Edgemont Highlands
Community Wildfire Protection Plan
January 2023 Update

Prepared for: Edgemont Highlands
Community Association Durango, Colorado

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Edgemont Highlands Community Wildfire Protection Plan 2023 Update

Approval and Concurrence

Approval

The Durango District of the Colorado State Forest Service has reviewed this Community Wildfire Protection Plan and approves its content and certifies that it meets or exceeds CSFS Community Wildfire Protection Plan minimum standards.

DocuSigned by:
Ryan E. Cox
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Ryan Cox Date
District Forester

The following entities have received a copy of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan and agree with and support its content and recommendations.

DocuSigned by:
Rex Howard
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Rex Howard Date
Board President, Edgemont Highlands Community Association

3/8/2023

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Chief, Durango Fire

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Shawna Legarza Date
Director, La Plata County Office of Emergency Management

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 1
2. BACKGROUND 1
   A. Location 1
   B. Community 1
   C. Local Fire History 3
   D. Recent Wildfire Preparedness Activities 3
3. PLAN AREA 4
   A. Boundaries 4
   B. Private Land Characteristics 4
   C. Public Land Characteristics 5
   D. Fire Protection 5
4. PLANNING PARTNERS AND PROCESS 6
   A. Partners 6
   B. Process 6
   C. Desired Future Condition 6
5. POLICIES 7
   A. Federal 7
   B. State 7
   C. Consolidated County Annual Operating Plan 8
   D. USFS and BLM Land and Resource Management Plan / Fire Management Plan 8
   E. La Plata County CWPP 8
   F. Edgemont Highlands 9
6. RESOURCE ASSESSMENT AND TRENDS 10
   A. Fuels and Fire Hazard 10
   B. Values At Risk 12
   C. Protection Capability 13
   D. CO-WRAP Analysis 13
7. MITIGATION ACTION PLAN 16
   A. Education and Community Outreach 16
   B. Policy 16
   C. Wildfire Mitigation Activities 16
8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION 22
9. GLOSSARY 23
10. LITERATURE CITED 25
11. APPENDICES 26
Appendix A: Maps 27
Appendix B: Protecting Your Home from Wildfire: Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones 32
Appendix C: Fuelbreak Guidelines for Forested Subdivisions and Communities 33
Appendix D: Fire-Resistant Landscaping 34
Appendix E: Firewise Plant Materials 35
Appendix F: Gambel Oak Management 36
Appendix G: Firewise Construction: Site Design and Building Materials 37
Appendix H: CO-WRAP Analysis Wildfire Risk Assessment 38

1. INTRODUCTION

Community Wildfire Protection Plans are authorized by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003. HFRA places renewed emphasis on local community wildfire protection and response planning by extending a variety of benefits to communities with a wildfire protection plan in place. Among the benefits are the abilities to participate in establishment of fuels treatment priorities for both federal and non-federal lands surrounding communities, establishment of a local definition and boundary for the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), and enhanced opportunities for cost-sharing of community-based fuels treatments.

The Edgemont Highlands Community Association has recognized that the subdivision may be at risk from wildfires moving into or originating within the subdivision. A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Edgemont Highlands was developed in November 2012 to guide wildfire mitigation efforts. A revision in 2019 was done to update wildfire mitigation accomplishments and newly recognized opportunities since 2012. This 2023 update recognizes the Timbers and Overlook phases that have been added to the subdivision as well as the most recent fuel mitigation accomplishments and opportunities since 2019.

2. BACKGROUND

A. Location

This CWPP covers the Edgemont Highlands subdivision and its defined Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Edgemont Highlands is located in La Plata County in southwest Colorado, approximately five miles northeast of Durango on the north side of County Road 240 (**Vicinity Map**, Appendix A). Average elevation of the subdivision is approximately 7400 feet.

B. Community

Edgemont Highlands is a 500-acre subdivision with 476 single-family home lots, which includes five areas containing lots developed as multi-family lots/ patio homes, and a community lodge. As of August 2022, the original Edgemont Highlands sections and the original Timbers additions are essentially built-out. As of fall of 2022, the new Timbers Phase 3D has sold all 24 lots and housing construction has started in this phase. Timbers Phase 3D is adjacent to the 40-acre BLM land. The Overlook addition has 100% of the 57 lots sold. It is expected that all the lots will be occupied by the end of 2023. There are 200 acres of open space in communal ownership under the Edgemont Highlands Community Association. The residences are single-family structures or attached townhomes with exterior finishes in combinations of hardboard or wood siding, metal, masonry, and stucco. Roof coverings are Class A metal, cement tile or asphalt shingle. Most have wood or composite decks and porches. Driveways are paved and all the homes have at least a 2-car garage. The water supply for the subdivision is a central system coming from two storage tanks with a combined water capacity of 1.3 million gallons.

Public access to the subdivision is via two entrances onto La Plata County Road 240. An emergency access connects Red Canyon Trail in the Timbers Phase 3D addition to County Road 249. Roads in the subdivision are paved two-lane. Access is adequate for normal urban structural fire apparatus.

Edgemont Highlands is located in a ponderosa pine/Gambel oak type. Tree species include ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and occasional white fir (*Abies concolor*), Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*) and narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus augustifolia*). Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) is occasionally found as a small tree but is more commonly a shrub in the understory. Other understory species include chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana ssp. melanocarpa*), shrubby cinquefoil (*Pentaphylloides floribunda*), wax currant (*Ribes cereum*), Oregon grape (*Mahonia repens*), kinnikinnik (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and common juniper (*Juniperus communis*). Grasses include pine dropseed (*Blepharonueron tricholepi*s), Arizona fescue (*Festuca arizon*ica), blue gramma (*Bouteloua gracilis*) and sedge (*Caryx spp.*). Forbs include yarrow (*Achillea lanulosa*), pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla patens*), Nuttall's larkspur (*Delphinium nuttallianum*), James buckwheat (*Erigonum jamesii*), and several penstemmons (*Penstemmon spp.*).

A characteristic of the subdivision is the retention of the native trees and shrubs during construction of the residences. The overall context is semi-rural. Most homes have irrigated yard areas with planted grasses, flowers, and shrubs typical of southwestern Colorado.

The wildlife present in the area includes all the species expected in the lower montane areas of the central Rocky Mountains. Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), elk (*Cervus elaphus*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), cougar (*Felis concolor*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), skunk (*Spilogale spp*), and piñon mouse (*Peromyscus truei*) are some of the mammalian species. Merriam's turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo merriami*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), mountain and western bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides* and *S. Mexicana*), downy woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*), and mountain chickadee (*Parus Gambeli*) are some of the avian species. No US Fish and Wildlife Service listed "Threatened" or "Endangered" species are known to inhabit the subdivision.

Slopes range from essentially level (5%) from County Road 240 north to Edgemont Highlands Pass and 10 to 15% from there north to the border with Durango Hills subdivision above Monarch Crest Trail. Side slopes into Spring Creek on the west edge and the drainage between Edgemont Highlands and the Timbers at Edgemont Highlands phase are up to 40%. Slope shapes are convex. Aspect is generally southerly.

Annual precipitation for the area is approximately 21 inches, with the majority falling as snow from October through March. May and June are relatively dry, with a summer "monsoon" in July and August. Early monsoonal storms are often characterized by dry thunderstorms with lightning and strong, variable outflow winds. The largest wildfires in the past 20 years in La Plata County have occurred from early June into early August.

C. Local Fire History

No wildfires have occurred in the subdivision since its inception. However, large wildfires have occurred in La Plata County in similar fuel types over the past twenty years. Examples include the Missionary Ridge Fire (2002) that burned 76,000 acres of Gambel oak, ponderosa pine, aspen, spruce and mixed conifer and 56 homes less than one mile north and east of the subdivision, the Red Creek Fire of 2010 that burned 45 acres of mixed-conifer forest approximately three miles northeast of Edgemont Highlands, and the 416 Fire that burned 50,000 acres of similar forest types in the Hermosa Creek drainage 7.5 miles to the northwest.

D. Recent Wildfire Preparedness Activities

1. A resident of the community is a Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP) Ambassador for the community. A community resident is presently a board member for the La Plata County Wildfire Advisory Board.
2. The trail maintenance crew employed by the Community Association has done some thinning of trees and Gambel oak on the community open space along the trail system over the past several years.
3. The Community Association has had thinning and oak mastication contracts with local contractors since the initial CWPP was completed. Mastication was completed on all the treatment areas identified in the initial CWPP. However, enough time has gone by that some areas of original oak mitigation will need to be revisited in the near future. Thinning has been done on the shaded fuelbreak areas within the subdivision common spaces identified in the initial CWPP except for the far northeast corner (approximately 7 acres). The northeast now consists of residential lots and has been thinned out by virtue of home building.
4. The subdivision covenants advise use of the guidelines from CSU Publication 6.302, *Creating Wildfire Defensible Zones* in new home construction. Publication 6.302 has since been updated twice and replaced with the current publication, *The Home Ignition Zone*. New residential construction has generally been consistent with these construction guidelines.

3. PLAN AREA

A. Boundaries

The original CWPP covering the WUI area and this revision have been developed collaboratively with the Edgemont Highlands Community Association, subdivision residents, the Colorado State Forest Service, La Plata County Office of Emergency Management, Durango Fire Protection District, Wildfire Adapted Partnership, the San Juan National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. The WUI area is based on the area centered on the subdivision likely to burn in high fire danger conditions during a single burning period if pushed by 20 mph winds. The WUI boundaries are from the confluence of Mud Springs Creek and the Florida River; north-northwest along the ridge just east of the east fork of Mud Springs Creek to the Baldy Mountain ridge; southwest from Baldy Mountain along Missionary Ridge to Spring Creek; then south along Spring Creek to its intersection with the west boundary of Durango Hills subdivision; then south along the west boundary of Durango Hills to County Road 240; then west to Whistling Horse Road and south to Ute Pass Road; then southeast across the hill east of the radio tower to the Florida River; then northeast along the Florida River to the beginning point. Total WUI area is 4,400 acres and is shown on the WUI Map in Appendix A. Private land in the WUI covers 2,703 acres. The remaining acres consist of 1600 acres within the San Juan National Forest, 17 acres owned by La Plata County as a potential school site and 80 acres under Bureau of Land Management stewardship.

B. Private Land Characteristics

The 2,703 acres of private land within the WUI boundary includes the 500-acre Edgemont Highlands subdivision with the Timbers and Overlook additions, with 476 residential lots. Other subdivisions in the WUI are Edgemont Ranch with 187 residences; Durango Hills with 83 residences; Florida River Estates with 66 residences; Florida Pines with eight residences and Edgemont Meadows, a new subdivision with 134 homesites. There are approximately 60 other parcels outside the subdivisions, ranging in size from approximately 0.1 acre to 160 acres. Altogether, there are approximately 994 residences plus at least the same number of garages, sheds, barns, and other outbuildings within the WUI area.

Land use history is a rural landscape of former homesteads and relatively large holdings that were used for farming, ranching and timber production. As Durango grew in population through the mid to late twentieth century a number of the large holdings were subdivided for residential purposes. This trend accelerated from the 1970's through the present time, resulting in suburban-like residential densities scattered across a more rural forested landscape matrix. The subdivisions have retained much of the forest matrix as they were developed. Current land uses are generally residential, agricultural (pasture and hay production), and non-industrial business.

The vegetation cover type in the subdivision is Ponderosa Pine /Gambel Oak. The Gambel oak and montane shrub understory varies in abundance across the subdivision but is always an understory component. White fir and blue spruce are found as minor components of both the overstory and understory in the northeast part of the subdivision, but ponderosa pine is always dominant. Fuel Models associated with the cover type are discussed in section 6: **Resource Assessments and Trends**.

Private lands outside the subdivision within the WUI area have similar cover types. Vegetation grades from Gambel oak/montane shrub in the southwest part of the WUI on south and west aspects to ponderosa pine/Gambel oak through the rest of the south half of the WUI. Mixed-conifer forest with mixtures of ponderosa pine, aspen, white fir and blue spruce begins about 8,000 feet in elevation and continues through the San Juan National Forest boundary.

C. Public Land Characteristics

Public lands in the WUI include 1600 acres within the San Juan National Forest to the north of the subdivision, and 80 acres in two 40-acre parcels managed by the Tres Rios Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management located to the northeast and south of the subdivision. La Plata County owns 17 acres in the south-central part of Edgemont Highlands. Vegetative cover includes ponderosa pine, Gambel oak and other montane shrubs, similar to Edgemont Highlands.

D. Fire Protection

Structural and wildland fire protection is provided by the Durango Fire Protection District (DFPD). DFPD Station 5 is 0.25 mile east of the eastern entrance to Edgemont Highlands at the intersection of County Roads 240 and 234. Staffing at this substation is by volunteer firefighters as needed. Station 3, at the intersection of 32nd Street and County Road 250, is 3.75 miles from the entrance and is staffed 24/7. Several residents in the subdivision are volunteer or paid staff of DFPD or Upper Pine River Fire Protection District

Both structural and wildland fire engines are resources available through DFPD. Other wildland fire resources are available through Durango Interagency Dispatch Center. Wildland fire resources in the Four Corners area include engines and crews from the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado Department of Fire Protection and Control, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes. An air tanker base is located at Durango - La Plata Regional Airport and additional aerial wildfire support can be provided by the Mesa Verde National Park initial attack helicopter at Hesperus, the Ute Mountain Ute initial attack helicopter at Towaoc and the Colorado Department of Fire Protection and Control Single Engine Air Tanker at Cortez. The Counties, Federal land management agencies, Colorado Department of Fire Protection and Control and the Fire Protection Districts in southwest Colorado operate under a Consolidated County Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for wildfire protection.

4. PLANNING PARTNERS AND PROCESS

A. Partners

The Community Association has received process and planning assistance and input from the following individuals and organizations:

- Durango Fire Protection District
- Mark Loveall (Ryan Cox), Supervisory Forester, Colorado State Forest Service Durango Field Office
- San Juan National Forest
- Ian Barrett, (Mark Atwood) Fire Management Specialist, Colorado BLM, Southwest Colorado Fire Management Unit
- Ashley Downing, Executive Director, and Charlie Landsman, La Plata County Coordinator, Wildfire Adapted Partnership.
- Butch Knowlton, (Shawna Legarza), La Plata County Emergency Manager.
- Bruce Short, Short Forestry LLC, forestry and fire management consultant.
- Ron Duvall, Mosaic Forestry LLC, forestry consultant

B. Process

A Core Team was assembled including representatives from the Colorado State Forest Service, San Juan National Forest, Durango Fire Protection District, the Edgemont Highlands Community Association, and Firewise of Southwest Colorado for the initial CWPP effort. An inventory of the common space was done in November 2011 and supplemented in April 2019 to characterize the forest and woody fuel conditions. A meeting of interested subdivision residents was held in April 2019 to re-explain the CWPP process to residents, present the current CWPP, forest and fuel conditions and get feedback on what the updated Plan should contain. The draft updated CWPP was reviewed by the DFPD, La Plata County, Colorado State Forest Service, BLM and Wildfire Adapted Partnership and a final update presented to the Community Association in September 2019.

C. Desired Future Condition

The Desired Future Condition (DFC) for Edgemont Highlands has been developed through the collaborative CWPP process and remains the same in this revision. The DFC is:

Edgemont Highlands is a desirable forested community safer from catastrophic wildfire moving into or through the community. Homes are less vulnerable to wildfire by encouraging the use of fire-resistant construction methods and ignition-resistant landscaping. Fuels within 100 feet of residences are maintained at levels which would support only low intensity surface fires, while fuels in the remainder of the landscape in the subdivision would support low to moderate intensity wildfire.

5. POLICIES

A. Federal

The original Edgemont Highlands CWPP (November 2012) and subsequent updates (2019 and 2023) have been developed in response to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). This legislation established unprecedented incentives for communities to develop comprehensive wildfire protection plans in a collaborative, inclusive process. Furthermore, this legislation directs the Departments of Interior and Agriculture to address local community priorities in fuel reduction treatments, on both federal and non-federal lands.

The HFRA emphasizes the need for federal agencies to collaborate with communities in developing hazardous fuel reduction projects and places priority on treatment areas identified by communities themselves through development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Priority areas include the wildland-urban interface (WUI), municipal watersheds, areas impacted by windthrow or insect or disease epidemics, and critical wildlife habitat that would be negatively impacted by a catastrophic wildfire. In compliance with Title 1 of the HFRA, the CWPP requires agreement among local government, local fire departments, and the state agency responsible for forest management i.e., the Colorado State Forest Service. The CWPP must also be developed in consultation with interested parties and the applicable federal agencies managing public lands surrounding the at-risk communities.

B. State

The State of Colorado is concerned about the size and intensity of wildfires occurring across the state in recent years. The State Legislature enacted House Bill 1110 in 2008, creating a five-year program running from 2009 to 2014 that allows landowners to deduct a portion of the actual costs of their wildfire mitigation from their state income tax. That program has been extended through 2024. The program allows each landowner to get credit for 100 percent of the cost of wildfire mitigation in 2019 and 50 percent in 2020 through 2024 up to a total of $2,500. The work must be done in accord with an approved Community Wildfire Protection Plan to qualify.

The Colorado State Forest Service conducted a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and released a Statewide Forest Resource Strategy in 2010. One of the themes for the Assessment and Strategy is “Protect Forests from Harm.” The identified threats relevant to Edgemont Highlands are:

- Wildfire in the Wildland-Urban Interface.
- Insects and Diseases Affecting Community Forests

The area around the subdivision has been identified on the La Plata County Communities of Concern map as having High Wildfire Susceptibility based on weather, historic fire occurrence, topography, surface fuels and canopy closure. The applicable strategies identified to address the threats are:

- Focus forest management activities to reduce impacts of wildfire and forest insects and diseases.
- Coordinate forest management implementation among all parties affected by the CWPP.
- Advocate landscape approaches to protect communities.
- Collaborate with land management agencies, fire protection districts and insurance organizations to develop improved standards that lead to protection of homes in the WUI.
- Expand the use of the Colorado Good Neighbor Policy.

C. Consolidated County Annual Operating Plan

The Counties, Federal land management agencies, Colorado Department of Fire Prevention and Control and Fire Protection Districts in southwest Colorado operate under a Consolidated County Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for wildfire protection. This plan provides for mutual aid to assist with the management of wildfire incidents in southwest Colorado. The plan for mutual aid provides significantly enhanced initial and extended attack capabilities through the rapid mobilization of fire protection resources for managing a wildfire. The Consolidated County AOP outlines standard operating procedures and the level of participation and available resources of each party under the plan.

D. USFS and BLM Land and Resource Management Plan / Fire Management Plan

The San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, the Southwest Colorado District-Tres Rios Field Office Resource Management Plan and associated Fire Management Plans describe the role of fire in the native ecosystems in southwest Colorado. These plans outline the strategies that the USFS and BLM will utilize to manage wildland fire and fuels on these federal lands in southwest Colorado. The San Juan National Forest Fire Management Plan (2007) and the Southwest Colorado District-Tres Rios Field Office Fire Management Plan (2015) specifically describe objectives and strategies to manage fire and fuels on federal lands near communities within the wildland- urban interface.

E. La Plata County CWPP

The Updated Edgemont Highlands CWPP tiers to the updated 2019 Edgemont Highlands CWPP, and the La Plata County CWPP revised and approved in July 2006. This plan is consistent with the goals and strategies described within the La Plata County CWPP and provides further strategic and tactical recommendations specific to wildfire protection and mitigation for the Edgemont Highlands community.

F. Edgemont Highlands

Edgemont Highlands is guided by a set of covenants adopted May 11, 2004 which sets the standards for home construction and establishes the community open space. Section 4.1 states that all dwellings constructed on any portion of Edgemont Highlands shall be designed and built in accordance with the plans and specifications approved by the Architectural Review Committee. Section 4.2 discusses wildfire mitigation, stating "(A)ll improvements on the Property shall be constructed to incorporate a surrounding area of "defensible space" to mitigate wildfire danger. For Defensible Space Management Zones, the covenants encourage owners to follow the CSU Publication *6.302 Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones* which was replaced in 2021 with the CSFS publication *The Home Ignition Zone*. The covenant continues that all plans for removal of trees and other vegetation must be approved by the Architectural Review Committee.

The Community Association is responsible for maintaining the Common Area open space, including trails and established footpaths.

6. RESOURCE ASSESSMENT AND TRENDS

A. Fuels and Fire Hazard

1. Cover Types

The Edgemont Highlands subdivision has one predominant cover type – Ponderosa Pine/Gambel Oak, with scattered Gambel oak-dominated montane shrub patches. Gambel oak associated with piñon pine and junipers occurs on southerly slopes in the northeast part of the subdivision. The ponderosa pine is approximately 100 years old, reflecting the extensive timber harvests that occurred in the lower elevations of La Plata County in the early 1900's. Stand densities range from 30 to 150 square feet of basal area per acre and average approximately 60 square feet per acre. Stand densities are generally acceptable for good forest health but ladder fuels are common due to the shrub component and low crown basal heights. The problem is compounded by fast growth and residents' reluctance to cut Gambel oak because of the desirable screening effects. Trees are immediately adjacent to many residences.

2. Fuel Models

The fuel models present in the subdivision were determined for this update by the CO-WRAP Wildfire Risk Assessment (Appendix H) and field confirmation. Fuel model descriptions are from USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-153, *Standard Fire Behavior Fuel Models: A Comprehensive Set for Use with Rothermel's Surface Fire Spread Model* (Scott and Burgan 2005).

Models TU5 Left Side, TL8 Right Side

TU5 – Very High Load, Dry Climate Timber-Shrub (81% of the area): Fires generally carry through the surface litter and brush with moderate flame lengths and spread rates. Interlocking tree crowns and the presence of fuel ladders coupled with low fuel moisture, low humidities, high temperatures and moderate (10 mph) to high (20 mph) winds can increase spread rates and flame lengths and move fire into the tree crowns. The preponderance of this fuel model dominates potential fire behavior across the subdivision

TL8 – Long-Needle Conifer Litter (7% of the area): Fires carry through the cured litter and limited low herbaceous material on the ground surface. Spread rate is moderate and flame length is low. Although surface fire in this model is relatively controllable, the intermixing of this model with TU5 can cause passive and active crown fire to develop.

Models TU5 and TL8 described above dominate fire behavior across the subdivision. Other fuel models present in the subdivision include TU1 – Light Load Dry Climate Timber-Grass-Shrub (5% of area); SH2 – Moderate Load Dry Climate Grass-Shrub (3% of area); TL3 – Moderate Load Conifer Litter (3% of area); and TL2 – Low Load Broadleaf Litter (1% of area).

3. Slash Treatment

Effective reduction of slash created by fuels mitigation is an important aspect of a fuels mitigation program. Piling and burning of slash is an effective treatment but usually requires snow cover or very moist conditions. Broadcast burning is also effective and more ecologically desirable since it can increase soil nutrients and provide good establishment conditions for desirable vegetation. However, broadcast burning requires a high level of technical expertise to accomplish.

Chipping slash is an alternative to piling and burning but it can generate large chip piles that stay for years or chip depths across the landscape which are a fire hazard in themselves in dry years.

4. Structural Vulnerability

Residential structure ignitability based on construction type and materials is generally low with some moderate. Siding material for the residences varies from stucco to hardboard to wood or cement planking to metal and stone. Fences, porches and decks are generally of wood construction. Roofing is predominately Class A composition shingles with some metal or cement shingle material. The major vulnerability issues are:

- Flammable vegetation like grass, shrubs or trees in close proximity to the structures (within Zone 1).
- Decks with no bottom screening or barriers to ember flows.
- Firewood piles on or under decks.
- Pine needles and leaves on the roofs and in gutters.
- Wood architectural features like porch supports and cross-beams that could catch embers or firebrands.
- Steep driveways in the northern part of the subdivision that could hinder emergency access.

Access to Edgemont Highlands is good and all the streets will accommodate a Type 1 structural engine.

B. Values At Risk

1. Socio/Economic

The semi-rural ambiance of the subdivision is valued by its residents. House pets are common. Edgemont Highlands is a moderate-cost subdivision close to Durango so the location is prized by its residents.

2. Ecological

The setting of Edgemont Highlands is semi-rural forest, so loss of the trees and shrubs from wildfire would have a significant impact on the ambiance of the community, even if no structures were lost. No threatened or endangered species are known to inhabit the subdivision itself, but rare plants may occur within the WUI area.

Southwest Colorado is noted for its good air quality. Wildfire would negatively affect the air quality of the area during a fire.

Wildfire can adversely affect soil quality, reducing water permeability, increasing bulk density and removing organic matter. The soils in the subdivision are sedimentary with moderate erodibility and moderate fertility.

The subdivision is located in the Florida River watershed. Water originating from the watershed flows into the Animas River and then into the San Juan River and the Colorado River. Introduction of soot and sediment due to a wildfire within the watershed could compromise water quality in the lower Animas River and the San Juan and Colorado Rivers.

Ecosystem health for the subdivision is generally good. The forest harvest and thinning activities in the late 1970's over the area now encompassing the subdivision plus the thinning in the common space over the past ten years resulted in good tree density and forest health conditions over most of the subdivision. The remainder of the WUI is fair. Tree densities in the area north of Edgemont Highlands are higher and ladder fuels are more prevalent. The area south of the subdivision in Edgemont Ranch has more Gambel oak in the forest understory, competing with the ponderosa pine and serving as a potential ladder fuel. The Bureau of Land Management thinned the BLM parcel to the northeast of Edgemont Highlands in the late 1990's, and again in the summer of 2022. The contractor anticipates removing the log decks in the Spring of 2023. La Plata County initiated treatment on its 17-acre parcel in 2022. Treatments included oak mitigation and pine removal to reduce the possibility of running crown fire and for insect resistance. The parcel's location along County Road 240 enhances the possibility of ignitions from vehicles or people along the road.

C. Protection Capability

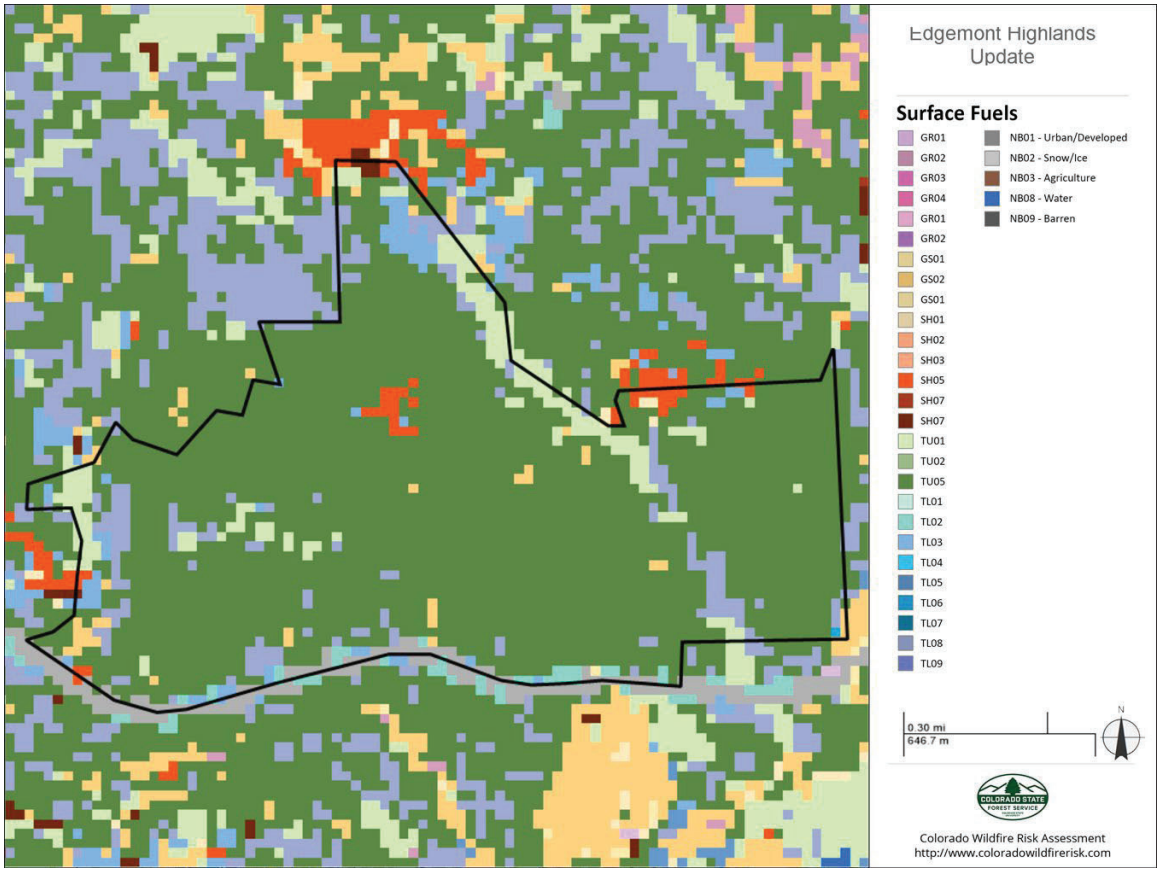
The subdivision is served by the Durango Fire Protection District. The District is staffed by both full-time staff and volunteer firefighters. The main fire station is located in Bodo Park in Durango eleven miles southwest and there is a volunteer-staffed DFPD substation approximately 0.25 mile east of the intersection of Edgemont Highlands Drive and County Road 240 at the intersection with County Road 234. DFPD Station 3, at the intersection of 32nd Street and County Road 250, is 3.75 miles from the entrance and is staffed 24/7. There are 65 fire hydrants across the subdivision. Water flow from the hydrants should be able to support suppression of several structures at one time, based on input from the subdivision's water plant operator.

U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management fire crews and aerial wildfire support by the Mesa Verde National Park initial attack helicopter at Hesperus and the Ute Mountain Ute initial attack helicopter at Towaoc are available under the County mutual aid agreement. Wildland fires occurring on private lands are generally managed for full suppression. Wildfires on National Forest and BLM-managed public lands and Tribal lands in La Plata County are managed with policies that may involve full suppression, point suppression, confinement, or containment strategies.

Evacuation of the subdivision in an emergency should be moderately easy due to two entrances onto County Road 240 and good alternative directions for traffic movement within the subdivision. Roads within the subdivision are paved and generally two-lane, but smoke hindering visibility, winding roads limiting sight distance, cul de-sacs with only one outlet for several residences and steep driveways in the northern portions of the subdivision may cause some problems in evacuation. Cell phone reception is spotty across the subdivision. Evacuation actions are the responsibility of the La Plata County Sheriff's Office and the La Plata County Emergency Manager.

D. CO-WRAP Analysis

The subdivision has been analyzed with the Colorado Wildfire Risk Assessment Program (CO-WRAP), and the assessment is in Appendix H. The fuel models present in the subdivision are displayed in the Fuel Type map below:



Fuel Types:

- **TU5 - High Load Conifer Litter, 81% of area**
- TL8 – Long Needle Litter, 7% of area
- TU1 – Light Load Dry Climate Timber-Grass-Shrub, 5% of area
- SH2 – Moderate Load Dry Climate Grass-Shrub, 3% of area
- TL3 – Moderate Load Conifer Litter, 3% of area
- TL2 – Low Load Broadleaf Litter, 1% of area

The characteristics of the subdivision regarding burn probability, wildfire risk, potential wildfire behavior, suppression difficulty and values at risk by percentage of the subdivision area are shown below:

- **Burn Probability:** This category is the annual probability of the area burning under high to extreme fire conditions, based on over 3 million wildfire simulation runs of areas across Colorado. The subdivision rates as ***High to Very High***.

- **Values at Risk**: This category combines the risk factors for Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), Forest Assets, Riparian Assets, and Drinking Water Importance into a single factor. The values range from -1 Least Negative Impact to -9 Most Negative Impact.
    - -1: 1%
    - -2: 3%
    - -3: 5%
    - -4: 2%
    - -5: 3%
    - **-6: 78%**
    - -7: 8%
- **Wildfire Risk**: This factor is a composite value combining Burn Probability and Values at Risk. There are 6 categories, from unburnable to highest risk.
    - Unburnable 2%
    - High Risk 7%
    - **Highest Risk 91%**
- **Suppression Difficulty**: This factor reflects the difficulty and cost of using a bulldozer or similar piece of machinery for suppression due to terrain and vegetation conditions. The factor is a value from -1 Least Difficult to -9 Most Difficult.
    - -2: 2%
    - -4: 15%
    - **-5: 83%**
- **Fire Behavior:**
    - Rate of Spread:
        - Very High to Extreme (2650 - 4000 feet + per hour), 12% of area
        - **High (800 – 2650 feet per hour), 79% of area**
        - Moderate (265 – 800 feet per hour), 5% of area
        - Unburned to Low (0 – 265 feet per hour), 4% of area
    - Flame Length:
        - **Extreme (25 feet +), 91% of area**
        - Low (1-4 feet), 7% of area
        - Non-burned, 2% of area
    - Fire Intensity:
        - **Very High to High, 91% of area**
        - Moderate, 5% of area
        - Low, 2% of area
        - Non-burnable, 2% of area
    - Extreme Weather Fire Type:
        - **Passive Canopy Fire, 82% of area**
        - Active Canopy Fire, 11% of area
        - Surface Fire, 7% of area

7. MITIGATION ACTION PLAN

A. Education and Community Outreach

The audience for the Mitigation Action Plan includes the residents of Edgemont Highlands, landowners immediately surrounding the subdivision that can benefit from mitigation activities on their properties and in the subdivision; government agencies planning complementary mitigation treatments and/or supplying grants or matching funds to perform mitigation; and emergency responders.

Outreach methods may include:

- Educational information at scheduled community meetings.
- Educational community workshops which could include subdivision residents and other community members sponsored by the Wildfire Adapted Partnership and/or the Durango Fire Protection District.
- Firewise® information mailed to all residents.
- Awareness training on basic wildland fire behavior and evacuation procedures for subdivision residents.

B. Policy

Authority and responsibility for managing vegetation on private property within Edgemont Highlands rests with the residents. The Community Association has authority and responsibility for managing vegetation on the common space.

C. Wildfire Mitigation Activities

1. Vegetation/Fuels Management

The recommendations below are consistent with The Home Ignition Zone. "A Guide to Preparing your Home for Wildfire and Creating Defensible Space" A Colorado State Forest Service Publication: 2021_CSFS_HIZGuide_Web.pdf.

The Defensible Space Management Zones are defined as:
Zone 1: The area nearest to the residence or other structures where flammable vegetation and materials should be removed; 0 to 15/30 feet depending on slope.
Zone 2: The transitional area designed to diminish the intensity of a fire approaching a residence; 30 to 100 feet or more, depending on slope.
Zone 3: The area farthest from a residence with vegetative health and resilience the most important objectives; from 100 feet out to the property boundary.

Virtually the entire subdivision consists of Zones 1 and 2 due to residential density.

The major Zone 1 vegetation management issues are fuels like grass, leaf and needle litter and very flammable landscape plants growing in close proximity to structures. Very flammable vegetation or shrubs are discouraged within 15 feet of residences. If desirable trees, shrubs or other plants are in this area, dead branches, stems and leaf litter should be removed and the zone extended accordingly. Additionally, irrigating Gambel oak during the growing season significantly reduces its flammability. Xeric

landscaping techniques using plants and materials with low flammability can reduce the risk of flames adjacent to structures. Wood chips should not be used as mulch adjacent to structures or under flammable shrubs within Zone 1. Residents are encouraged to use rock, gravel, or other inorganic materials within the first three to five feet of their home.

The Zone 2 area from 30 feet to 100 feet of the residences is nearly continuous across the subdivision due to lot sizes and residence locations. Here, trees should be thinned to a spacing of at least 10 feet between crowns. Several interlocking trees can be clumped together and managed as single trees if desired. Prune tree branches off the trunk to a height of 10 feet from the ground or 1/3 the height of the tree, whichever is less. Oak and other shrub clumps should be spaced no closer than two and a half times shrub height to other clumps or trees. Gambel Oak management techniques are included in Appendix F. Grasses should be mowed to a maximum of six to eight inches, especially by fall when grasses are dried out.

Areas farther than 100 feet from structures are in Zone 3. These areas should be managed to maintain good forest health and to reduce the probability of continuous crown fire. Most of the common spaces are in Zone 3.

Example Zone 3 Common Space Tree Density

Probability of wildfire moving into or out of Edgemont Highlands can be reduced through maintenance of shaded fuelbreaks in the common space areas throughout the subdivision. The treatment prescription would be similar to Zone 2, i.e., crown spacing of at least 10 feet between tree crowns, tree clumps or shrub clumps and pruning of tree branches up 10 feet or 1/3 tree height, whichever is less. Residual stand density would be approximately 40 to 50 square feet of basal area (BA). More dense clumps of trees up to densities of 90 square feet BA per acre can be left in some areas for wildlife security and screening between residences. The denser (50-90 square feet BA per acre) areas should not exceed 25% of the common space area. The recommended common space treatment area in the Overlook totals 6 acres, in the Timbers totals 14 acres, some of which is not common space but owned by individual residents, and area remaining to be treated in the main Highlands is approximately 7 acres. Recommended treatment areas are shown on the **Recommended Treatments Map** in Appendix A**.**

Thinning the ponderosa pine and Gambel oak in areas outside Edgemont Highlands would contribute to wildfire risk reduction in the entire landscape as well as the subdivision itself. The recommended prescription is the same as that for the Edgemont Highlands common space, providing for 25% of the area in denser clumps of trees or oak and the matrix in less dense areas that would be resistant to crown fire. Thinning treatments are recommended for the 40-acre BLM parcel northeast of the subdivision; 6 acres in Edgemont Ranch common space along County Road 240; and the 17 acre La Plata County parcel. The recommended treatment areas are shown on the **Recommended Treatments Map.**

Edgemont Highlands' Landscape Architect recommends that residents use the existing Edgemont Highlands Approved Plant List contained within the recorded Landscaping Guidelines for the community as their first choice. Secondarily, use ignition resistant plant materials per CSU Publication 6.305 *Firewise Plant Materials*. The native plants (indicated with an "a" next to the scientific plant name) are the best choices for Edgemont. However, if native species with high water needs are chosen for limited planting within a lot, they should be placed in locations that are somewhat shaded and perhaps get roof runoff. Non-native species with low to medium water needs may be allowed in limited quantities, however non-native species with high water needs will generally not be allowed.

As wood slash is chipped in wildfire mitigation treatments, chips may be used for trail erosion control on common space trail treads. Wood chips degrade relatively quickly so they do not pose a large fire hazard on the trail system. Chips should not be used within 30 feet of residences, sheds, or other structures.

2. Structure Vulnerability

Wood shake roof shingles are prohibited by the Edgemont Highlands Architectural Guidelines since those materials are very receptive to sparks and flame and do not last well in the area's climate. Class A fire-rated roof materials such as metal, cement, cement-fiber shingles, or composition shingles and tile are not receptive to sparks, flame and heat and are allowed subject to the Architectural Review Committee's approval. Enclosing soffits with metal is not specifically required but discourages ignition of roofs and eaves. Detailed fire- resistant construction guidelines are found in *Firewise Construction: Site Design and Building Materials* (Bueche and Foley, 2012) in Appendix G.

Locate woodpiles at least 30 feet from structures if practical and not under decks. Clear flammable vegetation at least 10 feet away from woodpiles. The underside of wood decks, porches and steps should be free of combustible materials or vegetation and screened with 1/8 inch or smaller metal mesh screening or blocked off so as not to allow embers and flames underneath them.

3. Safety

The Community Association should work with the La Plata County Emergency Manager to develop an Emergency Evacuation Plan for the subdivision. The plan should include wildland fire safety zone locations, standard evacuee assembly points, communication trees and management action points. Subdivision residents should be offered a general emergency situation safety awareness session annually to update emergency communication trees, evacuation routes and gathering points. La Plata County offers the "CodeRed" emergency alert system for cellphones, similar to the "reverse 911" call system for landlines.

4. Specific Activity Recommendations and Priorities

The following mitigation activity and treatment recommendations are listed by priority for the Edgemont Highlands Community Association, the residents and land owners of Edgemont Highlands, Durango Fire Protection District and adjoining landowners and cooperators.

Group	Activity Year / Priority	Activity/Action	Estimated Cost
Community Association	Continuing	Assist homeowners with individual defensible space creation and fuel mitigation by providing annual information and education programs on effective mitigation techniques. Encourage residents to reach out to WAP to provide wildfire risk assessments for individual properties (www.wildfireadapted.org). Consider application for "Firewise USA™ Community" designation.	$500 annually
Community Association	2020 – 2025 Priority 2	Thin 27 acres of common space to densities from 40 to 50 square feet of basal area per acre as shaded fuelbreaks. This includes an area along the east side of the Timbers addition that is not common space. Remove ladder fuels in common space within 75 feet of residences. Lower Red Canyon Completed 2020 Upper Red Canyon Oak Mitigation completed 2021 Brush piles to be burned 2023.	$1,500 to $5,000/ acre
Community Association/ La Plata OEM	2020 Priority 1	Develop a subdivision emergency notification and evacuation plan in consultation with the La Plata County Emergency Manager and the subdivision residents. The plan would include safe evacuation routes, "Safety Zones" where residents could safely shelter-in-place and fire equipment staging areas.	$5,000

Group	Activity Year / Priority	Activity/Action	Estimated Cost
La Plata County, WAP	2021 Priority 3	Work with La Plata County and WAP to develop a management plan for the 17-acre block within the subdivision. Recommendation is to maintain stand densities of 40 to 70 square feet of basal area per acre across the block. Work started in 2022.	$1,500/acre
BLM	2023 Priority	Encourage the BLM to thin trees and oak clumps on the 40-acre block in the WUI northeast of the subdivision. Recommendation is to maintain stand densities of 40 to 70 square feet of basal area per acre across the block. Completed 2022, log decks to be removed Spring 2023	$1,500/acre
Community Association	2023-2025 Priority 4a	Thin trees and oak clumps on the 36-acre block in the WUI northwest Corner of the HOA, west of water tank.	$1,500 to $5,000/acre
Community Association	2023-2025 Priority 4b	Thin trees and oak clumps on the 36-acre block in the WUI southwest Corner of the HOA, above Spring Creek and adjacent to Summit Ridge Trail road. Goats were used in 2021 and 2022 to treat the area directly below Window Lake Trail Road and Pioneer Trail USFS trail.	$1,500 to $5,000/acre
Edgemont Ranch & Edgemont Meadows Community Assocication	2022 Priority 6	Work with Edgemont Ranch and Edgemont Meadows subdivisions to thin trees and oak clumps on 6 acres of common space along Road 240. Recommendation is to maintain stand densities of 40 to 50 square feet of basal area per acre on the treated areas as shaded fuelbreaks. Concurrent with the County Property some of this is being done.	$1,500 to $5,000 /acre
Community Association	2023-2026 Priority 5	Treat 5 acres of HOA parcel between Durango Hills and EHCA above Monarch Crest. Recommendation is to maintain stand densities of 40 to 70 square feet of basal area per acre across the block	$1,500 to $5,000/acre
Community Association	Continuing	Re evaluate prior oak mitigation areas for needed mastication and thinning.	$1,500/acre machine $5,000/acre crew

Group	Activity Year / Priority	Activity/Action	Estimated Cost
Home owners	Continuing	Pruning and trimming trees and large shrubs around residences consistent with the recommendations of 2021_CSFS_HIZGuide_web.pdf1.	$500 per lot annually
Home owners	Continuing	Use Edgemont Highlands approved landscape plants (first choice) or ignition resistant plant materials per CSU Publication 6.305 *Firewise Plant Materials* (second choice) for lot landscaping. Currently being updated.	Variable
Community Association	Continuing	Recruit a community member as a WAP Neighborhood Ambassador.	N/C

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of outreach, education, and mitigation efforts within the Edgemont Highlands and its WUI are an important part of the CWPP. The monitoring and evaluation actions for the CWPP are shown below along with the responsible group and when those actions should occur.

Monitoring		
Group	**Action**	**Period**
Community Association	Annual Report to the Community and Colorado State Forest Service	Annually
CSFS	Monitoring of mitigation work status for work covered by grants	As required

Evaluation		
Group	**Action**	**Period**
Community Association	Annual Report will list “Lessons Learned” from fuels mitigation projects and activities over the preceding year.	Annually
Community Association	Review CWPP and measure progress by degree of accomplishment of mitigation benchmarks	Annually
Community Association/CSFS	Update CWPP	Every 5 years

9. GLOSSARY

acre: an area of land containing 43,560 square feet. A square acre would be about 209 feet by 209 feet. A circular acre would have a radius of 117.75 feet.

basal area: (a) the cross-sectional area of a single stem, including the bark, measured at breast height (4.5 feet above the ground) For example, the basal area of a tree 13.5 inches in diameter at breast height is about 1 square foot. Basal area = 0.005454 times diameter squared. (b) of an acre of forest: the sum of basal areas of the individual trees on the area. For example, a well stocked pine stand might contain 70 to 90 square feet of basal area per acre.

canopy: the foliage formed by the crowns of trees in a stand.

crown: the part of a tree or woody plant bearing live branches and foliage.

defensible space: an area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards the structure.

diameter at breast height (dbh): the diameter of a stem of a tree at 4 ½ feet above the ground.

downed fuels: the accumulated woody and vegetative material on the forest floor from leaf/needle fall, natural pruning and breakage that serves as fuel for wildfire.

ecosystem: A spatially explicit, relatively homogenous unit of the earth that includes all interacting organisms (plants, animals, microbes) and components of the abiotic environment within its boundaries. An ecosystem can be of any size: a log, pond, field, forest, or the earth's biosphere.

fuel loading: the oven-dry weight of fuel per unit area.

ladder fuels: combustible material that provides vertical continuity between vegetation strata and allow fire to climb into the crowns of trees or shrubs with relative ease.

litter: the surface layer of a forest floor that is not in an advanced stage of decomposition, usually consisting of freshly fallen leaves, needles, twigs, stems, bark, and fruits.

lop and scatter: a hand method of removing the up-ward branches from tips of felled tress to keep slash low to the ground, to increase rate of decomposition, lower fire hazard, or as a pre-treatment prior to burning.

sapling: a usually young tree larger than a seedling but smaller than a pole.

shaded fuelbreak: A strategically located strip or block of land (of varying width) depending on fuel and terrain, in which fuel density is reduced, thus improving fire control opportunities. The stand is thinned and remaining trees are pruned to remove ladder fuels. Most brush, heavy ground fuels, snags and dead trees are removed and an open park-like appearance established.

silviculture: the art, science, and practice of establishing, tending, and reproducing forest stands of desired characteristics. It is based on knowledge of species characteristics and environmental requirements.

slash: the residue of treetops and branches left on the ground after logging or accumulating as a result of storms, fire, girdling or delimbing.

snag: a standing, generally unmerchantable dead tree from which the leaves and most of the branches have fallen.

stand: a contiguous group of trees sufficiently uniform in age-class distribution, composition, and structure, and growing on a site of sufficiently uniform quality, to be a distinguishable unit.

thinning: a cultural treatment made to reduce stand density of trees primarily to improve growth, enhance forest health, or recover potential mortality.

Wildland-Urban Interface: The geographical meeting point of two diverse systems - wildland and structures. In the WUI, structures and vegetation are sufficiently close so that a wildland fire could spread to structures, or a structure fire could ignite vegetation.

Definitions except defensible space, shaded fuelbreak and Wildland-Urban Interface from *The Dictionary of Forestry*, John A. Helms, editor.

10. LITERATURE CITED

Bueche, David and Foley, Tim. 2012. Firewise Construction: Site Design and Building Materials. Colorado State Forest Service, Ft. Collins, CO. 33 p.

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Scott, Joe H., Burgan, Robert E. 2005. Standard fire behavior fuel models: a comprehensive set for use with Rothermel's surface fire spread model. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-153. Fort Collins, CO; USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 72 p.

11. APPENDICES

A. **Maps**

B. **The Home Ignition Zone. "A Guide to Preparing your Home for Wildfire and Creating Defensible Space" 2021_CSFS_HIZGuide_Web.pdf**

C. **Fuelbreak Guidelines for Forested Subdivisions (F.C. Dennis)**

D. **Fire-Resistant Landscaping (CSU Extension Pub. 6.303, F. C. Dennis)**

E. **FireWise Plant Materials (CSU Extension Pub. 6.305, F. C. Dennis)**

F. **Gambel Oak Management (CSU Extension Pub 6.311, Jester, Rogers and Dennis)**

G. **Firewise Construction: Site Design and Building Materials (Bueche and Foley)**

H. **CO-WRAP Wildfire Risk Assessment**

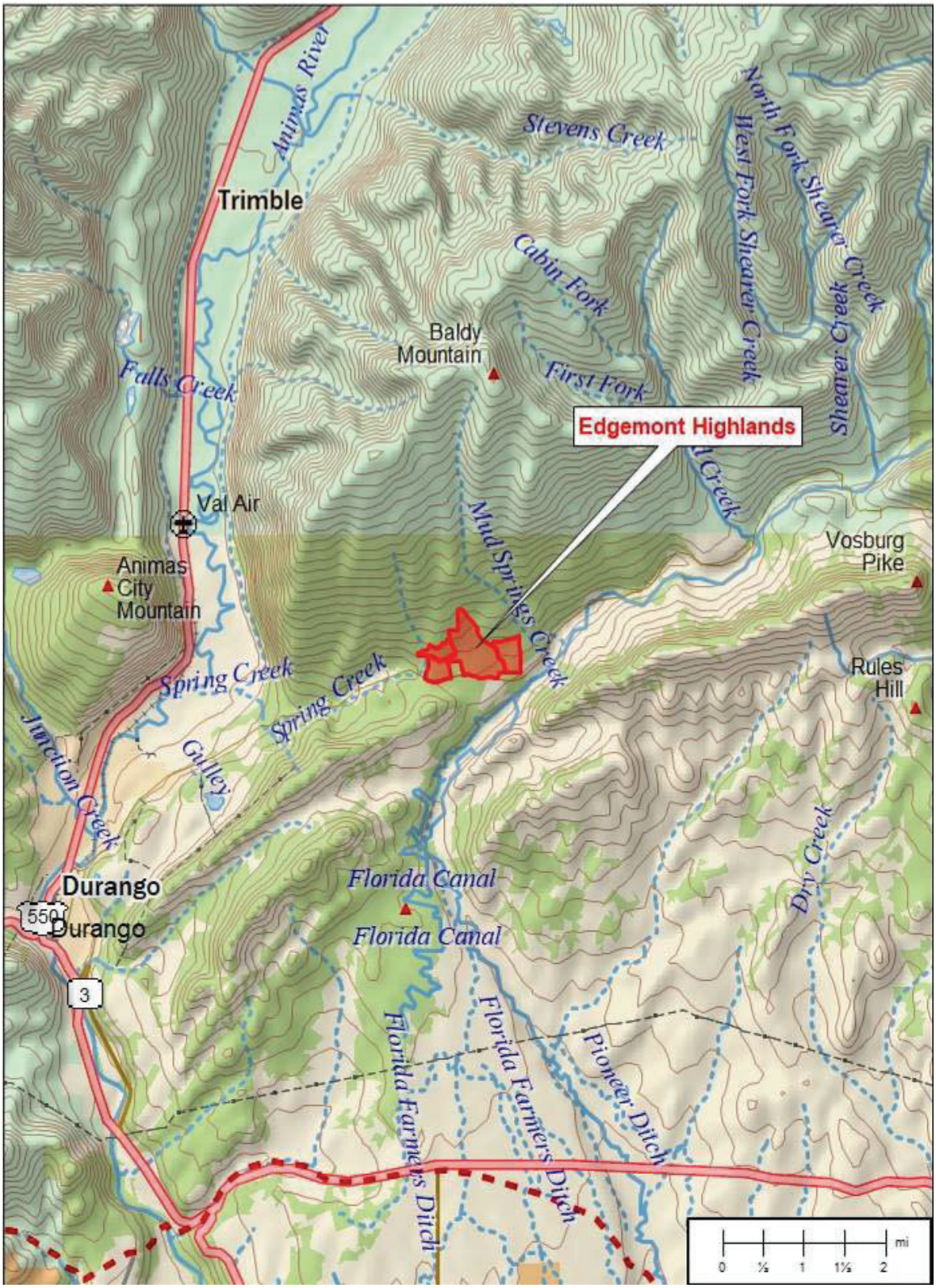
Appendix A: Maps

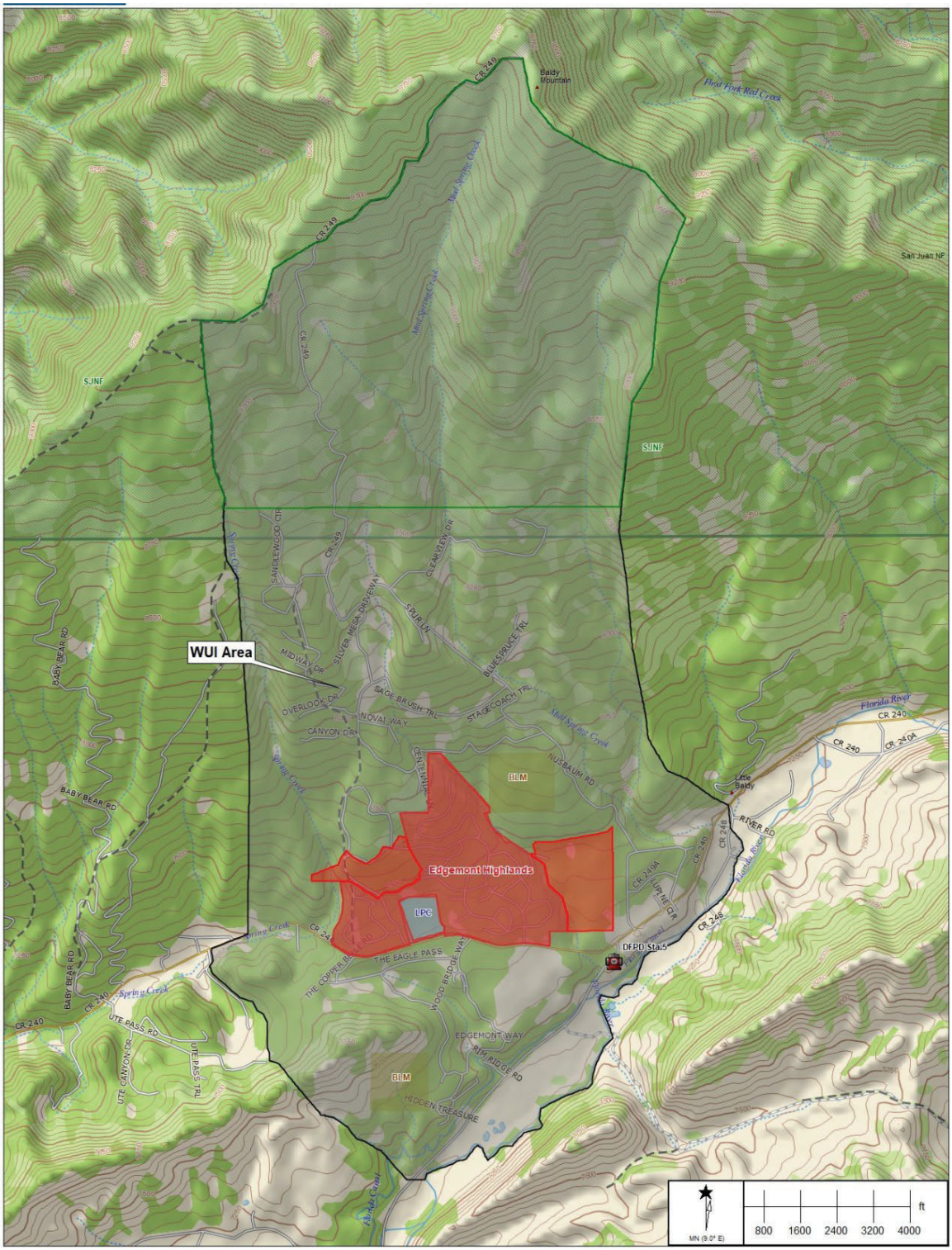
1. **Edgemont Highlands Vicinity Map**

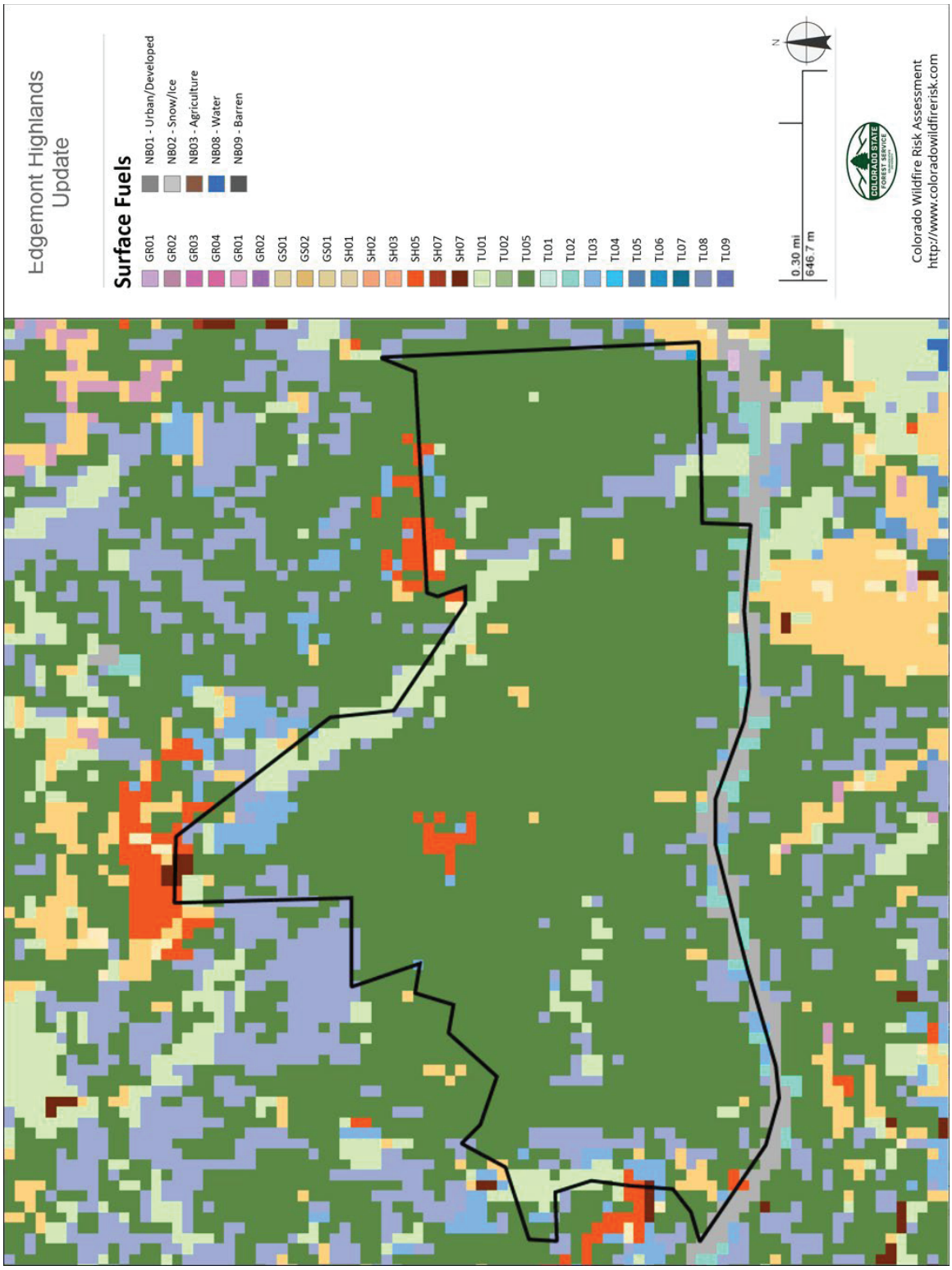
2. **Edgemont Highlands WUI Map**

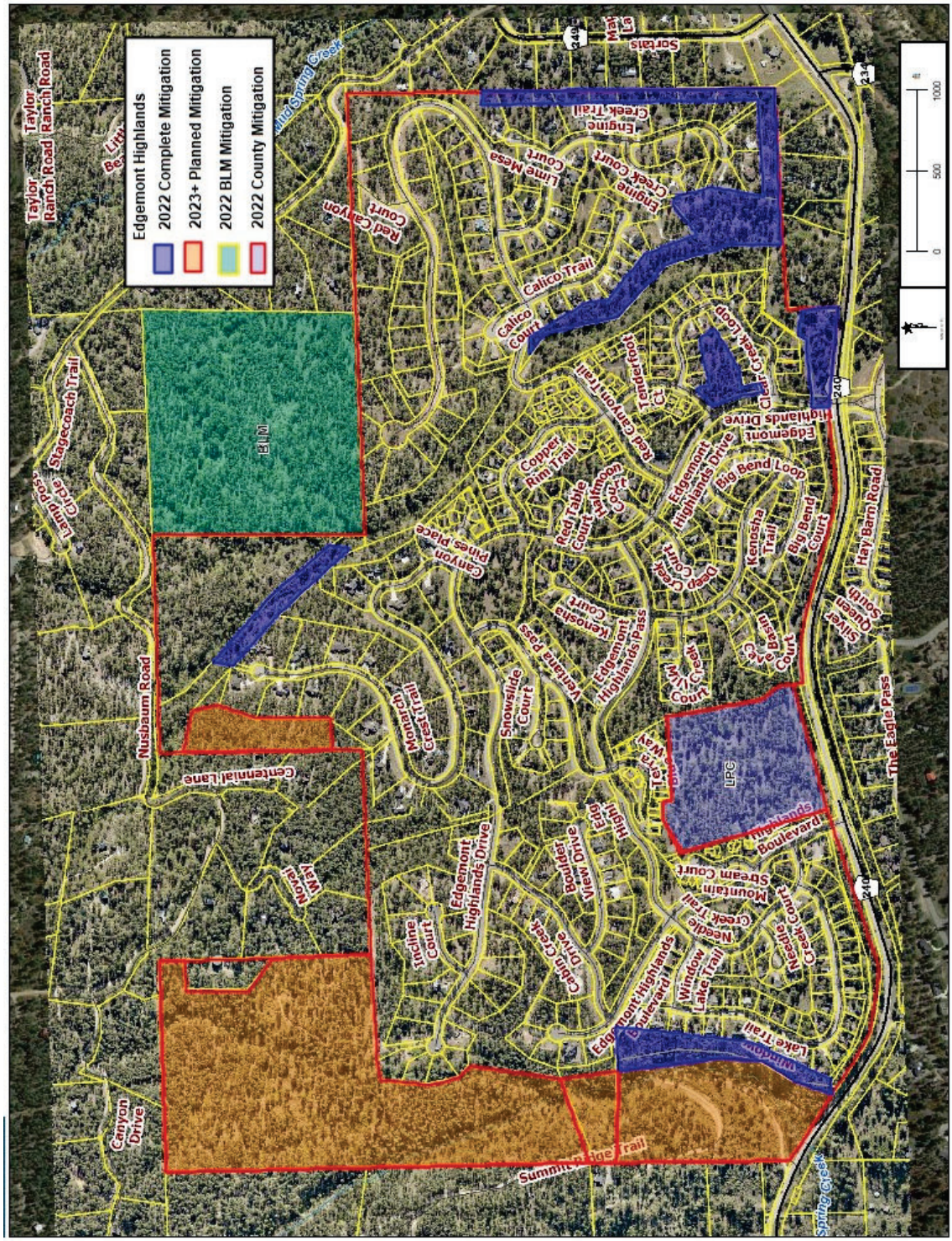
3. **Edgemont Highlands Fuel Models**

4. **Edgemont Highlands Recommended Treatments Map**









Appendix B: Protecting Your Home from Wildfire: Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones

https://static.colostate.edu/client-files/csfs/pdfs/FIRE2012_1_DspaceQuickGuide.pdf

Appendix C: Fuelbreak Guidelines for Forested Subdivisions and Communities

https://static.colostate.edu/client-files/csfs/pdfs/fuelbreak_guidellines.pdf

Appendix D: Fire-Resistant Landscaping

https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/fire-resistant-landscaping-6-303/

Appendix E: Firewise Plant Materials

https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/firewise-plant-materials-6-305/

Appendix F: Gambel Oak Management

https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/gambel-oak-management-6-311/

Appendix G: Firewise Construction: Site Design and Building Materials

https://static.colostate.edu/client-files/csfs/pdfs/firewise-construction2012.pdf

Appendix H: CO-WRAP Analysis
Wildfire Risk Assessment

RiskSummaryReport_Edgemont_Highlands Update_2019