To the Ravalli County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Draft Committee and the County Commissioners,

Comments on the Draft Update Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Thank you for including these comments in to the CWPP update.

As Mark Twain said, "Researchers have already cast much dark on the subject, and if they continue their investigations we shall soon know nothing at all about it." I mention this to suggest that if we fail to retain a sense of humor we will also most likely fail in our ability to actually learn much from our data.

In my 40 years with the USFS among a myriad of other things, I did fire research – mostly the saw, shovel, Pulaski, looks like it's time to get both feet back in the black sort of research – but including one season of habitat typing, fuel loads, fire breaks, helicopter landing zones, and pre-attack plan mapping.

In early August 2000 I was in a helicopter enroute to do structure protection on a Forest Service backcountry station, the day the extreme fires blew up. The Darby District's most heavily managed timber stands – burned as hot – or in a lot of cases hotter than, other parts of the forest. Foresters saw 30 years of their silvacultural work burn up in a day, or in the month the followed.

The take home message was, and still is, that on any given Sunday, when the wind blows, all bets are off. The increase of forest flammability due to the increase of fuels due to overzealous fire suppression is a serious concern, and one we do need to address.

Still, fuels reduction forestry is an incomplete panacea at best.

Moisture Management vs Fuels Management

Every fire I was ever on, went out, eventually. Sometimes even because of our work. But the key factor was a break in the weather.

We were often just holding the line until we got some cooler, calmer, wetter weather. And with any luck, and if we stayed calm, maybe nobody got hurt. Cool, calm, moist – these factors dampen fire behavior. Hot, windy, dry – these factors increase fire behavior. Overzealous removal of canopy, shade and wind breaks in our forests are counter productive to reducing fire danger. Retaining overstory, and shade and wind breaks have multiple benefits including; fish and wildlife habitat, native plants, and moisture in 1,000 hours fuels and soils etc. How can we put greater emphasis on cool and clean water? For starters by retaining moisture buffers. We need to leave areas of group retention of shade breaks, and wind breaks within fuel reduction sites. We could collect data on the differences in areas with different shade and wind break prescriptions, long term…..

Home Ignition Zones

Fire Protection begins at home.

The CWWP needs to prioritize reduction in flamability from the inside out.

Can we consider property tax rebates or some other financial incentive like the private property thinning program?

Is thinning the forest over a mile from structures as much about getting some logging done as anything else?

Of course, access/safety for firefighting is a priority there…

WUI Boundary

Fire protection begins at home – where does it end? One and half miles is too far. Is a thousand feet far enough?

The Lost Horse Drainage specifically needs to be removed from the WUI. There are naturally occurring fuel breaks. Higher elevation habitat types, especially wetter ones, such as those in the upper Lost Horse drainage never did burn very often. Fuel loading there is not greatly outside of what might be considered a historical norm.

Thanks for your work and for considering my incomplete remarks.

Charles Mabbott

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