objectives are specific, measurable steps that can be taken to meet the goal within a set timeframe.
 - a. Identify objectives and who will get them done. Set deadlines and hold people accountable.
 5. Identify the financial resources needed to achieve the goals and objectives.
 - a. Assess opportunities to partner with area nonprofit organizations to act as fiscal sponsor (e.g. Friends of Bridger-Teton or High Country Resource Conservation and Development Council).
 6. Develop an agreed-upon structure for the Coalition.
 - a. Do not recreate the wheel. Consider using an existing structure, such as the Teton Area Wildfire Protection Coalition's charter to develop AAWPC. Utilize the suggested structure developed by coalition members and build upon it as needed.
 7. Communicate regularly.
 - a. Set a regular date and time for AAWPC meetings.
 - i. Host meetings at regular times and at a location that will allow the greatest participation possible. AAWPC should discuss plans and progress as well as provide a learning opportunity for future training and education opportunities (i.e. cost-share program, fire ecology, changes in agency authorities).

- b. Review progress often and address challenges as a team. Success and failures must be addressed in a timely fashion. Ask for help when needed and share resources to overcome barriers.
 - c. Maintain the partnership. Set aside time at each meeting to review participation, goals and objectives, and make changes as needed.
 - d. Engage local Public Information Officers to share information and communicate with residents (e.g. Lincoln County, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management).
 - e. Use existing Joint Fire Management Officer phone calls during fire season to engage a wider AAWPC audience.
 - f. Invite AAWPC partners to Teton Area Wildfire Protection Coalition meetings.
8. Share the work. Participating in a collaborative effort is an impact on most participants and tasks such as setting meeting agenda, sending out notes, etc. should not be placed upon just one person.
 9. Host cross-jurisdictional training opportunities in prescribed fire and mitigation work. These opportunities create familiarity, cohesion, and respect for everyone's abilities.
 10. Develop talking points and FAQs. Agree upon common language and speak with a collective voice.



AAWPC partners gather to discuss strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.



- CMAT Boundary
- Alpine Timber Sale
- County Priorities
- Bonneville-Alpine Fire Protection District
- Bradley Mountain
- Alpine 4H Timber Sale
- Power line Corridor
- Alpine Fire District
- Alpine Rx
- CTNF Priority Projects
- Palisades Reservoir

Project Priorities

Alpine Community Wildfire Protection Coalition

0 1.5 3 Miles

Initial priorities and past projects outlined by AAWPC partners. Use these priorities to focus AAWPC efforts.

Outreach and Awareness

Findings:

1. Homeowners and residents do not fully understand mitigation actions they can take to keep their homes and community safe. They are willing to do the work and share mitigation messaging with their neighbors, but lack the information and resources to do so.
2. Varied community demographics challenge outreach and engagement efforts.
3. The community's wildfire risk and the effects of fire across a landscape are not fully understood by residents.
4. Large wildfires are not frequent in the area and awareness of wildfire potential is low.



Raising wildfire awareness must occur on the ground, with residents. Bring coalition members along to help.

Recommendations:

1. Seek participation by focusing message delivery on high-risk areas first.
2. Display risk in an understandable format for residents by finalizing the Alpine area Project Priorities map. Share the map widely.
3. Use a sand table exercise or simulation to highlight wildfire scenarios.
 - a. Host simulations to community leadership and residents.
4. Develop a “train the trainer” program to educate spokespeople to help spread the message.
 - a. Review materials from the 2019 Neighborhood Ambassador training and institute a program.
 - b. Host Home Ignition Zone trainings.

5. Collect and share informative wildfire information and resources related to fuels reduction and wildfire resiliency such as videos from trusted sources like USDA Forest Service, researcher Jack Cohen, and Institute of Business and Home Safety (IBHS).
 - a. Provide presentations on fire ecology that discuss fuel types and expected fire behavior.
 - b. Host field trips to recent wildfires and prescribed burns to share the impacts, effects, and benefits of fire.
6. Seek opportunities for one-on-one interaction with the landowners and property managers who have authority to reduce risk.
 - a. Use trusted authorities to influence residents to mitigate—firefighters, friends, neighbors, relatives, and mitigation specialists who have a relationship with residents.
 - b. Get on the ground, meet on-site, and walk around the home providing specific mitigation recommendations.
 - c. Provide free comprehensive site evaluations outlining specific mitigation tasks.
 - d. When concluding the one-on-one interaction, if you feel it is appropriate, ask for a commitment to take action.
 - e. During your one-on-one engagement be prepared with materials the homeowner might need, such as:
 - i. Mitigation contractor list
 - ii. Firewise plant list
 - iii. Home hardening activities
 - iv. Mitigation maintenance activities
7. Additional ways to engage residents include:
 - a. Develop demonstration sites and host field trips to past mitigation projects where homeowner engagement is high, such as Star Valley Ranch.
 - b. Host education events every spring, rotating between high-risk neighborhoods. Provide interactive and engaging activities such as arriving in a fire engine and displaying the challenges of tight turn-arounds or overhanging vegetation.
 - c. Develop and share mitigation and AAWPC information in local media sources.
 - i. Local radio station Public Service Announcements
 - ii. Alpine Newsletter
 - d. Use “WUI Checkpoints” to engage residents in single point of access neighborhoods. WUI Checkpoints are similar to a “fill the boot” campaign where fire personnel and residents stage vehicles and fire apparatus along the roadside. As residents pass, they are provided mitigation information with contact information and available resources. Names of interested individuals are collected for follow-up.
8. Take advantage of smoke in the air. When conducting pile and broadcast burning operations, engage residents by having an available spokesperson on-site to leverage mitigation discussions about the benefits and risks associated to fire.
9. Use a single social media platform, such as the Lincoln County or Alpine Fire District websites, to share available mitigation resources.
 - a. Request that AAPWC partners provide a link on agency pages and social media, if possible.

- b. Create and share a contact list detailing who offers particular kinds of expertise (fuels specialist, possible financial assistance, insect and disease issues, etc.).
 - c. Share programs and information available to residents, such as:
 - i. Cost-share
 - ii. Biomass removal and disposal mechanisms
 - iii. Sign-up information for Code Red
 - iv. Reflective address signage (available from Lincoln County)
 - v. Expertise, resources, and available equipment
10. Inform people and educate residents, developers, and building departments about ignition-resistant building and landscaping materials to choose for new home construction and rebuilds.
11. To engage seasonal residents and absentee landowners, schedule outreach and mitigation events when they are in the area.
12. Encourage neighbors to contact absentee landowners about mitigation efforts and opportunities by accessing contact information on the [Lincoln County Assessor's website](#).



AAWPC members participate in a tactics discussion. Develop plans together and identify who can help.

Capacity

Findings:

1. Concerns were raised from homeowners about funding and adequate skills to do mitigation work on their property or within their neighborhood.
2. Bridger-Teton National Forest has no planned mitigation projects in the Alpine area over the next five years. Caribou-Targhee National Forest has a planned project (Jordan Canyon). To move through the planning phase they will need assistance to get through the environmental analysis process.
3. Key fire and fuels positions on the Greys River Ranger District are vacant, limiting their participation.
4. Palisades Ranger District does not have a fire prevention person to lead education efforts limiting this effort cross-boundaries.
5. Alpine Fire Chief is the only paid fire district employee and is stretched to accomplish all protection and mitigation tasks associated with Alpine area.
6. County Fuels Mitigation Coordinator is funded solely through grants and located two hours from the Alpine area.
7. Diversified funding is limited.



One-on-one interactions with residents lead to mitigation. Before leaving ask for a commitment to act.

Recommendations:

1. Increase resident capacity to complete the work by providing educational resources, tools, and programs to support mitigation efforts. Programs such as the existing Lincoln County cost-share program, free slash disposal sites, and rental facilities can enable residents to complete work with their limited capacity or capacities.
2. Utilize and develop local resources, such as:
 - a. Lincoln County chipper and other available equipment to complete mitigation actions
 - b. Agency crews to do mitigation work through an agreement
 - c. Slash pick-up or disposal program
 - d. Mitigation tool trailer or discounted rental program
3. Utilize residents to sponsor neighborhood work days. Volunteers can help with mitigation assistance by hauling slash and helping residents that are unable to complete mitigation work.

4. Bundle projects where possible. Increasing total acres of a project often minimizes the cost per acre.
5. To increase USDA Forest Service capacity,
 - a. Support the implementation of the Jordan Canyon project and utilize Wyoming State Forestry Division to assist with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through Good Neighbor Authority.
 - b. Line officers must show the need for education and prevention technicians or other fire and fuels staff.
 - c. Bridger-Teton National Forest and Caribou-Targhee National Forest complete joint NEPA.
6. To increase Alpine Fire capacity to complete mitigation actions and education,
 - a. Show the need for additional staff and equipment to the Fire Board, Fire Warden, and County Commissioners.
 - b. Develop a detailed plan that is clear and specific to address unmet needs.
 - c. Identify, recruit, and train volunteers to assist with:
 - i. Slash hauling
 - ii. Home site visits and Rapid Risk Assessments
 - iii. Risk mapping
 - iv. Fundraising
 - v. Grant writing
 - d. Contact Friends of Bridger-Teton or High Country Resource Conservation and Development Council to see if they can assist. Partner to seek donations ear-marked for Alpine Fire.
 - e. Support the development of a Neighborhood Ambassador Program.
 - f. Evaluate current Alpine Fire suppression agreements and request sufficient remuneration for services provided.
7. To increase overall Alpine area mitigation capacity,
 - a. Formalize a full-time Alpine area-wide fuels mitigation position.
 - i. Request Title III funding allocation to develop a sustainable mitigation position within the Alpine area.
 - ii. Provide vehicle, cell phone, computer, and other essential resources for this full-time position, if possible.
 - b. Assess Good Neighbor Authority as an opportunity for the USDA Forest Service to complete broadcast burns and mechanical treatments on private lands.
 - c. Engage Caribou-Targhee National Forest chipper and staff to complete cross-boundary mitigation.
8. Hire a Student Conservation Association intern to support outreach and awareness.
9. Seek funding opportunities from traditional and non-traditional sources.
 - a. Federal and state grant programs, such as:
 - i. Rural Fire Assistance Program
 - ii. FEMA – Pre-disaster Mitigation and Hazard Mitigation Grant programs

iii. Natural Resources Conservation Service/USDA Forest Service – Joint Chiefs
Landscape Restoration Partnership

- b. Local businesses
- c. Insurance sector
- d. Private foundations
- e. Utilities
- f. Citizens



Alpine Fire Chief, Mike Vogt, works with residents in the Rees Neighborhood. Fire personnel are one of the most trusted authorities to move residents to take action.

Mitigation Practices

Findings:

1. Identified high-risk neighborhoods within the Alpine area are typified by dense vegetation overhanging roadways and expansive continuous fine fuels. Partners voiced concerns regarding the lack of safe ingress and egress.
2. A significant number of homes within the Alpine area are highly vulnerable to wildfire, as structure hardening activities are not taking place on existing homes and new construction.
3. Defensible space treatment costs are high. Cost-share program reimbursements may not be enough to cover the true cost of mitigation activities in the Alpine area.
4. Current defensible space activities may not be changing fire behavior.
5. The current process to provide cost-share funding is limited to a single, one-time treatment. The reimbursements are based on the entire parcel boundary vs. the treatment area. By using this reporting approach a property owner may only complete 0.5 acres on a 2-acre parcel, for example, and be ineligible for future funding due to the designation that the entire parcel is mitigated.
6. CMAT identified a need for additional slash disposal opportunities in the Alpine area. Increasing slash disposal opportunities in the area will increase mitigation activities on the ground.



Developing priorities is a first step to sustainable mitigation.

Recommendations:

1. Reduce fuel loading along right of ways. Develop and implement an annual maintenance plan for right of ways and engage residents in maintenance (e.g. mowing).
2. Increase the skills of AAWPC by attending National Fire Protection Association's Assessing Structural Ignition Potential training and working closely with partner agencies.
3. Incorporate comprehensive home hardening and structural ignitability practices into defensible space and private property treatments for current and future developments.
 - a. Address the highest priority risk actions first.
 - i. Remove combustible vegetation and materials closest to the home, then work toward the forest.

- ii. Modify vegetation continuity (both horizontally and vertically) to provide adequate spacing.
4. Require completion of minimum structural ignitability practices to obtain reimbursement under existing cost-share program. These requirements include:
 - a. Moving firewood at least 30 feet from home.
 - b. Enclosing vents, chimneys, and stove pipe openings with 1/8" metal mesh screening.
 - c. Cleaning roofs, decks, and other areas where flammable materials have accumulated.
 - d. Removing flammable materials (needles, leaves, mulch) within 5 feet of the home.
5. Recommend other more costly home hardening techniques such as installing Class A roofing, ignition-resistant siding, artificial decking, double pane windows. The Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety has comprehensive information available:
<https://ibhs.org/guidance/wildfire/>.
6. To qualify for first entry mitigation activities, property owners must agree to a minimum standard that will change fire behavior. Do not allow treatment to occur at a minimal level across the entire property, rather focus work using the defensible space zone concept.
7. Work together to develop standard scopes of work that will lead to more effective fuels treatment that integrates local forest ecology, native vegetation considerations, and proper spacing and separation of vegetation.
8. Develop a maintenance schedule to monitor previously treated areas and provide recommendations to homeowners.
9. Collect actual treatment area acreages using GPS vs. the use of parcel boundaries to identify completed mitigation.
 - a. When needed, treat parcels in phases and allow for multiple entries until the entire parcel is completed. Allow cost-share funding to be used in multiple project phases.
 - b. Current cost-share agreements with homeowners are two-year agreements.
 - i. Ensure that residents understand that they can complete work in phases allowing for a larger investment over time.
10. Develop additional slash disposal opportunities. The Alpine slash site located on Bureau of Reclamation land is permitted for the next five years; however, this site is not available during high water.
 - a. Develop additional slash disposal sites such as at the new Alpine Fire Station, USDA Forest Service lands, or at the Greys River snowmobile parking area. Consider fencing slash disposal sites to have better control over material dumped on site, and staff with volunteers.
 - b. Use the Lincoln County-owned chipper and develop a chipper program.
 - c. Seek other disposal opportunities, such as funding roll-off containers or vouchers for free dumping at the landfill.
11. Develop safe slash pile burning practices and consider instituting a burn permit program.

Policy and Regulations

Findings:

1. Significant, unregulated growth in high risk areas was identified as a concern.
2. Numerous neighborhoods have been developed over time with little to no consideration for wildfire risk.
3. Several Home Owner Associations do have codes and covenants in place.
4. Residents burn slash and debris frequently and no permit is needed to do so.

Recommendations:

1. Raise awareness of how ignition resistant construction and neighborhood development could help with and provide guidance for growth and development in the Alpine area.
 - a. When capacity allows, develop realistic and enforceable codes that can be presented at the right time.
2. Continually educate and inform Lincoln County Commissioners, Alpine Town Council, residents, and developers of the value of select National Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Codes, land development, and zoning codes.
3. Develop an open burning permit process.



Open pile burning is a cost-effective way to remove forest slash. Requiring burn permits can reduce escapes.

The Team

The Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) is sponsored by the USDA Forest Service to assist communities. CMATs are comprised of public and private 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.

Jonathan Bruno

CMAT Team Leader
Chief Operations Officer
Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc
Cell: 719-433-6775
jonathan@cusp.ws

Liz Davy

District Ranger
USDA Forest Service

Jeremy Taylor

International Association of Fire Chiefs

Pam Wilson

Public Information Officer
Wildfire Mitigation Consultant

Erin O'Connor

WUI Specialist II
Texas A&M Forest Service

Don Ferguson

Public Information Officer
USDI Bureau of Land Management





Community Toolbox
<http://bit.ly/2WpRNbg>

The Community Toolbox contains this report and numerous resources that will help increase mitigation in the Alpine area.



USDA National Forest Service CMAT

<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire/cmat>