

Redefining 'community' in the Applegate

BY SANDY SHAFFER

For the past three-plus years folks across the country (including me) have been working with federal, state and local partners to develop a national Cohesive Strategy for Wildfire Management. Suppress all fires? Let them burn? Thin all federal lands? Impose building restrictions in rural areas? One solution alone doesn't work, weather patterns are constantly changing, and the cost of fire suppression nationally is unsustainable. Something has to change.

The final Cohesive Strategy identified three areas for regional or local areas to address in order to reduce the severity of fires, loss of life and property, and also suppression costs. They are: fire-resilient landscapes, appropriate wildfire response, and fire-adapted communities. This last is where *you and I* come into the picture.

A fire-adapted community (FAC) has been simply defined as one where "human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property."

The basic premise is that through a combination of knowledgeable and coordinated pre-fire planning, preparedness

and action, coupled with evacuation plans and appropriate fire response, the loss of life and property due to a wildfire can be prevented or minimized. The "community" takes responsibility for its wildfire risk.

Eleven potential components of an FAC have been identified in the Cohesive Strategy (but not all might be applicable to every community). They are:

- Defensible space and/or a Firewise community
- Fuel reduction efforts beyond the defensible space
- Local building and development codes for fire-safe homes
- Family and community evacuation plans
- Internal safety zones
- Exterior/community fuel buffers (to help keep a wildfire from spreading to the community)
- Forest management/fire-resilient forests (to help prevent explosive crown fires that kill trees and spread embers)
- Fire prevention and education efforts
- Local capacity to fight fire
- Local cooperative fire agreements (mutual aid between agencies)

• Local Community Wildfire Protection Plans, or CWPPs.

Some of you are probably asking if we really *need* to address this FAC thing here in the Applegate. After all, we already have our CWPP, we do education and outreach, we have mutual aid agreements and county building codes in place, and, we've done a good job on defensible space.

But think about our local dry climate, the fact that most of us live in the wildland-urban interface, and the majority of us in the Applegate either abut or are within a half mile of federal lands. Another factor is that our "fire season" comes later in the summer than in other regions, so it's not unusual for national fire suppression resources to be tied up elsewhere when we get our first lightning storm in June or July. Throw in what's happening financially at the federal, state and local levels, and ask: is wildfire preparedness *really* going to be a priority? We definitely need to be able to fend for ourselves!

So looking through those 11 items again, the fire-adapted "community" is more than a single property owner or two, but it's a lot more defined than, say,

the entire city of Williams. Definitely not a whole county, even though something like building codes might come under the county's jurisdiction.

Therefore, the leading question is: *how do we define* "community"? Initially I would think that long roads such as Humbug or Thompson Creek could be considered "communities," but Fire Chief Fillis says those are a bit too long and should be broken up. Could Murphy be a "community" under this type of definition? Maybe, but Ruch might be too large. So *who should* define where FACs are in the Applegate? My answer would be residents, local fire folks, community leaders, maybe federal land managers, too—all working together.

Our Applegate has long been recognized as a leader in wildfire preparedness, but now it's time to *push this even further* by becoming "fire-adapted." I *urge you* to take the next step and talk to your neighbors, and maybe even your fire chief about the components of this FAC concept. Start to define *your* "community" and see what you collectively can begin to tackle. Let's all work *together, now*, to be fire-adapted before next fire season. Because no one else is going to do it for us!

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Fuel-reduction assistance grants available for middle Applegate residents

BY BRIAN BALLOU

Residential landowners in much of the Applegate River Valley within Jackson County (*see map*) are eligible for fuel-reduction assistance grants from the Oregon Department of Forestry's (ODF) Medford Unit. A grant pays a property owner \$400 for creating a 100-foot fuel break around a primary residence, and improving driveway access for emergency vehicles. These measures may help protect the home against wildfire damage or destruction.

Financial assistance is also available for fuel-reduction projects in strategic locations such as roadsides and property lines, and areas where there are fields of brush and thickets of trees.

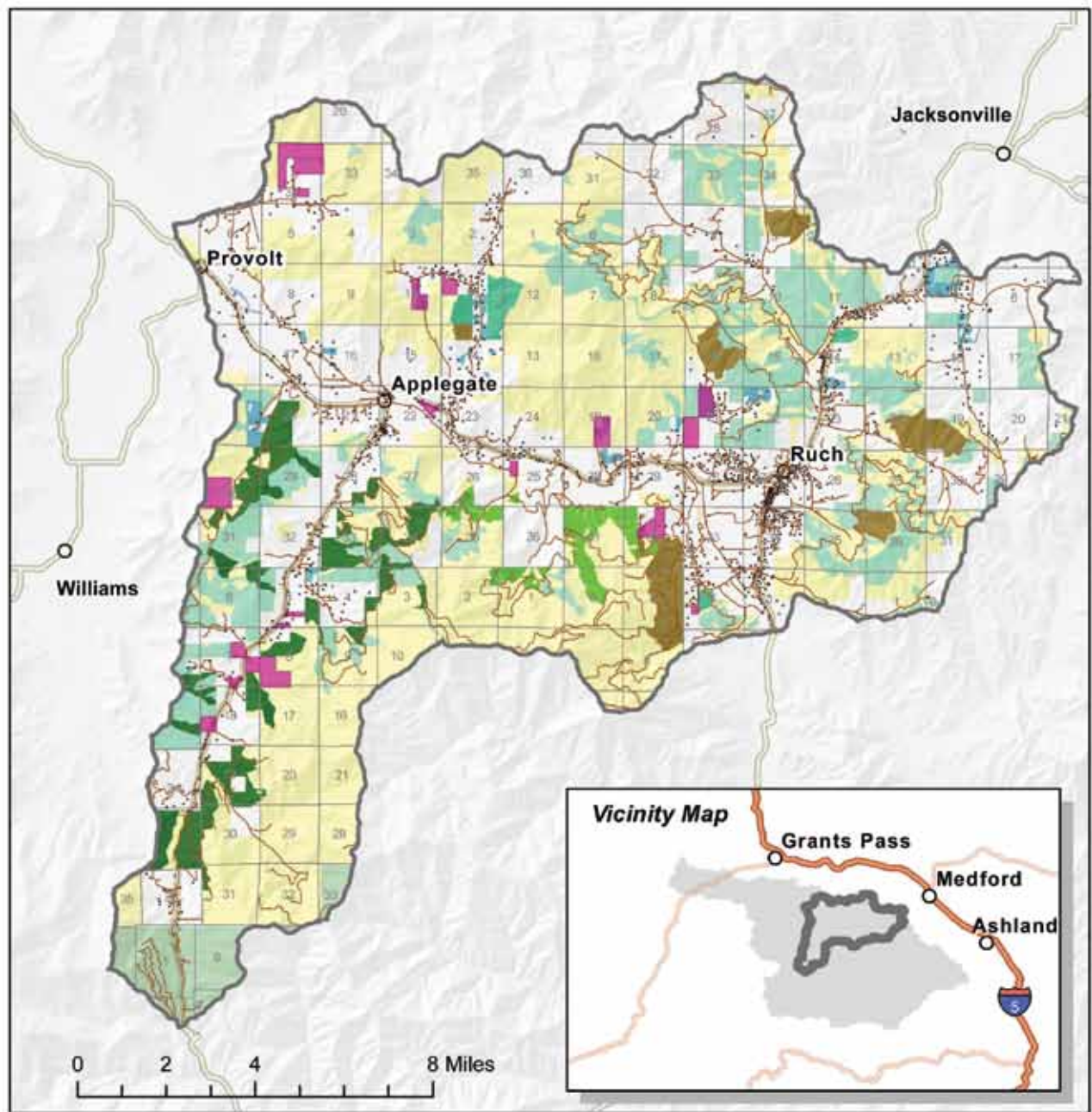
To receive a grant, a property owner must agree to meet fuel-reduction specifications prescribed by an ODF fire prevention specialist. In addition to establishing a fuel break around the home and driveway, the property owner may be required to move or enclose firewood or lumber piles, remove flammable material from beneath decks, and replace fire-vulnerable landscaping plants with fire-resistant species.

Payment will be made upon completion of the project and approval by ODF.

For more information, and to schedule a free on-site fuel-reduction evaluation, contact the Oregon Department of Forestry's Medford Unit office at 541-664-3328.

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Middle Applegate Collaborative Fuel Reduction & Restoration Project



Legend

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|---|---|----------------------|
| Middle Applegate Project Boundary | BLM Fuels Treatments Status, YR Complete | General Owner |
| Prospective Fuels Treatment Landowners | Completed 1998-2007 | BLM |
| SITUS (Home Sites) | Completed 2008-2010 | Private |
| Applegate Watershed (Vicinity Map) | In Progress | USFS |
| BLM Middle Applegate Pilot Phase | Past Private Fuels Treatments | |
| Pilot Joe | Past Private Fuels Treatments | |
| Pilot Thompson (draft) | | |

