

## 2021 North Fork CWPP:

### b. Strategic Planning

In keeping with the National Fire Plan, the NFLA's Fire Mitigation Committee adopted a definition of "Wildland/Urban Interface" in 2004 that was tailored to the North Fork ecosystem's geography, demography and fire history.

The North Fork community occupies a corridor at risk from severe wildfire. The corridor is approximately three miles wide and thirty-five miles long, extending from Big Creek to the Canadian Border along the North Fork of the Flathead River. The community's wildland/urban interface extends up to 1.5 miles from the boundaries of the corridor, where private property with structures adjoins or intermixes with public lands:

*"The Wildland Urban Interface is any location where a fire can readily spread from vegetation (wildland fuels) to manmade structures (urban fuels). This is generally measured geographically as a 1.5-mile zone around areas with structures (e.g. homes, businesses, and outbuildings); public works facilities (e.g. drinking water and sewer); and critical infrastructure (e.g. power lines, gas lines, pipelines, bridges, railways, emergency communication sites, and watersheds)."*  
(p. 21, 2020 Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan)

The committee participated in the development of the initial Flathead County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), approved by the county commissioners in 2005 and revised in 2011 and 2020. Committee members prepared a "North Fork Flathead Wildfire Mitigation and Planning Report," which was appended to both the 2005 and the 2011 Flathead County CWPP's, and is scheduled to be updated in 2022. The report identified properties in inhabited areas of the North Fork that were most at risk from future wildfires. Those properties, which are shown in the accompanying map depicting important fuel reduction areas updated for the 2022 version, are as follows:

- Properties on the "North End," from Trail Creek to the Canadian Border, are considered particularly at risk. The area has not burned since the fires of the early twentieth century. Many sites within the area are choked with mature and decadent lodgepole pine and heavy downed fuels. It is difficult to gain access to the sites and to defend them. The US Forest Service and private landowners have treated a number of locations along Trail Creek Road to improve the situation, more work remains to be done.
- Properties in the Wedge Canyon Fire area that have significant downfall and dense lodgepole pine regeneration that has not been treated are at risk. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has approved the Wedge Canyon Targeted Implementation Program (TIP) covering the Wedge Canyon Fire burn area, plus private lands north of Trail Creek to the Canadian Border.
- Properties in the area from Whale Creek south to Moose Creek, which also have not burned during the recent fire cycle. Thick ladder fuels mix with older trees on many sites. Center Mountain Road, now gated, anchors the western side of the area. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (MT DNRC), US Forest Service, and many private landowners have undertaken projects to address hazardous fuels, but there is considerable work remaining.

- Properties in the river corridor from Hawk Creek south to the 1988 Red Bench Fire boundary. In addition, untreated properties within the Red Bench Fire boundary with significant downfall and dense lodgepole regeneration stands also are currently at risk..
- Properties in the Hay Creek area, both north and south from the top of Hay Creek Hill, which have not burned during the current cycle. Montana DNRC, US Forest Service and private landowners have undertaken projects in this area as well.
- Properties along major Ingress/Egress corridors are prioritized for treatment. Those corridors include:
  - The North Fork Road,
  - Trail Creek Road over the Whitefish Divide, and
  - Red Meadow Road over the Whitefish Divide for egress routes out of the North Fork.
 Secondary roads include:
  - Moose Creek Road,
  - Center Mountain Road
  - Red Meadow Road East of the North Fork Road,
  - Teepee Lake Road.
  - The old Polebridge Loop Road abandoned by the County is important egress for local residents
  - The County Road from the Polebridge Mercantile to the Park Entrance at Polebridge is also an important egress route for local residents and Park visitors.
- With a significant amount of hazardous fuels modifications completed around private structures, access roads, and on federal land adjacent to private lands, a current focus is looking at tying together fuel treatments to create shaded fuel breaks west of private land and structures to provide potential anchor points for suppression actions in the event of major fires.
- The continuation of implementation of hazardous fuels projects by the US Forest Service and Montana DNRC adjacent to private lands is critical. The most recent Forest Service project – Frozen Moose – is currently being litigated and the timing of its implementation is uncertain. In addition, the implementation of planned prescribed fire treatments to reduce fuel loadings in those portions of the North Fork where mechanized treatments are not permitted is important to reducing the threat to private lands downslope/downwind.