Arizona State Forestry Division
Bureau of Indian Affairs: Southwest, Navajo, Western Regions
Bureau of Land Management: Arizona, New Mexico
National Park Service, Intermountain Region
New Mexico State Forestry Division
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2
U. S. Forest Service

June 17, 2016

To: **Southwest Agency Administrators, Incident Commanders, and Zone Chairs**

From: **Southwest Coordinating Group**

Topic: **2016 Southwest Area Wildland Urban Interface and Structure Protection Guidance**

Background

Protection of structures and communities in the wildland urban interface is a shared partnership between the home and landowners and their servicing 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 will handle structure protection in the Southwest Geographic Area, among all involved agencies and the public.

Per Federal Wildland Fire Policy as referenced in the 2016 *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* Chapter 1 (page 3.34-3.44):

> The operational roles of the federal agencies as partners in the wildland urban interface are wildland firefighting... Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, state*, or local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural fire protection activities under formal fire protection agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist state and local governments with structural protection.)

With the increased growth in the wildland urban interface, landowners must recognize their responsibilities to protect their homes and property. Therefore, the Southwest Coordinating Group (SWCG) promotes the creation of fire adapted communities that can survive the effects of a wildland fire without intervention.

Wildland fire agencies have primary responsibility for wildland fire suppression strategies within their respective protection areas, to include providing community defense and *structure protection*. Wildland fire resources may work with assist local fire agencies in protecting communities and structures from an advancing wildland fire.

* The New Mexico Forestry Division does not have any structural fire suppression responsibilities.

Leaders Intent

SWCG's first and foremost intent is to protect human life (i.e. keep our firefighters and the public safe). Secondly, once firefighter and public safety has been established, firefighting responders and resources will work aggressively to keep any wildland fire away from structures and communities. All strategies and tactics will be based on this intent; fully understanding we will not be able to protect structures in every situation. Management of risk to responders, fire behavior, resource availability, and other critical factors will all dictate and/or contribute to the appropriate strategy/strategies implemented.

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 structure engines.

Definitions

- ***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. The 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 responsibility is generally performed by local structural fire qualified governmental entities; however, there are areas where there is no structural fire agency in place.

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 Teams will engage local government agencies (fire departments, law enforcement, disaster services, etc.) and wildland firefighting contractors working for insurance companies in the planning of strategies and tactics for community and structure protection.

There are areas in the Southwest where no local structure protection fire agency exists. Through established agreements and authorities, the wildland fire protection agencies may have the responsibility to engage in *structure* protection, but landowners maintain primary responsibility for both *structure protection* and *structure fire suppression* when no local fire authority has been formed to provide structure fire protection.

It is important for SWCG's supporting agencies to:

- **Partner** with communities as well as individual home 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 home 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

Wildland fire resources across the Southwest generally do not have the responsibility per policy as well as the capability and training to perform *structure fire suppression* actions.

Some local fire agencies may have limited capability within their own areas of jurisdiction to respond to a wildland fire. It is important to understand what capability the local agency has and whether the local agency has options to reach out to others through mutual aid or other mechanisms to enhance local capability.

6/17/16

Chair, Southwest Coordinating Group