

# Community Wildfire Risk Assessment and Fuel Reduction Plan

*for the*

Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Community

*in*

Lincoln County, Nevada

*December 2002*



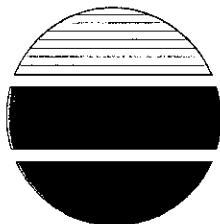
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EXHIBIT C8 Lands

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## **PART I – COMMUNITY RISK ASSESSMENT**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

During the 2002 fire season more than six million acres and nearly 2,000 homes were lost to wildfires in the western United States. This record fire year resulted in the greatest natural resource losses and the highest wildfire suppression costs recorded to date, with reclamation costs yet to be determined. Congress, aware of the potential for this type of tragedy to occur, and the potential for pre-suppression planning and treatments to reduce the risk of loss, has allocated National Fire Plan funding for fuel reduction projects. In fiscal year 2001, 775,880 acres were treated for fuel reduction in the wildland/urban interface (National Fire Plan website).

In 2001, the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Community (MWGRC) was listed as a community at risk for a wildland/urban interface fire, along with numerous other communities in Lincoln County, Nevada. In Nevada, the Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF) administers grants awarded through the National Fire Plan to develop and implement plans to reduce the risk of loss during wildland fires in interface communities. Lincoln County submitted an application for assistance to NDF to complete a Wildfire Risk Assessment for the MWGRC. Resource Concepts, Inc. (RCI) was retained by Lincoln County to perform the risk assessment and provide specific, community-wide fuel reduction recommendations. The primary goals of the plan are to effectively reduce the wildfire threat while sustaining the needs, opportunities, land uses and values of the Community.

Homeowners will have to make difficult decisions regarding fuels reduction. Common sense dictates that a majority of the fuel be removed to decrease the wildfire hazard and improve fire safe conditions on private property. However, people enjoy living and vacationing in the MWGRC for the privacy and visual beauty the vegetation provides. The recommendations given in this report are to assist private property owners in balancing acceptable fuels removal with due consideration of the aesthetic values. The recommended fuel hazard reduction methods will assist in reducing the threat and impacts of wildfire. However, following all of the recommendations in this report will not prevent the possibility of a wildfire from occurring.

The objectives of the MWGRC Fire Safe Plan are to:

- Empower private landowners by presenting defensible space and firebreak recommendations to reinforce personal safety and protect private property.
- Increase community safety by expanding current fire suppression resources and promoting pre-suppression methods that minimize ignition risks and fuel hazards.
- Set guidelines that will enable Lincoln County to implement community hazard reduction programs to maintain fire safe communities.

- Promote fire hazard reduction and pre-suppression cooperation with public land managers to ensure the sustainability of the fire safe plan for private and public lands alike.

## **1.1 PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION**

The MWGRC is located approximately 25 miles north of Pioche and 85 miles south of Ely, Nevada along US Highway 93. A rest area and a seasonal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) fire station at Pony Springs are located approximately five miles north of the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Road turnoff. The Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Road extends approximately 9 miles from Highway 93 to the entrance of the Community. The private lands that constitute the MWGRC are located in portions of T. 5 N. R. 67 E. sections 26, 33-35 and T. 4 N. R. 67 E. sections 1 and 2. The risk assessment project area includes the entire Community, which is comprised of approximately 810 acres of private land, subdivided into 61 parcels (Figure 1.0). Records indicate that less than 25 percent of the landowners in the MWGRC reside in Lincoln County. The Community has about 12 full-time residents with a majority of the 40 to 50 homes used seasonally for vacation purposes.

Land ownership around MWGRC consists of both public and private land (Figure 2.0). Mining, agriculture, residential, and recreation are the primary land uses. The BLM currently manages all of the public lands adjacent to MWGRC.

### **Planned Fuel Reduction Treatments**

In 2001, the BLM Ely Field Office published an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the *Mount Wilson Guest Ranch Community Urban Interface Project*. The EA described the proposed fuel treatments for the public lands directly adjacent to the MWGRC. The EA was appealed prior to implementation of the plan, which recently resulted in a Settlement Agreement. The Agreement now restricts the amount of fuels that can be removed on public land, and includes variations from BLM's original fuel reduction plans proposed in the EA. The new locations and specifications for fuel treatments are included in Appendix A.

## **1.2 CLIMATE**

The climate at the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Community is generally warm to hot in the summers and cool in the winter. The average annual precipitation is 8 to 14 inches with approximately half of the precipitation occurring as snow during the winter months with a second peak in precipitation during the summer (BLM 2001).

Prevailing weather conditions create upslope breezes that start in the late morning from the west and southwest. In the evening, the wind reverses and downslope breezes blow from the east. During weather changes, stronger winds blow from the south or southwest. During thunderstorm activity lightning is common and wind can come from any direction. Due to the terrain in the Community it is not uncommon for erratic winds to swirl in multiple directions.

## 5.0 AVAILABLE AGENCY ASSISTANCE

Those individual landowners who would like to work with a forester directly should call Mark Hill, the Southern Region NDF Resource Management Officer, at (702) 486-5123. The Forest Stewardship Program through NDF may provide cost-share assistance to landowners selected to participate in fuel reduction and forest health activities. Assistance for fuel removal may be available from the Pioche Conservation Camp. Landowners should contact Art Cameron, the Pioche Camp Supervisor at (775) 962-5179.

Individual landowners who want to develop water sources or thin trees for wildlife habitat enhancement can contact NRCS Soil Conservationist, James Potts, in Caliente at (775) 726-3101. The High Desert Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council may also be able to help landowners in implementing fuels reduction, vegetation replacement, and dry hydrant installation. Teri Knight is the RC&D coordinator to contact in Las Vegas, and may be reached at (702) 262-9047 ext. 108. The University of Nevada Cooperative Extension also has expertise to assist with educational needs regarding the wildland/urban interface.

## 6.0 SUMMARY

The recommendations in this report have been specifically developed for the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Community, and are summarized in Table 3.0. They expand on standard recommendations generally proposed for the region, based upon site-specific characteristics observed during the wildfire risk assessment performed by RCI in August 2002. General and specific recommendations provide a critical starting point for the Community to take a proactive approach to reduce the risks to property and life from a wildfire.

TABLE 3.0 PRIORITY TREATMENTS TO REDUCE WILDFIRE RISKS IN THE MWGRC.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	DESCRIPTION OF AREA TO BE TREATED
Firebreaks	BLM	Install a firebreak 300 feet wide on both sides of the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Road for approximately four miles.
		Install a firebreak 300 feet wide on both sides of Stagecoach Road for approximately 2 miles.
		Install a firebreak 300 feet wide on both sides of Road 'A' for approximately 4 miles.
		Install a firebreak 300 feet wide on both sides of Road 'B' for approximately 0.25 miles.
		Install a firebreak 300 feet wide on the east side of the Community.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	DESCRIPTION OF AREA TO BE TREATED
Fuel Reduction Treatments	Property Owners	<p>Install fuel reduction treatments 60 feet wide along both sides of the Community roads.</p> <p>Remove rabbitbrush along Craw Creek.</p> <p>Maintain fuel reduction treatments.</p>
Defensible Space	Property Owners	Remove, reduce, and replace vegetation around homes for a minimum distance of 100 to 200 feet, depending upon slope.
	Lincoln County	<p>Develop brush clearance and biomass disposal programs for safe and timely disposal of debris removed during fuel reduction treatments.</p> <p>Coordinate with the Power Company(s) to maintain vegetation clearance under utility lines.</p>
Fire Suppression Fire Suppression	Lincoln County	<p>Install three, 5,000-gallon water tanks for fire suppression.</p> <p>Acquire two or three 150-gallon slip-on tanks and pumps designed for pickup trucks.</p> <p>Create additional draft sources in Craw Creek or install dry fire hydrants.</p>
	Property Owners	<p>Install 1,000-gallon water tanks at homes for fire protection.</p> <p>Acquire a backup generator for pumping water in case of a power outage during a fire.</p>
Roads and Driveways	Lincoln County	<p>Name, record, and map all Community roads and driveways.</p> <p>Widen Community Roads to 22 feet where possible, or install turnouts every 350 feet.</p>
	Property Owners	Widen driveways to 22 feet where possible, or install turnouts every 350 feet.

In the Mt. Wilson Guest Ranch Community, **effective firebreaks will require extensive clearing for protection from worst-case scenario fires.** Firebreak widths vary from 150 to 600 feet depending upon the fuel type, slope, and predicted flame lengths.

Risks to structures can be addressed and mitigated by improving access and fire suppression resources. Creating effective defensible space around structures will reduce fire exposure. Shortening fire suppression response time and increasing accessibility into and out of the Community will reduce the risk of losses as well.

**The area within a minimum of 100 feet of a structure is the homeowner's primary responsibility and individual opportunity to reduce risks to life and property.** Drastic vegetation treatment, sometimes including tree removal and replacement, is critical around the homes in the extreme fire hazard MWGRC. Careful and selective pruning and tree thinning are required along roadways and driveways, to minimize the threat of a fast moving fire that can block escape routes for residents and preclude access by emergency equipment and resources during a wildfire.

**It will take a significant, on-going effort and commitment to modify the fuel structure in the dense pinyon-juniper woodlands and maintain that modified environment to accomplish hazard reduction.** In order to effectively reduce wildfire risk and efficiently implement long term risk management plans, fuel reduction treatments must occur on both public lands adjacent to the MWGRC and the private lands within the Community. Recognizing this need, Lincoln County is currently developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BLM to transfer the fuel treatment and maintenance responsibility for public lands around the MWGRC to Lincoln County. Such an agreement would allow the County to implement timely vegetation treatments that will help to provide protection of life and property in the MWGRC.

**There is still no guarantee that a devastating wildfire will not occur in the MWGRC, even if all of the recommendations in this report are implemented.** However, Community awareness and individual attention to fuels management on private property will help achieve the highest level of wildfire safety possible.