

10.14. Community at Risk: Wildland Agencies and Unprotected Areas

The communities in Clackamas County that are not covered by a structural fire agency are considered Communities at Risk (CAR) by Oregon Department of Forestry. The majority of these areas are within wildland agency protection boundaries (ODF and USFS). The wildland agencies provide fire suppression for forest land only and do not provide structural fire protection. The ODF and USFS have participated in the Clackamas County CWPP planning process to identify opportunities to prevent, prepare for and respond to potential wildfire events in unprotected areas.

Unprotected Areas Description

In 2004, the Governor's Fire Service Policy Council convened a task force to discuss the issue of areas that are vulnerable to wildfire but are without publicly-funded structural fire protection. This is a major issue throughout the state because the number of unprotected homes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) continues to grow. State firefighting actions on these lands are made possible only after the Governor invokes the Conflagration Act. The task force agreed that protection should be provided only if the county is 1) completing a community wildfire protection plan; 2) has adopted the Department of Land Conservation and Development's Goal 3) requiring fire defense standards for new construction in forest zones; and 4) is changing property tax statement language for ODF assessment from "fire protection" to ODF "non-structural fire suppression" so homeowners and insurers are not lead to believe they have structural fire protection. This section of the Clackamas County CWPP addresses the unprotected areas, thereby meeting the provisions set forth by the task force.

There are approximately 722,799 acres of structurally unprotected lands in Clackamas County. The majority of this acreage is Mount Hood National Forest land, private industrial forest land, or undeveloped land. Some small pockets of land do contain a few residences, buildings and infrastructure that would require protection. These are the areas addressed here.

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

The majority of communities, buildings and infrastructure in structurally unprotected areas are very rural examples of the Wildland Urban Interface. They are characterized by residential homes surrounded by heavy fuels and steep slopes, very limited access and potential communication issues. These factors, combined with the lack of structural fire protection make unprotected communities extremely vulnerable.

Wildland Agency and Unprotected Area Wildfire Hazards

The Clackamas County CWPP wildfire hazard assessment assisted the ODF and USFS in identifying areas that may be at higher risk to potential wildfires. Map #4 illustrates the overall wildfire hazard risk in the unprotected areas and will be used to help target areas for wildfire prevention activities.

Structural Ignitability

The Clackamas County Department of Transportation (DTD) notifies local deputy fire marshals of new lots of record to receive input on access and water requirements. In areas that are not in a structural fire agency's boundary, these requirements may not be adequately incorporated into new

development. In an effort to reduce structural ignitability, DTD now requires that any new construction must either annex into a structural fire agency's boundary or contract for structural protection. Lots zoned for Agriculture/ Forestland are required to have fuel breaks, emergency access and turn-arounds and adequate water supply.

Emergency Response

A major wildland urban interface fire in the unprotected areas of Clackamas County would likely require a multi-agency response. The Oregon Department of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service are the wildland protection agencies. The USFS and ODF have a mutual aid agreement that allows for the sharing of resources. The Clackamas Fire Defense Board also has a Fire Mutual Aid Agreement that is the vehicle through which resources can be shared across jurisdictional boundaries throughout the County. The USFS is not a signatory on this agreement, so any assistance from structural fire agencies would have to come through the ODF agreement.

Burning of yard waste and debris is a major issue in unprotected communities because backyard burning is responsible for the majority of fire ignitions in the WUI. The majority of the unprotected communities are outside of the DEQ's boundaries, which means they must get permission from the local fire department to burn. The fire departments regulate what they can, but are often too understaffed to monitor illegal burns. Although ODF regulates illegal burning during fire season, it is not common knowledge and the only burn permits issued are for recreational camp fires. This means that backyard burning in unprotected areas is largely unregulated.

The majority of acreage outside of structural fire protection boundaries is in the eastern portion of the county, where VHF is more effective than 800 MHz. Radio communications in unprotected areas can be challenging because 800 MHz is the primary system for structural fire agencies. ODF, the USFS and the majority of rural structural fire agencies use VHF, so interoperability for a larger scale mutual aid event may become an issue. ODF has a limited supply of portable 800 MHz radios, but the USFS does not. In addition, the USFS does not routinely communicate with structural fire agencies, so there may be confusion regarding communication protocol during a large scale event. The USFS has identified the need to coordinate radio communications with structural fire agencies in the USFS CWPP Action Plan.

Water supply is usually an issue in rural, unprotected areas. ODF and USFS are accustomed to drafting from existing water bodies to supplement water that is brought on scene, and having water sources identified and developed in rural unprotected areas can be critical to response tactics. This has been identified as a need in the County CWPP action plan.

The ODF and USFS utilize permanent and seasonal staff to respond to wildfires. Wildfire training and refreshers are provided annually to remain current on qualifications. Although the wildland agencies are able to provide classroom training, the lack of live fire experience makes it difficult to retain some wildland qualifications. ODF and USFS is working with the Clackamas Fire Defense Board to identify opportunities to provide live fire training and prescribed burns to address the fire component of wildland task books.

Community Outreach & Education

ODF and USFS are committed to fire prevention, and use a variety of forums to promote residential fire safety, defensible space, and safe burning practices. Outreach activities include school programs, public presentations, media events and safety fairs. The USFS and ODF use fire severity rating signs placed in strategic areas to inform the public about wildfire danger. These wildland agencies are active members of the Clackamas County Fire Co-op which is a consortium of structural and wildland fire protection professionals that work together to deliver programs.

Local Communities at Risk (CAR's)

ODF and USFS have identified Communities at Risk that have unique wildfire hazards to be addressed at the more local scale. Communities that have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to wildfires are illustrated in Map #21 and listed in Table 10.14-1. Wildland Fire professionals considered the following factors to determine the local CARs including:

- Need for defensible space
- Access limitations (narrow driveways, lack of address signage, one way in/one way out)
- Steep slopes that can hinder access and accelerate the spread of wildfire
- Lack of water available for wildland fire fighting
- Heavy fuels on adjacent public lands
- Potential ignition sources from recreationists and transients
- Agricultural and backyard burning
- Lack of community outreach programs to promote wildfire awareness
- Communications difficulties

Fuels Reduction

The Oregon Department of Forestry has been successful in receiving numerous grants to encourage homeowners and small woodland owners to reduce hazardous fuels through a cost share program. Fuels Reduction projects on federal land require an in-depth National Environmental Protection Act analysis that can be costly and time consuming, so completing fuels reduction projects in a timely manner can be challenging. However, the USFS has identified priorities for fuels reduction on federal lands adjacent to communities at risk.

To ensure that landscape-level treatments are paired with projects to create defensible space around vulnerable communities, priority fuels reduction projects have been overlaid with the Communities at Risk Identified by Wildland Agency and Unprotected Areas (Map #21).

Fuels Reduction Priorities include:

Sandy Watershed	Powerlines near Govt. Camp
NF Bedford	Timberlake CCC Job Corps
USFS Summer Homes	Ripplebrook Guard Station
Kiwanas Camp	Joe Graham Guard Station
Trillium Lake	3 Lynx
Wapinitia	Zig Zag Guard Station
Sisi Butte Lookout and Electronic Site	

Wildland Agency and Unprotected Area Action Plan

The ODF and USFS have developed a list of actions to build capacity at the District scale and has identified actions that can help to make the local CARS more resilient to potential wildfires. The action plan for Unprotected Areas and the CARs therein is provided in Table 10.14-2.

Table 10.14-1 Structurally Unprotected Communities at Risk

Community At Risk	CAR Priority	Defensible Space	Access	Water	Public Forest Lands	Private Forest Lands	Recreators/ Transients	Protection Capabilities	Burning	Preparedness	Communications	Steep Slopes	Description
Clackamas County Unprotected Communities at Risk (USFS CARs that are in both districts, but protected by USFS)													
Ripplebrook Guard Station	High	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	The USFS Ripplebrook Guard Station houses many Job Corps instructors. There are at least 20 structures behind the station, and 4 buildings associated with the station. There is a helibase with structures to be protected as well. Farther upslope, there are 2 bunk houses with 6 units. Access is generally good, and there is an improved gravel road to helibase and bunk house tied to water system from job corps and hydrants, radio comms is good there is no cell service.
Timberlake Job Corps	Medium	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	The Timberlake Job Corps is a United States Department of Labor program that provides housing and curriculum to students from 18-25. It is located on USFS land and uses USFS buildings. The big problem here is protection capability. The Job Corps is about 30 minutes from Estacada Fire, which is the closest structural protection district. Currently, there is no contract in place to provide structural protection and the Job Corps is considering a Fire Brigade that would help with initial attack until Estacada arrives. They do have a hydrant system. Radio communications are adequate because the Whalehead repeater is nearby, but there is no cell service here. Burning is accomplished through burn permits and they is generally not an issue. Shaded fuel breaks leading into job corps boundary are needed. There is great opportunity for youth engagement, potentially integrating structural fire protection into curriculum (although turn over is problematic).
3 Lynx	Medium	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	The 3 Lynx community was established as hydropower was being developed on the Clackamas River. It used to be a thriving community, but there are many empty structures now, This community of about 15 homes contracts with Estacada fire for structural fire protection. There is adequate water here, but communications may be compromised and response times will be greater than 10 minutes.
Joe Graham /Clackamas Lake Guard Station	Medium	X			X		X	X		X	X	X	The Joe Graham/Clackamas Lake Guard Station was once a ranger district, so there are many historic structures here. It has water system and there is a huge lake nearby. There was a fire here in 02-03, The visitor's center is typically occupied on a rotating basis.

Community At Risk	CAR Priority	Defensible Space	Access	Water	Public Forest Lands	Private Forest Lands	Recreators/ Transients	Protection Capabilities	Burning	Preparedness	Communications	Steep Slopes	Description
Clackamas County Unprotected Communities at Risk (CARs that are in the ODF protection boundary only)													
Elk Prairie	High	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	Elk Prairie is a community of many residential homes that are surrounded by private forest land. Access here is poor and there is no hydranted system in the area. There are ponds that may be used for fire suppression.
Upper Sawtell Unprotected	High	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	This community includes everything above Maple Grove and North of Elk Prairie. The area has very poor access and a great deal of debris burning. It is surrounded by BLM and private forest land, and has steep slopes. ODF has done some canvassing in this area and would like to partner with local fire agencies to inform the landowners of their unprotected status.
East Highland	High	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	East Highland Road has about 7 homes surrounded by 3 fire districts, but is unprotected. Water and access are major issues here. This community includes the BLM seed orchard.
Wapinitia	Medium	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	The Wapinitia community is highly vulnerable. It is a few miles east of the Hoodland Fire District on Hwy 26. ODF and USFS have made attempts to work with the community in the past but it has been difficult to achieve and sustain progress because many homeowners are not engaged. There is a stand pipe and a pump house but it doesn't have much volume. There was a house fire recently, and the home owners used the standpipe and local hose to help with fire. The HOA Board is not supportive of defensible space, but some individual owners have done some work on their own. There is little support for fuels reduction on common areas. The community is surrounded by USFS land. The USFS attempted to create a 300 foot defensible space buffer, but the community was not supportive. Access is extremely limited, and radio and cell communications are limited.
Lower Highland	Medium	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	Lower Highland Road is a good example of the Wildland Urban Interface as it has heavy fuels adjacent to unprotected homes. The homes are surrounded by managed forest land which could serve as an ignition source. Access and communications are good. There are no hydrants, but there are ponds nearby.
Ramsbey Unprotected	Medium	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	The unprotected portion of Ramsbey Road has a history of arson fires. There are managed private forest lands surrounding the area which also can serve as an ignition and fuel source. Communications and protection capabilities are the most challenging aspects for this community.
Lais Road	Medium	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	Lais Road has serious access constraints as it is one way in and out and many homes have steep and narrow driveways with poor turnarounds. There are a series of cabins along the river that are access through Weyerhaeuser industrial forest land. Although it is close to the river, water will be an issue here because it is difficult to access the river.
Butte Creek Unprotected	Medium	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	The unprotected portion of Butte Creek Road is highly vulnerable because there is no water, access limited to one way in and out, and there is managed BLM and private forest land. Communication is limited here and Butte Creek is one way in and out all the way into Scotts Mills.

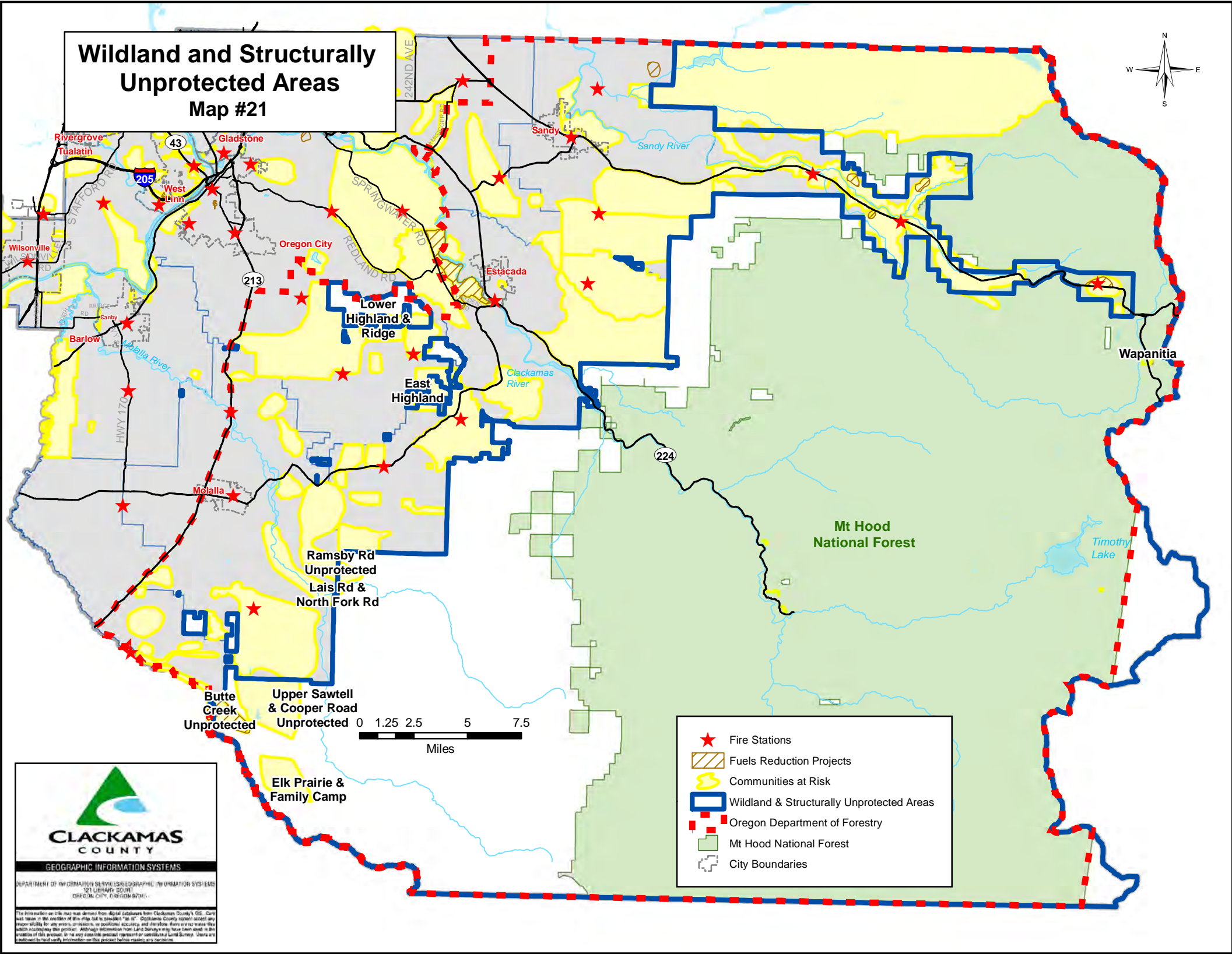
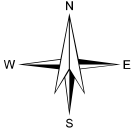
Table 10.14-2 Wildland Agency (ODF & USFS) Action Plans

Action Item	Timeframe	Partners	CAR
ODF CWPP Action Plan			
Work with the County Tax Assessor to change the language on property tax statements for ODF assessment from “fire protection” to ODF “non-structural fire suppression” so homeowners and insurers are not led to believe they have structural fire protection.	Ongoing	ODF, County Tax Assessor	ODF-Unprotected Areas
Clarify roles and responsibilities for fire suppression and prescribed burns on State Park lands and Metro-owned properties.	Ongoing	State Parks, Metro	ODF
Continue to seek funding to support the fuels reduction cost share assistance program.	Ongoing	WSFM, SFA	ODF
Continue to seek funding to support the seasonal Fuels/Fire Crew	Ongoing	Clackamas County, WSFM, SFA	ODF
Work with local fire agencies and natural resources managers to identify opportunities for live fire exercises.	Ongoing	Metro, City Parks Depts., FDB	ODF
USFS CWPP Action Plan			
Work with the Clackamas Fire Operations Group to enhance capabilities for interoperability. Consider having a cache of at least five 800 MHz portable radios available for USFS use. Work with mutual aid partners to determine best communications strategies (consistent frequency, VHF and 800 MHz).	2 Years	CFOG, Fire Districts	USFS
Work with the Clackamas Fire Defense Board to become a signatory on the County's Mutual Aid Fire Agreement.	1 Year	FDB	USFS
Clarify relationships, roles and financial responsibility for responding to fires in unprotected areas (currently there is no mechanism for reimbursement in unprotected areas).	Long Term	FDB	USFS
Conduct and operations meeting with adjacent RFPD's to discuss how we will operational response tactics.	2 Years	Local Fire Districts	USFS
Work with AMR to develop an understanding of resources available for emergencies and protocol for response.	1 Year	AMR	USFS
Work with CCOM, BOEC and Sandy Fire to include USFS as a resource on run cards associated with events in the Bull Run Watershed.	1 year	CCOM, BOEC, Sandy Fire	USFS

Table 10.14-2 Unprotected Area Action Plans

Unprotected Areas Action Plan (ODF and USFS)			
Action Item	Timeframe	Partners	CAR
Inform homeowners in unprotected areas of their unprotected status (using mailings) and provide them with information about options for enhancing structural protection	2 Years	Fire Co-op, USFS	All Unprotected Areas
Encourage communities in unprotected areas to develop local community wildfire protection plans & become Firewise/USA Communities.	Ongoing	Clackamas County,ODF, USFS	All Unprotected Areas
Research opportunity to provide disclosure of unprotected status on lots through deed restrictions. County currently requires all new homes to be in a fire District or contract for services.	2 Years	Clackamas County	All Unprotected Areas
Partner with the Fire Co-op to create and distribute outreach materials that promote responsible burning, defensible space and reduction of structural ignitability within the Home Ignition Zone.	Ongoing	Fire Co-op	All Unprotected Areas
Promote legal, safe and responsible debris burning through public outreach and education.	2 Years	ODF, DEQ, Fire Co-op	All Unprotected Areas
Reduce hazardous fuels in the ROW of potential evacuation routes. Engage residents adjacent to primary evacuations routes to extend treatments onto private land.	Ongoing	ODOT, Clackamas County Roads	All Unprotected Areas
Continue to collect structural ignitability data by conducting structural triage assessment data collection (including GPS points) for homes in Communities at Risk.	Ongoing	ODF	All Unprotected Areas
Develop a community-driven pre-disaster plan including evacuation routes, telephone call down trees, and other strategies for strengthening community response.	Ongoing	Clackamas County Emergency Management	All Unprotected Areas
Implement road addressing (including length of driveways) and other signage for emergency response.	Ongoing	ODF	All Unprotected Areas
Seek grant funding to support fuels reduction and creation of defensible space around homes.	Ongoing	ODF	All Unprotected Areas
Work with private forest landowners to reduce fuels adjacent to CAR's.	Ongoing	CCFA	All Unprotected Areas
Work with BLM and USFS to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to CAR's.	Ongoing	BLM, USFS	All Unprotected Areas

Wildland and Structurally Unprotected Areas Map #21



- ★ Fire Stations
- Fuels Reduction Projects
- Communities at Risk
- Wildland & Structurally Unprotected Areas
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Mt Hood National Forest
- City Boundaries

CLACKAMAS COUNTY
GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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