Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies Working Together in Emergency Response Management

Date: May 19, 2026 NRCG Memo# **2026-004**

To: Northern Rockies Interagency Wildland Fire Community

From: Chair, Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

Subject: Community and Structure Protection Guidelines

Community Protection Guidelines supersede any prior Community and Structure Fire Protection Guidelines developed by Northern Rockies Coordinating Group (NRCG). Specifically, this memo supersedes NRCG 2021_008_MEMO for Structure Protection Guidelines dated January 22, 2021.

Definitions - The following are defined:

- **Wildland Fire Protection:** Protecting natural resources and municipal watersheds from damage from any fire that occurs in the wildland. State, tribal and federal forestry or land management and some local government agencies normally provide wildland fire protection.
- **Structure Protection:** Protecting a structure from the threat of damage from an advancing wildland fire. This involves the use of wildland fire protection strategies, tactics, and practices for the purposes of establishing wildland fire control and prevent the spread of wildfire from impinging upon structures. Protection can be provided by both the rural and/or local government fire departments and wildland fire protection agencies.
- **Structure Fire Suppression:** Interior or exterior actions taken to suppress and extinguish a burning structure or improvement associated with standard fire protection equipment and training. This is the responsibility of local government entities; however, there are areas where there is no structural fire agency in place.

Background

Protection of structures and communities is a shared partnership between the home and landowners and their fire agencies. Structure and community protection represents both high risk operations and a source of large fire suppression costs for all fire agencies. Clarification on what, how, and where we will accomplish structure protection roles and responsibilities must be identified in advance, and we need to establish common expectations, for how we handle structure protection in the Northern Rockies, among all involved agencies and the public.

With the increased growth in the wildland urban interface, landowners must recognize their responsibilities to protect their homes and property. Therefore, NRCG promotes the creation of fire adapted communities that can survive and remain viable without extraordinary intervention by fire services when wildfire moves through or near the community.

Wildland fire agencies have primary responsibility for wildland fire suppression strategies within their respective protection areas, have a responsibility for **structure protection**, and may assist local fire agencies in protecting communities and structures from an advancing wildland fire.

Leaders' Intent
Our first and foremost intent is to keep our firefighters and the public safe. Secondly, once we have established firefighter and public safety, we will work aggressively toward keeping the wildland fire away from structures and communities. We will base our strategies and tactics on this intent. We will not be able to protect structures in every situation. Risk to firefighters, fire behavior and availability of resources will all dictate the strategies that we will use.

When our firefighters engage in structure protection, we will ensure that they take safe, appropriate, and reasonable tactical actions for which they are trained and equipped. To remain cost effective, state and federal agencies may limit the use of tactics such as gelling, wrapping, extensive hazardous fuels modification, and utilization of Type 1 and 2 structure engines.

Unified Efforts
Fire agencies may have a shared responsibility for wildland fire and structure protection within the scope of their state laws, agreements, and annual operating plans. Agency Administrators will discuss, with their partners, appropriate apportionment of roles and responsibilities, capabilities of each party, how the parties will interface with each other, and how the parties will address costs. Agency Administrators will provide leaders' intent for structure fire protection based on the guidance contained here; and incident management organizations will engage local government agencies (fire departments, law enforcement, disaster services, etc.) in the planning of strategies and tactics for community and structure protection.

There are areas in the Northern Rockies where no local structure fire agency exists. Through established agreements and authorities, the wildland fire protection agencies may elect to engage in **structure protection**, but doing so does not obligate wildland fire protection agencies to engage in structure fire suppression in areas where no local fire authority has been formed for that purpose.

It is important for NRCG members to:

- Partner with communities, and their fire agencies, as well as individual homeowners and landowners to identify what actions can be taken to mitigate potential wildland urban interface losses, as well as to identify financial and technical assistance opportunities for homeowners and landowners.
- Identify how the parties will work together when a wildland fire impacts another agency with jurisdictional responsibility.
- Establish agreements and/ or local operating plans to identify roles and responsibilities prior to the wildland fire.

Capabilities
In most cases wildland fire agencies do not possess the capability or statutory responsibility to conduct structural fire suppression operations.

Some local fire agencies may have limited capacity within their respective jurisdictions to respond to wildland fire incidents. It is essential to clearly understand the capabilities and limitations of local fire agencies, as well as the availability of mutual aid agreements or other support mechanisms that may be utilized to enhance local response capacity and operational effectiveness.

Ryan Melin
Chair, Northern Rockies Coordinating Group