FIRE ADAPTED NEW MEXICO LEARNING NETWORK












Leader Guidebook

Contents

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The Fire Adapted New Mexico Learning Network was developed by the Forest Stewards Guild with many local experts and practitioners through the generous support and leadership of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network and New Mexico Counties. The Forest Stewards Guild is a non-profit organization based in Santa Fe, NM that practices and promotes forestry that is ecologically, socially, and economically responsible. The Forest Stewards Guild is a core member of the national Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net).

FAC Net is a national network of people working to build wildfire resilience capacity in wildfire-prone communities and is supporting several state-level initiatives like FAC NM including networks in Washington, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, and Montana. It is supported through a partnership among The Nature Conservancy, the Watershed Research and Training Center and the USDA Forest Service. FAC Net's purpose is to connect and support people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. A fire adapted community is a knowledgeable, engaged community that is taking actions that will enable them to safely accept fire as part of the surrounding landscape. For more information about FAC Net, visit www.fireadaptednetwork.org.

Introduction

Knowing where to start to reduce wildfire risk can be a daunting task. While there are many resources available online that describe how to assess and address wildfire risk, the solutions remain local and a one-size fits all approach doesn't reflect the unique social characteristics of a particular community. To help provide some guidance, the Fire Adapted New Mexico Learning Network (FAC NM) created this guidebook for FAC NM Leaders. FAC NM Leaders have the knowledge and experience necessary to guide others in how they can reduce the wildfire risk to their home, their neighborhood, and their community. FAC NM Leaders do not have to be "experts" in forestry or wildland fire fighting to make a difference in their communities. They only need a desire to help others take steps that will make their homes, neighborhoods, and communities better prepared to live with fire.

How to use this guidebook

This guidebook will empower FAC NM Leaders to find solutions and next steps, not necessarily provide them. It provides an overview of a few well-established methods for assessing wildfire risk, identifying community assets, proactively planning for wildfire preparedness, and other useful planning tools. This guidebook, nor the FAC NM Leader program in general, is meant to replace any already established programs or tools.

The vision for the FAC NM Network is to create connections among individuals and communities to share resources, solutions, challenges, and lessons learned in order to take collective action to build wildfire resilience.

The Fire Adapted New Mexico Learning Network

One of the primary goals of the Fire Adapted New Mexico Learning Network (FAC NM) is to empower everyone living in the wildland urban interface (WUI) to take action to reduce their wildfire risk. Fire and forestry professionals representing state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations are a great resource, but they have limited capacity when faced with the scale of wildfire risk. There is a lot of knowledge and experience in our formal and informal networks, but we lack an efficient way to communicate. For example, what solutions has a Firewise site in the Sacramento mountains used to manage slash from landowner defensible space projects that they can share with a Firewise site outside of Taos? The vision for the FAC NM Network is to create connections among individuals and communities to share resources, solutions, challenges, and lessons learned in order to take collective action to build wildfire resilience.

The FAC NM Network, at its core, is a grassroots effort. The network is designed to have only as much structure as is necessary for it to function for the benefit of its members. There are two primary membership categories; FAC NM Member and FAC NM Leader. There are no barriers to becoming a FAC NM Member. Simply go to www.facnm.org enter your information in the member directory. There is a place for everyone to get involved or simply get information about fire adaptation and preparedness. FAC NM Leaders, as previously described, must complete a few tasks in order to be recognized as a FAC NM Leader and are committed to accepting a leadership role in their communities.

In addition to promoting action to reduce wildfire risk, the FAC NM Network seeks to establish a baseline understanding of the important role fire plays in forested ecosystems in New Mexico. Resilient forests and WUI communities are not devoid of fire, they live with fire. Before arriving at any solution to address the risk of wildfire, we must first agree on what the problem is. In many cases, it has been the exclusion of fire or the failure to plan, build, and live with fire in mind that has led to the loss of homes, lives, and infrastructure. Climate change and land use patterns over the last several decades have exacerbated the challenges associated with living with fire. Finding solutions to reducing wildfire risk must include a discussion of these larger issues.

FAC NM Member: *Anyone can become a FAC NM Member and have access to forums and resources.*

FAC NM Leader: *Someone neighbors can look to for advice on what to do to reduce wildfire risk. FAC NM Leaders must complete a few tasks in order to become a Leader.*

What is a FAC NM Leader?

FAC NM Leaders take a greater role in helping their communities improve their wildfire resilience. A FAC NM Leader is someone neighbors can look to for advice on what to do to reduce wildfire risk. FAC NM Leaders are the engine of the FAC NM Network. Experience has shown that collaboration is one of the most effective ways to reduce wildfire risk. Sharing resources, whether they be financial, labor, or ideas, helps FAC NM Leaders have an outsized impact in their communities. Collaboration only works if there are active participants. Organizing community chipper days, responding to a question on the FAC NM forum, and sharing a success story about a neighborhood firewood removal program are all examples of how FAC NM Leaders can help drive the FAC NM Network.

How to become a FAC NM Leader

All FAC NM Leaders start as FAC NM Members. Potential FAC NM Leaders should first join the FAC NM network and create a profile. Next, FAC NM Leaders should complete the short FAC NM Leader form on www.facnm.org. Upon completion of the FAC NM Leader form, potential FAC NM Leaders will be connected with a FAC mentor to help guide them through the rest of the process. A FAC mentor is simply an existing FAC NM Leader.

The next step is to complete the FAC NM Leader Assessment found at the end of this guidebook and review it with a FAC mentor. The FAC NM Leader Assessment is designed to help FAC NM Leaders answer some basic questions about their community and requires Leaders to take a few initial actions to get the ball rolling with fire adaptation work. Some FAC NM Leaders may have already completed many of the required tasks and will simply need to document them. Once the FAC NM Leader Assessment is complete, the FAC NM Leader should upload the document to the "FAC NM Leader Assessments" forum category on www.facnm.org along with any supporting materials. Having completed FAC NM Leader Assessments available online will serve as a resource for future FAC NM Leaders.

The process to become a FAC NM Leader is designed to inspire action among those that wish to take on a greater role and responsibility to address wildfire issues while not placing any unnecessary barriers in their way. It is also a way to recognize the work many FAC NM Leaders have already been engaged in for years in their respective communities.

In summary, the process to become a FAC Leader is:

1. Join the FAC NM Network as a member on www.facnm.org
2. Complete the short FAC Leader form, also on www.facnm.org
3. Connect with a FAC mentor (facilitated by FAC NM staff)
4. Complete the FAC Leader Assessment and review with FAC mentor
5. Upload completed FAC Leader Assessment to the "FAC Leader Assessments" forum category on www.facnm.org.
6. Congratulations, you're now a FAC Leader! Keep up the good work!

I'm a FAC NM Leader, what now?

The first responsibility of a FAC NM Leader is to be an active participant in the FAC NM Network. The following are suggestions for how every FAC NM Leader should engage with the Network.

1. Submit one blog post per year sharing a success story or lesson learned from working to increase fire adaptation in your community.
2. Convene or attend two in-person meetings with neighbors per year. This could be as simple as a barbecue or neighborhood meeting over coffee to discuss the upcoming fire season. A presentation on FAC NM at a previously scheduled meeting, such as neighborhood association meeting, will suffice as well.
3. Actively participate in the FAC NM Network forum with five posts or responses per year.
4. Attend the annual Wildland Urban Fire Summit. This annual meeting is a great way to meet other FAC NM Leaders throughout the state and learn about how they are working to increase fire resilience in their community.
5. Recruit other FAC NM Leaders. Encourage your friends and neighbors to become FAC NM Leaders so that we can continue to grow the network.

Firewise and FAC

"What's the difference between Firewise and Fire Adapted Communities?" is a common question. First, it is important to state that neither this guidebook, nor the FAC NM Leader program, are meant to replace existing programs or resources such as Firewise, or Ready, Set, Go!. Rather, this guidebook outlines several resources and programs that people working on fire adaptation can employ. Firewise is one tool in the toolbox for improving wildfire resilience.

Firewise USA is a recognition program administered by the National Fire Protection Association that began in 2002. Firewise emphasizes fuels reduction and recommends steps homeowners can take to reduce their individual wildfire risk. For example, landscaping practices to reduce flammable materials close to the home and standards for pruning trees and bushes. www.firewise.org contains several resources for homeowners, such as an online toolkit, a checklist for steps to reduce wildfire risk, and an online application for becoming a Firewise site. Firewise recognition is achieved after a community completes a 6-step process (www.firewise.org):

1. **Wildfire risk assessment:** Obtain a wildfire risk assessment as a written document from your state forestry agency, fire department, or other fire or forestry professional.
2. **Board/committee:** Form a board or committee comprised of residents and other stakeholders.
3. **Action plan:** Create an action plan based on the wildfire risk assessment.
4. **Educational outreach:** Host at least one wildfire risk reduction educational outreach event or related activity annually.
5. **Wildfire risk reduction investment:** Invest a minimum of $24.14 per dwelling unit. www.firewise.org has more information about how to calculate the wildfire risk reduction investment.
6. **Application:** Once all the criteria has been completed, you can submit an electronic application.

Firewise recognition is an important tool in the ongoing process to reduce fire risk. Many communities working on fire adaptation begin by becoming recognized as a Firewise site. Perhaps the most important distinction between Firewise and FAC is that Firewise is a specific program designed to reduce risk to homes and property, whereas Fire Adapted Communities is an umbrella concept that includes multiple scales of cultural change as well as mitigation and recovery actions.

projectwildfire.com

A fire adapted community is "a human community consisting of informed and prepared citizens collaboratively planning and taking action to safely coexist with wildland fire" (https://fireadapted.org/). What actions a community takes to become more fire adapted depends entirely on the conditions on the ground and the priorities identified by local stakeholders. There is no checklist or designation for fire adapted communities. Working towards wildfire resilience requires a collaborative approach amongst various stakeholders in a community. A greater impact can be had at larger scales when collective action is taken.

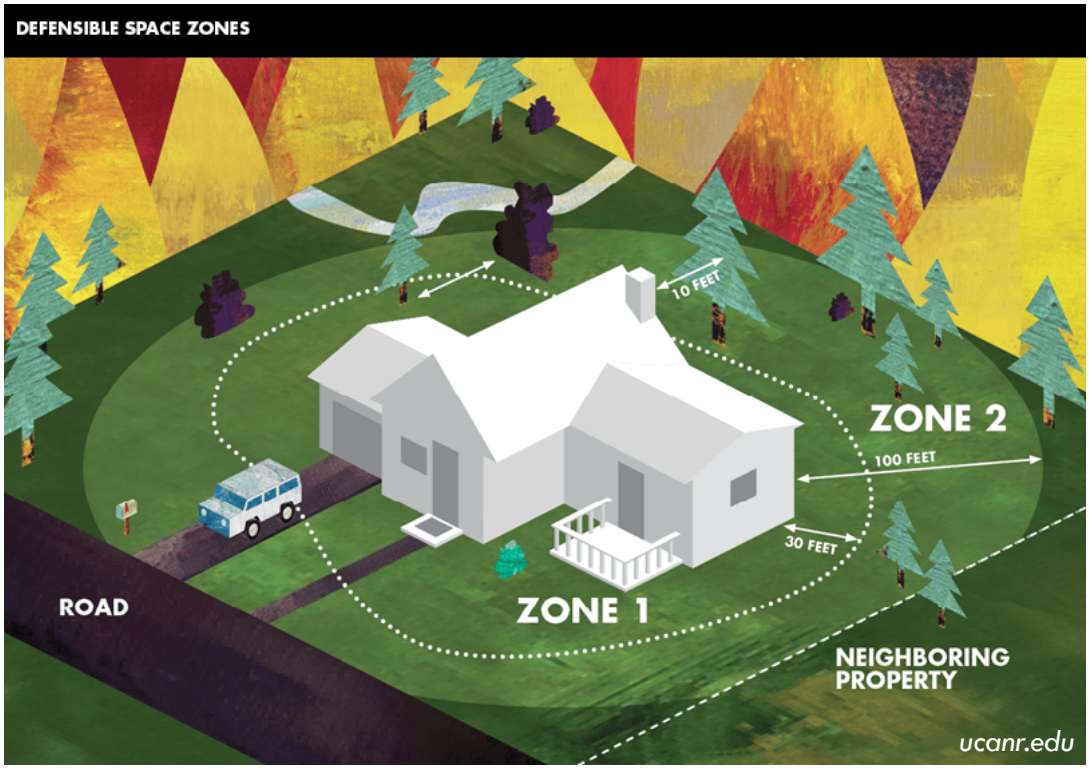
Reducing structural ignitability

As a FAC NM Leader, your neighbors will be looking to you for advice on a very important question, "what can I do to keep my house from burning in a wildfire?" While there is no guarantee that any of the actions described in this guidebook will prevent the loss of your neighbor's homes, there are several easy steps anyone can take that will certainly reduce that risk.

Accepting that fire, both wild and planned, is a part of living in fire prone and fire adapted areas doesn't mean that losing homes and infrastructure is inevitable. However, it does require taking ownership of the responsibility of living in a fire adapted ecosystem. Research has shown that many forests in NM are greatly departed from historic conditions, which has led to the character of wildfire changing and increasing in severity and scale (Allen, 2007). Yet a home within even the "healthiest," most resilient forest is at risk unless proper precautions are taken.

Assessing and addressing the wildfire risk to your home involves many factors (Forest Stewards Guild & Wildfire Network, 2017). Some of them you can change, others you cannot. An example of a factor impacting your home's wildfire risk that you cannot change is the slope or steepness of the ground on which your house is built. Fire typically burns faster up steep slopes. However, identifying un-changeable factors like slope may help you make decisions about how to change the factors you can control. For example, if your home is on a steep slope you should extend the area of defensible space an amount proportional to the slope.

All of the actions described in this section will occur in what is known as the home ignition zone (HIZ), which is the immediate area of about 300 feet surrounding the home (www.firewise.org). The primary duty of fire fighters is to protect public and firefighter safety. In a quickly evolving wildfire incident, firefighters may be limited in their capacity to devote protection resources to any single home. The goal for homeowners should be to prepare their home to resist ignition from a wildfire even if they need to evacuate and firefighters are unavailable to protect it. There are, of course, no guarantees when it comes to preventing losing one's home in a wildfire. The best we can do is acknowledge and understand the risk and take reasonable steps to protect our values at risk. Within the HIZ, consider these three categories for action, they are organized in order of importance.



Three categories for action within the Home Ignition Zone

1. No chainsaw necessary:

Before even beginning a discussion that involves cutting trees or removing vegetation, there are a number of relatively easy actions a homeowner can take to make their home more resistant to wildfire. While there are other actions homeowners can take to harden their homes, such as using fire resistant building materials, the actions below can be done with minimal capital investment beyond the homeowner's time. Studies have shown that the greatest risk a home faces is from the ember shower that may originate miles away from the house itself and from home-to-home ignitions (Cohen, 2000a, Cohen, 2000b). The following actions are a great place to start with recommendations for reducing wildfire risk.

Chris Schaum, a thinning contractor in Santa Fe, NM, points out pine needle accumulation to a landowner during a home assessment.

- Keep pine needles and leaves raked away from within 10' of the house including on and under porches, decks, and any corner of the house where flammable debris can accumulate.
- Before evacuating or in the event of a nearby wildfire, close all windows and doors.
- Cover all vents, eaves, and overhangs (including decks) with 1/8th construction screening to prevent embers from entering the home or accumulating underneath.
- If time allows before evacuating or in the event of a nearby wildfire, remove all exterior furniture cushions and any flammable furniture (a wicker chair for example).
- During wildfire season, move woodpiles to 100' away from the home.
- Keep the roof and gutters clear of flammable debris such as pine needles and leaves.
- Remove propane tanks from grills within 100' of the home.

2. An inflammable buffer:

While ground fires are much easier to control, that doesn't mean they don't pose a risk to your home. Creating an inflammable buffer around your home to halt the advance of a groundfire is crucial to defensible space. A common solution is to remove flammable materials such as grass and plants within 0-3 feet of your house. A common landscaping feature is to lay gravel or other rock material extending about 3 feet from the house. If ornamental plants are within this zone, they should be selected based on their fire-resistant capabilities. Many native plants are naturally fire resistant and should be used in favor of non-native ones that may increase your fire risk (New Mexico State Forestry, n.d.).

Beyond the immediate 0-3' zone around your home, managing or removing flammable ground fuel up to about 100' is also recommended. This includes raking pine needles outside of that zone, keeping the grass mowed, and using fire resistant landscaping.

3. Standing fuel reduction:

Most commonly referred to as defensible space, this includes removing standing live and dead trees and shrubs and/or removing low lying limbs. The primary reason to remove live and dead standing trees from around your home is to prevent, or stop, an active crown fire. An active crown fire is one that burns quickly through the canopies of live trees, typically driven by high winds.

Preventing or stopping an active crown fire is accomplished in two ways. First, removing "ladder fuels" such as a small tree growing underneath a larger one may keep an approaching ground fire from spreading into the canopy of the larger tree. Second, breaking up the continuity of tree canopies to where individual tree crowns do not touch, or creating space between groups of trees, which may result in an approaching crown fire dropping to the ground. Ground fires are much easier to control and tend to burn at a much lower severity than active crown fires (Reynolds et al., 2013). It is important to keep in mind that while standing and down dead trees provide habitat for wildlife they do pose a wildfire and windthrow hazard (Reynolds et al., 2013; Colorado State Forest Service, 2012).

Before treatment

After treatment

Assessment tools

In addition to home assessment tools described in the previous section there are a number of assessment tools that have a broader focus. Which tool to use and when depends on the specific needs of your community and the scale at which you are working e.g. the community or county level. The descriptions below are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they are intended to provide enough information to help FAC NM Leaders make an informed decision about which tools they may want to explore further for use in their community.

Assessments at a glance

Tool	*Summary*
FAC community self-assessment tool (FAC SAT)	***Comprehensive assessment tool that identifies values at risk, gaps in capacity, and prioritizes fire adaptation actions.***
Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) planning	***A key component to receive wildfire risk reduction funding. Can be done on a community or county-wide scale. Many communities in NM are already included in a CWPP. Plans must be updated every 5 years.***
Asset-based situation assessment (ABSA)	***Qualitative approach to fire adaptation planning. Relies on personal connections and interviews. Focuses on a community's strengths and assets, rather than what it lacks.***
Resilience assessment	***Comprehensive but scalable. Resilience as a concept is a useful framework for approaching fire adaptation work. Information gleaned from step one, describing the system, can inform other assessments and planning efforts.***

FAC Self-Assessment Tool

By: Michelle Medley-Daniels, The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

The national Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) developed a community self-assessment tool (FAC SAT) to assist communities in understanding and articulating their fire adaptation practices and approaches. Because fire adaptation is a continuous, adaptive process there is no checklist or end-point. A standardized checklist could mislead communities into taking actions that aren't locally appropriate; instead self-assessment and planning tools can help community partners shape strategies that are cohesive, inclusive and culturally appropriate. The FAC SAT was designed to help communities articulate their situation, determine priorities and create an action plan. It is customizable so that communities can adjust both the process and the output to meet their unique needs. It is intended as an **adaptive management** tool.

The FAC SAT process involves identifying and assessing:

- community values at risk;
- community capacity to implement FAC activities; and
- gaps or limitations in funding, resources, partnerships, and workforce/volunteers.

It also allows communities to track their capacity to live safely with fire over time:

- prioritizing future fire adaptation activities;
- complementing other work plans; and
- increasing understanding of long-term community fire adaptation needs.

The most current version of the FAC SAT, along with a Facilitator's Guide, is available here: https://fireadaptednetwork.org/resources/fac-assessment-tool/

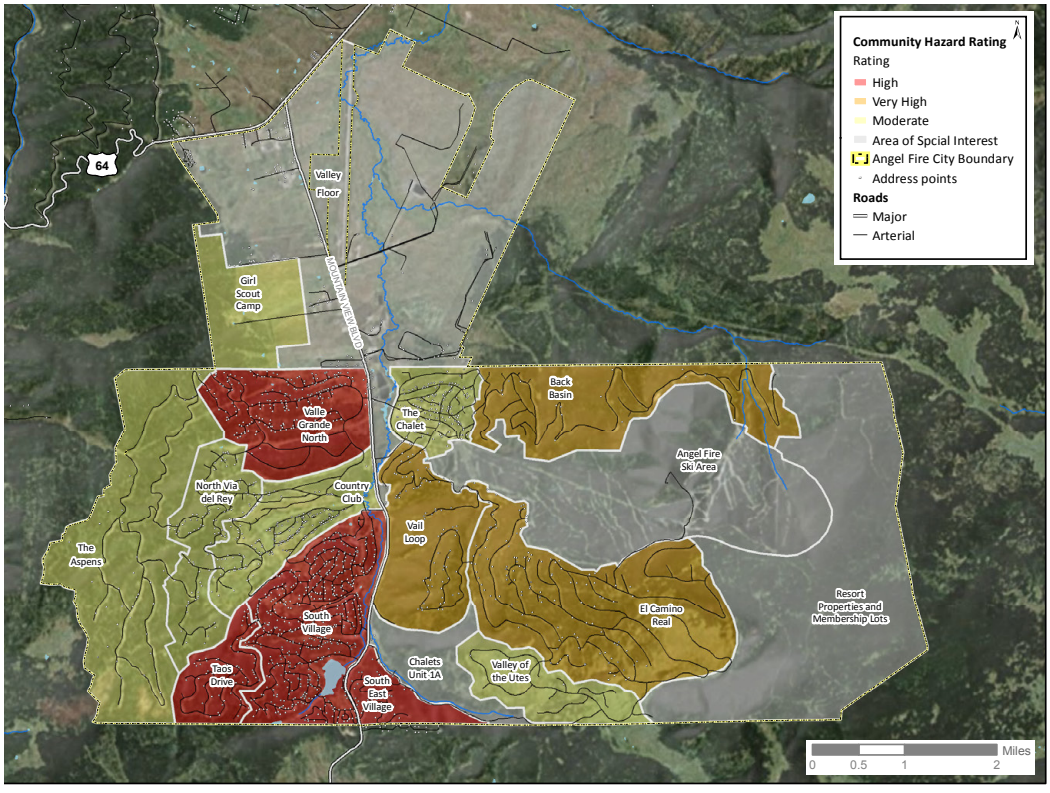
Community Wildfire Protection Plans

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) are important planning documents for residents and government officials alike. CWPPs are also an important element for pursuing funding for wildfire risk reduction related projects. For example, proposals to the New Mexico Association of Counties Wildfire Risk Reduction Program must identify which communities at risk will benefit from the proposed project (NMAC, 2019). Proposals must also include a reference to the CWPP that the affected communities at risk are identified in. Identifying priority projects, training, and needed wildland firefighting equipment is also helpful for fire departments and other government entities when seeking funding from city and county governing bodies. CWPPs vary in the scale at which they are developed e.g. at the county or community scale. The primary functions of a CWPP are to:

- Assign wildfire risk ratings to all communities covered by the plan.
- Identify prioritized fuels reduction projects.
- Identify priority actions that will increase wildfire resilience that don't necessarily involve fuels reduction.
- Include maps and other visual and spatial representations of wildfire risk and other hazards within the county or community.

Most counties in New Mexico are covered under an existing CWPP. However, many of them may be considered out of date (older than 5 years). In 2015, the New Mexico Association of Counties (NMAC), in collaboration with New Mexico State Forestry (NMSF) and the Forest Stewards Guild, developed guidelines for updating Community Wildfire Protection Plans (NMAC, 2015). The update guidelines also outlined elements that should be included in new CWPPs as well. The guidelines outline the process for updating existing CWPPs as follows:

1. Review existing CWPP.
2. Host collaborative meetings.
3. Update maps.
4. Reflect changes in risk ratings due to complete projects or changes in landscape.
5. Develop updated priorities.
6. Distribute CWPP update drafts to key stakeholders (including local, state, tribal, and federal partners) for review and input before the final approval.



This map from the Angle Fire CWPP depicts the wildfire community hazard ratings.

Christian Smith GIS

7. Submit the final document to your local government body, local fire department(s) and New Mexico State Forestry for required signatures and endorsement. Additional signatures from other stakeholders such as tribes, state and federal agencies, and resident organizations is encouraged.
8. Once signed and endorsed by your local governing parties, submit all documentation to NM State Forestry no later than September 1st for final approval by the New Mexico Fire Planning Task Force.

The 2015 CWPP update guidelines also recommend that updates include sections on planning for wildfire preparedness (during a wildfire) and post-fire recovery. Post-fire effects, such as flooding and erosion, can often be worse than the damage sustained during the fire itself. By planning ahead of time, communities can expedite the restoration process and take a proactive rather than reactionary role in post-fire recovery. The After Wildfire Guide is an excellent post-fire planning tool created by NMSF (New Mexico State Forestry et al., 2018).

In addition to the items listed above, CWPPs and updates must also include the following elements:

1. 1. Collaboration: A CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties.
2. Prioritized fuel reduction: A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
3. 3. Reduce structural ignitability: A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.
4. Secure signatures:
    a. The applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities);
    b. The local fire department(s); and
    c. The state entity responsible for forest management.

In addition to knowing what should go into a CWPP or update, one should also have an idea about the process for writing a CWPP or update. Some examples of guiding principles are included below.

1. **Review successful examples:** Whether you have or have never written a CWPP or update, find examples of 3-5 other CWPPs and take note of what you like and dislike about their content and how they are organized. This review may help inform your own CWPP. Using an existing CWPP as a template is OK so long as credit is given where appropriate and the authors consider ways to improve upon previous versions.
2. **Outline risk assessment process:** When determining community risk ratings, there are established methods available such as the Wildfire Hazard Severity Checklist (NFPA, 2008) and geographic information systems (GIS) modeling. Whatever method you use to assign risk or re-assess risk, document it. Describe in the plan how you arrived at the risk ratings so that when updating the CWPP a similar process can be followed to re-assess risk ratings.
3. **Update, don't re-write:** If you are writing a CWPP update, remember that much of the work has already been done by the previous CWPP. Unless there are glaring mistakes or revisions to be made, focus instead on what has or has not changed within the planning area that would affect risk and priority actions. Some priority actions may be ongoing, such as education and outreach. It is OK to roll over ongoing priority actions.
4. **Identify successes and challenges:** If a priority action was not met in a CWPP that is being updated, try to find out why. Also, if there have been successful projects or developments, highlight those in the plan.
5. **Have a plan for public input:** The public should be involved in developing a CWPP or update. It is important to design a transparent and concise public input process. Assign clear deadlines to receive comments on drafts and input on priorities. Public input should not be open-ended. Do your due-diligence to conduct outreach to various stakeholders and provide multiple options for comment such as surveys, interviews, public meetings, and making drafts of the document available on-line. Clearly outline the process you followed to solicit public input in the plan.

6. **Action oriented:** Assessing wildfire risk and hazards are an important component to a CWPP but solutions and actions to reduce risk and improve wildfire resilience should also be included. Avoid writing a plan that "sits on a shelf" by including actionable and discrete recommendations for actions. For example, rather than a priority action that states "conduct resident outreach campaign about wildfire preparedness" a better priority action would be "host a fall and spring community wildfire preparedness day at the County fire station."
7. **Formalize the CWPP core team:** Once your CWPP is written and approved, what next? Implement it! By formalizing the CWPP core team, which is a group of stakeholders representing various interests within a community, your CWPP is more likely to be implemented. Formalization may be as simple as hosting regular meetings to keep key stakeholders engaged and making progress on priority actions.

Asset-Based Situation Assessment

By: Jana Carp, Jana Carp Consulting

Asset-Based Situation Assessment (ABSA) is a relaxed process of face-to-face interviews that focuses on the existing strengths of a community as the basis for its self-directed, collaborative action (Carp, 2017, Carp, 2018). By listening to people's fire stories firsthand, you learn about their knowledge, experience, interest and relationships related to fire—and realize how these strengths have contributed to community good. ABSA is rooted in Asset-based Community Development (ABCD), a specific path for identifying and connecting a community's assets so that they use and grow their capacity to change on their own terms (Depaul University, 2019).

You can also learn where agreement and disagreement take place, and why. As you proceed through the interviews, ABSA helps you:

- Meet people and find new partners;
- Find organizations, businesses and key events that express values you share; and
- Understand the level and character of fire-related knowledge and experience in a community.

If you do not already have partners in the area where you will be working, this is a low-key but structured way to initiate good working relationships. And if you are already familiar with a community, it helps you recognize opportunities for people to work together and build community capacity. In either case, it enables you to find people who care about fire's role in their community, who enjoy meaningful community involvement, and who are natural collaborators. By prioritizing relationship-building, ABSA prepares a solid base for you to facilitate community-directed action.

Why focus on assets, when communities are facing the severe threats and vulnerabilities posed by inevitable wildfires? Because a community's assets are the building blocks of its capacity to respond to and recover from challenges (resilience). Also, a realistic sense of the community's strengths tends to generate energy, creativity, and participation among members: "our glass is half full, let's fill it up some more." Many people have generous impulses and enjoy doing what

they do best on behalf of their neighbors' and their community's well-being. But focusing primarily on what the community lacks works against their creative ingenuity – "our glass is half-empty, we need help" – and can lead to dependency on outside initiative and funding. When a group of positive people focuses on mobilizing their community's assets for fire adaptation, they enlist local resources in creating grass-roots opportunities. Their small-scale successes pave the way to greater visions of accomplishing more together, which motivates building local knowledge and experience (capacity). An asset-based vision of a fire adapted community includes its capacity to self-mobilize to support, inform, and participate in its fire-related institutions.

What Are Community Assets?

What Are Community Assets? "What is your experience of wildfire?" As you listen to the stories that follow that question, you will notice that your interviewees will mention local people, groups, businesses and agencies, places, and events that they particularly appreciate. These are the "assets" or strengths present in the community. To work strategically with these assets, it helps to organize them into categories. There are three primary asset types. Each type has different strengths that they contribute to community well-being. Remember that all these assets are local (geographically present).

- **Individuals** have skills (machine repair, emergency response, bookkeeping), talents (music, baking, note-taking) and abilities (listening, physical strength, inclusivity).
- **Associations** are any informal, voluntary group of residents. Their assets can include local knowledge and traditions, communication and networking, and event organization.
- **Institutions** are formal organizations with employees and buildings. Their assets can include professional contacts, meeting space, employment opportunities, and equipment.

You may decide to add more types of assets to your ABSA, such as:

- **Physical assets** that are specifically related to fire, such as areas available for large animal evacuation, reflective 911 address signage, radio repeaters, and water sources.
- **Cultural and historical assets** such as generational knowledge of fire ecology, traditions of sharing, indigenous fire practices, and community fairs and festivals.
- **Economic assets** include locally-based monetary exchanges for goods and services, bartering, donors, and community funds, no matter how small or informal.

During your situation assessment, you are likely to come across certain individuals who are "connectors"—those who know the community well, listen to understand, and genuinely enjoy collaboration. Stay in touch with them. Later, you may want to convene them as a small group, where they can pool their knowledge of the community's assets through sharing stories at a local restaurant or around a kitchen table. Encouraging them to use their connections to find additional assets sets the stage for new opportunities. "Connectors" may also make good future FAC NM Leaders.

A community's assets are the building blocks of its capacity to respond to and recover from challenges.

While there are no firm rules for how to engage in successful asset-based situation assessment, here are some general guidelines:

Planning the ABSA:

- Set a geographic boundary for your community but be ready to adjust it. The problem with putting lines on a map is that inevitably, someone or some valued asset may be outside of your pre-determined boundary. However, a place-based approach will help you focus your efforts.
- Start with a couple of key contacts to interview instead of making a complete list. End each interview by asking who else you should talk to. You should explicitly target some people in the community who you do not know or who you may assume do not have an interest or knowledge in fire adaptation. This part of the process is a great opportunity to familiarize more of the community

with your fire adaptation activities and grow your network.

- Expect to spend about an hour per interview, so meet someplace comfortable. Offices and conference rooms emphasize professional position while restaurants offer a social feel. Buy your interviewee coffee at a local business in appreciation of their gift of attention.
- Take time before and after interviews to wander and observe the area. Look for opportunities to chat about wildfire with store workers, restaurant waitstaff, librarians, and others. Check out bulletin boards, posters, and displays for anything related to fire.

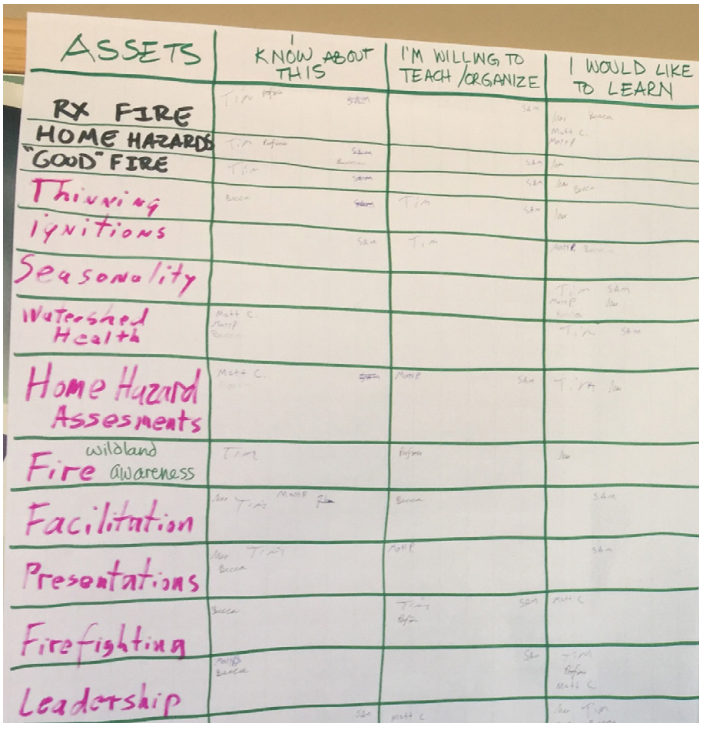
During the ABSA:

- Remember that people are likely to speak more freely to a neutral person than to a representative of an agency that is itself invested in the situation you are asking about.
- Look for and welcome diverse opinions and expertise. You may learn as much from a rancher, a school administrator, and a bicycle race promoter as from a fire chief and a forest health scientist.
- For most people, hand-written notes seem less intrusive than a recording app. Jot down the story outlines and the assets mentioned. Stop taking notes if a story becomes personal.
- Focus on understanding your interviewee without adding your own commentary. Do not correct any misconceptions about fire or forestry at this point. Instead, learn about why and how they came to their present understanding.
- Focus on the positive (asking questions about assets and not getting bogged down by problems), send thank-you notes, and keep personal information confidential to set up good working relationships for the future.

Completing the ABSA:

- Your situation assessment is complete once you feel that you have a good sense of the level of experience, skills/assets, and interest in fire adaptation among various individuals, groups and organizations in the community.
- Review your opportunities to proceed collaboratively in relation to the assets you have uncovered. Put your own agenda or program aside for the moment. What did you learn about community strengths, differences, barriers to fire adaptation, and opportunities for actions? Who would you like to work with?
- Share the results by typing up an inventory of the assets you found, using at least the main three categories: **individuals, groups and organizations**. A simple directory format (names, contact information) can be sufficient, with key words about each asset's reported strengths. Send it to the interviewees and include an invitation for a future get-together as appropriate.

At this point, it's good if your community asset directory feels incomplete, because the next step is getting "connectors" together to pool their local knowledge to fill in the gaps. As the group works together to get a full picture of "what we have to work with", ideas will flow about "what we can do now."



Resilience Assessment

Resilience thinking, born out of the field of ecology, has emerged in recent years as an alternative to contemporary planning and natural resource management paradigms. Resilience is not just about what happens after a disturbance such as a wildfire, but recognizing that disturbance plays an important role in ecological and human systems. Taking a resilience approach to fire adaptation re-frames the challenge. Fire is not the problem. It is our inability, at times, to live with fire that has caused much of the challenges we deal with today. A good metaphor to help understand resilience is to ask the question "do healthy people get sick?" The answer being yes, we all get sick but healthy people, resilient people, recover

A resilience assessment, which was developed by the Resilience Alliance, provides a framework for FAC NM Leaders to bring this approach to fire adaptation (Resilience Alliance, 2010; https://www.resalliance.org/). There are five phases to a resilience assessment, (1) describing the system, (2) understanding system dynamics, (3) understanding cross-scale interactions, (4) understanding system governance, and (5) acting on the assessment (Resilience Alliance, 2010). Each of those phases requires a much more in-depth discussion and reading than is appropriate for this guidebook. Rather, this section will focus on the first and perhaps simplest phase, describing the system. Completing this first phase will give FAC NM Leaders a good introduction to resilience thinking and, like asset mapping, provide a new perspective for how to conceptualize fire adaptation work.

Describing the system

System, in this sense refers to a **social-ecological system** (SES). An SES refers to the ecological and social interactions and benefits that define a place, such as a watershed or a fireshed (Walker & Salt, 2012). The Santa Fe Fireshed (santafefireshed.org) is a great example of a SES with boundaries based on physical features (debris flow paths and fire risk), as well as the social and political entities that share the fire risk and responsibility for reducing it within those boundaries (Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, 2019).

There are five steps to describing one's SES (Resilience Alliance, 2010). This should be an iterative process. While it is perfectly reasonable to perform these steps in order, you may need to go back and adjust things like soft boundaries and main issues after speaking with members of the community and when new information comes to light.

1. **Setting soft boundaries and defining the focal system.** What is the smallest scale you want to assess the resilience of? Your property, your neighborhood, your county? Keep in mind you may need to adjust these boundaries as the assessment proceeds.
2. **Identifying the main issues.** What are the main challenges and concerns within the scale you are assessing? Wildfire, post-fire flooding, economic impacts? The answer to this question may result in the boundaries you defined in part one being expanded to include an entire watershed for example, instead of the political boundaries of a town.
3. **Identifying the resilience of what.** What assets or elements of your system would like to "protect" and remain resilient? What are the main issues and challenges threatening your system?
4. **Identifying the resilience to what.** What kind of disturbances is your system facing? Wildfires, post fire flooding, smoke etc.?
5. **Expanding the system.** Having described the smallest scale, what larger scales should you consider in the future? If you started with your town, perhaps your county is next. If you started with your county or even state, maybe expand your assessment to include the region or include state and federal partners in your next assessment as well.

As with the other assessment tools discussed in this guidebook, should a FAC NM Leader decided to conduct a resilience assessment they should explore the topic further using other reference materials specifically devoted to the method. There are several additional resources and examples of resilience assessments that have been conducted in other places available at www.resalliance.org.

Common strategies and considerations for FAC NM Leaders

Regardless of which assessment tool a FAC NM Leader uses to get started, there are several common strategies and considerations that are useful at all levels of wildfire resilience planning and action. Focusing on these skills and actions will help leverage the work done on one assessment for use on another.

Collaboration

Collective action is more effective than acting alone. Furthermore, wildfire risk is shared across property boundaries, political boundaries, and is affected by the choices of one's neighbors by the actions they have or have not taken to reduce it. While collaboration is a large topic worthy of a lengthier discussion, two key practices will help to refine how FAC NM Leaders focus their approach.

1. **Forming a collaborative group:** Identifying the people that will help you conduct your assessment should be the first step to any assessment. Start by listing the various constituencies that should be represented such as local, state and federal agencies, neighborhood associations, fire departments, elected officials, and local businesses. Don't be afraid to cast a wide net. It is important to continue outreach efforts to people and groups that are not currently participating.

Key functions of the collaborative group should include regular meetings and communication (email, Facebook or website etc.). Face to face meetings and regular communication are important to keep people engaged and interested in the work you are doing. It may also be necessary to define roles and responsibilities of the group. However, try not to get bogged down in process and decision making unless it becomes an issue and is relevant to the work your group is trying to accomplish. Build the governance structure as needed as opposed to starting with too much structure.

2. **Relationship building:** As a FAC NM Leader, you will be working to inspire others to take action. Being successful in that endeavor will rely largely on the strength of the personal and professional relationships you maintain and cultivate. Sharing resources and organizing volunteers will be much easier if as a FAC NM Leader you have a group of friends and partners committed not only to a common cause, but that also trust and respect you for the work you are doing as a FAC NM Leader.

Community organized chipper day

Joe Stehling

Taking a participatory approach

Living with wildfires is something everyone living in the WUI must do, regardless of interest or experience with fire adaptation work. For that reason alone, FAC NM Leaders should emphasize taking a participatory approach to fire adaption work. Cast a wide net and offer multiple opportunities to participate in planning efforts (CWPP), community meetings, and fuels reduction projects for example.

Collaboration is often messy and complicated. You will need to balance many different stakeholder viewpoints and perspectives about how to live with fire and how to prioritize actions. However, without a robust and transparent participatory approach, your efforts may fall flat if your fellow community members don't feel their voice has been heard throughout the process. Much has been written on public participation and a quick google search will yield various articles and guides that FAC NM Leaders may find useful. A good rule of thumb is to offer multiple options for participation. Surveys are a common tool for gathering public input, but don't rely solely on surveys to guide your efforts. Host meetings, conduct interviews, mail surveys, post them online etc. Whatever participatory methods you use, document them and have an answer to the question "how did you solicit public input." Be intentional in your methods. Sherry Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" is often used as a tool for those engaged in participatory process to gauge their efforts (Arnstein, S. 1969).

Identifying risk

Identifying wildfire risk, whether it be to homes, ecosystems, or communities is an important first step for increasing wildfire resilience. In many cases, it may be a somewhat uncomfortable process as residents learn of the inherent risks that come with living in fire adapted ecosystems. Be prepared for the risks you identify to be a result of living in a place where wildfires have always and will always continue to occur.

For some communities and homeowners, prioritizing risk may be a useful way to focus efforts. For others, a list in no particular order may suffice. The order in which risk areas are addressed may be determined as much by cost and the effort required as wildfire hazard. Every community will have their own calculus to determine the order of importance of their fire adaptation actions. Going after the "low hanging fruit" first is a perfectly reasonable method. The important thing is that communities take actions to reduce their risk and increase their resilience.

Celebrating success

It's tempting to only want to focus on problems, challenges, and what's wrong with a home or community based on a desire to want to fix it. However, don't shy away from acknowledging what is going well. Celebrating success, whether it is the completion of a defensible space project, being awarded a grant, or a wildfire that was stopped at the border of a treatment area can be inspiring. Having success lets people know their efforts are being valued and aren't wasted. Success breeds success. Others can follow the example you and your community have set and the good ideas will spread…like wildfire!

Identifying assets

Similarly to why celebrating success is important, identifying assets as an approach to fire adaptation creates a more positive perspective. There is strength and capacity in communities that is important to acknowledge. You don't need a grant, a degree, or a season of wildland fire fighting under your belt to reduce wildfire risk. Skills not commonly associated with fire preparedness can be extremely useful. For example, a community member with graphic design skills can help with an outreach campaign and create fliers, or an architect can research fire resistant building materials.

Making a plan for action

Assessments are a great place to start but they are not the end goal. It is equally, if not more important to eventually shift the focus to making a plan for action. Work with your partners to create a list of actionable, discrete goals and outcomes. No goal or task is too small. Schedule times throughout the year to review your community's action plan and review what has been completed, what has not (and why), and what new actions/goals have emerged since the last review.

Amending and updating plans for action is an important part of adaptive management. Assessments, planning based on the assessment, and making a plan for action is a process loop that should be repeated to make meaningful progress. The work of fire adaptation is never done and as environmental conditions and community members and values change, priorities, strategies, and actions may need to change as well.

Pile burning near a home to reduce hazardous fuels.

Final thoughts

Before having ever heard of FAC NM, most FAC NM Leaders will likely have already been working to improve fire adaptation in their communities. Simply by taking the initiative to engage with their neighbors and work to reduce fire risk, you have already taken the most important step; taking responsibility for living in a fire adapted ecosystem. While the FAC NM Leader program will provide tools and resources for FAC NM Leaders to conduct their work, it is more about harnessing the capacity that already exists in our communities. Through our collective action, we can spread good ideas and success to move all of our communities further towards fire resilience.

Hopefully, this guidebook will have provided FAC NM Leaders with new tools for assessing their community's needs, challenges, and assets. Knowing where and how to start can be the most difficult part to any project. Using the tools in this guidebook, FAC NM Leaders should have options for beginning the work of fire adaptation, and ideas about how to frame issues for their communities. It is important to remember that this guidebook is not exhaustive in its list of tools, resources, and strategies. FAC NM Leaders are encouraged to continually do their own research about how to build wildfire resilience in their communities. www.facnm.org is also updated periodically as new resources are identified.

Glossary of terms

Active crown fire: A fast moving fire that spreads through the crowns of trees. Typically driven by wind or terrain. Active crown fires are more difficult to suppress than ground fires.

Adaptive management: "Resource management approach based on the science of learning by doing" (Chapin et al., 2009).

Community wildfire protection plan: A planning document that identifies community risks and priority actions related to wildfire preparedness, response, and fuels reduction projects. CWPPS are often conducted at the County scale and are recognized in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act as a way for communities to help prioritize where fuels reduction treatments occur on federal lands. CWPPs are an important pre-requisite to receiving various sources of funding to reduce wildfire risk.

Fireshed: A geographic area defined by a shared wildfire and post-fire flooding risk as well as common political and economic values at risk.

Firewise: a recognition program of the National Fire Protection Association awarded to a community that completes the application process and works to maintain their status.

Fire adapted community: A human community consisting of informed and prepared citizens collaboratively planning and taking action to safely coexist with wildland fire.

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network: A network of natural resource professionals, community members and others working towards greater fire resiliency that collaborate to share lessons learned, challenges, and solutions to living well with fire.

Frequent fire: A fire regime where fires have historically occurred with a frequency of every 1-15 years. Pondersosa pine and low-elevation grasslands and prairies are typical frequent fire regime vegetation types.

Fire regime: The character and frequency at which wildfire historically has occurred in a wildland setting.

Home ignition zone: The area within up to 300 feet from the home where mitigation work should occur to reduce the risk of a wildfire and ember shower impacting the structure.

Prescribed fire: the practice of using fire as a tool to mimic natural disturbance (wildfire) and/or reduce fuel loads resulting from a forest restoration or risk reduction project.

Resilience: "The capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks" Walker and Salt.

Social-ecological system: A place, such as a watershed or a fireshed, that is defined by geophysical boundaries as well as the ecosystem services humans derive from that place.

Wildland urban interface: Area where the built and natural environments overlap, particularly in relation to wildfire.

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The FAC NM Network vision is to create connections among individuals and communities to share resources, solutions, challenges, and lessons learned in order to take collective action towards building wildfire resilience.

For more information visit:

facnm.org

FIREADAPTEDNM learning network

FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES LEARNING NETWORK

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Leader Guidebook - January, 2019; V1.0

FIRE ADAPTED NEW MEXICO LEARNING NETWORK

FAC NM Leader Assessment

To help FAC NM Leaders get started in their fire adaptation work, this Assessment will establish a baseline of knowledge within the FAC NM Leader community. Knowing things like when the last CWPP was completed and if there are any nearby Firewise sites will help focus the efforts of FAC NM Leaders and prioritize where to start. Some FAC NM Leaders may have already completed many of the tasks outlined here and be well-versed in their community's history of fire adaptation work. The purpose of the FAC NM Leader Assessment is to ensure all FAC NM Leaders are starting off on an equal footing and have completed a few key tasks so that the FAC NM Leader program continues to prioritize taking *action* in their communities to advance wildfire resilience.

After completing the FAC NM Leader form on www.facnm.org, potential FAC NM Leaders will be connected with a FAC mentor (a current FAC NM Leader) to guide them through the process, answer questions, and discuss their completed FAC NM Leader Assessment. When the FAC NM Leader Assessment is complete, FAC NM Leaders should upload them to the FAC NM forum, where there is a designated place for Assessments. The forum is also a good place to look at completed Assessments should FAC NM Leaders have any questions about how to complete them. A fillable word .doc version of this assessment is available on www.facnm.org.

Your name		FAC Mentor	
Community/city where you live		FAC Mentor community/city	
County where you live		FAC Mentor County	

1. **Is your community covered by a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP)?**

There are several places to find out if your community is covered by a CWPP. Many (but not all) CWPPs are available on New Mexico State Forestry's website (see below). You can also try contacting your local and/or county fire officials. All communities in New Mexico should be covered by a current CWPP in order to proactively plan for wildfire. http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/FireMgt/cwpps.html

Yes___ No____

If yes, what is the name of the plan and what date was it approved? Please provide a digital copy of the plan to your FAC NM Leader mentor if one is available.

Name of plan_____
Date approved_____

2. **Does your community have a Firewise designation?**

   Yes____ No____

   Are there any other Sites in your county? If yes, list them below and include their website, Facebook page, and contact information if available.

   Yes____No____

Name of Site	Website or Facebook page	Contact name phone etc.

The National Fire Protection Association maintains a database of all active Firewise sites at https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/By-topic/Wildfire/Firewise-USA/Firewise-USA-Resources/Firewise-USA-sites

3. **Do you and/or your community have an evacuation plan?**

Community wildfire protection plans and all-hazard/emergency management plans are common places to look for an evacuation plan. Some communities also have stand-alone evacuation plans.

Yes____No____

If yes, what is the name of the plan and what date was it approved? Please provide a digital copy (if available) of the plan and/or maps to your FAC NM Leader mentor.

Name of plan_____
Date approved_____

4. **Complete at least one kind of assessment for your home, your neighbors' home, and/or your community. Describe the results of the assessment you completed.**

For example, home hazard assessment, FAC Self-Assessment Tool, asset mapping, resilience assessment. For results, what were there specific hazards that need to be addressed at the homes you assessed? What were some of the key assets you identified?

Type of assessment_____

Results:

5. **Who are 1-3 community members, local/state/federal agency representatives, or other partners that will help you address wildfire resilience in your community?**

6. **Provide a link to a question or response of yours on the www.facnm.org forum.**

7. **What is your plan for your first in person meeting with neighbors? Will you attend an already scheduled event such as a neighborhood association meeting or convene your own event?**

8. **Identify 1-3 priority actions to improve wildfire resilience or maintain success for each of the following:**

Your home/property or your neighbors' home/property

1.

2.

3.

Your community/neighborhood

1.

2.

3.