

Sevier County, Tennessee

Actions Speak Louder Than Words



Prepared by the Community Mitigation Assistance Team
May 18, 2022

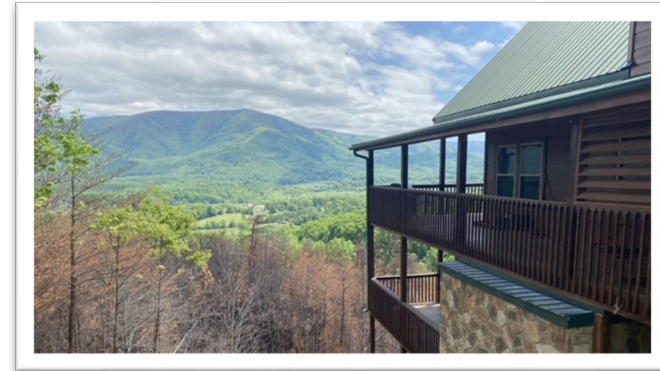


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Compared to some areas in the western U.S., large destructive wildfires are a relatively young phenomenon in eastern Tennessee. The 17,000-acre fire that swept through Gatlinburg in November 2016 served as notice that Tennessee is not immune to these types of fires. Less than six years later in March 2022, wildfires erupted across the Hatcher Mountain area in Wears Valley, resulting in more structures lost and numerous evacuations. This fire, which was fueled by a combination of strong winds and dry ground conditions, was mirrored by similar fires in nearby Seymour and adjoining Blount County.

The USFS (Region 8) initially reached out to discuss the possibility of a Community Mitigation Assistance Team (CMAT) coming to Sevier County, and they worked with the Tennessee Division of Forestry (TDF) and Sevier County to initiate the formal request for the team. Though there are no USFS lands within Sevier County, the agency recognizes the value of an outside perspective looking at the issues and making recommendations. The agency also felt having the CMAT here could be a good learning opportunity for adjoining Cocke County partners in identifying opportunities to avoid the challenges currently being experienced by Sevier County, as they have similar terrain, and will undoubtedly start to see development increase as Sevier County gets built out.

This report captures findings from the Team's activities, which included CWPP review, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats exercise, individual and small group



Wears Valley from Hatcher Mountain. Photo Credit: Jen Haas

discussions, and it provides actionable recommendations to increase mitigation activities in the County.

Though not a specific request within our Delegation of Authority, CMAT felt it was imperative to look through the lens of what Sevier County needs to do to be ready for funding if made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

The CMAT has categorized the findings and recommendations into four categories that we feel represent the needs of Sevier County and the direction they need to focus on as they move forward with their wildfire mitigation program. These categories are:

1. Partnerships and Planning
2. Mitigation Actions
3. Community Engagement
4. Funding

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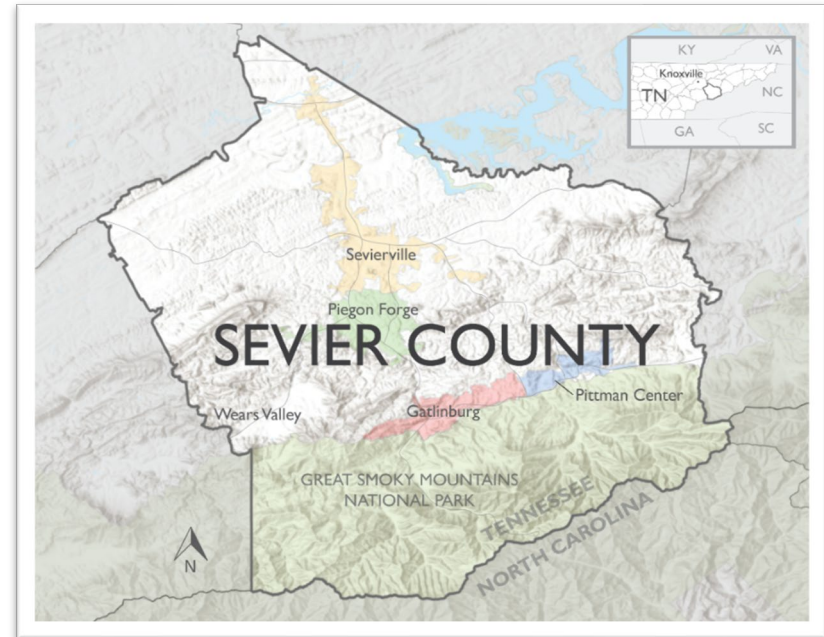
*Looking west through the burn scar atop Bullhead Mountain.
Photo Credit: Jen Haas*

INTRODUCTION

Sevier County serves as the northern gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) which sees an average of over 14 million visitors annually. Gatlinburg is the county's largest community and home to about 40,000 of the county's 95,000 residents; followed by Sevierville with 16,000 residents and Pigeon Forge with about 6,000. Because of its proximity to GRSM and the number of visitors the park draws into the area, the main economic drivers of revenue for Sevier County is the tourism/travel industry. This has resulted in its densely forested areas and steep topography being dotted with thousands of commercial cabins, residential homes and condominiums in close proximity to each other, many of which are reached only by narrow, winding roads. According to the Gatlinburg Firewise Action Plan (2018):

“The Southern Region has the fastest growing population and is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation regarding population and development. Due to this rapid growth and the expansion of development into rural areas, it also has one of [the] highest potentials for wildland fire threat to public safety and the potential for damage to structures and forest resources as population and development increases.”

The fires that swept through the Gatlinburg on November 28, 2016 greatly impacted the city. In this 17,000-acre fire, over 2,400 structures and businesses were destroyed or damaged and 14 lives were lost. Less than six years later, in 2022, the Hatcher Mountain Rd./Indigo Lane Fire impacted about 2,500 acres and damaged 213 structures.



Due to the lack of large wildfires up to that time, there was a strong need to raise awareness among residents regarding their wildfire risk as well as actions they could undertake to reduce that risk.

Since 2016, various partners have been working to improve the situation. TDF has hired additional contract wildfire mitigation specialist positions to interact with residents, encourage Firewise USA® community (FWC) recognition, and develop community-level CWPPs. There are now 10 FWC

INTRODUCTION

and most are actively pursuing wildfire mitigation work; however, there is a need for more resources to support their efforts. Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge Fire Departments both have Firewise community coordinators that work closely with their constituents.

In 2018, the County created a Fire Administrator position to oversee the fire departments. In Tennessee, unless a county passes a fire resolution, the county is not required to offer fire services. A fire resolution was recently passed which is allowing the Fire Administrator to set up contracts with the various fire departments to provide fire services throughout the county.

The Fire Administrator has established an FAC Committee, which includes representatives from each agency and fire department as well as residents, that has been meeting on a semi-regular basis to share information and learn. They also worked together to plan the 2022 Wildfire Prep Day Expo.

These changes are all for the good and are something to be proud of. However, and understandably so, the community has a deep sense of loss, angst and concern due to their collective fire histories. This history still defines relationships, level of trust and cooperation, but partners are working together and overcoming.

Sevier County has an Interim CWPP (2019) in place and that plan needs to be dusted off and finalized so it can be used to continue to guide future mitigation efforts.

However, large wildfires have continued to happen, and homes are still being lost, and agency partners are looking for ways to increase momentum and build greater community resiliency.

Sevier County is at a tipping point in their wildfire mitigation efforts. It is time to step back, discuss honestly what is and isn't working, evaluate the needs of the community and bring cohesion and focus to ongoing and new efforts.

It is time to shift from the strong focus on education to building complementary programs that will support overall efforts. Continuing to provide some level of education, mitigation training, and awareness work is fine, but should not be the primary activity. The time is ripe for a transition to the next phase with a more action-based strategy.

CMAT developed a sample Fire Adapted Sevier County **Work Plan** that addresses the recommendations in this document. See [Appendix A](#).

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

PARTNERSHIPS

Groups or organizations that are ready to move beyond education to the next level need to think about their structure and how they operate together. It is imperative in today's competitive funding world that these groups radiate collaboration and coordination. Observations and experience over the past 20 years have shown that the most successful collaborative efforts have dedicated coordinators.

FIRE ADAPTED SEVIER COUNTY

Finding: The creation of the County-wide Fire Adapted Committee was applauded as an outstanding advancement within the County since the 2016 fires. The group shares information and supports peer-to-peer learning and training but could have a more purposeful goal.

Several potential key partners were identified as not being at the table including: contractors, Foothills Land Conservancy, real estate and insurance agents, and electric companies.

Committees, working groups and partners need to have cohesion which takes time and commitment.

Recommendation:

I. The FAC Committee MUST be maintained and fostered. Restructure the group into a collaborative partnership or coalition and focus your efforts on taking action, not just raising awareness and sharing information.

2. Change the name to something like “Fire Adapted Sevier County” that portrays permanence versus a working group, and speak with one voice. Become the “Go To” organization in Sevier County for wildfire resiliency and action.

3. Develop a mission and set goals and objectives to strive towards.

4. Create a logo and “brand” yourselves.

5. Set a regular meeting date (i.e., First Monday of every quarter) and stick to it.

6. Discuss who's not at the table that should be and invite them to participate.

7. Designate/hire a dedicated coordinator to facilitate the group. This individual's responsibilities would include:

- a. Meeting facilitation and development (bring people to the table, ensuring agendas are focused on pressing and relevant issues and needs)
- b. Collaboratively plan projects
- c. Create programs to meet community needs (chipping, slash removal, cost-share, etc.)
- d. Ensure accountability
- e. Track Progress

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

8. Develop a Communications Plan

- a. Key Messages (Common Language)
- b. Goals and Objectives
- c. Target Audiences
- d. Communication Channels -- One-stop shopping website (with links to other relevant sites)
- e. Content
- f. Evaluation

9. Share stories and celebrate success!

- a. Sustained participation in any partnership will require frequent communication and recognition of contributions.
- b. Recognition does not have to be formal and can be as simple as a handwritten thank you.
- c. Recognition in the presence of peers and partners goes a long way toward retaining volunteers.
- d. Share accomplishments to build momentum for mitigation work.
- e. Use visuals and maps to share stories of successful mitigation projects.
- f. Highlight people, places, and specific resources. Vary what stories you share.



Best Practice: Maintaining Partnerships



Building and maintaining strong partnerships enables your community to accomplish more. It's important to design a maintenance plan. Conduct frequent review of participation, challenges, barriers, short and long-term plans, and accomplishments.

Ask yourselves: How can we make this partnership better to get more done? What are we really trying to accomplish here? Why do some people participate, and others don't?

Encourage feedback and frequent communications from partners. Create an environment for healthy change and open conversation.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

PLANNING is a key component in reducing wildfire risk throughout the county. Collaborative planning is imperative in securing implementation funding and moving towards larger, landscape-scale cross-boundary projects.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

Finding: The Sevier County Interim Wildland Fire Protection Plan (2019) (CWPP) provides guidance at a high level and has not been finalized. There is a misperception that the County CWPP can't recommend specific actions because the majority of land is private. CMAT found that of the 39 listed Project Descriptions, 23 were prevention and education focused, 2 were partnerships focused, 10 were planning focused, and 4 were response and evacuation focused. There were no specific implementation actions identified. Smaller community-level plans have been developed for six communities.

Recommendation:

- I. TDF should immediately review and update existing CWPP Action Plans taking the following into consideration:
 - a. Work together to identify and map key high-risk areas.
 - b. Make implementation the priority activity; Include site-specific project locations and treatment types.
 - c. Include maps that display potential priority work areas. These areas can be defined by parcels, ingress and egress routes, or other delineations and should be portrayed at a useful scale.

- d. As the Sevier County CWPP is finalized, reference all existing community-level CWPPs.

2. These same standards should apply to any new CWPPs developed.

Finding: Action Plans are not detailed enough to lead to meaningful work.

For example: Currently, a recommended action is “*Perform home safety, business, and County facility assessments with wildfire focus.*” This recommendation does not directly address *how you will make a home, business or county facility safer*, rather it describes a step in the process. An assessment will identify the needs, gaps and activities, but making a home safer will require that a mitigation action, such as removing combustible mulch from the first five feet, be completed.

Recommendation:

1. Be strategic – Focus on high-risk areas first. Strive for larger landscape fuel treatments and helping clusters of homes reduce risk. Scattered smaller treatments are not as effective.
2. Within the CWPP Action Plan, group project descriptions by recommendation categories (Community Hazard Reduction, Structural Ignitability, and Education Initiatives) and rank their priority.
3. Within the CWPP Action Plan spell out the direct actions to be taken and how the actions will lead to the desired

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING



Brook Smith (TDF) reviewing a county map to identify mitigation priorities.
Photo Credit: Brad Wright

Finding: CWPP Action Plans are currently constrained by a dollar figure. This constraint has created a false restriction on what can and should be included in the CWPP Action Plan.

Recommendation:

1. Do not limit CWPP Action Plans to a dollar figure. Activities presented in the plan should be identified based on the values at risk, need, and priority, regardless of the cost.

outcome. For example, if the project is to “*Make Homes Safer*” the recommended action must describe the “how.”

See [Appendix B](#) for an example of how mitigation projects could be described in a CWPP Action Plan.

PARCEL LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

Finding: Tennessee Division of Forestry and local fire departments assist residents with home and community risk assessments.

Recommendation:

1. Use risk assessments as an opportunity to actively engage residents and lead them to action.
 - a. Inform them of their risk and give them specific mitigation actions to reduce their risk.
 - b. Present information in a relatable and understandable way so that residents are comfortable completing tasks. Include pictures of problem areas as needed.
2. Be clear about what residents need to do. Provide a written report with site-specific, prioritized mitigation recommendations.
 - a. Point out specific opportunities where mitigation can most easily be done.
 - b. For example, “Install 1/8-inch metal mesh screening underneath front porch. Remove rhododendron and mountain laurel within 5 feet of the house. Thin pine saplings within 30 feet on the south side of house.”

PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

3. Provide residents with the contractors and resources list.

TRACKING PROGRESS

Essential to planning and prioritization is an up-to-date operational picture. This picture must include information on where, when, and what (the type of treatment and size) mitigation work has occurred.

Finding: Current outcomes tracking is limited.

Recommendation:

1. Track accomplishments, activities, and outcomes.
 - a. Utilize Sevier County GIS to support mitigation planning and accomplishment tracking.
2. Map FWC, and more importantly, their work.
 - a. Develop a process where Mitigation Specialists collect spatial data on projects completed.
 - b. Capture and share proposed, planned and completed work.
3. Collect and share information with Fire Adapted Sevier County members and the larger community, including political leaders.

Finding: A space or time has not been created to recognize the work already being done in the community.

Recommendation:

1. Create milestone goals with mitigation on an annual basis (i.e.: 150 homes creating defensible space, 1,000 cubic yards of debris removed from HIZ) and celebrate as a community when goals have been accomplished.
2. Take time to share accomplishments – who did the work, what was done, how it was done. Recognize community volunteer leaders who are leading people to reduce their risk.
3. When non-traditional partners like Dollywood undertake mitigation, share the story (tie it back to “working together to make our community safer from wildfire”).

MITIGATION ACTIONS

As partners and residents talked about issues relating to increasing the pace and scale of mitigation work within Sevier County, there were numerous barriers and challenges that were mentioned including the planning of projects, the lack of capacity to get the work done, and how to dispose of the slash created from projects. Understanding and evaluating the dynamic pieces of a mitigation strategy are imperative to address and improve wildfire risk reduction efforts.



*Burn scar next to mitigation work on Hatcher Mountain.
Photo Credit: Jen Haas*

CROSS-BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

Wildfires do not stop at jurisdictional boundaries. Partners need to explore every opportunity to conduct mitigation work along boundaries between varying jurisdictions.

Finding: Limited mitigation work has occurred along the boundary between Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and private lands in Sevier County.

Recommendation:

1. Connect fuels, forest management and defensible space projects to benefit cross-boundary areas. Engage with other neighborhoods and jurisdictions to accomplish work on adjoining properties.
2. GRSM should plan projects that protect critical Park infrastructure (employee housing, Park Headquarters) as well as cultural resources (homesteads and cemeteries).
3. GRSM must investigate opportunities to increase “fence” line projects within Sevier County, similar to those being implemented in North Carolina.

MITIGATION ACTIONS

GETTING THE WORK DONE

Finding: TDF has a crew (and equipment) that completes fuel reduction and prescribed fire projects; however, the crew is not being utilized in Sevier County.

Recommendation:

1. Investigate opportunities to engage the TDF crew through a vendor agreement to complete landscape / residential work in the area. Use crews on highly visible public land projects such as at Ski Mtn or Mynatt Park.

Finding: Partners expressed a desire to establish a county-wide mitigation crew.

Recommendation:

1. Pilot the use of a work crew by engaging with AmeriCorps or a SE Conservation Corps program first. This will provide an opportunity to assess the training and supervision needs as well as production rates and costs.

2. When developing a crew do the following:

- a. Designate a crew boss or supervisor that has the time to work with the crew daily.
- b. Understand the indirect and direct costs. How much will insurance, travel, housing, fuel, training, equipment and transportation cost? Who will manage these costs?

- c. Create more projects than you think can be completed. Having “shelf stock” projects will help if the crew moves quicker than anticipated.
- d. Provide the “right” tools for the job. Ensure the crew has professional quality tools and there is a maintenance program in place to keep all equipment in tip-top operational condition. Provide PPE.
- e. Set the expectation early on that outcomes (acres treated, homes protected, defensible-space created) and relationships (trust with residents, professionalism, rapport) are the program objectives.

Finding: Some residents are not able to physically do the work or cannot afford it, and some might be more motivated if there was financial assistance.

Recommendation:

1. Develop a cost-share program to support the cost of mitigation work.

2. Develop a program to assist elderly, disabled and underserved populations with mitigation needs.

Finding: Completing mitigation work can be a struggle. Steep slopes, dense vegetation individuals, and a lack of mitigation workers all compound the issue.

MITIGATION ACTIONS

With the large emphasis placed squarely on the shoulders of the residents to complete the work, a need exists to expand the workforce and help people do the work.

Recommendation:

1. Establish a list of contractors and slash drop-off locations to share with homeowners, businesses and government agencies. List details on the services the contractors provide (chipping, thinning, mastication, burning). Update annually.
2. Create a one-page handout for residents that highlights things to consider when hiring a mitigation contractor.
3. Work directly with residents and FWC to create and advertise projects that encompass numerous homes, parcels or roadsides. Developing and seeking funding for larger projects sends a tangible message to contractors that Sevier County is taking wildfire risk reduction seriously and may encourage contractors to add employees or new equipment. As is often quoted from the baseball movie, Field of Dreams - “build it and they will come.”

VOLUNTEERS

There are many considerations when you bring volunteers in to undertake mitigation work. First and foremost, try to match the type of volunteer to the opportunity. Does the work involve hauling slash to the roadside or do you actually need trees cut down or slash piles burned? More complex projects may be better suited to “trained” volunteers like Team Rubicon or AmeriCorps. Simpler tasks may be more appropriate for the Scout group or students. Logistics needs like equipment, food, water, porta-a-potties, and lodging/camping facilities need to be considered as well as permits, liability waivers, crew supervision and safety, all depending on the size and complexity of the project.

Finding: For the most part, volunteer participation has been limited to individuals and residents within the designated FWC, working only within their respective areas or occasionally helping out a neighbor in an adjoining community.

Recommendation:

1. For larger, more complex activities like tree thinning or pile burning, recruit Team Rubicon or AmeriCorps for assistance.
2. For simpler projects, engage volunteer groups to haul slash, clean debris, or leaf blowing as well as supporting other activities, like providing refreshments at mitigation events and reporting accomplishments. Service clubs may be good groups to tap into to help with maintenance work for the

MITIGATION ACTIONS

elderly and disabled. Groups to consider include 4H and Youth Groups, UT students, Boy Scouts, Samaritans Purse and church groups.

3. Encourage FWC leaders to request assistance from their neighbors for non-mitigation activities like spreading the word, engaging new residents and communities, maintaining a community Facebook page, writing grants, soliciting donations, writing stories, or taking photographs.

SLASH DISPOSAL OPTIONS

There are many different reasons why residents may not undertake fuel reduction work; however, the most common reason provided is that they don't know what to do with the slash, followed by the cost of the work. Providing some level of incentive or financial assistance can really help to move the needle forward with on-the-ground work. Due to the large number of out-of-town property owners, the County may need to consider several different options for debris removal. The goal is not to provide these services for free but rather as an incentive.

Finding: There is a need for a mechanism to get rid of debris and slash. When a lot is cleared for development slash piles are created and left onsite.

Recommendation:

1. Examine the different types of chipping and slash removal programs provided in [Appendix C](#) to develop one or more county-wide programs to assist residents.
2. Share locations where debris can be dropped off.
3. Use all the forest prescriptions available. When appropriate, slashing down and leaving some larger material on-site to decompose and act as erosion control is a perfectly acceptable treatment.
4. Provide firewood to residents in need by hauling material to a convenient site for firewood use. Look for the potential to engage a civic group to manage the project.
5. Consider the purchase of an air curtain burner or tub grinder to be placed at a central County location where material could be dropped off and dealt with.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How partners reach out to residents and visitors and how much time is spent on it is a vital consideration in our limited capacity world. With millions of visitors entering Sevier County annually, it is no wonder a great deal of time and energy is spent accommodating these guests from all over the world. With a thoughtful outreach and engagement strategy, communities can meet the needs of residents and visitors.

REFOCUS YOUR ENERGY

Finding: Partners spend a great deal of time on prevention and wildfire messaging.

In some communities, many homes are second homes or rental properties. While awareness of the fire adapted ecosystem in the area might be lacking amongst those visiting the area, residents know the history and the risk.

Recommendation:

1. Invest most of your time and resources on risk reduction actions. Meetings, recognition programs, news releases, or going to events do not accomplish mitigation.
2. Review municipally owned parcels, such as parks and open space lands to develop mitigation demonstration sites that highlight what well mitigated, fire adapted lands and buildings can look like.

- a. Mynatt Park in Gatlinburg was referenced as an area that would work well for a demonstration area due to its proximity to both a community and GRSM.

3. Push prevention messages when needed most, like during times of drought, or forecasted high winds and prior to green up in the spring. People tend to ignore messages that don't feel relevant.

4. Target your message to the audience. Do not expect that the same message will resonate with residents and visitors alike. Target fire safety, prevention, and evacuation information to visitors.



Best Practice: Messaging



The most productive education techniques are those that focus on direct engagement and active communication.

Keep messaging simple and concise. Don't use jargon or acronyms. Focus messaging on risk, ways to reduce risk, and who to follow up with (provide contact information). The messaging should have a purpose, a call to action.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COMMON LANGUAGE

Finding: Different groups often use different terminology, leaving everyone confused as to what needs to be done.

Recommendation:

1. Agree on and create a common terminology or FAQ resource. As a partnership, develop a common language, especially around terminology like “Firewise” and “fire adapted communities”.
2. Make sure partners and residents understand what a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is, its objectives, goals, and desired outcomes, and the difference between other reports (such as Risk Assessments and Action Plans).

THE INFORMATION SOURCE

Finding: Currently information is dispersed across numerous websites and locations: Sevier County Emergency Response, Sevier County Firewise Adapted Communities, UT Extension: Sevier County Firewise Program, Tennessee Wildland Fire.

Recommendation:

1. Create a website for Fire Adapted Sevier County and make it a one-stop shop for disseminating information with links to useful information on other partner’s websites.

Add the following content:

- County and Community-level CWPPs
- Contractor List / Slash and Fuelwood Drop Off Sites



- Event Calendar
- Incentive Programs
- Grant and Funding Opportunities

Finding: A strong emphasis is put on fire awareness and education events in May, which is towards the end of the spring fire season in Tennessee.

Recommendation:

1. Switch your education efforts to a fall focus and motivate residents to undertake action prior to the fall/spring wildfire season.

CHANGE THE PARADIGM

Finding: It is difficult to get community buy-in when it comes to reducing wildfire risk.

Recommendation:

1. Encourage residents to take pride in creating a safer environment for their neighbors and community by reducing risk around their home. “This is what we do in Sevier County.” Leading by example is one of the most effective tools to move individuals to act.
2. Set an example for residents to follow. Expand upon the successful combustible mulch replacement project in Gatlinburg to the other County facilities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SHARE SUCCESSES

Finding: The community has several successful projects completed or underway.

- The City of Gatlinburg has replaced their immediate zone fuels (5 feet from structures) with non-combustible materials.
- Dollywood is reducing fuels on their property (they own ~400 acres) along their train tracks and fireworks areas with help from TDF crews.

Recommendation:

I. Work with agency or business (Dollywood) public relations personnel to highlight and promote successful projects and programs, like those referenced above, as examples of what can be done by working together. When project locations are accessible to the public, create demonstration sites.

FIREWISE USA® COMMUNITIES (FWC)

Finding: There are 10 active FWC within Sevier County. A Firewise community designation is a step along the community wildfire mitigation journey, but not the final destination.

Recommendation:

I. The focus must not be on the number of FWC. Expanding (and maintaining) relationships, completing effective on-the-ground mitigation, developing new volunteers, resources and skills, increasing the number of

homes hardened, and homes mitigated must be the focus over signing up new FWC.

2. Think to the future. As interest increases and new communities become engaged, there will need to be staff to support new CWPP development and implementation activities.
3. Provide needed support to FWC to help them get work done. If residents are struggling, help them coordinate volunteer projects, provide them the tools (masticator, full size chipper, fuel crew), or secure more funding.
4. TDF should plan to increase capacity to support community mitigation implementation. These positions would work to implement CWPP Action Plan Items by developing treatment prescriptions, securing work bids, managing contracts, and supporting mitigation events.
5. Be realistic. Leverage the power of the collective FWC's funds. Develop shared resources to be used amongst all partners. Instead of purchasing small, underpowered chippers, leverage numerous communities' funds to rent larger capacity chippers and share the resource. This will require coordination and planning, but a large chipper can knock out in a few hours what might take a week using a small chipper. Being efficient is key when you are working in areas of dense vegetation with limited volunteers.

FUNDING

Funding community wildfire mitigation is no easy task. Applying for and managing financial assistance is a full-time job which requires creativity, tenacity and vision. In order for mitigation work to be sustained, all partners must make a commitment to invest and leverage financial resources to build the mitigation coffers.

Finding: New funding may soon become available through the Community Wildfire Defense Grants within the Infrastructure Bill. Capacity is lacking across all partners to effectively manage large amounts of grant funding.

Recommendation:

Take actions that will help you be ready to receive funding.

I. Discuss and select an appropriate fiscal manager (Appalachian RCD, Sevier County, other?).

2. Create a line item within City and County budgets for wildfire mitigation efforts. Start with what you can and increase on an annual basis. This could provide a necessary match on a grant request or allow for timely payments to contractors, but more importantly, it sends a message to the community that the City and County are serious about wildfire mitigation.



Some grants allow you to take up to a 10% indirect fee to help offset costs of managing a grant, filing reimbursement requests, etc.

3. Encourage Homeowner Associations and communities to create a line item within their budgets for wildfire mitigation efforts.

4. Keep a “Wish List” of needs (personnel, equipment) and shovel-ready projects (prescriptions for treatments) so when grant opportunities come up you know how much funding to apply for and can quickly write a proposal.



Many funders like to see that there is a “local investment” occurring from the community as well as homeowners.

Finding: Funding mitigation work has been limited to Tennessee Division of Forestry’s HMG program, which includes three types of Hazard Mitigation Grants (HMG) available to residents and communities.

- a. \$1,000 Start-up grants to assist with the development of CWPPs
- b. \$500 Community Education Grants
- c. \$20,000 HMA Grants. These one-time grants are to support communities after they have completed their CWPP.
 - i. In subsequent years, communities are eligible to compete for up to \$10,000.

Recommendation:

I. Sevier County, TDF and GRSM should seek larger funding to support a comprehensive mitigation program which might

FUNDING

include purchasing equipment, slash removal or chipping programs, a cost-share program for mitigation work, cross-boundary treatments, demonstration projects, county roadside mitigation, or starting up a mitigation crew.

2. Grants.gov is a large database of federal grant opportunities and can be searched by grant type (wildfire risk reduction or hazardous fuels reduction).

3. Some other potential funding opportunities include:

- a. Secure Rural Schools Act - Title III funding (through County) can be used to support FWC but the County must elect to use Title III
- b. Private Foundations
- c. Action, Implementation and Mitigation Program (through Coalitions and Collaboratives)
- d. Ready, Set Go Chipper! (through International Association of Fire Chiefs)
- e. Southern Foresters Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grants
- f. Local businesses (may be willing to help support local educational events, allowing communities to use more of their funding towards actual on the ground work).

THANK YOU

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City of Gatlinburg, City of Pigeon Forge, City of Sevierville, National Park Service – Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Sevier County Emergency Management, Tennessee Division of Forestry, University of Tennessee Extension Office, US Forest Service - Cherokee National Forest



THE CMAT TEAM

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.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**Community Wildfire Mitigation
Best Practices Toolbox**



<https://co-co.org/community-wildfire-mitigation-best-practices-toolbox/>

APPENDIX A – WORK PLAN

FIRE ADAPTED SEVIER COUNTY WORK PLAN

Action	Deadline	Assigned to	Updates
PARTNERSHIPS – page 3-4			
Fire Adapted Sevier County (FASC) Schedule Quarterly Meetings w/dates, time and locations	5/31/22	Sevier County	
Designate/hire a coordinator		Sevier County	
Develop Mission / Goals / Objectives	First FASC Meeting 2022	FASC Members	
Create Working Groups (Communications, Implementation, CWPP)	First FASC Meeting 2022	FASC Members	
Invite missing partners to participate	Ongoing	FASC Members	
Develop a Communications Plan	8/31/22	Comms Working Group	
PLANNING – page 5-7			
County CWPP Convene the Sevier County CWPP Working group	First FASC Meeting 2022	CWPP Working Group	
Work together and identify key risk and focus areas on a map.			

APPENDIX A – WORK PLAN

Review action plan and update to include specific, actionable items and locations where work will occur.			
Finalize County CWPP	7/1/2022		
Community Level CWPPs Review and update FWC level CWPP action plans			
Tracking Share annual FW Community data with Partners			
Develop reporting / tracking process to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acres • Homes mitigated • Volunteers • \$ invested • Slash collected 			
Celebrate Successes Annually acknowledge the work being completed (via website, social media, press release, public event or an annual report)			

APPENDIX A – WORK PLAN

MITIGATION ACTIONS – page 8-11 Convene the Implementation Working Group to examine slash management opportunities.			
Work on reducing fuels on County Right of Ways.			
Complete projects on County and City Properties (list individually here to track progress).			
Develop at least 2 mitigation projects each year that make use of volunteer groups. 1. 2.			
Develop a pilot project on City property and use Team Rubicon or AmeriCorps to complete work.			
Develop a cost-share program.			
Develop a vulnerable population volunteer support network.			
Develop and distribute Mitigation Contractor List. Include slash and debris drop-off locations.			
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – page 12-15 Convene the Communications Working Group.			

APPENDIX A – WORK PLAN

Develop and update a county website for FASC to house useful information.			
Create a common terminology sheet or FAQ source that is publicly available.			
Develop a mitigation demonstration site on municipally owned property (Mynatt Park).			
Share at least 4 mitigation success stories a year. 1. 2...			
FUNDING – page 16-17 Select a fiscal manager.			
Create a line item within County budget for wildfire mitigation efforts.			
Create a line item within city budget(s) for wildfire mitigation efforts.			
Create a “Wish List” of needs (people, equipment).			
Create a potential mitigation project list in high-risk areas.			
Compile a list of possible larger funding sources and prepare proposal(s).			

APPENDIX B – CWPP ACTION PLAN

Below we provide several CWPP Action Plan examples that highlight the level of detail needed:

Project Description	Recommended Action	Estimated Cost	Responsible Party	Funding Source	Initial Target Date
Reduce highly flammable species (kudzu) that are prevalent in the community (Pittman Center CWPP)	Work with local vendors and local government to use goats to manage overgrown kudzu infestations.				
	Use Goat Vendors on: Rt. 416 Old Hills Creek Rd./Rt. 321				
Fuels Projects	Bluff Mountain				
	Mitigate fuels 100 yards surrounding communications towers.				
	Dollywood				
	Install shaded fuel breaks on property boundaries.				
	Reduce fuels in fireworks and train areas.				

APPENDIX C – CHIPPER PROGRAMS

Slash disposal is most often cited as one of the biggest barriers to residents completing mitigation work. Below are several different and highly successful programs that we are aware of. You, as the local experts on terrain, access, and community needs, are the subject matter experts best suited to decide what option(s) will work best in your community. In every example provided, several partners have come together to offer these services to meet the demand.



Volunteers participating in a chipper day event. Photo Credit: CUSP

North Carolina Forest Service (NC)

<https://www.resistwildfirenc.org/pdf/FuelsRemovalProgramGuidelines.pdf>

This Fuel Removal Programs provides a free, road-side debris pile removal service to communities / homeowners within North Carolina, with preference given to Firewise USA® communities and communities that have been assessed with high risks, communities within Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Areas of Concern, etc. NCFS selects contractors to do the work after communities have applied and been selected.

Chaffee Chips (CO)

<https://envisionchaffeecounty.org/chaffee-chips/>

Chaffee Chips empowers community members to create defensible space around their homes by coordinating neighborhood slash removal and chipping services. Residents sign up online to receive assistance.

In addition to Chaffee Chips, any community member or group engaged in fire mitigation with slash removal needs can rent trailers through **Chaffee County Fire Rescue** for a small fee plus a deposit. Note, this is not a trash service. Fire department staff both drop off and pick up the trailer. Visit <https://www.chaffeecountyfire.org/mitigation-trailer> for more information.

APPENDIX C – CHIPPER PROGRAMS

Wildfire Adapted Partnership (CO)

<https://www.wildfireadapted.org/chipper-rebate-program>

This program encourages the chipping of slash from reducing flammable vegetation conducted on any privately-owned property within the 5-county region. WAP will reimburse the homeowner 50% of the cost up to \$250; HOAs/communities are eligible for a 50% reimbursement (maximum \$750) of chipping expenses. You may choose to rent a chipper yourself or hire a mitigation company to provide chipping services, assuming all requirements are met. This rebate program works particularly well for out-of-town property owners because the work can be done on their timeframe; it is not based on a particular pick-up day.

FireFree (OR)

<https://www.firefree.org>

Fire Free in Bend, Oregon was originally started as a curbside chipping program. Due to the demand they transitioned to FireFree days where residents of Deschutes County drop off yard debris at landfills throughout Deschutes County. Residents can drop off grass clippings, brush, plant prunings, pine needles, pine cones, weeds, trimmings and branches, stumps or trees (no larger than 12" diameter) for free.

Neighborhood Fuels Reduction Program & Slash Sites (CO)

<https://cusp.ws/forest-issues-2/chipper/>

This program is designed around the concept that The Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) is not a contracted chipper service and neighborhoods must participate in the entire process. Resident volunteers are required to participate by planning, checking for pile compliance and hauling the slash while CUSP staff operate the equipment. CUSP provides all the necessary PPE for volunteers. In many communities, CUSP returns every year on the same date. CUSP requires that residents document slash accumulation hours and be able to pay an \$85/hour fee for two staff (\$25/hour per additional staff).

CUSP also manages slash drop-off sites which are centrally located. The slash sites are cooperatively managed with local counties. The cost for drop off is \$20.00 per pick-up truck load with that cost covering annual grinding and staff to manage the sites. Visit <https://baileyslashsite.com>.