



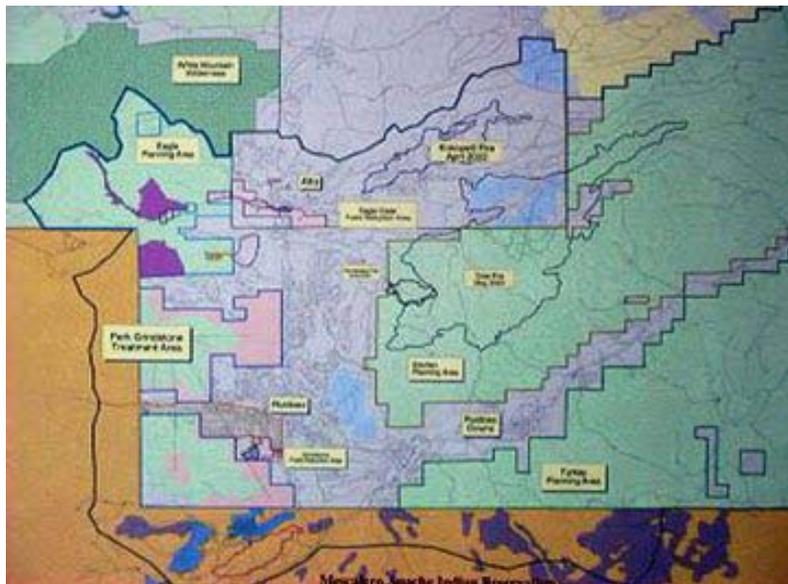
Mitigating Fire Hazards at the Wildland-Urban Interface

The Village of Ruidoso, New Mexico has developed a forest health and fire management plan to manage its extensive wildland-urban interface. This community based, multi-stakeholder process has evolved since the mid-90s, and has been recognized with both Firewise Communities USA and National US Forest Service Rural Communities Assistance Spirit awards in 2003.

The Village of Ruidoso is located in Lincoln County in south central New Mexico. Located at 7,000 feet elevation in the Sacramento Mountains, Ruidoso is a typical mountain community in the west. Dense stands of Ponderosa pine and other mixed conifers are common both within and around this growing, tourism based community, which is surrounded by state and federal lands, including Lincoln National Forest and the Mescalero Apache Reservation.

The year-round, permanent population of Ruidoso is about 8,500 with possibly just as many absentee homeowners and landholders. During the summers, the local population swells to 20,000 or more (including partial year residents and tourists) within a surrounding wildland-urban interface (WUI) area encompassing 14,000 acres.¹

Ruidoso is the largest population center in Lincoln County, the second fastest growing county in New Mexico, having experienced approximately 60% population increase between 1980 and 2000. One result of this intense growth was an increased focus on the region's forest health and wildfire issues.



Ruidoso's Wildland-Urban Interface.
Credit: <http://ag.arizona.edu/oals/ALN/aln55/deiaco1.html>

By 1996, a Ruidoso citizens' group (the Lincoln County Forest Health Coalition) was collaborating with the New Mexico Division of Forestry to hold workshops and meetings. The citizen's group regularly lobbied the Ruidoso village council to develop a forest health and fire management plan. In 1998, the village began a forest debris pick up service for residents; this helped encourage people to begin fire management activities on their properties. In 2000, the village added a second "grapple" truck (used to remove debris) and a forester to the village staff. Despite these preliminary

¹ Detailed map available at: http://ruidoso-nm.gov/Forestry_Documents/Forestry_Department/WUI%20MAP.pdf



activities, in 2000, New Mexico Forestry assessed Ruidoso as the state community most at risk to catastrophic wildfire; the US Forest Service ranked Ruidoso the second most at risk community in the nation.

In November 2000, the Ruidoso Wildland Urban Interface Group was created with the goal of establishing a geographic area designated as the Ruidoso WUI and developing an overarching wildfire prevention plan for it. This group meets monthly and is hosted and coordinated by Ruidoso Forestry. Land managing members include: the USDA Forest Service; Mescalero Apache Tribe; Bureau of Land Management (BLM); Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); New Mexico State Land Office; Village of Ruidoso; Lincoln County; Ruidoso Downs; and New Mexico State Forestry Division. Thus, official development of Ruidoso's Community Forest Management Plan (CFMP) followed several years of grassroots efforts to increase community awareness and initiate action on these issues.

Take Time To Protect Your Home!

Reduce the Threat of Wildland Fires

1. Stack firewood away from the house.
2. Thin and prune trees and shrubs.
3. Maintain a circle of safety—at least 30 feet or greater on slopes.
4. Keep grass and weeds mowed.
5. Keep the immediate area clear of debris.
6. Enclose openings such as porches and foundations.
7. Remove tree limbs that hang over structures.
8. Replace or treat wood shake roofs with fire retardant materials.
9. Keep roofs and gutters clear of debris.
10. Keep your fire extinguisher charged and available, and a hose near outdoor faucets.
11. Dispose of ashes properly.
12. Provide adequate access for emergency vehicles.
13. Install spark arrestors on chimneys.
14. Provide an adequate outdoor water supply.
15. Dispose of trash legally—do not burn it.

Ruidoso Fire Department Informational Pamphlet on Mitigating Wildfires.
Credit: http://ruidoso-nm.gov/Forestry_Documents/Information_Pamphlets.html



In 2002, the village council enacted a suite of ordinances mandating fuels reduction on all lands within Ruidoso and a fire hazard rating standard for new construction with regard to structural ignitability and site development. The objectives of the ordinances are ground fire management, forest health, and natural landscape opportunities. A working blueprint for the plan incorporated the concepts and guidelines from the Firewise Communities/USA Program. Its goals were:

1. establish crown fire mitigation measures on public lands;
2. establish ground fire mitigation measures on private land; and
3. target restoration levels of fuels reduction and develop uses for the resulting forest debris that would promote community sustainability through local economic development.

A Ruidoso commissioned Forest Task Force conducted a baseline and needs assessment of major CFMP components: Fuels Management, Infrastructure Protection and Structural Safeguards. Finally, the village council acted on the recommendations of the Forest Task Force. Municipal infrastructure was enhanced and ordinances were enacted requiring fuels management on all properties and site development within Ruidoso town limits. In addition, a Forestry Department was created to administer and implement the CFMP. This evolved into Ruidoso's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in 2004. In 2004 revisions of the 2002 ordinances included protection of old and large trees, protection of root zones during site development, and establishing guidelines for bark beetle habitat reduction. Ruidoso implemented a \$335,852 grant from the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program and \$502,587 from FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program for fuels reduction projects on municipal lands and right of ways. Utilizing over \$2,000,000 in grant assistance through New Mexico Energy, Minerals, Natural Resources Department - Forestry Division's "Cost-Share" program and State Fire Assistance programs, Ruidoso has treated more than 2,500 acres of private land.

To effectively engage the community, the Forestry Department has a webpage at the Village of Ruidoso website, has conducted Firewise workshops, ran TV "house make-over" spots on a local channel, and offers a community tool wagon for volunteer projects. Village of Ruidoso Emergency Management has established wildfire evacuation routes and a reverse 911 telephone system, located at police dispatch, which can dial 500 numbers in 10 minutes delivering early warning messages for evacuation, etc.

Implementation of Ruidoso's CFMP has promoted an increase in the number of forest contractors from 3 companies doing business in 2000 to more than 30 active companies in 2008. In addition, this community has created more than 60 natural resources related jobs. The overall effects of this community's efforts are: reduction of risk to wildfire; a greater awareness and understanding of natural resource challenges; an increase in forest ecosystem health; and a boost to local economy and employment.

Within the Greater Ruidoso WUI, a working group has treated more than 10,000 acres on public land. Wyden Authority grants have been used on Ruidoso lands adjacent to USDA Forest Service land. Ruidoso participated also participated in the Western Governors Association Forest Health Advisory Committee and the USDA Forest Service Region 3 Southwest Strategies in an effort to create recommendations for change and enhancement of current public land management policies with regard to forest health and wildfire hazard reduction issues. Ruidoso presented its story to the United Nations' North American Forestry Commission in 2005.

Rick DeIaco, Forester for the Village of Ruidoso, recognized that community based fire management requires patience, persistence, flexibility, and a commitment to developing community specific answers to the community's questions of "Why?" "What?" "Where?" "Who?" and "How?" DeIaco believes strong public awareness and involvement is essential to successful implementation.

Compiled by Nathaly Agosto Filión, ISC from articles cited below.

For More Information

Website:

Village of Ruidoso's Forestry Department:

http://ruidoso-nm.gov/Forestry_Documents/Forestry_Department.html

Department At-A-Glance: [http://ruidoso-nm.gov/Forestry_Documents/Forestry_Department/SWS%20Ruidoso%20case%20study%202008%20with%20pics%20\(updated%2010-08\).pdf](http://ruidoso-nm.gov/Forestry_Documents/Forestry_Department/SWS%20Ruidoso%20case%20study%202008%20with%20pics%20(updated%2010-08).pdf)

"Developing a community-based forest health and fire management plan: The story of Ruidoso", Rick DeIaco: <http://ag.arizona.edu/oals/ALN/aln55/deiaco.html>

Contact:

Rick DeIaco, Village of Ruidoso Forestry Department

575-258-4343; RickDeIaco@ruidoso-nm.gov



This case study was produced by the Institute for Sustainable Communities for our Sustainable Communities Leadership Academy. The Academy is a state-of-the-art training and technical assistance program on community-based climate solutions. Its purpose is to build the capacity of communities to take smarter, swifter, more effective action to increase energy efficiency, reduce climate pollution and dependency on fossil fuels, create green businesses and jobs, and strengthen their resilience to the local impacts of climate disruption.

Learn more at www.iscvt.org.

