

La Plata County

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update 2023



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Acronym Definitions	
Acronym	Definition
4 Rivers	Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CFP	Community Fire Plan
CPAW	Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire
CSFS	Colorado State Forest Service
CWPP	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
DFPD	Durango Fire Protection District
GIS	Geographic Informational System
HFRA	Healthy Forest Restoration Act
IGA	Intergovernmental Agreement
LPFPD	Los Pinos Fire Protection District
LPC	La Plata County
POD	Potential Operational Delineation
RMRI	Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative
SJMA	San Juan Mountains Association
SCC	Southwest Conservation Corps
SJNF	San Juan National Forest
SW CO CFLRP	Southwest Colorado Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program
UPFPD	Upper Pine Fire Protection District
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
WAB	La Plata County Wildfire Advisory Board
WAP	Wildfire Adapted Partnership
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface
WWPF	Wildfire and Watershed Protection Fund

La Plata County Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update

Introduction

La Plata County, Colorado is located in Southwest Colorado with the New Mexico state line forming the southern boundary. Four Colorado counties (Montezuma, San Juan, Hinsdale, and Archuleta) adjoin the west, north and east boundaries. Durango is located near the center of the county and serves as the county seat. Other municipalities include Bayfield and Ignacio and the sovereign nation of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. The county encompasses 1,692 square miles with 1.08 million acres, and the vegetation varies from mixed conifer in the higher elevations to ponderosa pine with Gambel oak in the mid-elevations and pinyon-juniper in the lower elevations. The majority of vegetation is either fire dependent or fire adapted. With 1.08 million acres, land ownership varies (Table 1) and approximately 41% of La Plata County land is in public ownership and managed by land management agencies.

TABLE 1: Land Ownership in Acres		
Owner	Acres	Percent
Private	436,195	40.1%
Federal	428,410	39.4%
State	14,661	1.3%
Tribal	199,756	18.4%
City / County	9,216	0.8%
Total	1,088,238	100.0%

Source: *La Plata County GIS*

Land Ownership in La Plata County

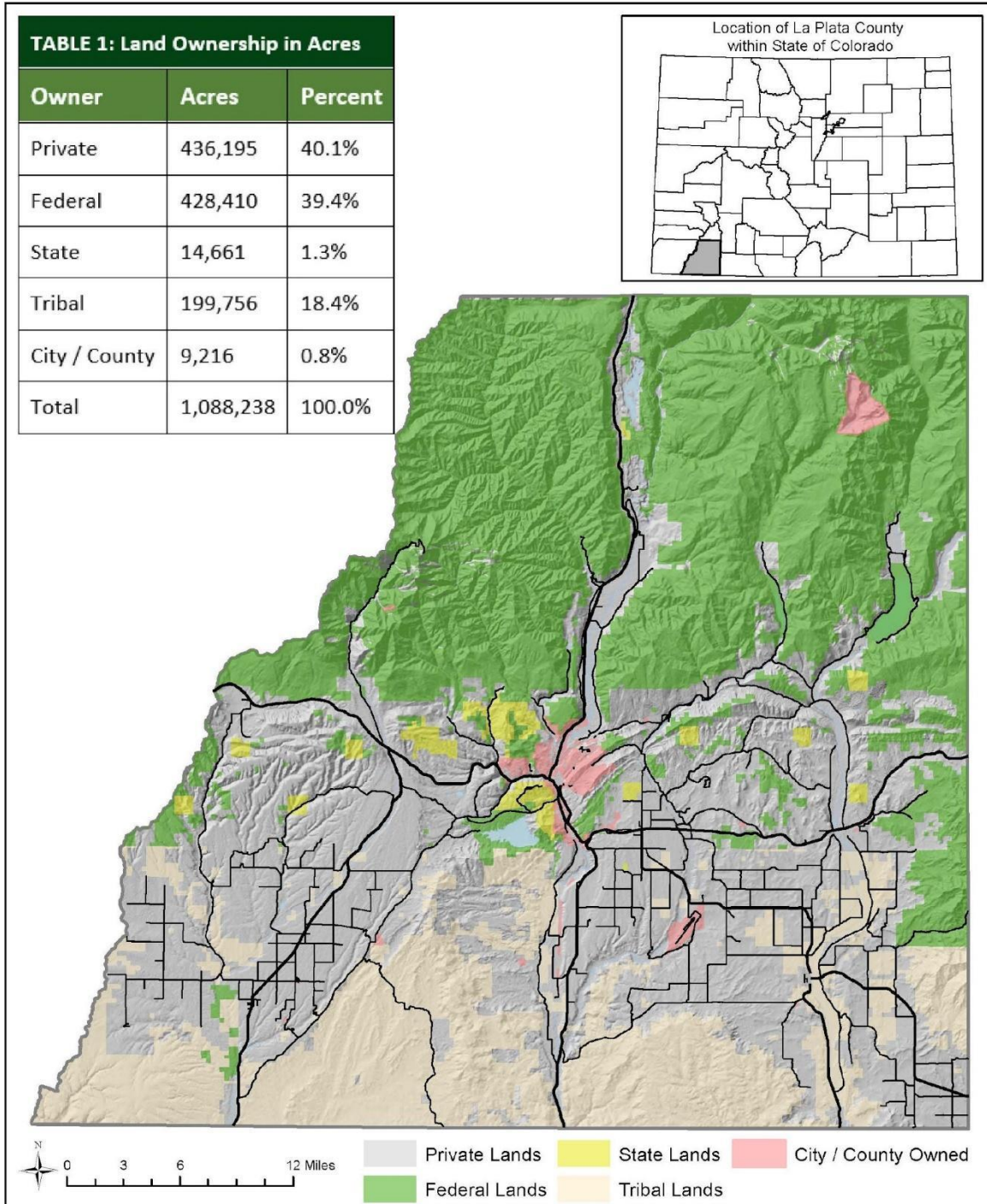


Figure 1: Land Ownership in La Plata County

La Plata County's scenic character supports recreation and tourism year-round, making it an ideal place for tourism and over 2,900 seasonal residences. The total population of La Plata County is 56,250 and since 2010, La Plata County's population has had a high growth rate of nearly 12%. The state of Colorado's growth rate is 15.1%, while the total US population has increased by only 7.4% (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. Accessed November 2022*) The growing population is reflected in over 7,000 new homes built since 2000 with a total of 28,545 housing units. Due to historical fire suppression, fire behavior trends toward higher intensity fire increasing the risk to community assets and development. Homes that are adjacent to flammable vegetation, even agriculture fields, are considered directly exposed to wildfire. It should not be overlooked that homes with ember exposure or home-to-home ignition can be at high exposure to loss. Fire behavior mapping and examination of historic fires, analysis of weather, vegetation types and fire regimes, demonstrate that county-wide, La Plata County homes are in direct or indirect exposure to wildfire through flammable vegetation, embers, and home-to-home ignition (*Headwaters Economics, Wildfire Risk, p.10*). The vast majority of homes reside in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), increasing the risk to lives and property. (Find out how the WUI is defined on pages 8 & 9). Approximately 8,448 residents are especially vulnerable to wildfire danger. Vulnerabilities include, but are not limited to, elderly living alone, families in poverty, families without a vehicle, and mobile home residents. According to Headwaters Economics Profile of Wildfire Risk, populated areas of La Plata County have 91% higher wildfire risk in populated areas compared to all other Colorado counties. The risk to populated areas is derived from the wildfire likelihood and intensity with expected consequences to homes if a fire occurs. The high wildfire risk, exposure to wildfires, population growth, and new housing in La Plata County make its residents and property especially vulnerable to wildfire.

TABLE 2: La Plata County Demographics (as of July 2021)	
Category	Statistic
Population	56,250
Population Growth (2010 – 2021)	11.90%
Population per Square Mile	32.9
Median Household Income	\$69,291
Median House Value	\$415,900
Number of Housing Units	28,545
Number of New Housing Units (Since 2000)	7,780

Sources:

- a. *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. Accessed November 2022*
- b. *Headwaters Economics.*
- c. *Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire*

Below is a map of Colorado Forest Atlas showing WUI and social vulnerability index.



Colorado Wildfire Risk Public Viewer

<https://co-pub.coloradoforestatlas.org>

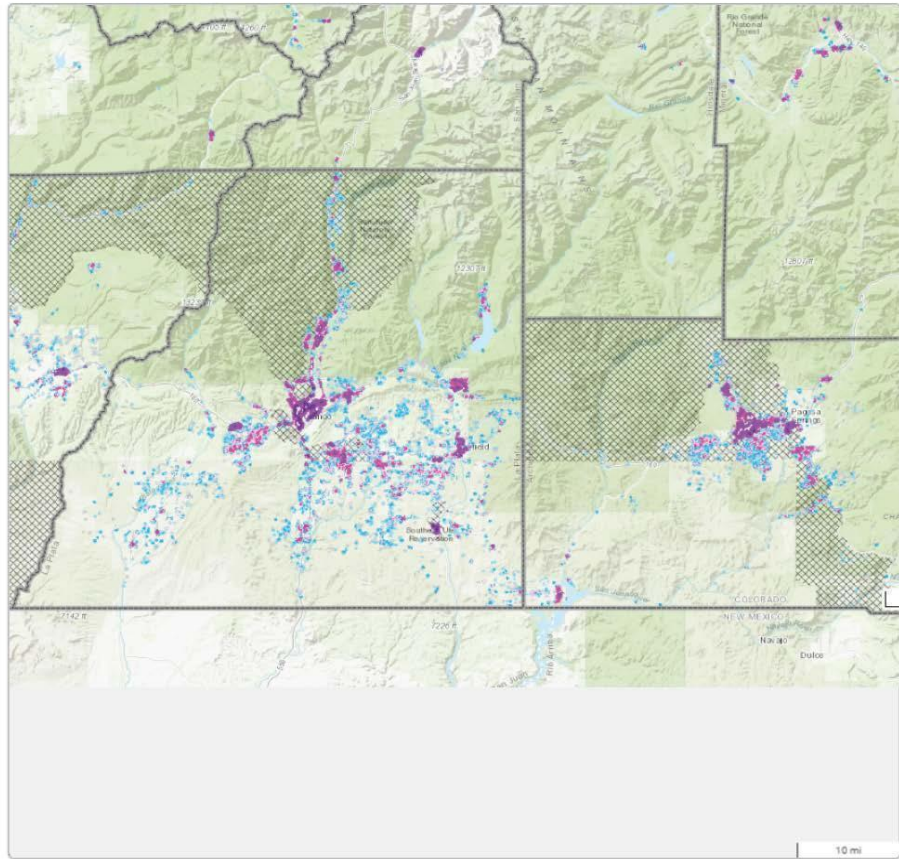
Wildland Urban Interface and Social Vulnerability Index

Housing density depicting where humans and their structures meet or intermix with wildland fuels.

Created on:
1/18/2023, 10:17 AM

Disclaimer

The user assumes the entire risk related to their use of the Colorado Wildfire Risk Public Viewer and either the published or derived products from these data.
The Colorado State Forest Service is providing these data "as is" and disclaims any and all warranties, whether expressed or implied, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.
In no event will Colorado State Forest Service be liable to you or to any third party for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, special or exemplary damages or lost profit resulting from any use or misuse of these data.



Legend

<https://co-pub.coloradoforestatlas.org>

Wildland Urban Interface

- Less than 1 house/40 ac
- 1 house/40 ac to 1 house/20 ac
- 1 house/20 ac to 1 house/10 ac
- 1 house/10 ac to 1 house/5 ac
- 1 house/5 ac to 1 house/2 ac
- 1 house/2 ac to 3 houses/ac
- More than 3 houses/ac

Social Vulnerability Index

- ⊠ Eligible for 25% Match

County Boundaries

- < 1:1,500,000

Figure 2: WUI and Social Vulnerability Index Map

Fire History

La Plata County is no stranger to wildfires and the probability of wildfire occurrence in any given area of the county is very likely. The county has a high diversity of vegetation cover, ranging from sage/grassland through pinyon-juniper, ponderosa pine, aspen, spruce-fir forests depending on elevation, topography, and moisture regimes. The majority of these vegetation types are either fire dependent, or fire adapted with fire being the dominant historical natural disturbance type. In 2002, the Missionary Ridge Fire sent shock waves through the county as it burned over 70,000 acres and 56 homes and outbuildings. Then in 2018, the 416 Fire burned 52,778 acres and caused 1,300 homes and businesses to evacuate. The fire led to closure of the San Juan National Forest, Bureau of Recreation, City of Durango and La Plata County lands from public access for the first time in history. Both the 416 Fire and Missionary Ridge Fire remain in the top 10 largest fires in Colorado history and both took place in La Plata County. The long history of wildfires in La Plata County shows evidence of the active fire regime within the county. For a list of significant fires in La Plata County over a 20-year period, see Table 3. The severity of these fires led to many Community Fire Plans to be developed in 2006 in the region, yet La Plata County aims to have an updated and unifying document as wildfires have become an expected occurrence.

TABLE 3: Significant La Plata County Wildfires Over Twenty-Year Period (2002-2022)		
Date	Fire Name	Size (acres)
2002	Missionary Ridge Fire	73,000
2009	Pinon Fire	111
2011	Sambrito 2	522
2012	Vallecito Fire	1,400
2012	Lightner Fire	57
2012	Goblin Fire	1074
2012	Air Park Fire	500
2012	Stateline Fire: (FireID:637721)	350
2012	X Rock	8
2014	Sunnyside	53
2017	Lightner Creek Fire	412
2018	416 Fire	54,129

2018	358 Fire	51
2020	84 Fire	25
2020	Six Shooter	182
2020	East Canyon Fire	2,905
2021	Vosburg Pike Fire	70
2022	Ute Pass Fire	30
2022	Bear Dance Fire	89
2022	Perins Peak Fire	106
2022	Twin Buttes Fire	3.6

Sources:

- a. *Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control*
- b. *Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire*
- c. *San Juan Mountain Association*
- d. *Durango Fire Protection District*

CWPP authorization and process

In response to the tragic wildland fires in 2000 and 2002, the U.S. Congress authorized the National Fire Plan in 2000 and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) in 2003. Under this legislation, local communities are encouraged to develop and implement forest management plans and hazardous fuel reduction projects. Key to the planning of preventive actions is detailed mapping and cooperative efforts by all stakeholders and land owners. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are directed by HFRA to give consideration to the priorities of local communities as they develop and implement these plans. HFRA defines Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) within the legislation:

...areas extending 1½ miles from the boundary of a community-at-risk defined by the USFS and BLM inventory and which lack emergency access routes; are in poor proximity to water sources; have areas with steep slopes; have high risk vegetation types; and/or that are in close proximity to fuels on public lands.

In La Plata County, this process started in 2002 with numerous cooperators developing the [Community Fire Plan](#) (CFP), the [La Plata County CWPP in 2006](#), and the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW) [wildfire hazard assessment in 2020](#). These plans, developed as a component of the National Fire Plan, identified wildland fire risk areas and developed goals and action recommendations throughout La Plata County. This community-wide effort, and the wildland fires of 2002, raised awareness considerably. Five counties in Southwest Colorado, including La Plata, unveiled CFP, which collectively are considered national models for collaboration, and for intergovernmental planning and action around wildland fire education and emergency response. The five CFPs and our regional progress toward goal attainment can be found at the following website: www.wildfireadapted.org. La Plata County was

selected as a CPAW community in 2020 which produced a county-wide wildfire hazard assessment informed and calibrated with local expertise. Thus, this CWPP is an update to the 2006 CWPP which was a product of the 2002 Community Fire Plan for La Plata County and the 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan. It was revised on the principles, requirements and guidelines established through HFRA. This CWPP is intended as an overarching document for the county, with the hope that individual communities or homeowners' associations will create CWPPs that are specific to their areas. Steps taken to complete this CWPP update include:

- Holding planning meetings with fire and land management agencies.
 - December 1, 2022– La Plata County Wildfire Advisory Board Meeting
 - December 8, 2022 – Stakeholder meeting – La Plata County Meta Meeting
 - January 26, 2023 – Follow up stakeholder meeting
 - Drafts circulated for comments January 18th and February 15th
- Discussing and sharing planning information with the county residents.
 - January 17, 2023 – WAP Ambassador meeting
- Utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to create maps.

Stakeholders in this CWPP Update

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – Tres Rios Field Office
- City of Durango, Town of Bayfield, Town of Ignacio (municipalities)
- Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)
- Durango Fire Protection District, Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Protection District, Los Pinos Fire Protection District, and Upper Pine Fire Protection District (local fire protection districts)
- Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative
- La Plata County: Board of County Commissioners, Office of Emergency Management, Wildfire Advisory Board
- Private mitigation contractors and biomass utilization/timber industry businesses
- San Juan National Forest
- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- Southwest Conservation Corp
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP, formerly FireWise of Southwest Colorado)

La Plata County Wildland Urban Interface

Definition of Wildland Urban Interface Communities

La Plata County CWPP stakeholders have agreed to use the definition of wildland urban interface (WUI) communities (“Communities at Risk”) as defined in the Federal Register on January, 2001 (Vol. 66, No. 3, Pages 751-777). According to the Federal Register “the urban wildland interface community exists where humans and their development meet or intermix with wildland fuel.” These communities are further classified as:

Intermix Community

An area with more than one structure per 40 acres scattered throughout the wildland fuels.

Interface Community

An area where structures are directly adjacent to wildland fuels with three or more structures per acre and a clear line of demarcation between urban and wildland.

Occluded Community

An area with less than 1,000 acres where structures are adjacent to an island of wildland fuels generally within a city.

Communities of Concern

Communities at Risk are defined as those communities that are listed in the Federal Register referenced above. In addition, the Stakeholders have identified “Communities of Interest” defined as those communities that meet the definition of Communities at Risk (intermix, interface or occluded) but are not listed in the Federal Register. For the purposes of this CWPP, the Stakeholders have defined **Communities of Concern** as both Communities at Risk and Communities of Interest.

Wildland Urban Interface Definition

“...the urban wildland interface community exists where humans and their development meet or intermix with wildland fuel.” – Federal Register

In accordance with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, La Plata County has established a localized definition of the Wildland Urban Interface. This definition was developed in collaboration with the USFS, CSFS, local fire protection districts and homeowners’ associations. Wildland Urban Interface in La Plata County is defined as:

1. An area extending ½ mile from the boundary of a Community of Concern or;
2. An area within 1 ½ miles of a Community of Concern, including any land that
 - a. Has a sustained steep slope that creates the potential for wildfire behavior endangering the community at risk;
 - b. Has a geographic feature that aids in creating an effective fire break, such as a road or ridge top;
 - c. Is in condition class 3 (areas where fire frequency has departed from historic condition by multiple return intervals, or the risk of losing key ecosystems is high as defined by the National Interagency Fire Center, Fire Regime Condition Class Definition)
 - d. Is adjacent to an evacuation route for a community at risk.

It is anticipated that as new development takes place in the county, new Communities of Concern will be identified and mapped. If a community does not appear on the base map but meets the county’s definition of a WUI community then it shall be considered to be included within the Wildland Urban Interface.

Areas of concern/priorities

This map represents the high-risk areas of La Plata County. In 2021 the county participated in Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW). Through this grant, an employee of the United States Forest Service Fire Lab, Missoula, created wildfire maps including wildfire likelihood, wildfire intensity, flame length, landscape wildfire hazard, mitigation difficulty, and wildfire urban interface mapping (reference Appendices for additional maps). The map below represents where fire will burn at the quickest spread and highest intensity with the worst fire conditions.

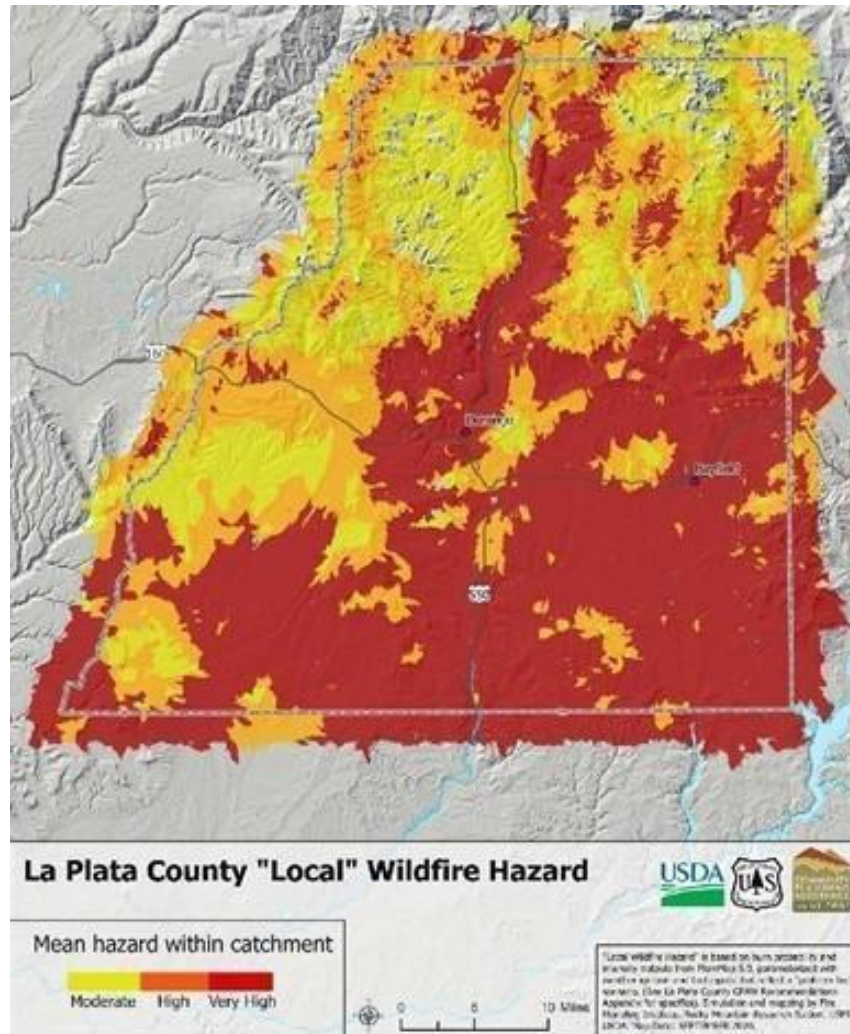


Figure 3: La Plata County Local Wildfire Hazard Map

Additionally, in 2020/2021 the Southwest Colorado Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) completed a stakeholder priority process for its geography. This process looked at USFS PODs (Potential Operational Delineations) with regard to their importance related to the 4 RMRI values (Communities,

Clean Water, Forests & Wildfire, and Recreation). The map below shows priority PODs in La Plata County across all values in green and the top WUI PODs outlined in blue.

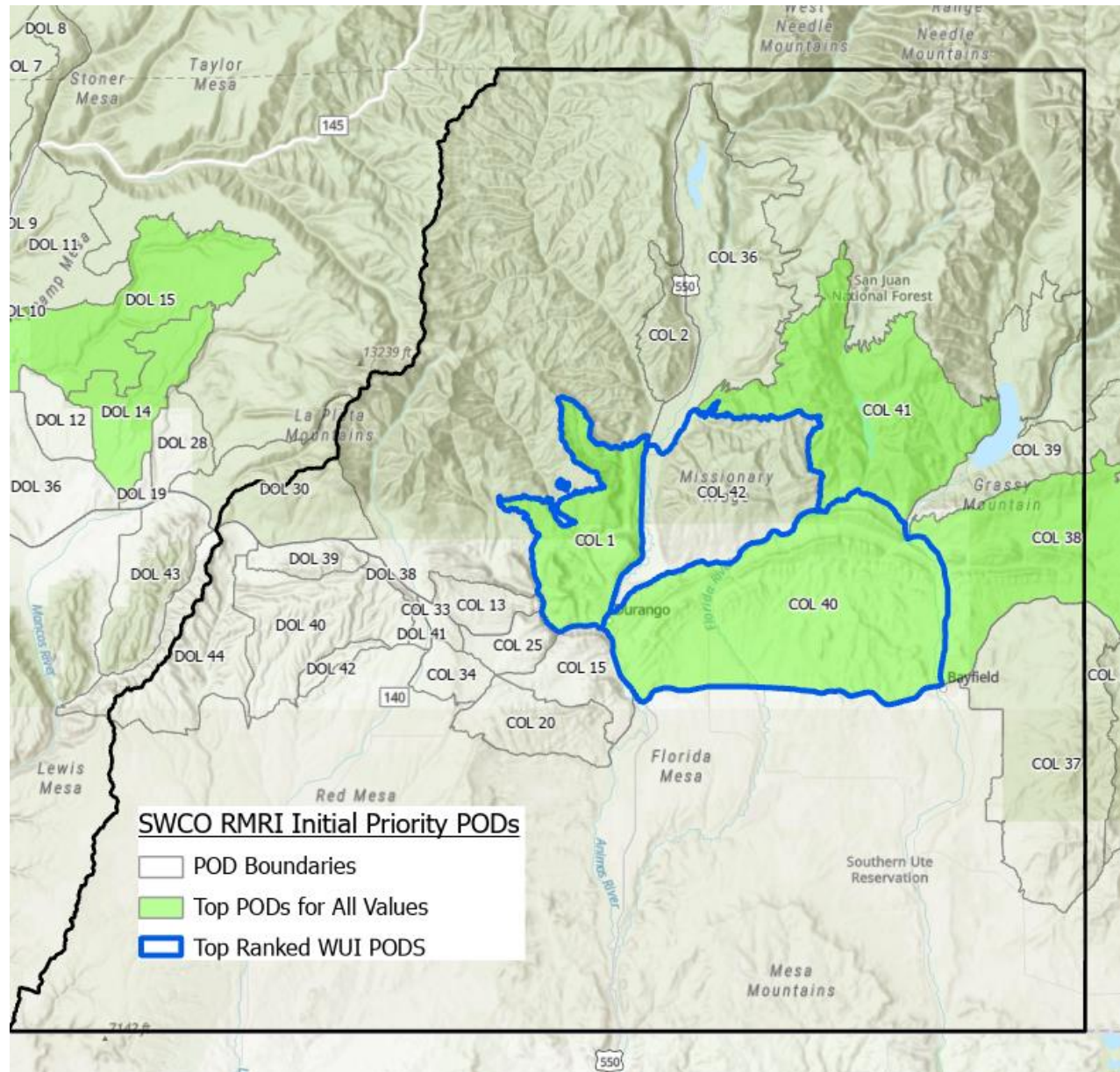


Figure 4: Southwest Colorado RMRI Initial Priority PODs

Combining the local wildfire hazard map with the PODs map and overlaying densely populated areas of the county. In addition, CWPP stakeholders, with their depth of experience, weighed in to map the top areas of concern within La Plata County as shown below:

Areas of Concern/Priority in La Plata County

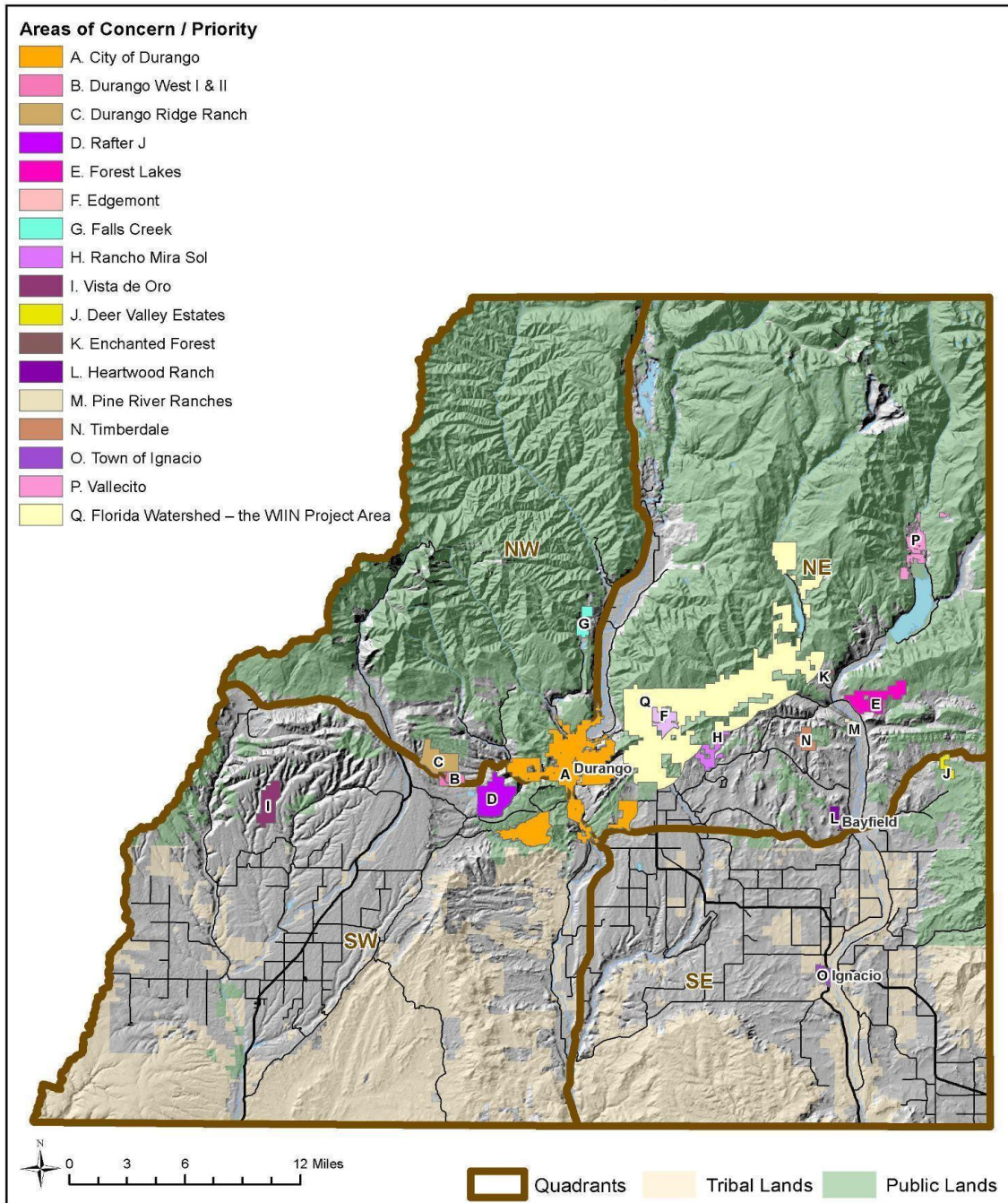


Figure 5: Areas of Concern/Priority Areas in La Plata County

Accomplishments since last CWPP

The first CWPP for La Plata County was completed in 2006 included at that time were goals related to reducing risk in the wildland urban interface and structure ignitability, and increasing wildfire education and fuel reduction projects. Below is a summary of effort and organizations that have been working toward achieving these goals over the last 16 years. In La Plata County, there have been large collaborative efforts to create CWPPs (Figure 4) and increase on-the-ground cross-boundary treatments that ultimately reduce the overall wildfire risk throughout La Plata County.

CWPPs in La Plata County 2023

Legend

CWPPs in
La Plata
County

19 Total CWPPs in La Plata
County



- Coolwater and Los Pinos CWPP (2012)
- Deer Valley Estates CWPP (2009)
- Durango West Metropolitan District #1 CWPP (2009)
- Durango West Metropolitan District #2 CWPP (2011)
- Edgemont Highlands CWPP (2012)
- Enchanted Forest Estates CWPP (2015)
- Falls Creek Ranch Homeowners Association CWPP (2011)
- Forest Lakes CWPP (2011)
- Forrest Groves Estates Subdivision CWPP (2015)
- Greater Lemon Reservoir (2017)
- Heartwood Ranch CWPP (2012)
- Lake Purgatory CWPP (2020)
- Los Ranchitos Estates CWPP (2012)
- Pine River Ranches CWPP (2012)
- Rancho Mira Sol CWPP (2013)
- Timberdale Ranch CWPP (2012)
- Tween Lakes Estates CWPP (2012)
- Vallecito CWPP (2014)
- Vista De Oro CWPP (2012)

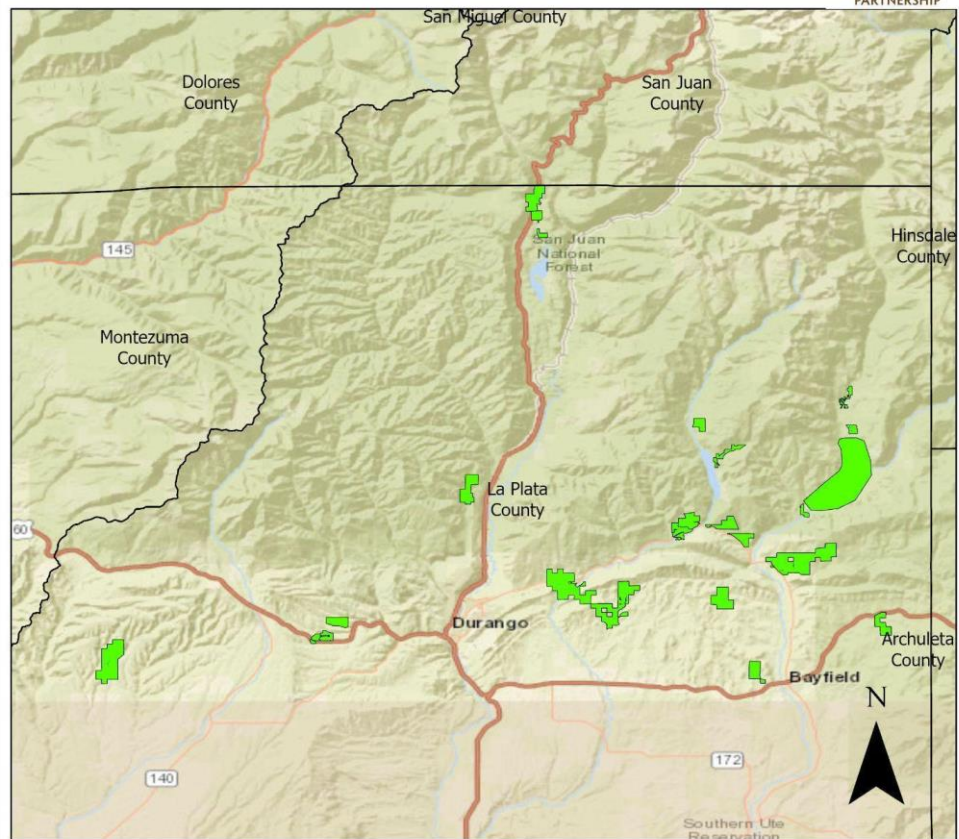


Figure 6: CWPPs in La Plata County

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO) has invested heavily in hazardous fuels mitigation efforts over the past 23 years particularly in the Durango area within La Plata County. The BLM has completed 3,390 acres on BLM-managed lands during 2006 to 2022, from 21 fuels mitigation projects in 11 locations. Past catastrophic wildfires in Colorado and especially within La Plata County have emphasized the need to continue wildfire mitigation work.

On April 15, 2020, the BLM TRFO started planning to implement a variety of large-scale wildfire mitigation treatments on approximately 5,800 acres of BLM-managed land within the 22,027 acres of BLM lands in the Durango area in La Plata County. The environmental analysis proposed action to address these hazardous fuels. The project would reduce risk to public safety and infrastructure, improve forest health, and enhance wildlife habitat. The Durango Area Programmatic Hazardous Fuel Project Environmental Assessment was finalized in January 2021 and project implementation started in 2022, continuing over a 10-year period to meet vegetation restoration needs.

BLM Durango Area Programmatic Hazardous Fuels Project EA <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1505044/570>

Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire

In 2020, La Plata County was selected to participate in the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW) program. During this process, La Plata County stakeholders worked with CPAW staff to provide assistance focused on: analyzing local land use documents that have implications on the WUI, providing an updated countywide hazard assessment as a tool for land use planning, and recommending future actions for La Plata County to increase its wildfire resilience. A full report with three key recommendations was provided to La Plata County.

[Full CPAW Report](#)

Fire Adapted Durango Partnership

In the wake of the 416 Fire in 2018, the City of Durango formed a new collaborative partnership called the Fire Adapted Durango Partnership, made up of fire experts and public land managers, in order to focus on reducing the risk of fire in the Durango Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) on city-owned lands. Risk analysis and treatment planning is ongoing, with fire mitigation in the WUI extending into the coming years. Project areas include: City parks, Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park, Horse Gulch, Tanque Verde, and Animas River Trail.

Partnership members: City of Durango, Bureau of Land Management Tres Rios Field Office, Colorado State Forest Service, Durango Fire Protection District, Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control, Wildfire Adapted Partnership, La Plata County, San Juan National Forest, La Plata Electric Association and Durango residents.

<https://www.durangogov.org/firemitigation>

Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative

Four Rivers Resilient Forest Collaborative (Four Rivers) is a forest focused collaborative in Columbine District of the San Juan National Forest. First convened in the summer of 2019, the Four Rivers Collaborative is grounded in the vision of a future where our communities lead stewardship actions that promote resilient watersheds and forests on all lands within our scope, strengthening the ecological, economic, and sociocultural character of the region. The collaborative has a geographic focus of La Plata and San Juan (CO) counties. The collaborative has recently developed both its strategic and communications plans and is concentrating its efforts on three focus areas: implementation and adaptive management; community action and education; and economic sustainability and workforce development.

La Plata County Wildfire Advisory Board (WAB)

Based on the CPAW work and because wildfire is a pressing issue county-wide, in March 2021, the La Plata County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved Resolution 2021-09 creating a Wildfire Advisory Board (WAB). The board consists of seven volunteer members who are selected by the BOCC as well as four ex-officio seats; including membership from the San Juan National Forest, Colorado State Forest Service, Durango Fire Protection District and Los Pinos Fire Protection District. These members meet monthly to strategize and develop recommendations for the BOCC on ways to improve La Plata County's wildfire preparedness and community protection.

Accomplishments to date include developing outreach strategies and promoting mitigation collaborations. WAB is working on a wildfire preparedness code for new structures, along with partners, to build community awareness about living with wildfire. This work includes building a centralized website to provide a one-stop-shop for information on wildfire preparedness, mitigation activities in the county, funding, events and how-to resources.

https://www.co.laplata.co.us/services/community_development_services/planning/planning_commission/wildfire_advisory_board/index.php

La Plata County Meta Group

The Meta Group is an ad hoc group of interested land management, wildfire mitigation and education stakeholders/experts working in La Plata County. The group started meeting quarterly in December 2021. This group came out of the Wildfire Watershed Protection Fund (WWPF), and is a place for stakeholders to present accomplishments and planned treatments with the purpose of increasing coordination with other agencies and partners within the county. The Meta Group provided the collaborative component for creating this CWPP update.

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) - Southwest Colorado

In 2019, the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) unanimously selected Southwest Colorado as the first place to focus its collective efforts to increase the resilience of the forests, wildfire habitat, communities, recreation opportunities and water resources. The Southwest Colorado area encompasses nearly 750,000 acres in La Plata and Montezuma counties. Efforts will focus on mitigating 200,000 acres

of private lands associated with infrastructure that have high wildfire risk and 209,000 acres of National Forest adjacent to communities. Other efforts include helping communities to be more accepting of the role of wildfire and prescribed fire, supporting a growing wood products industry and maintaining the economic viability of Southwest Colorado communities. Efforts under RMRI will run for 10 years (2019 – 2029).

<https://restoringtherockies.org/>

Southwest Colorado Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (SW CO CFLRP)

The purpose of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) is to encourage the collaborative science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes. In 2022, the USDA Forest Service announced that the San Juan National Forest will receive over \$3 million annually for restoration work through CFLRP. The investment will expand the impact of existing projects in Southwest Colorado over the next 10 years. The program will enable the SJNF to adapt to future disturbance while retaining ecosystem function, productivity, and ecosystem service. The CFLRP strategy is to enhance the resilience of critical watersheds, wildfire and aquatic habitats, community infrastructure, economic drivers and forest conditions.

Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP)

Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP) is a non-profit organization that inspires, educates and enables individuals and communities to protect lives and property from wildfire. WAP has wildfire education and wildfire mitigation incentive programs serving Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan counties in Southwest Colorado. WAP (formerly FireWise of Southwest Colorado – the name was changed in October 2018) has been providing wildfire education and supporting wildfire preparedness planning and implementation since 2003; and with the work of volunteers, WAP has made great strides to increase wildfire awareness and help residents learn to live safely with wildfire.

Key services:

- Neighborhood Ambassador Program
- Chipper Rebate
- Defensible Space Cost Share
- Community Wildfire Protection Plans and Community Wildfire Risk Assessments
- Wildfire Education
- Evacuation Planning

WAP continues to expand its programs and currently has 77 Neighborhood Ambassadors representing 64 communities in La Plata County. WAP enables residents to complete home ignition zone projects to create defensible space around homes and community projects on common space, both leading to a decreased risk of wildfire in the WUI. On average, WAP enables the treatment of about 500 acres per year through its Chipper Rebate Program, Defensible Space Cost Share Program and funding for community-scale projects.

<https://www.wildfireadapted.org/>

Wildfire and Watershed Protection Fund (WWPF)

In 2021, the City of Durango, Durango Fire Protection District and La Plata County, signed an intergovernmental agreement creating the Wildfire and Watershed Protection Fund (WWPF). This agreement creates a partnership to accelerate landscape-scale wildfire mitigation by coordinating treatments on private lands with those on adjacent public lands. The partnership utilizes Durango Fire Protection District as resources on the ground and pools funds and resources from the City of Durango and La Plata County fulfilling a WWPF coordinator to obtain funds and implement projects.

Accomplishments to date include securing an EPA grant distributed through Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) for mitigation of private lands in the Florida Watershed. The geographic area of this grant begins above Lemon Reservoir and extends to County Roads 243, 240 and 245. Numerous communities exist within the project area with both established HOAs and those without a governance structure. Funding is available through 2026. The spawning of the landscape scale map created by Mountain Studies Institute (MSI) as well as the formation and ongoing operation of the Meta Group are completed by WWPF.

https://www.co.laplata.co.us/departments/emergency_management/cdphe_epa_grant.php

WWPF obtained a Colorado Department of Natural Resources Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Plan (COSWAP) grant for private and HOA lands in the Florida Watershed and County Road 240 corridor including the subdivisions of Timberline, Songbird, Ute Pass, Spring Creek, Cliffs of Durango, Baby Bear, Durango Hills and Edgemont. Funding is available through July 2025.

Two COSWAP workforce grants were obtained: one for Southwest Conservation Corp to complete mitigation of a county-owned parcel within the Edgemont subdivision, and the second for the State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT) to complete mitigation along 83 miles of county roads and in Vista de Oro subdivision.

https://www.co.laplata.co.us/departments/emergency_management/decreasing_wildfire_risk.php

Vision Statement

The vision of the La Plata County CWPP is to improve county-wide preparedness for wildfire by increasing the pace and scale of mitigation efforts, increasing cross-boundary projects, and increasing wildfire mitigation education, protecting water resources and community assets, fortifying community values such as recreation and economies, ultimately creating fire adapted communities where residents can live safely with wildland fire.

Revised Goals, Strategies, and Partner Responsibilities

Goal A: Reduce wildfire risk in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) by reducing structure ignitability and increasing the number of fuels reduction projects on public and private Lands

Strategy #1: Advance building codes and policies to reduce structure ignitability.

Partners responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- La Plata County
- Municipalities
- Wildfire Advisory Board (WAB)

Strategy #2: Create a centralized map for mitigation/treatments, risk, and WUI.

Partners responsible:

- 4 Rivers Collaborative
- Fire Protection Districts
- Meta Group
- WAB

Strategy #3: Promote and expand mitigation incentive programs for private landowners through increased participation in defensible space cost share, chipper rebate, and larger community projects program, ultimately helping to offset the expense of mitigation on private lands.

Partners Responsible:

- Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)
- Fire Protection Districts
- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- Wildfire Adapted Partnership (WAP)
- Wildfire Watershed Protection Fund (WWPF)

Strategy #4: Increase opportunities for slash removal or biomass utilization from fuels reduction projects and ongoing maintenance of treated areas on private lands (slash depots, air curtain burners, chipper rebates, pile burning, etc.), ultimately decreasing the amount of slash that ends up in the landfill or sits in piles on private land.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Local contractors
- WAP

- WWPF

Strategy #5: Increase planning and execution of cross-boundary treatments throughout the county and especially in priority areas (Forest Lakes/Grassy Mountain, Florida Watershed, City of Durango, etc.).

Partners Responsible:

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- CSFS
- Fire Protection Districts
- Municipalities
- San Juan National Forest (SJNF)
- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #6: Create and promote utilization of a centralized resource center. Help promote resources for local residents such as incentive programs, education, local mitigation contractors, and biomass utilization while also tracking acres treated on private land.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Local mitigation contractors and biomass companies
- WAB
- WAP

Strategy #7: Explore locally generated long-term, non-grant, funding sources (i.e. tax base) for fuels mitigation projects.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- WAB
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #8: Increase wildfire risk site assessments of private residences and communities.

Partners Responsible:

- CSFS
- Fire Protection Districts
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #9: Update local neighborhood/subdivision level CWPPs within La Plata County that are older than 10 years, promoting cross-boundary/landscape scale treatments when possible.

Partners Responsible:

- CSFS
- Federal partners (BLM, SJNF) with land adjacent to communities
- Fire Protection Districts
- WAP

Strategy #10: Pass a county-wide Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) policy.

- CSFS
- La Plata County
- Municipalities
- WAB
- WWPF

Goal B: Increase public involvement in wildfire prevention and education

Strategy #1: Promote targeted learning opportunities and training for residents and industry.

Partners Responsible:

- CSFS
- Fire Protection Districts
- WAB
- WAP

Strategy #2: Develop demonstration sites and experiential opportunities.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Other nonprofit education partners (Trails 2000, San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA))
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #3: Create an overarching communication plan around “Living with Wildfire.”

Partners Responsible:

- 4 Rivers Collaborative
- Fire Protection Districts
- WAB
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #4: Build the capacity of Wildfire Adapted Partnership’s Neighborhood Ambassador Program through recruitment, training, and utilization of volunteers.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Homeowners' Associations
- WAP

Strategy #5: Increase education and social license of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments.

Partners Responsible:

- BLM
- CSFS
- Fire Protection Districts
- SJNF
- WAB
- WAP

Strategy #6: Promote education opportunities geared toward K-College such as "Living with Wildfire" and workforce development.

Partners Responsible:

- Meta Group
- San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA)
- Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC)

Strategy #7: Increase wildfire education, prevention and preparedness outreach to tourists from out of the area that may use local accommodation including short-term rental properties.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- WAP

Goal C: Promote healthy watersheds, forest and range ecosystems along with wildland fire mitigation

Strategy #1: Increase prescribed fire on landscape and limit practitioners' liability.

Partners Responsible:

- BLM
- Department of Fire Prevention and Control
- Fire Protection Districts
- USFS

Strategy #2: Promote strategies (utilization of resources), data sharing, monitoring, desired conditions, and overall coordination among all landscape-scale initiatives (RMRI, SWCO CFLRP, 4 Rivers, WWPF).

Partners Responsible:

- 4 Rivers Collaborative
- CFLRP
- Fire Adapted Durango Partnership/Municipalities
- RMRI
- WWPF

Strategy #3: Plan, execute, and monitor treatments that directly tie into watersheds, forest health, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

Partners Responsible:

- BLM
- USFS (CFLRP and RMRI)
- WWPF

Strategy #4: Provide ongoing support for IGAs/WWPF as an additional means to get acres treated on the ground.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Municipalities
- WAB
- WWPF

Goal D: Increase wildfire preparedness and response efforts

Strategy #1: Identify, promote, and strengthen evacuation routes including bridge capacity for emergency vehicles.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- WWPF

Strategy #2: Promote community-level preparedness/evacuation drills and safe and improved community-level egress routes.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Homeowners' Associations
- La Plata County Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- WAP

Strategy #3: Identify vulnerable populations and targeted outreach for additional needs related to evacuation (single car homes, elderly, large animal evacuation).

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts

- Homeowners' Associations
- OEM
- WAP

Strategy #4: Increase rural fire water supplies through ponds and dip or draft sites.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Homeowners' Associations and/or Metro Districts

Strategy #5: Promote increased participation in CodeRed emergency notification system.

Partners Responsible:

- Fire Protection Districts
- Municipalities
- OEM
- WAB
- WAP

Goal E: Increase capacity building to address workforce development and biomass utilization

Strategy #1: Support and advertise the existence of private contractors who are able to complete fuels reduction projects on homeowners' properties.

Partners Responsible:

- CSFS
- Private Contractors
- WAP
- WWPF

Strategy #2: Utilize and promote local biomass alternatives for mitigation projects, and also support Southwest Colorado biomass utilization through grant funding opportunities.

Partners Responsible:

- BLM
- CSFS
- Local biomass businesses
- Municipalities
- USFS
- WAB

Strategy #3: Target college and vocation/tech students to increase workforce development for forestry careers (including class curriculum and internship opportunities) in Southwest Colorado,

while also making it economically feasible for entry level or seasonal positions to live and work in SW Colorado.

Partners Responsible:

- 4 Rivers Collaborative
- Meta Group
- SCC
- WWPF

Updating CWPP

The La Plata County CWPP will be reviewed each year to update with accomplishments or incorporate any new priorities. Review of the CWPP will be the responsibility of the La Plata County Meta Group (which currently meets quarterly). Annual accomplishments will be summarized and compiled during the quarter 4 meeting.

Every five years, the key stakeholders (signers) will take on the responsibility of a more detailed review of the CWPP and the list of accomplishments. The stakeholders will also reassess the goals and strategies. This will again be worked into the responsibilities of the Meta Group and will be more in-depth than a normal 1-year summary of accomplishments. At the five-year period, stakeholders will take a closer look at priority areas/areas of concerns, goals, strategies, and make appropriate changes to the CWPP.

Conclusion

This CWPP complements and builds upon the La Plata County Community Fire Plan (2002) and CWPP (2006). It incorporates key principles and guidelines arising from the HFRA. The plan lays out an ambitious program for:

- Reducing wildland fire risk in the wildland-urban interface (WUI)
- Accomplishing important fuel treatments on federal and private lands
- Reducing structural ignitability
- Increasing community safety
- Protecting community and county values like natural resources, watersheds, recreation, and economies
- Continuing successful education and community mobilization endeavors
- Continuing to enhance partnerships between federal, state and local agencies and among community organizations and local governments
- The plan also sets the La Plata County WUI definition and defines La Plata County's Priority Area and Areas of Concern

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Community-level CWPPs with date completed included in this La Plata County CWPP Update:

- Coolwater and Los Pinos CWPP (2012)
- Deer Valley Estates CWPP (2009)
- Durango West Metropolitan District #1 CWPP (2009)
- Durango West Metropolitan District #2 CWPP (2011)
- Edgemont Highlands CWPP (2012)
- Enchanted Forest Estates CWPP (2015)
- Falls Creek Ranch Homeowners Association CWPP (2011)
- Forest Lakes CWPP (2011)
- Forrest Groves Estates Subdivision CWPP (2015)
- Greater Lemon Reservoir (2017)
- Heartwood Ranch CWPP (2012)
- Lake Purgatory CWPP (2020)
- Los Ranchitos Estates CWPP (2012)
- Pine River Ranches CWPP (2012)
- Rancho Mira Sol CWPP (2013)
- Timberdale Ranch CWPP (2012)
- Tween Lakes Estates CWPP (2012)
- Vallecito CWPP (2014)
- Vista De Oro CWPP (2012)

Appendix 2: CPAW Maps from:

https://cms9files.revize.com/laplatacounty/planning/CPAW%20Final%20Recommendations_La%20Plata.pdf

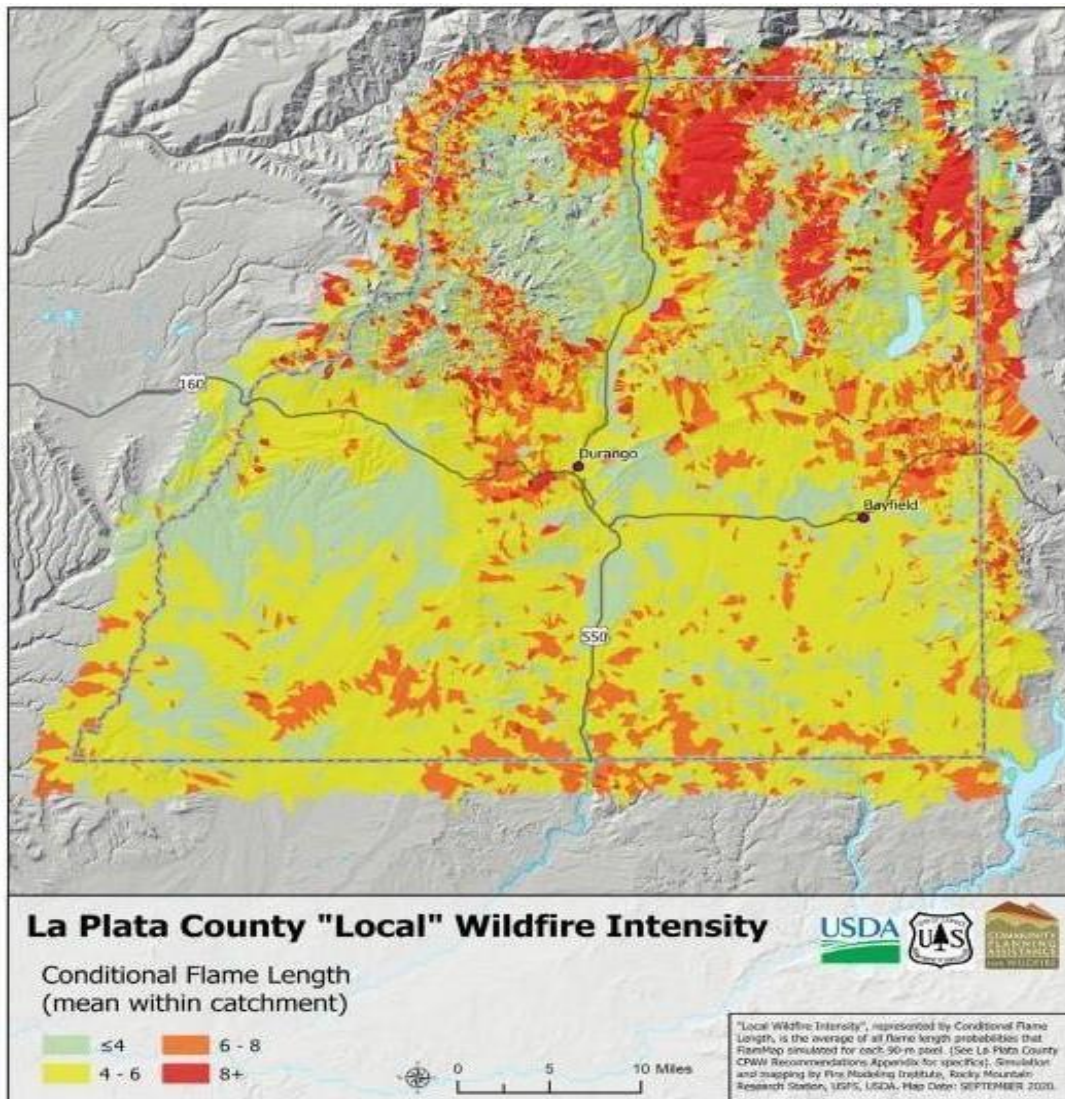


Figure 4: Landscape Wildfire Intensity (conditional flame length) Map

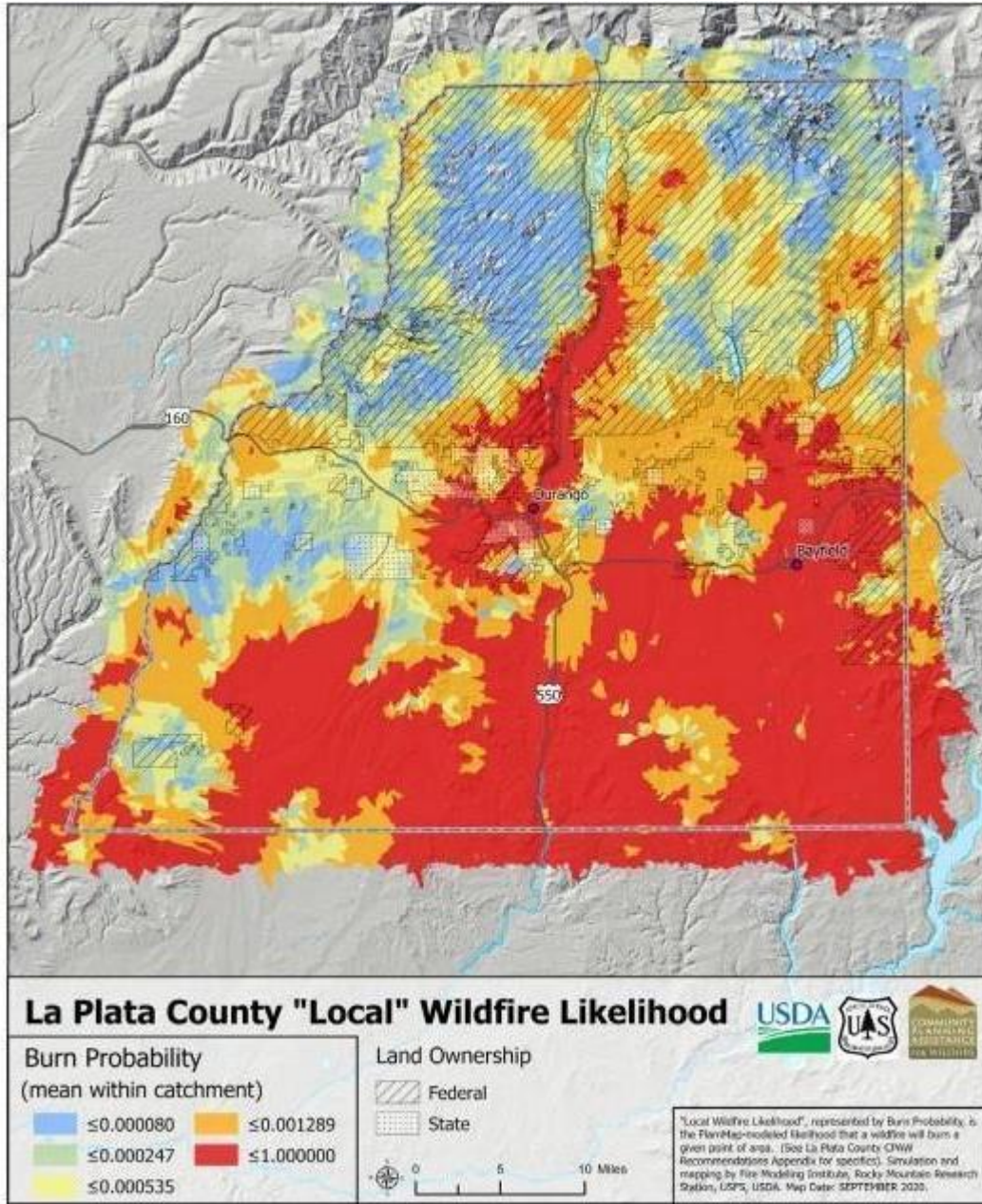


Figure 5: La Plata County Mean Burn Probability Likelihood Map

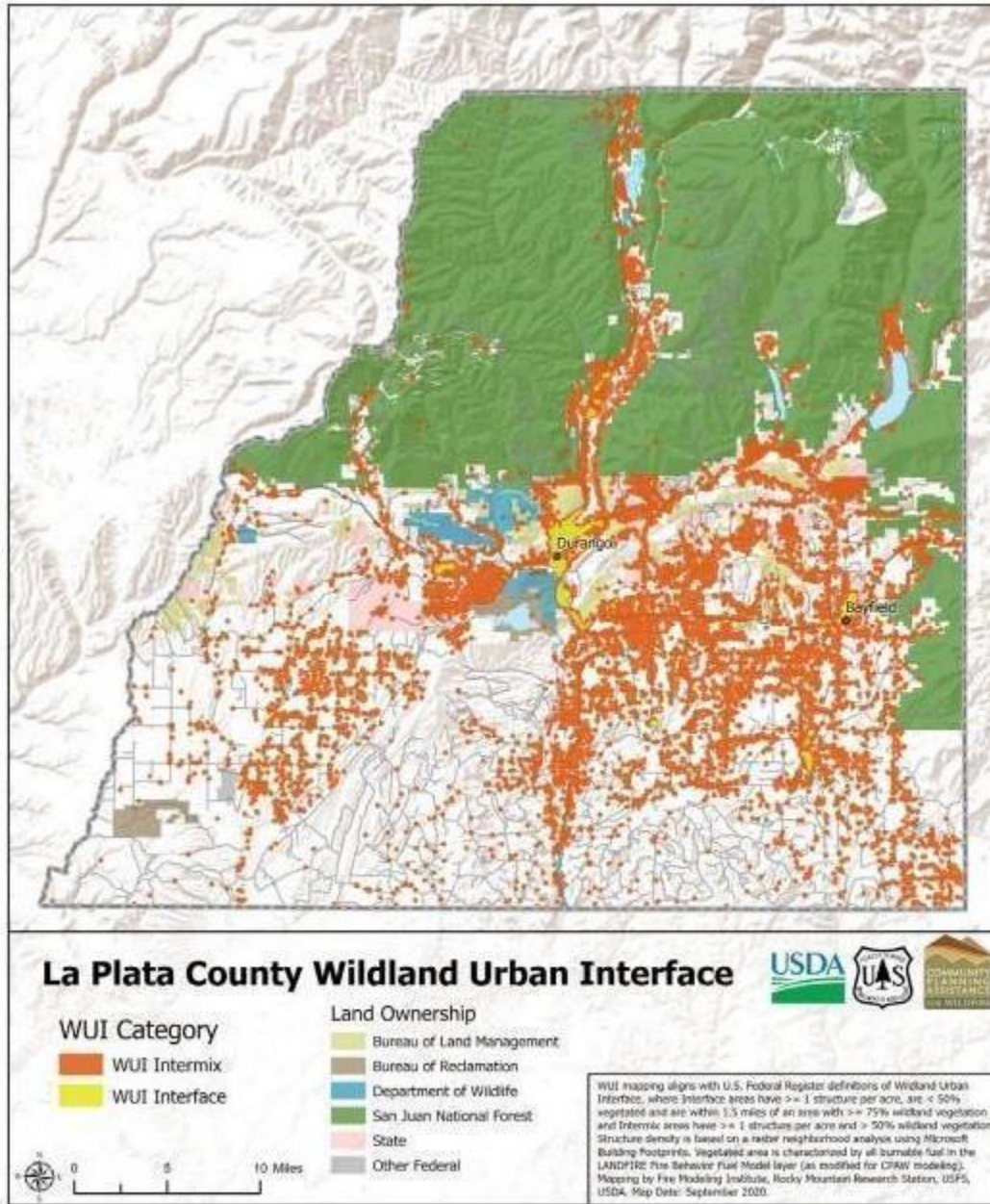


Figure 6: La Plata County Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Map