

# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

## Purpose:

- A Community Assessment is intended to help a community plan for the specific wildfire risks and challenges in that neighborhood without engaging in the in-depth process of developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
- The Assessment will provide a baseline evaluation of your community that you can use to support your community outreach.
- This assessment and plan can be used to apply for Firewise Communities USA status.
- It also serves as a guide for work within the neighborhood and to help FireWise of Southwest Colorado more directly support the efforts of Neighborhood Ambassadors.

## Who Is It For:

A Community Assessment may or may not be appropriate for your neighborhood. It is less comprehensive than a CWPP and will not involve or require the level of community or partner participation that a CWPP does. This tool may be right for your neighborhood if you are:

- Just starting out and need initial professional advice on the primary wildfire hazards.
- Homes are the main value at risk. The other values such as communications towers, major power lines, oil and gas infrastructure, businesses, public facilities, etc. are very limited or not present.
- Not adjacent to state or federally owned forested lands.
- Interested in recognition from the Firewise USA program, but aren't ready for a full-blown CWPP.

## Who You'll Need:

At least two residents to reduce bias in the visit and write-up and make sure all of the bases are covered. This should include at least one FireWise Neighborhood Ambassador (NA). One resident should be in charge of taking notes on the template. One person should take photos.

**FireWise County Coordinator:** Can help coordinate agency participants

**Local Fire District Chief or representative:** Provides emergency response perspective, anecdotal fire history, home protection capability and concerns

**Forestry and/or Wildland Fire representative:** Provides wildfire behavior perspective and treatment suggestions. This person should represent any included, adjacent, or nearby public lands (FS/BLM) where applicable. May substitute Colorado State Forest Service personnel where public lands are not nearby.

**State Forest Service representative (when available):** Provides healthy forest mitigation guidelines

## How To Do It:

1. Neighborhood Ambassador(s)(NAs) decide their area to work within.
2. A Neighborhood Ambassador contacts their FireWise County Coordinator to arrange a ½ to whole day site visit with the local fire district, fire or forestry representatives, and the Colorado State Forest Service when available. More than one resident in the community should be involved to reduce the bias of the Assessment.
3. NAs provide neighbors with notice before the site visit and invite them to attend or to a follow-up gathering where the finding of the site visit will be presented.
4. During the visit, NAs and other resident(s) use the Community Assessment template to ask pointed questions of the professionals and to take pictures associated with the various aspects of a fire adapted community.
5. The NAs synthesize the information gathered and photos taken during the walk-about and/or engine drive through. Other residents may also give input if the NA wants. Use the Community Assessment template to format this into your Community Assessment document. Your County FireWise Coordinator will be available to help you as needed.
6. Ambassadors incorporate short-term actions to mitigate some of the hazards identified during the site visit into the Community Assessment document. Neighbors can help refine the short-term goals and action steps for their neighborhood (see next step).
7. NA(s) take the findings to the community, preferably with the presence of their County FireWise Coordinator and one or more of the professionals who were present during the on-site Community Assessment. This Community meeting can be held the same day as the on-site assessment with the report written as a follow up to the day with the community input, or this can be done in two steps, depending on what fits with your community.

**Location Map:** <http://www.coloradowildfirerisk.com/map>, County GIS Viewer

**Define Community:** Briefly describe the ecosystem, number and style or age of homes, roads, and land uses

**Wildfire Risk:** Describe how a wildfire is likely to start and spread within the community.

**Wildfire Preparedness Activities:** Describe past and current wildfire preparedness activities in the neighborhood.

**Community Strengths and Vulnerabilities:** Provide photos and brief descriptions of common strengths and vulnerabilities of the community in the following categories. Try to capture photos of hazards without giving away the home or take pictures of hazards as well as wildfire preparedness efforts at the same home site.

Access

Home Construction and Landscaping

Defensible Space Zones/ Forest Fuels

Community Fuel Breaks and Safe Areas

Fire Suppression Resources or Challenges

**Evacuation Readiness:** Describe the community and individual household evacuation readiness or needs.

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### **Plan of Action:**

Based on the vulnerabilities and beliefs about fire risk and spread in your community, create a list of achievable actions to reduce the risk and make community members more prepared for wildfire.

Keep in mind the five areas of consideration for a Fire Adapted Community: Evacuation Readiness, Access, Built Environment, Defensible Space, and Community Protection.

Designate at least one Firewise day education or mitigation project (Firewise Communities requirement).

Include at least \$2/per capita/per year of work to be completed (Firewise Communities requirement).

This list may be developed with input of the community during or directly following the assessment, or may be brought to the community in a follow-up gathering where the findings of this plan are presented.

### **Using and Reviewing this Assessment:**

This Assessment is a tool for sharing general information about the wildfire hazards in your community. The plan of action is for short-term goals to be pursued with the lead of the community's FireWise Neighborhood Ambassador(s). This plan should be reviewed each year to reflect the actions taken by the community and outline a further plan of action. As needed, the fire district and forestry professionals should be invited back to review the work that has been done, and its potential efficacy for addressing the risk it is proposed to reduce.

This Assessment can be used for the purposes of seeking Firewise Communities USA status from the national Firewise organization. See [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org) for more information and to obtain an application.

This Assessment is not a substitute for individual homeowner action. It is critical for residents to become informed of their specific risks and vulnerabilities to life and property. Neighborhood Ambassadors are available to provide technical support and encouragement for individual property actions, but will be focusing on their own properties and activities that can reduce the

wildfire risks to the community as a whole. Even if you have addressed all of the vulnerabilities identified in this plan, there is no guarantee that there won't be significant losses from a wildfire in your community; however, every step taken as individuals and as a community reduces the risks posed by wildfire in your community.