

# Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition

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## *A Path Forward*



Prepared by the Community Mitigation Assistance Team

January 29, 2021



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In August 2020, the Medio Fire started on the Española Ranger District and eventually burned across 4,010 acres within the Fireshed. After experiencing increased public interest during the fire, the Forest worked to continue that interest throughout the fall, hosting numerous virtual public meetings. The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition (GSFFC/Coalition) also recognized the opportunity and sought to identify ways to sustain that increased engagement and encourage increased wildfire mitigation.

In late fall, the Santa Fe National Forest and GSFFC initiated a request for a Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT). The request included assistance developing strategies to sustain community engagement following the increased interest resulting from the Medio Fire, a review of current programs and activities and identifying opportunities to increase mitigation actions on private and tribal lands within the Fireshed. The CMAT was also requested to provide an actionable plan that identified capacity needs for implementing the CMAT's recommendations.

This CMAT assignment was conducted virtually due to travel and in-person gathering restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Team Members conducted an extensive review of Coalition resources and documents, followed by an intensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) exercise with Coalition members, and followed that up with numerous individual and small group interviews. Based on the identified need related to engagement, CMAT provided a virtual workshop to the Coalition with Dr. Sarah

McCaffrey, a social scientist with the Rocky Mountain Research Station titled *Public Response to Wildfire: Myth vs. Reality*. Coalition members had the opportunity to ask questions of Dr. McCaffrey through a facilitated discussion on how these findings could help with Coalition engagement efforts.

This report captures findings from the various activities described above and provides actionable recommendations to increase public participation in mitigation activities and enhance the overall effectiveness of GSFFC strategies and tactics. The report also provides Mitigation Guiding Principles which should be used to guide all the Coalition's mitigation and engagement efforts.

The CMAT has separated the findings and recommendations into four categories to align with the objectives of GSFFC's request.

1. The Coalition
2. Enhancing Communications & Expanding Community Engagement
3. Fireshed Ambassador Program
4. Mitigation on All Lands

To assist with the implementation of CMAT recommendations, this report includes a Community Toolbox ([link here](#)) that contains research, references and resources relating to the recommendations for the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed.



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# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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These guiding principles have been developed by mitigation subject matter experts, social scientists, community leaders, wildfire personnel and land managers. The principles apply to mitigation efforts across the board in every community and are proven to increase mitigation outcomes.

**Be strategic** – Focus on high-risk areas first. Be strategic by creating 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. Connect fuels, forest management 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. In times of Covid-19, face-to-face meetings may be hard. Make a phone call or use online tools, like Zoom or Facetime to engage.

**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. 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 contribute (either in cash or sweat equity) to 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.

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

**Promote home hardening and defensible space** – Having homeowners prepare their yard and structure for



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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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. 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.

**Celebrate success!** – Sustained participation in any partnership will require frequent communication and recognition of 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 to build momentum for mitigation work. Stories, especially those from the perspective of the property owner, often have the biggest impact.

# INTRODUCTION

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Wildfire is a common occurrence across New Mexico and within Santa Fe County; the intensity of these fires has a direct correlation to both climatic conditions and precipitation received. The potential for wildfires occurs year-round, and a recent period of extended drought lends to a heightened probability of larger wildfires in the future.



GSFFC was formed in 2016 as a partnership of public and private organizations that convene to address wildfire risk and forest health in an area called the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed. The Fireshed includes the Santa Fe Municipal watershed, an area of key importance to the City of Santa Fe, as it provides 50-60% of their water.

The focus area encompasses 107,000 acres including the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, the Pueblo of Tesuque, and communities within and adjacent to its boundary. Santa Fe County has varied land ownership, including large areas of federal, state, and private land. Federal lands comprise approximately 60% of the Fireshed.

The following organizations and agencies participate in the Coalition: New Mexico State Forestry, Pueblo of Tesuque, Santa Fe Watershed Association, City of Santa Fe Fire Department, City of Santa Fe Water Division, SFNF: Espanola and Las Vegas-Pecos Ranger Districts, Santa Fe County, Region 3 of the USDA Forest Service, Santa Fe Fat Tire Society, Ecotone Landscape Planning LLC, Rio Grande Water Fund, Santa Fe Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Forest Stewards Guild, Wildfire Network, Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, New Mexico Forest Industry Association, USGS Jemez Mountain Field Station, New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Glorieta Adventure Camps, and Santa Fe County Fire.

# INTRODUCTION

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The 2020 update of the Santa Fe County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (SCCWPP) analyzed the significant amount of wildfire mitigation work accomplished since the original 2008 SCCWPP was completed and identified the need for additional wildfire mitigation projects. The SCCWPP also highlights the role of GSFFC.

The Coalition has developed and is in the process of finalizing a Fireshed Resilience Strategy to help guide their actions into the future. A Fireshed Wildfire Risk Assessment is also in place.

## **The Coalition's Mission**

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition uses proactive, collaborative approaches to improve the health and long-term resilience of forested watersheds and communities by addressing the wildfire risk that threatens us. The Coalition works to build support, understanding, and shared knowledge of the role of fire in a learning and adaptive framework to realize our goals. Our primary goal is to initiate and complete high priority on-the-ground projects that make the Fireshed and its communities more resilient to wildfire. This goal will be realized when fire is used as a tool for management throughout our frequent fire adapted forests, and communities in and adjacent to these forests are fire adapted, meaning they understand the role of fire and are prepared for its occurrence.

# THE COALITION

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The Coalition has an extensive history of collaboration, sharing of resources and working together. Many partners have been with the Coalition since its inception and several organizations have provided the next “generation” of Coalition partners. The breadth of knowledge, skills, passion and commitment to the land and the people of the greater Santa Fe area was evident to the CMAT.

Working together on common goals builds stronger relationships and makes the partners, and the community they serve, stronger and more resilient when the inevitable crisis happens, whether that be wildfire, flooding or pandemic.

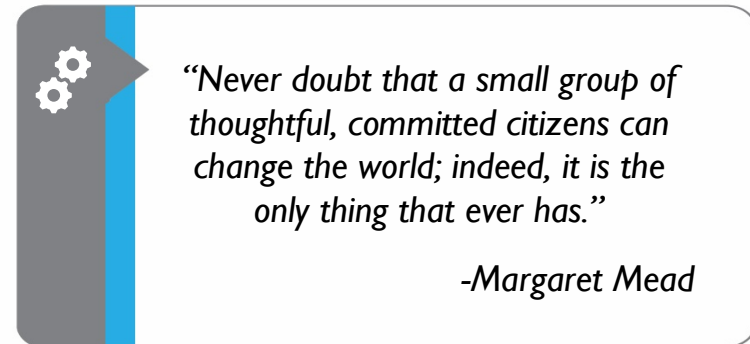
The Coalition has three committees that undertake a majority of Coalition work. These committees and their responsibilities are described within the Operating Principles ([link](#)).

## **Findings:**

An important function of the Coalition is to provide a venue to develop, maintain and strengthen each other's programs.

The Coalition has common goals and strong agreement on the desire to increase the pace and scale of mitigation work. However, the understanding of the goals seems to vary.

The activities of the GSFFC do not always align with the agreed-upon goals of the Coalition. Currently, there is only one member on the Implementation Committee, 19 individuals on the Resiliency and Assessment Team and 21 on the Communications Team.



The primary focus is vegetation management on federal lands, perhaps at a cost to other mitigation opportunities.

Awareness of programs, projects, tools and resources of individual organizations was not widespread with all Coalition Partners.

The time and resources spent reacting to opposing voices is extensive. This draws significant energy away from strategic and proactive efforts.

## **Recommendations:**

**Focus Coalition time on risk reduction activities**, active communications, and engagement. Add participants to the Implementation Committee.

**Make implementation processes and planning a more robust part of the Coalition** beyond individual organization implementation efforts.



# THE COALITION

## Finalize the Fireshed Resilience Strategy and use it.

- Review and consider adding the CMAT recommendations to the draft Resilience Strategy.
- Coordinate a series of work sessions to explain the document and develop and implementation plan.

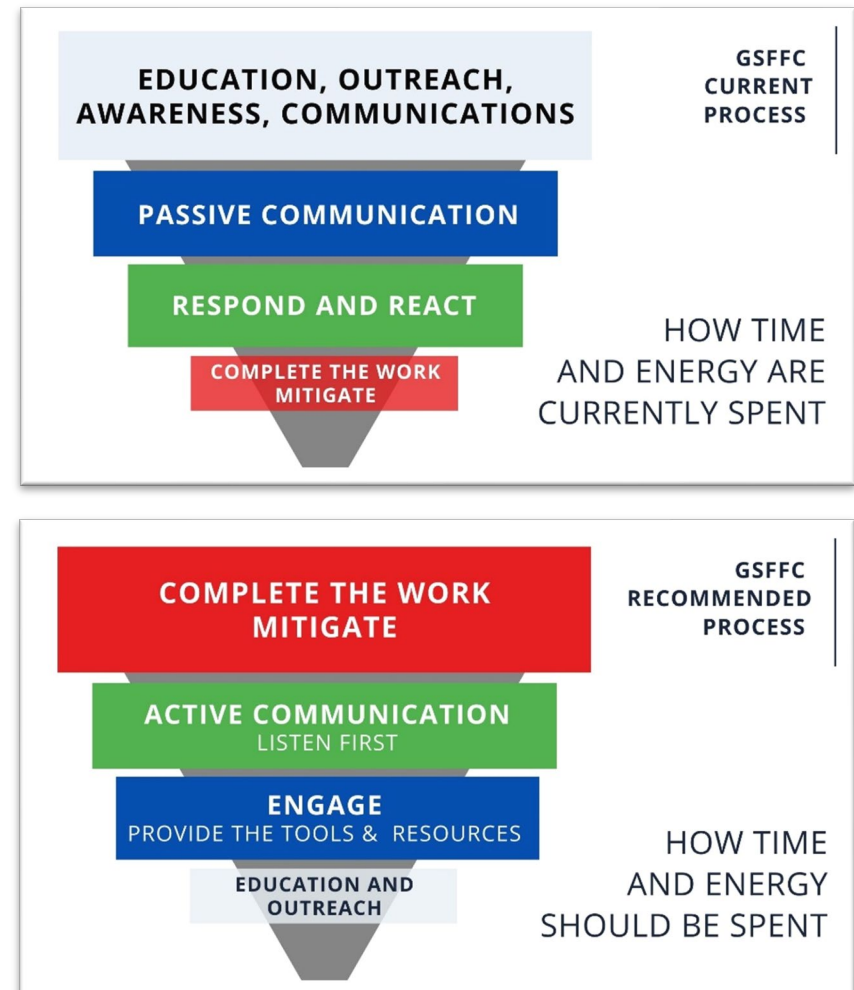
## Revisit the Coalition's Mission and Vision frequently.

Ensure that these critical statements are understood by all participants and embedded in everything the Coalition does. Remember that the “...primary goal is to initiate and complete high priority on-the-ground projects that make the Fireshed and its communities more resilient to wildfire.”

**Realign Coalition committees and activities** using existing guidance documents and the Fireshed Resilience Strategy which is under development. This will help the Coalition re-focus investments (time, funding, capacity, resources, etc.) to better meet the Coalition's community and resilience goals.

**To ensure that participants agree to the Operating Principles, Mission and Vision** require that participants sign onto the Fireshed Resilience Strategy document.

**Build a better understanding of each partner's mitigation programs.** Identify specific features and geographic boundaries of each program, including available tools, equipment, and people. (Refer to GSFFC Programs spreadsheet in the [toolbox](#).)



# THE COALITION

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**Share opportunities and resources** that may be applicable to all partners and members. This may include funding opportunities, sharing Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District's contractors list, equipment resources, and staffing availability in support of the greater Fireshed or working group initiatives.

**Develop an annual collective outcomes report** to help understand if you are meeting your collective goals and to share with the community, stakeholders, and partners. This does not have to be labor intensive or a book. Keep it short, simple, and concise.

**Develop tactics to react to comments** about Coalition or partner projects or programs with the least number of partners as possible. Avoid making this the main focus of the Coalition as this distracts from your important work together.

**Recognize that you can never get everyone to agree.** Refer to Page 12, Public Relations and Engagement Tactic 10, in the GSFFC Communications Plan for specific communications guidance.

Most long-standing coalitions, like the GSFFC, eventually require additional capacity to facilitate and coordinate the mission and vision of their group. Capacity does not always equate to funding a position, but it should be a consistent person and funding assures that consistency. The CMAT identified several needs:

- **Fireshed Manager.** Paid position to coordinate, facilitate and administer day-to-day operations of the Coalition. This position is currently funded for a limited time period and is important to continue increasing the success of the Coalition.
- **Ambassador Coordinator.** This position would recruit, train, and administer day-to-day needs of neighborhood ambassadors to provide consistency in this program and serve as a liaison between ambassadors and the Coalition to ensure the long-term strategy is met.
- **Mitigation specialist(s).** At this time, requests for home assessments, and other programs associated with completing mitigation on private land seem to be met by personnel within agencies and groups who do this work. We foresee a time when requests will increase due to the Coalition's efforts to increase mitigation on private lands, raising concerns for additional capacity to perform this work. An active training program of new mitigation specialists and/or volunteers who would like to do this work will increase a pool of qualified personnel to meet additional requests.

## Findings:

The Coalition has a strong history of diverse and engaged partners, yet there still seem to be some key missing voices.

# THE COALITION

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## **Recommendations:**

Before inviting new participants to the Coalition, ask what they will provide and what their expectations are for participating.

**Seek partners that will support** standing teams, ad-hoc working groups, and activities.

**Provide a one-on-one or small group orientation** for new members that covers history, mission, vision, strategy, and how the group works together.

Potential new partners to the Coalition include:

- NM Acequia Associations
- Pueblos - Pojoaque, Nambe
- BIA – Northern Pueblos Agency
- HOA or Neighborhood Ambassador representatives
- Upper Pecos Watershed
- Volunteer Fire Protection Districts
- PNM
- Santa Fe County Commissioners

## **Findings:**

The Coalition has been in existence since 2016 and has realized numerous successes and confronted varied challenges. It is necessary to periodically assess the path traveled and the path forward.

## **Recommendations:**

**Undertake planned maintenance of the Coalition.** This is not a focus of individual organization activities, outputs or outcomes, rather this is a focused effort to invest in Coalition relationships and to assess **how the Coalition works together.**

**Take time to strengthen trust among ALL coalition members.** Remember that everyone who participates in the Coalition cares about the area and wants to be a part of the solution.

- Ask Coalition members: Why they participate? What they care about and what they want to get from participation?
- Ask the hard questions about the Coalition's work: "What is working and what is not?"
- Celebrate successes – both large and small!

## **When planning for future meetings:**

- Build agendas together
- Set ground rules and stick to them.
- Allocate time on meeting agendas to conduct a plus /delta exercise to identify the opportunities and shortfalls of the Coalition's efforts (What people like – pluses, and what could have been better – deltas).
- Make time for trust-building exercises/ icebreakers / retrospection.
- When faced with critical conversations and/or opposing voices, consider bringing external facilitators or mediators into the conversation.

# THE COALITION

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## **Findings:**

The City of Santa Fe previously provided funding to support administrative tasks, facilitation, and website maintenance as well as help get the Ambassador Program off the ground.

Revenue sources are limited for Coalition-specific capacity and activities. Forest Stewards Guild recently secured funding to support a part-time Fireshed Manager; however, the funding covers only a short period of time.

Committees have no budget to work with.

## **Recommendations:**

**Consider a set contribution** (cash, purchase, or in-kind) from each partner on an annual basis to support the Coalition's administrative, Committee activities, costs of proposed projects (non-mitigation), outreach and education materials or other needs. Direct purchase or In-kind assistance could cover printing costs, web hosting, staff support, equipment, and technical resources.

**Develop a mechanism** to collect cash contributions (donations) and identify someone to manage the funds.

**Leverage funding/opportunities** for outreach and education, learning opportunities and events with other agencies and organizations to create opportunities to benefit more than one entity. For example:

- Align messaging with Fire Adapted Communities New Mexico.



# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

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Adaptation and resilience occur over time, requiring changes in behaviors, understanding, and trust. These changes need to occur at the individual and community level, by those leading the efforts and by those needing a helping hand. As the Coalition seeks to create a healthy ecosystem and safer communities it is essential to share information that is useful and provide the resources that support positive change. The way information is shared, who delivers the information, what is shared and how information is shared, matters immensely.

Coalition partners excel when it comes to innovative means of communicating Coalition values. They have developed and delivered numerous ways to share wildfire-related information through webinars and panel discussions to a multitude of audiences. They have film screenings, and Brewshed events, host subject matter experts who lecture on forest and fire ecology, vegetative fuels, and science-based research on forest health. They host live “Wildfire Wednesdays” events and share white papers on issues of interest, yet there exists a strong concern regarding the lack of actual face-to-face engagement and active participation from the community.

The importance of good, honest, and open communications is imperative in both internal and external communications. The success of the Coalition depends upon both. External communications are critical to build interest, foster trust, and achieve the desired outcome of increased mitigation and resiliency.

This section is divided into two sections: first, we look at the way that the Coalition communicates together and then we review how the Coalition communicates with residents, leaders, and stakeholders outside of the organization. CMAT describes this external process of communications in a phased way: Inform, Educate, Engage. At each phase of the process, we focus on the activities that seek to empower people to act.



*“Communication works for those who work at it.” - John Powell*

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Coalition’s Communication Plan (2017) provides overarching guidance, goals, and objectives to the Communications committee. The committee also develops an annual Communication Strategy (2021) that outlines seasonal messaging and upcoming initiatives.

### **Findings:**

The Communication Plan does not identify mitigation as a goal.

Although there is a plan, it is unclear who will perform the tasks and how the goals and objectives are met.



# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

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Partners do not always provide needed information in a timely manner, thus hampering the efforts of the Communications Committee to keep the public informed.

The Coalition itself lacks funding to support ideas that the Communications Committee may wish to implement. There currently is no process in place to determine, implement, or fund proposed communication projects.

## **Recommendations:**

**Make on-the-ground actions a goal.**

## **Review and implement your Communications Plan**

Clearly identify roles and responsibilities by following the structure put forth within the Communications Plan -- Internal Communication, Public Relations and Education, Tribal Engagement, Communications with other Collaboratives.

**Have partners reaffirm their commitment** to support the Communications Committee with timely information.

As the Communications Committee develops their annual Communication Strategy, have them **develop proposals for communication projects**, including a draft budget and implementation plan. Present proposal(s) to the Coalition for approval and assistance with funding at their first quarterly meeting.

**Review and ensure the Communications Plan contains current actionable items** related to all Fireshed initiatives and activities.

## **EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Whether we are working to increase awareness about wildfire risk, sharing a fuels reduction project proposal or encouraging residents to reduce their wildfire risk, we must remember that most people are wondering, “What’s in it for me? Why should I care about this?” If we fail to listen to their concerns or address those questions, chances are we will not get the results we desire.

This communication section involves three different phases -- informing, learning opportunities, and engaging -- the latter phases building upon the preceding phase. Informing needs to have a “hook” that draws people in and makes them want to learn more. That desire leads them to seek more information or accept an invitation to a learning opportunity. That learning opportunity provides you the opportunity to start a dialogue and learn more about what interests them, and ultimately leads to engagement, where you get them to commit to taking action.

## **Inform**

### **Findings:**

Communications are typically developed by an individual partner and then amplified by other Fireshed partners and the

# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

Communications Committee. Many Coalition members expressed a need to implement additional outreach.

## **Recommendations:**

Recognize that awareness alone rarely results in action. **Make sure your message contains a call to action.**

**Target your message to the audience** – Provide a strategic message that is valuable and relevant to the audience you are trying to reach. Examples include:

- Providing defensible space and home hardening information to realtors and insurance agents
- HEPA filter loan program information to health organizations and doctor's offices

## **Findings:**

The coalition website contains a significant amount of information; however, homeowners have a difficult time understanding how the Coalition can help them. Residents commented that they don't know where to find information about actionable items they or their neighbors should be taking to reduce their wildfire risk, what programs might support their efforts, or information about how the Coalition can support the community.

## **Recommendations:**

**Determine the intent of the website** and how the information is organized. Present the most pertinent



**Active Communication** focuses on listening to understand, before seeking to be understood. Active communication occurs in-person, on-the-ground.

**Passive Communication** is the use of emails, advertisements, newspaper campaigns, and other similar activities. Passive communication can bring awareness to an issue but has limited effect when aiming to increase direct mitigation actions.

information in a way that's clear and easy to access. Consider adding a "Take Action" or "Homeowner Information" tab to direct homeowners to mitigation actions and resources.

**Add opportunities to connect, take action, or provide information** on mitigation outcomes through the website; this will help create repeat customers and referrals from those that use the site. Some potential website action items include:

- Sign up for a wildfire risk assessment or community presentation.
- Highlight the Santa Fe-Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District Defensible Space Program and contractors list.
- Slash removal options.

# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

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- Other mitigation programs: NRCS forest management program (properties over 10 acres), city and county mitigation programs.

**Keep information on the website current.** Review website content regularly to make sure that information aligns with available programs, all links work, and current partners are listed.

## Learning Opportunities

### Findings:

Education events are held throughout the year. These events were made possible through specific funding awards and involved various partners within the Coalition.

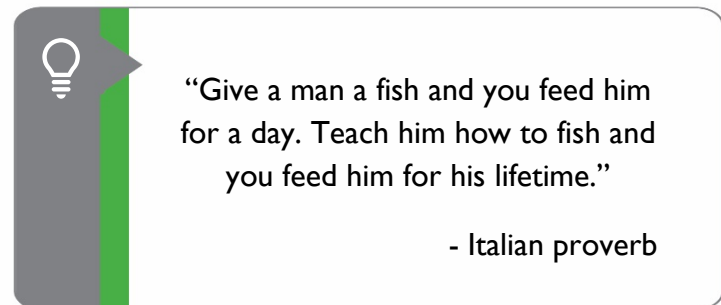
Field trips, tours, and in-person events have been postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

### **Recommendations:**

**Question your assumptions and perceptions on how residents are willing to connect.** Look for opportunities to interact with community members in-person and virtually on a regular basis. Continue to utilize technologies such as Facebook Live and video conferencing to include all interested parties in a hybrid environment.

**Provide information that residents can use.** Present information in a way that supports understanding and is interactive. Several examples are provided below.

- Fire science training for Fireshed Ambassadors.
  - Informational newsletters with info customized to OPPORTUNITIES in the Fireshed. Always include a clear call to action.
  - Look at [liberatingstructures.com](https://liberatingstructures.com) to get ideas for small group activities.
  - Have an online presentation and then facilitate discussion.
  - Host interactive presentations and educational interviews to initiate discussions and learning
  - Offer a panel discussion with an opportunity to take questions from the audience.
  - Remain steadfast and frequent with opportunities.
- Understand that the entire community may not be present during each event, but frequency and consistency is key in virtual environments for education.



# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

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## Engage

### Findings:

Though a wealth of learning opportunities have been presented many have not offered the opportunity for engagement, especially engaging residents.

### **Recommendations:**

**Look for opportunities to provide interactive activities.** The majority of your audience are adults and learn best by doing. Don't just tell residents what to do, **teach them how to perform mitigation tasks**, build community resiliency, and talk with their neighbors.

- Offer workshops that provide hands-on experience with various mitigation tools like chippers, pole saws, or brush hogs for those that want to do the work themselves.
- Demonstrate techniques for piling slash for future burning.
- Plan a workday that involves sharing safety considerations and mitigation best practices.

**Remember you don't have to do it all alone.**

**Capitalize on the skills and knowledge** of Santa Fe residents/Ambassadors to share information – what works/what doesn't with engaging communities, GIS and asset mapping, marketing, grant writing.

### Findings:

A great amount of time and energy is spent **reacting** to issues/concerns brought up by the public, which is preventing or shifting focus from more needed strategic efforts.

### **Recommendations:**

**Take time to listen** to the community's needs **and work together** to find solutions. If possible, set up a meeting or discussion with detractors to really listen to their concerns and find common ground. This will build trust, and a stronger and more sustainable relationship.

**On social media specifically**, realize when it's time to agree to disagree and move on. Remember that a concerned voice does not always mean they cannot support the effort. Do not let those concerns distract you from your goal of increasing resiliency within the community at large.

### Findings:

Members of the Coalition expressed a desire/need to engage new audiences. Some of the missing audiences identified by the Coalition are the hearing impaired, elderly, smoke sensitive, rural communities, and Spanish speaking populations; public health, HOAs, business associations, builders, religious affiliated organizations, realtors; Pojoaque, Nambe, BIA – Northern Pueblos Agency; Upper Pecos Watershed Association and NM Acequia Association.

# COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

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## **Recommendations:**

### **Determine the purpose of engaging new audiences.**

Are there gaps in Coalition representation? Is there a need to develop programs for “differently-abled” populations?

**Be strategic with your engagement.** Determine target audiences before seeking new opportunities of engagement. When Coalition capacity is limited for engaging new audiences, start with the audience where you can achieve the greatest benefit.

**Consider the messenger.** Some communities need agency people to establish credibility; others respond better to non-agency affiliated people. When possible, have two or more partners present together to demonstrate the strength of Coalition relationships.





# FIRESHED AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

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Recognizing a strong desire to engage more residents of high-wildfire risk neighborhoods in mitigation activities, Santa Fe Fire and the Forest Stewards Guild built a Fireshed Ambassador program. This neighborhood ambassador approach is based on findings that neighbors are influenced by neighbors and that volunteers can multiply the efforts of subject matter experts. This program was just starting to gain momentum when the Covid-19 pandemic caused a shift in engagement options, individual organizational priorities, and other Coalition needs. One of the two staff people who did a great deal to develop the framework for the program also transitioned to a different position.

A volunteer ambassador approach should be unique to each place and should enhance and amplify the efforts of professional partners. Several enthusiastic and engaged volunteers have gotten the current Ambassador Program off to a great start. By connecting this program first with partners and their available resources, then engaging more volunteers, this program presents the Coalition its greatest opportunity to change the pace of mitigation on private lands.

## **Findings:**

Ambassadors and volunteer residents expressed frustration over the slow response and/or lack of willingness from some County and City officials to engage in discussions around wildfire issues, concerns, or requests for assistance.

## **Recommendations:**

**Designate a Coalition member to serve as the point of contact (POC)** for residents to connect with. The POC could then work to engage appropriate City or County personnel and help address the needs of residents.

The POC could also work to elevate items of a more regional concern with the appropriate parties.

## **Findings:**

The full strengths of the Ambassador Program are not yet realized by Coalition members or used to link the program to the Coalition.

## **Recommendations:**

**Provide an overview document and presentation** about the program at a Fireshed Coalition meeting to increase awareness and gain internal support.

**Have the current Ambassadors designate an Ambassador Liaison to participate in Coalition and/or working group meetings** and serve as a liaison to other homeowner groups. There is a wealth of varied experience and knowledge among the small, existing ambassador group. When/if an Ambassador Coordinator is hired, **include that person in the Coalition meetings.**

## **Findings:**

There are partners who support the Ambassador Program, but the program, as set up, is not designed for expansion.

# FIRESHED AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

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There has not been stable funding for coordination and a question remains on who will backfill a recent staffing change.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Create a dedicated Fireshed Ambassador**

**Coordinator**, at least half-time, that would be the primary point of contact for residents. Roles would include:

- Serve as a liaison between volunteers and Coalition partners to improve efficiency and reduce impacts to partners.
- Coordinate or conduct site visits or home assessments, Community Risk Assessments, and connect residents with available programs.
- Maintain a contact list for both confirmed and potential Ambassadors. Share Ambassador contacts among the group, as they permit, to enable Ambassadors to reach out directly and coordinate with one another.
- Coordinate learning and engagement opportunities for Ambassadors.

## **Findings:**

Ambassadors are looking for increased opportunities for learning and engagement. A dedicated coordinator could develop these opportunities in collaboration with the appropriate Coalition members or other community partners.

## **Recommendations:**

**Provide one-stop shopping by collecting resource materials and opportunities in one place** (like the Ambassador Toolkit on the Coalition website). Consider using the *Overcoming Obstacles to Mitigation* template or web format to make Ambassador toolkit more robust.

**Develop a schedule of learning and training sessions and presenters and formalize an Ambassador training program.** Fireshed Ambassadors may be able to help organize these. Topics of interest brought up by Fireshed Ambassadors include:

- Using Google Earth and mapping access
- Sim Table simulations on fire progressions, and how smoke settles
- Our animals and wildfire. Concern for animal evacuation readiness was expressed by landowners in foothills communities.
- Insurance myths vs. reality
- Ember Awareness
- Impact of mitigation on property values
- Regulatory approaches, state, and local codes and HOA opportunities
- CWPP – what you can do to change the risk (present something like East Canyon example, evacuation exercise)

# FIRESHED AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

## Look for interactive opportunities to engage communities like:

- Mitigation workdays to support residents that cannot complete work.
- WUI Checkpoints: great exercise for single egress communities where FD and Ambassador Team up to engage residents as they enter or exit the neighborhood
- Wildfire Research Team and parcel-based risk assessment approach: Santa Fe Fire is initiating social science research to understand resident risk perceptions and evaluate parcel level risk in a subset of Santa Fe communities. If this approach proves successful, use findings to build this approach throughout the fireshed.
- Evacuation drill(s), simulated or real in partnership with OEM and local fire department

## Findings:

Some potential Ambassadors found the volunteer paperwork from the City of Santa Fe to be excessive (background check, driver's license) and an unnecessary collection of personal information.

## Recommendations:

**Only include what is really needed in volunteer paperwork.** Evaluate if running a “pledge and plan” commitment under a different organization might be an option.

## Findings:

Volunteers felt they lacked credibility in promoting the need to reduce wildfire risk in their communities.

## Recommendations:

**Have a Coalition partner interface with HOA Boards** initially to increase overall awareness of the community's wildfire risk and need for mitigation work and gain support for the Ambassador position.

When Ambassadors are “trained” let their community know.



# FIRESHED AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

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## **Findings:**

Residents expressed frustration over where to find information and conflicting reports of services/resources that are available to assist residents. They did not feel there was good guidance on where to get started and how to progress at a neighborhood scale.

## **Recommendations:**

**Add to the list of programs** found in the CMAT [toolbox](#) (site assessments, mitigation, chipping, pile burning, CWPP or Community Risk Assessment development) and contacts.

**Share contractors list** (from Jose' Valera-Lopez).

**Share key partner contact list** and area of expertise or services provided.

**Coordinate site visits and projects.**

**Offer Community Wildfire Risk Assessments** (see template in Toolbox) to help Ambassador prioritize actions and get started in their community.

## **Findings:**

Ambassadors and potential Ambassadors seemed unsure of expectations, and in some case, how to get started or who to contact for assistance.

## **Recommendations:**

**Offer orientation to get Ambassadors started** – maybe twice a year. This gives potential Ambassadors an opportunity to meet each other early on, voice questions and concerns and receive answers. It will help to start building that network between residents.

- Bolster your recruitment efforts by hosting an Orientation during the same months (Mar. and Oct. or Feb. and Sept.) annually, at a time that works well for working folks as well as retirees. Put an emphasis on recruitment the month before.
- Set an expectation with current Ambassadors and Coalition members to help recruit new Ambassadors by sharing a list of communities (or focus areas) in which you would like to have Ambassadors.
- Invite subject matter experts like Santa Fe Fire Dept. and NM State Forestry (or Soil and Water District if they handle cost-shares) to give short presentations (d-space, insects and disease, fire ecology, fire behavior). Residents are more likely to reach out and ask for assistance if they have met the people. (build in concept of leveraging)
- Invite one or two experienced Fireshed Ambassadors to attend each Orientation and share their community successes. Knowing others have succeeded opens residents' eyes to the potential of the position and can be a powerful motivator
- Leverage other organizations and existing resources to orient new ambassadors to base knowledge of forest health, fire ecology, mitigation techniques, and home ignition zone training. Consider developing a virtual

# FIRESHED AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

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orientation with readily available videos and/or partner with other organizations like FAC NM for the fire science, forest health, and ember awareness aspects of an orientation.

- Create an Ambassador binder for each volunteer with all essential information and page numbers so when information is updated, they can remove the outdated page. Several other Ambassador programs have done this with great success

## **Findings:**

There is not a mechanism in place for collecting volunteer hours or accomplishments from Ambassadors. Tracking progress toward goals is critical for evaluating program effectiveness and can also be leveraged as match to fund program work.

## **Recommendations:**

**Set up an online input form** to collect volunteer hours, investments, and mitigation outcomes.

**Utilize volunteer accomplishment tracking sheet found in Toolbox.**



# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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As documented in the 2020 CWPP update and the draft Fireshed Resilience Strategy, there has been a significant amount of fire mitigation work accomplished across the Fireshed since the 2008 CWPP was completed.

The Forest Service has several projects undergoing environmental analysis, has implemented fuels treatment on landscapes and has faced litigation at times. Several landscape-level treatment projects have been implemented where multi-



jurisdictional partnerships resulted in completing cross-boundary mitigation.

The 2020 CWPP categorizes the private landscape into focal areas each with their own description and priority. Work is occurring in these areas through a variety of funding sources; however, the largest gap in implementing mitigation across the Fireshed exists on private land. Landowners have expressed interest in achieving mitigation work but need direction, resources for removing slash, and in some cases, financial assistance.

The Santa Fe area and the Fireshed area share a unique tri-cultural heritage with indigenous people, Hispanic people and the more recent infusion of Anglo population. Each population has its own affinity with the Fireshed that are considered as restoration and mitigation activities are proposed. The Santa Fe Municipal Watershed which lies within the larger Fireshed boundary, provides essential drinking and irrigation water for all three populations.

Tesuque Pueblo is an active participant in the Coalition and supports the common goals of the Coalition. Tesuque Pueblo use these mountains for ceremonies and other traditional uses such as gathering of firewood and pinyon nuts, to hunt deer, elk, and turkeys. Pojoaque and Nambe Pueblos also have a vested interest in the watershed as they are downstream of the Fireshed area. Hispanic communities rely on this landscape for traditional uses as well. Visitors and residents alike

# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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appreciate and value the recreational opportunities that exist within the Fireshed.

Fire plays an important role in this landscape by maintaining and restoring a diverse ecosystem.

## ALL LANDS MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### Findings:

Completed, ongoing and planned fuels treatment projects are captured in the New Mexico Vegetation Treatments Opportunity Map.

All partners work on their mitigation projects independently. The Coalition's Implementation Team does not collaborate on priority areas beyond what is described in the CWPP and Draft Fireshed Resilience Strategy. Partners focus on their individual agency plans for prioritization. During Coalition meetings, the chair either reports out on partner projects or a round table report out is conducted.

### **Recommendations:**

**Utilize focal areas and priorities** set out in 2020 CWPP and Fireshed Resilience Strategy to target particular neighborhoods, HOAs and landscape projects to accomplish work.

**Implementation Team should update opportunity map** with accomplished and planned fuels treatments annually and share them with the public.

**Annually review projects** planned for implementation to ensure they are aligned with priorities in the Resilience Strategy and CWPP.

### Findings:

Prescribed fire is a commonly used slash management tool.

A major hurdle for prescribed fire and pile burning across all lands is a resistance to smoke from members of the public and several groups.

High recreation use can interfere with implementing projects during optimal burn windows. High recreation is thought of as so many recreationalists in the area during holidays, summer, or special events as well as heavily used trails, ski areas, etc. that their presence and influence on the economy takes precedence over completing priority mitigation work.

A HEPA filter loan program is operated by the Forest Stewards Guild.

### **Recommendations:**

Continue to inform residents within airshed of potential for smoke and where they can obtain information.

# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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Work with stakeholders to close down trails for recreation use during burn windows. Additional opportunities to reduce conflicts while accomplishing prescribed burns would be determined by relevant partners.

**Work with the public health agency to take over management** of the HEPA filter loan program. Interest in the program exceeds current capacity (during large wildfires) and may become an increasing burden in the future.

**Coordinate with Communications Team** to provide details and expectation of short-term sacrifice for long-term gain for the local recreation community. Post alternate recreation opportunities at temporarily impacted recreation sites. Incorporate recreation values in ways that will not negatively impact project effectiveness.

## **PUBLIC FIRESHED LAND MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Findings:**

Coalition partners are actively completing fuel treatments on public lands through a variety of funding sources. The Forest Service is currently working in three high priority areas: Hyde Park, Santa Fe Watershed and Pacheco Canyon. In addition, mitigation work is occurring on State, County, and Municipal lands -- Hyde Memorial State Park, Parker Property, and Aztec Springs.

### **Recommendations:**

**Implement strategic fuel breaks adjacent to communities** and other values at risk as outlined in the CWPP.

- Prioritize treatment areas adjacent to communities who are actively involved in mitigation.

**Implementation Team annually review the comprehensive list of potential treatment areas in the CWPP.** Update and clarify priorities to facilitate overall resiliency and fire behavior mitigation. Utilize treatment recommendations in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5, of the CWPP (pg 41, [link](#)).

**Coordinate projects outside Tesuque lands on non-Pueblo lands.** Reserved Treaty Right Lands funding is available for USFS lands where priorities align with Pueblo interests.

### **Findings:**

The Draft Fireshed Resilience Strategy and 2020 CWPP both divided the Fireshed into focal areas with specific treatments and treatment areas.

### **Recommendations:**

**Select two or three focal landscapes** to work in based on the risk and opportunities; this would accomplish landscape resiliency in a strategic fashion.

# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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## PRIVATE LAND MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Findings:**

Some Coalition partners as well as Ambassadors and interested residents have had difficulty engaging residents to take action.

Organizations that assist private landowners with mitigation projects appear to be reactive and not strategic.

Homeowners do not know what to do or who to turn to accomplish work on the ground, including slash removal.

### **Recommendations:**

**Promote the availability of and conduct** home assessments and develop mitigation prescription.

**Make home site visits a key engagement tool.** Ensure assessors understand the concept “from the front door to the forest” which encourages homeowners to start with actions around their home and work outwards forested areas.

Assure that Assessors are familiar with locally available programs (cost-share programs, mitigation services, chipping, slash disposal) to help residents accomplish the work.

**Establish a Community Hazard Assessment program** so that neighborhood volunteers understand various facets of their wildfire risk and have a specific action

plan for their property to get started. (See template in Toolbox).

**Make implementation a more specific, robust part of the Coalition** beyond just individual organization/agency implementation. Accomplish this through building a better understanding of what each other are doing, what their programs and knowing limitations of resources.

**Utilize treatment recommendations** in Table 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, of Santa Fe County CWPP (pg 41, [link](#)).

**Ensure Implementation Team regularly updates the status of projects** (accomplished, funded, in progress) and record this in a place readily accessible to Coalition members and the public. Update this tracking mechanism at least annually.

**Further develop and implement treatment opportunities** that benefit more than one organization/agency as a strategic effort.

**Determine where slash removal is an issue** for residents. Do not solely rely on burning to remove slash. Identify or create numerous tools, such as curb side chipper program or expansion of the City of Santa Fe Green Waste Program.

# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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**Spend less time on passive information sharing.** Go into a community or provide direct resources vs. general information.

## **Findings:**

Mitigation is occurring throughout the Fireshed on various jurisdictions, but private landowners want more focus from the Coalition on neighborhoods.

Currently, the majority of funding for wildfire mitigation goes to private landowners who own more than 10 acres with more of a forest stewardship focus. Funds for smaller parcels are not readily available. Current funding sources, such as NRCS, may be too restrictive to allow for widespread participation.

## **Recommendations:**

Focus Coalition efforts to increase private land treatments in areas adjacent to proposed public land projects. Cross-boundary projects can support public awareness, acceptance and buy-in, cost efficiencies, as well as increase effectiveness of management activities.

**Expand funding to support treatments and home hardening on private properties of all sizes.** Develop additional cost-share programs to encourage landowners to invest time and funds for mitigation on their property.

## **Findings:**

Residents and the CWPP identified a need for roadside thinning to improve evacuation routes.

## **Recommendations:**

**Seek funds to mitigate vegetation along ingress and egress routes** and improve passing and turnarounds, especially in high-risk areas. Where USFS roads are involved in accessing private lands, USFS road repair funds could be used to mitigate vegetation along ingress and egress routes within neighborhoods identified as high risk to wildfire.

## **Findings:**

Within the Fireshed, there are three identified Firewise USA Sites: Monte Sereno, Tesuque Village, Rancho Viejo all of which were renewed in 2020 by National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA® program. The Coalition members interviewed were not aware of work being done by these neighborhoods, however, NFPA provided information on mitigation activity indicating all three are still active and doing mitigation work.

WUI Code addresses construction and vegetation management of new builds, however the code does not address future maintenance needs.



# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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## **Recommendations:**

**Connect with these communities** to capture their work and celebrate their success. Encourage these communities to participate in the Ambassador Program and promote the program to other neighborhoods.

Consider vegetation management ordinance for maintenance of all residences, expand beyond new builds.

Engage residents and Ambassadors to promote maintenance.

## **PUEBLO LAND MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Tesuque Pueblo is the only tribal entity involved as a partner in the Fireshed, although many tribes in Northern New Mexico claim ancestral rights to area within the Fireshed. Nambe and Pojoaque Pueblos would be adversely affected by any downstream post fire effects.

## **Findings:**

Pojoaque and Nambe Pueblos do not have capacity to be involved in the Coalition as their focus is on other priorities.

Priority for treatment and restoration is Tesuque watershed.

## **Recommendations:**

**Seek funds or other mechanisms to provide Pueblos with capacity** to participate in Coalition meetings and events so they are involved/engaged in the Fireshed efforts.

Seek input on projects in the landscape important to each Pueblo.

**Ensure each Pueblo prioritizes projects** based on their own unique values, concerns, and priorities.

## **Findings:**

A barrier to implementing prescribed burns on Pueblo lands include approval of burn plans and prescribed burn qualifications by BIA. BIA does not have capacity to respond to these requests in a timely manner. Tesuque personnel are developing contingency plans for working with BIA on prescribed burns: A) Have BIA write and implement the prescribed burns. B) Have Forest Service write burn plans and implement prescribed burns through an MOU or agreement with BIA. C) Contract with a third party to write and implement burn plans.

## **Recommendations:**

Have the Coalition support and advocate for Tesuque plan to engage BIA in authorizing burn plans and provide qualified personnel to implement prescribed burns. Members of the Coalition can provide examples of cross-agency agreements or MOUs to be used by BIA.

## **Findings:**

Tesuque Pueblo wants people to understand the role fire plays on the landscape and to bring back “good” fire which is not always high intensity fire. The less vocal, traditional villages and

# MITIGATION ON ALL LANDS

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communities feel their issues and concerns are often dismissed by Coalition members.

It was noted that recreation seems to be prioritized over local traditional communities' uses.

## **Recommendations:**

Utilize Pueblo ideas and concerns during education and engagement efforts. Discuss these concerns during Coalition meetings with a desired outcome of creating a greater understanding Tribal values. This should lead to incorporation of these values into project prioritization and outcomes.

## **Findings:**

There is a desired approach to let fire pick what trees are removed. Some Pueblo members believe the Forest Service thins too many trees.

## **Recommendations:**

**Continue quarterly coordination and planning meetings with Forest Service** to discuss priorities, implementation needs and other areas for cooperation. Develop a demonstration project that allows Puelbo members to provide input on management prescriptions.

# APPENDIX – THE FIRST STEPS

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## **Realign Coalition with Operating Principles, Mission and Vision**

- Meet more frequently, balance your committees, and make mitigation the goal.
- Finalize Resilience Strategy including an action plan to drive future mitigation.

## **Build capacity for Coalition and program coordination**

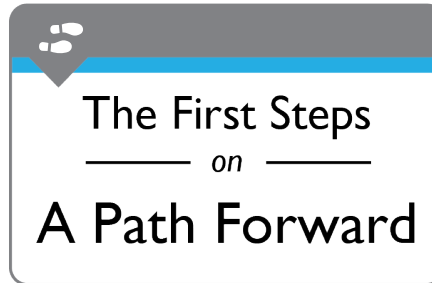
- Ensure continuity of the GSFFC Manager position.
- Review existing program and make adjustments to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

## **Undertake planned maintenance of the Coalition**

- Take time to strengthen the coalition by asking the hard questions – what works and what is not? Why members participate? What member care about and what they want to get from participation? Ask yourselves if you are still focusing on reactions vs. actions?
- Celebrate successes & accomplishments

## **Commit to and support the Fireshed Ambassador program**

- Seek specific funding for a Fireshed Ambassador coordinator.
- Engage partners to provide the information and mitigation support residents need.



## **Make implementation a more specific, robust part of the Coalition**

- Build the Implementation Team and align projects with focal area landscapes including private, tribal, and public lands. Invest in key projects and programs beyond landscape fuels treatments.

## **Build your private land mitigation infrastructure**

- Develop shared awareness of existing programs and assets.
- Follow best practices to make efficient use of resources through current programs and focus on filling gaps in mitigation support needed to move more residents to action (ex. Expand tools for slash removal, including on private lands.)
- Complete the GSFFC Programs Spreadsheet, share it and use it.

## **Review and implement your Communications Plan**

- Ensure mitigation is a clear goal of external communications.
- Structure your Communications Team to implement the plan; design engagement to leverage existing projects and programs and accomplish mitigation priorities.
- Listen to concerns and follow Communications Plan procedures to respond as necessary.

# THANK YOU

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Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, Santa Fe National Forest, City of Santa Fe Fire Department, Pueblo of Tesuque, Sierra Club, Fat Tire Society, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forest Stewards Guild, New Mexico State Forestry, Santa Fe Watershed Association, AmeriCorps VISTA, Santa Fe County Fire Department, The Red Elm, LLC, The Nature Conservancy, New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, City of Santa Fe Water Division, Fireshed Ambassadors representatives from Cerros Colorados Community, La Barbaria community, Villages of Santa Fe and Vista Encantada Neighborhood Association.

# THE CMAT TEAM

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The Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service to assist communities impacted by wildfire. CMATs are comprised of public and private wildland-urban interface (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.



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# SANTA FE TOOLBOX



<https://tinyurl.com/yyf8hg47>



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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