

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

La Paz County

Bureau of Land Management
Yuma and Lake Havasu Field Offices

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Community Wildfire Protection Plan For River Communities in La Paz County

Introduction

The purpose of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is to provide justification to La Paz County with written analysis of the wildfire threat and a mitigation plan to lower the threat from wildfire to the identified communities. La Paz County borders lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Yuma and Lake Havasu Field Offices.

The basis for the development of a CWPP is found in the federal legislation “The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003.” All federal land management agencies are required to assist communities in the development of a CWPP. Federal funding for hazardous fire-fuel reduction projects and community protection efforts will be based on a State’s ranking of communities at risk and the completion of CWPPs. Collaboration with the agencies and partners involved is essential in determining where the priorities for fire-fuel treatment exist and for dealing with wildfires.

This CWPP is broad based and focuses on the larger tracts of federal land. Private landowners are strongly encouraged to create defensible space (see “Living with Fire—A Homeowners Guide”) around their homes and property and reduce fire-fuels on privately held acreage.

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Community Profile for River Communities in La Paz County

Location

The affected communities are Cibola, Ehrenberg, Parker and Parker Strip, and Alamo, Planet and Lincoln Ranches, Arizona.

Population

The population for this part of the county is estimated at 7,971 people and 7,067 housing units.

Community				Population	Housing Units	Square Miles	Density
Cibola				172	161	18.01	8.94
Ehrenberg				1,357	824	11.93	69.06
Parker				3,140	1,157	21.98	52.63
Parker Strip				3,302	4,925	7.1	693.6

Land Owner/Jurisdiction	Acres	Percentage
Bureau of Land Management	1,683,489	58.3
Colorado River Indian Tribes	232,627	8.1
United States Military	396,819	13.7
Private	149,075	5.3
State	255,195	8.8
Wildlife Refuge	168,616	5.8
Other	4,144	.1

Description

The Communities, are north of Interstate 10, south of Bill Williams River, west of Arizona Highway 95, and east of the Colorado River. Topography is flat riparian with deep gorges cut by the Colorado River with numerous washes and several small mountain ranges.

The area's economy is based primarily on tourism, retail sales, and services. Of the 50 mile river front, the 16 mile strip of the Colorado River, between Parker Dam and Headgate Rock Dam, provides many water-based recreational activities and makes the river communities a destination point for tourists and winter visitors. Agriculture, historically the major economic base of the River community, continues to contribute to the economy. The area has many uses, but the number one use is year-around recreation. During the fall and winter the population can grow to a half a million or even a million visitors; spring and summer visitor use can be as high as a half a million as well.

Federal land ownership consist of Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colorado River Indian Tribes

Land Use

La Paz County land area is 4,500 square miles. The primary land uses are recreation and mining. The County has 4.4 people per square mile; the local industry is predominantly tourism. Ramifications of fire on these uses could be devastating to the local economy.

Native vegetation consists of cottonwood, willow, mesquite, palo verde, ironwood, creosote, quail bush, cattail, and arrowweed. Riparian fire-fuels types are dominant. Non-native vegetation consists of, but not limited to, salt cedar and mustard weed.

The remainder of the land falls into grazing and farming.

Infrastructure

The communities are moderately populated and the infrastructure is at risk from wildfire. Parker Dam has above ground power and telephone poles and the area has numerous below ground pipelines distributing services to neighboring states: Southern California, Nevada and other parts of Arizona, as well as states in Mexico. Other resources and critical areas that may be damaged from wildfire include habitat for endangered species or species of critical concern, cultural and historic sites, air and water quality, views, wireless communication sites, and state and local highway closures due to smoke.

Transportation

The main roads serving the communities are Interstate 10, a four lane median-divided interstate connecting Arizona and California running east and west; US Highway 95, a two lane undivided highway connecting Arizona, California, and Nevada running north and south; Arizona State Highway 95, a two-lane undivided highway south of Quartzsite;; and Posten Road, Cibola Lake Road, Riverside Drive or Business Route 95, Levee Road, and Baseline Road crisscross the county. Some of the roads are paved and some are unpaved. The main roads could be temporarily closed due to wildfire and smoke. Any dead end roads or weight limits on bridges of concern to fire resources are marked.

County Wildfire Risk Assessment

Within the Yuma/Havasu Fire District over the past ten years, 24,309.7 acres have burned for a yearly average of 2,430.9 acres burned.

The native vegetation species are not fire dependent and fires were most likely infrequent.

Besides fire, flooding and human intervention helped to control vegetation historically.

The current vegetation is primarily salt cedar. Humans' attempt to control the Colorado River or beautify their landscape helped cause this.

Ramifications of the current vegetation mix and the ignitability in the spring to fall will range from moderate to extreme, based on National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS). Common fire size will be class C (10-99.9 acres), very intense and very hard to contain and control. Current vegetation type and loadings are about 6 to 7 tons per acre within the river communities. Our fire-fuel hazards and wildfire occurrence are greatest along the Colorado River corridor. Ninety percent of homes, businesses, and essential infrastructure are within a ¼ to ½ mile from the corridor. Also refer to Bureau of Land Management Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy which has rated our River communities as High Risk.

Firefighting Equipment

Currently there is a limited amount of firefighting equipment stationed within the CWPP area.

Ehrenberg Fire District has one Type 6 engine for the river communities. Ehrenberg is about 25 miles away from Cibola, 40 miles from Parker, and 63 miles from the county line. The rural fire department possesses limited wildland capable engines with a response time of 30 minutes or greater. Ehrenberg Fire Department's current fire staff is 17 and plans to continue to ramp up. Some of the new personnel have not had wildland firefighting training or pack testing. (See Apparatus Inventory)

Buckskin Fire District has the only dedicated fire boat from Parker Dam to Headgate Rock Dam.

La Paz County Public Works Department has one D-7 dozer, four motor graders, four front end loaders, four 4000 gallon water trucks, two transports, and three t 10-wheel dump trucks.

The river communities have dedicated fire crews and equipment stationed at BLM Yuma/Lake Havasu Field Office. Stationed at Yuma Field Office are two type 6 engines, three fire boats, incident command personnel, Interagency Dispatch Center; stationed at Lake Havasu Field Office are one type 6 and one fire boat.

Colorado River Indian Tribes has two type 6 engines, one type 2 tender, and two type 1 dozer.

Escape Routes/Safety Zones

Current vegetation has a high volume layer of dead fuels mixed with live fuels (6 or 7 tons per acre) making line construction slow within the river corridor. With crews using hand tools and chainsaws only 3 to 5 chains can be done in a crew hour (1 chain hour = 66 ft.). An average river fire will be a wind driven at 10 to 20 miles per hour fire with limited available area to pile debris from line construction, making escape routes and safety zones hard to locate or construct and use. This increases the danger to firefighters.

Mitigation Strategy

Prioritizing Treatment Areas

The greatest wildfire threat to this part of the county is a major fire moving up or down the Colorado River. Buckskin Fire Department has responsibilities for both sides of the Colorado River from Parker Dam to Headgate Rock Dam, which is 16 miles of river front. A lightning strike or human ignition could start a fire in this location that could move in the direction of the predominant wind pattern. No fuels treatments have been accomplished to mitigate this risk as of the date of the plan. The most probable points of human ignitions are recreation sites and human congregation areas, such as Colorado River corridor and transportation corridors with rest stops or pull offs and developed and dispersed recreation sites along the river.

Another possibility is a fire occurring within a group of houses and rapidly spreading to nearby homes, BLM, and other lands before firefighters could arrive on-scene. Firewise defensible space principles need to be in place and planned for unforeseen developments.

Ehrenberg Fire District Wildland Mitigation: While no formal plan is in effect, the Fire District would like to cut fire breaks perpendicular to the river at a distance of about one mile or as recommended by a formal study and plan. There are approximately 12 miles of riverfront beginning at the CRIT Reservation on the north and continuing south. Most vegetation is native with some salt cedar.

There is some urban-wildland interface in Ehrenberg proper that should be mitigated, but that will require a study and plan.

Treatment Methods to Reduce Vegetation

The majority of the problem vegetation, fire prone vegetation, and non-native vegetation that causes high fire intensities or rapid fire spread are native annual grasses and non-native weeds. La Paz County has not been successful with fuels treatments from past or present along the river however, they have had some success along roads. Modifications of treatments may need to take place in various stages of the problem vegetation's life cycle to assist in successful fuels treatments. Chemical, mechanical, RX fire, and biological treatments hold promise to help manage and control the problem vegetation. There is a strong need for vegetation removal from the river and highway corridors.

Firewise Programs and Structural Ignitability

One proven method for protecting homes from a wildfire is to create defensible spaces. Homeowners can visit the Firewise Program at <www.firewise.org> to learn more about protecting their homes, some basics are:

1. Clear all dead and densely accumulated fire-prone vegetation, debris piles, and other flammable material within thirty feet of your home.
2. Keep the weeds mowed down, trim branches on trees to at least four feet in height, and move stacks of firewood away from buildings.
3. Homes with wood siding, shake roofs, and wooden porches and/or decks are especially susceptible to fire.

Education

Fire prevention, Firewise materials, talk with homeowners, and door to door visits about home fire protection, are some ways to educate the public about fire prevention. Currently La Paz County and the Bureau of Land Management have been collaborating on a county wide prevention and education effort at local schools, fairs, and civic meetings. Last year the BLM's Firewise traveler was in La Paz County for 10 days visiting La Paz County fairgrounds and Ehrenberg Fire Department providing information on defensible space for homeowners and property owners on what they can do to help protect their home or property from a wildfire. All local fire departments support State and Federal fire restrictions or closures during extreme fire seasons. For the last two years the BLM Yuma/Lake Havasu Fire Management Program has been working with the La Paz County Emergency Management Services to provide information and education to the residents of La Paz County in the form of Firewise booklets, checklists, and videos on how to protect their home or property.

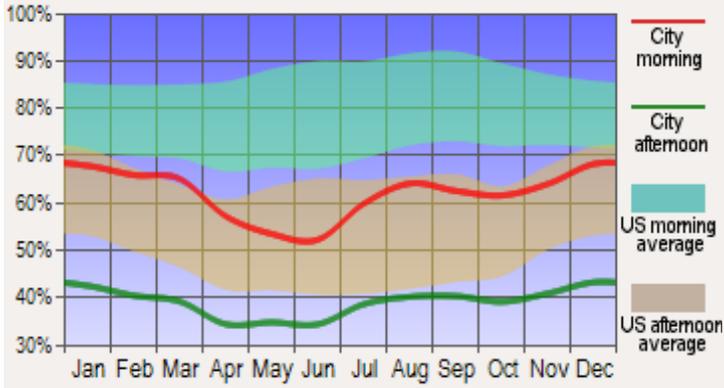
Action Plan

Once our plan is approved, La Paz County would like to continue collaborating with Federal and State agencies to improve the safety to its residents and visiting public by addressing our hazardous fuels and Wildland Urban-Interface problems in our area.

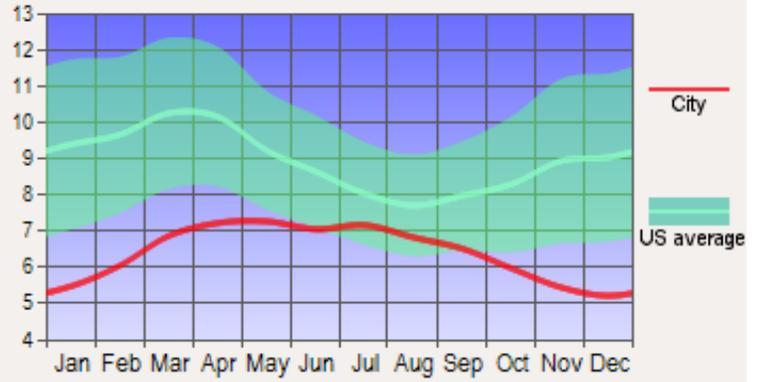
La Paz County would like the Bureau of Land Management to continue to assist them as technical advisors and work with each District Fire Chief to ensure cohesiveness on the ground. Funding levels could be at 90% by the Department of the Interior with only 10% matching funds. There needs to be a monitoring plan set up to ensure that the assessment strategy will be effective over the next 10 years. The county would like to start the funding for its projects in fiscal year 2006 and to start hazardous fuels and Wildland Urban-Interface removal in the fall of 2006, so the first prescribed fire could be during the winter of 2006-2007 to prepare for summer of 2007.

Weather

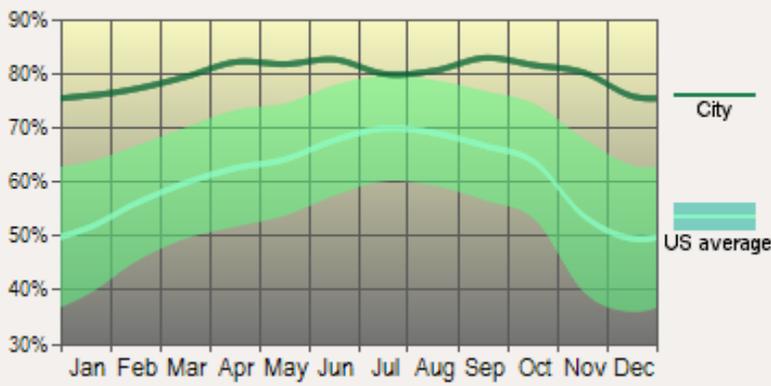
Humidity



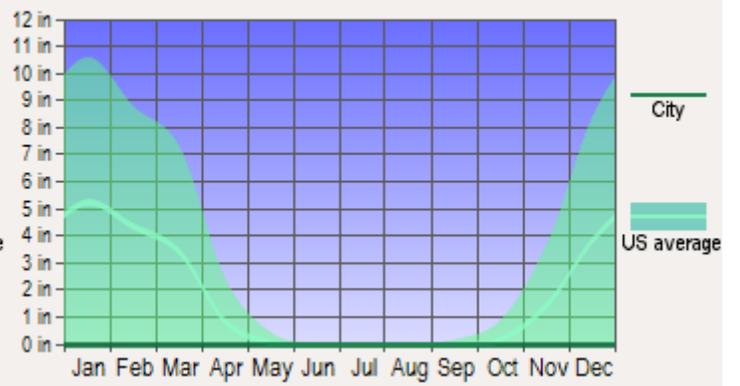
Wind Speed (mph)



Sunshine



Snowfall



Average Temperatures

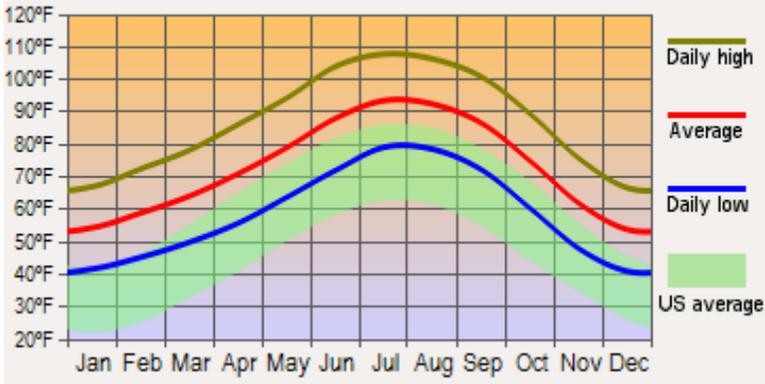
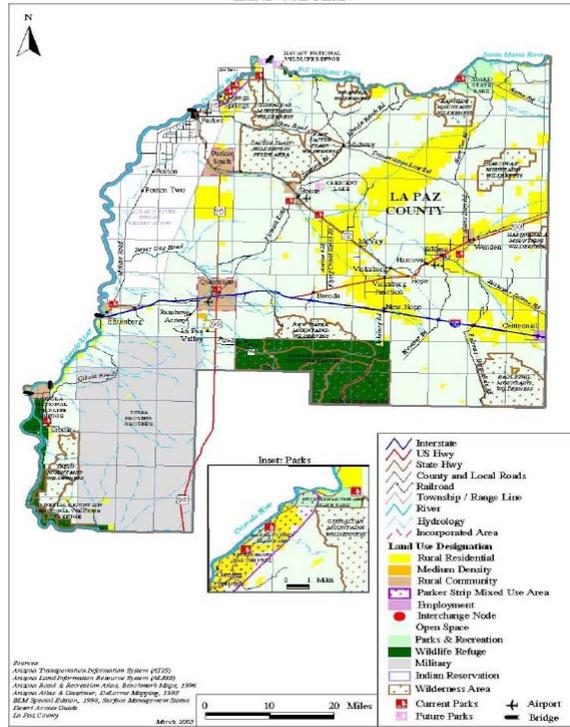




Figure 3.3
LAND USE PLAN



Adopted May 2, 2005

Ehrenberg Fire District Apparatus Inventory





















Contacts

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Reference Material

La Paz County Board of Supervisor Meetings

Arizona Department of Commerce, Community Profile

Southwest Community Wildfire Protection Plan Guide

U.S. Census Bureau

Federal Emergency Management Agency, Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan

Bureau of Land Management, Fire Reporting System, Fire Department Contact List

EHRENBERG FIRE DEPARTMENT APARATUS INVENTORY

number	Type	Brand	Type	GPM	Foam	Water Tank	Drive	Misc.	License #	
4401	1	2004 Spartan diesel	Triple Combination Pumper	1250 GPM	foam ejector	1000 gallon	2x4		G-705EG	
4402	1	1984 Ford diesel	Triple Combination Pumper	1000 GPM	foam ejector	750 gallon	2x4		PS-131A	
4451	6	1991 Ford diesel	Fast Attack Truck	50 GPM	foam ejector	260 gallon	4x4		PS-531D	
4452	6	2004 Chevrolet CAFS	Fast Attack	50 GPM		300 gallon	4x4	full medical equipment to EMT level	G-731AM	
4431	2	1976 Peterbuilt	Water Tender	500 GPM		4000 Gallon		Excellent Condition	PS-1878	
4400		2002 Ford Expedition	Command Vehicle	outfitted with command module in rear, including full set of ICS ID vests, white board, & Tough Book laptop with Cameo, Aloha, & county assessor's maps						G-728EG

La Paz County Board of Supervisors February 21, 2006, Regular Meeting, 10:00 a.m.
Partial Minutes

Presentation: "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" by James Stewart with the Bureau of Land Management

Glen Burkhart, Fire Mitigation Specialist with the Bureau of Land Management, spoke regarding the process of forming a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), requesting support and assistance from the Board. He introduced James Stewart, Mitigation and Education Specialist, to give a presentation regarding the benefits of the program and how to implement it.

James Stewart gave a power-point presentation that explained how to get the project started and the steps required to create a CWPP in a community. He noted that the County had initiated the first steps in that direction.

Discussion ensued regarding what had been accomplished thus far. Chief Deputy Major Biro added that a draft of a hazard mitigation plan was not yet ready to come before the Board. Chairman Fisher asked the public if they wished to comment on the presentation given.

Darryl Bump from Bouse announced that there would be a barbeque at the Bouse Park on Saturday, February 25, 2006, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and suggested that the representatives from BLM attend in order to inform the public about the CWPP process.

Angela Masales from the Quartzsite Chamber of Commerce asked if the Board had a weed abatement program.

Chairman Fisher suggested that she talk to the Community Development Department regarding weed regulations in order to find out whether it was what she had in mind regarding a "program."

Assessor Nault asked if anything had been done in the Wenden area regarding Centennial Wash in which a life was taken during a previous flood.

Discussion ensued and Interim Public Works Director Simmons stated that they are currently waiting on information from the Corps of Engineers, which he would follow up on.

Mr. Burkhart added that by forming a CWPP in a community, it makes it possible for La Paz County and the local fire districts to be able to receive, in priority placement, rural fire assistance funding from BLM and the Department of Interior, for fire equipment, training, and personal protection equipment for fire fighters. He added that, without this designation, funding for fire protection is difficult to obtain. He further added that 90% of the funding would be provided by the Department of the Interior with only a 10% match required by the County.

Chairman Fisher stated that he would like to see some public meetings occur in the outlying areas where the concerns are. With the barbeque in Bouse coming up, the timing is right for this type of input.

Judy Bump from Bouse thanked the BLM representatives for their presentation, noting the various fires that occurred in the Bouse area, and thanked those who had helped in the past.

La Paz County Board of Supervisors April 3, 2006, Regular Meeting, 10:00 a.m.
Partial Minutes

Community Development Director Bernhart requested approval to move forward with the creation and implementation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). He read aloud a letter dated March 22, 2006, from Rebecca Heick from the Bureau of Land Management, stating the purpose of the CWPP to “provide the County with the planning, documentation, and collaboration to prepare for the threat of wildland fire entering the communities within La Paz County.” He noted that the first step is to obtain a decision from the Board of Supervisors to move forward with the creation and implementation of a CWPP, and then to identify specific people to participate with BLM in this process. He further noted that the CWPP designation would be advantageous to the County in obtaining certain grants enabling the County to protect its citizens from wildfires, and explore the possibility of clearing areas where brush might produce increased fire hazards.

James Stewart, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist with the BLM stated that the CWPP is a tool to help bring in State and Federal funds into the County, and the next step to be eligible for the 2007 grant funds.

In answer to Chairman Fisher’s question, Mr. Stewart stated that La Paz County will be the first county among the river counties to move forward with implementation of the CWPP designation.

SUPERVISOR SCOTT MOVED to approve to move forward with the creation and implementation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Motion seconded by Supervisor Edey, passed unanimously.