

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

La Paz County

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Yuma and Lake Havasu Field Office

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Community Wildfire Protection Plan For Desert Communities in La Paz County

Introduction

The purpose of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is to provide justification to La Paz County with written analysis of the wildfire threat and a mitigation plan to lower the threat from wildfire to the identified communities. La Paz County borders lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Yuma and Lake Havasu Field Offices.

The basis for the development of a CWPP is found in the federal legislation; “*The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003*.” All federal land management agencies are required to assist communities in the development of a CWPP. Federal funding for hazardous fire-fuel reduction projects and community protection efforts will be based on a State’s ranking of communities at risk and the completion of CWPPs. Collaboration with the agencies and partners involved is essential in determining where the priorities for fuel treatment exist and for dealing with wildfires.

This CWPP is broad based and focuses on the larger tracts of federal land. Private landowners are strongly encouraged to create defensible space (see “Living with Fire—A Homeowners Guide”) around their homes and property reducing fire fuel on privately held acreage.

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Community Profile

Location

The affected communities are Quartzsite, Brenda, Vicksburg, Hope, Harcuvar, Salome, Wenden, Gladden, Bouse, La Paz Valley, and Rainbow Acres

Population

The population for this part of the County is estimated at 6,215 persons and 5,284 housing units.

Community	Population	Housing Units	Square Miles	Density
Quartzsite	3,354	3,186	36.28	87.82
Salome	1,690	1,176	27.42	42.89
Wenden	556	309	14.85	20.80
Bouse	615	562	10.09	55.68

Land Owner/Jurisdiction	Acres	Percentage
Bureau of Land Management	1,683,489	58.3
Colorado River Indian Tribes	232,627	8.1
United States Military	396,819	13.7
Private	149,075	5.3
State	255,195	8.8
Wildlife Refuge	168,616	5.8
Other	4,144	.1

Description

The Communities are in La Paz County north of Interstate 10, south of Bill Williams River, east of Arizona Highway 95, and west of La Paz County Line. Topography is flat desert with numerous washes and several small mountain ranges.

Quartzsite is 125 miles west of Phoenix at the junction of Interstate 10, U.S. 95, and Arizona highway 95, near the Colorado River. The community has a Mohave Desert setting and is only 879 feet above sea level. The nearby Kofa, New Water, and Plomosa Mountains provide topographic relief while the Colorado River lies only 17 miles to the west.

Salome lies in the beautiful McMullen Valley, situated between the Harquahala and Harcuvar Mountain Ranges, on Highway 60 between Wickenburg and Quartzsite. The fertile valley is rich in agriculture and booming with growth. The hills are full of old gold mines, history, peace, quiet, beautiful views, and wildlife.

Hope is located at the Junction of Highways 60 and 72. Beautiful open-desert country, with spectacular mountain views, this small desert community consists of one RV Park, one gas station, and one antiques store.

Wenden is the most eastern community in La Paz County, approximately 45 miles west of Wickenburg on Highway 60. Alamo Lake is approximately 38 miles north of Wenden on Alamo Lake Road. Wenden provides gas, food, and supplies to the Alamo Lake travelers. Agriculture is rapidly being developed and enjoying prosperous growth and returns in the area surrounding Wenden.

Native vegetation in La Paz County consists of mesquite, palo verde, ironwood, ocotillo, cholla, saguaro, creosote, and quail bush. Non-native vegetation consists of, but not limited to, salt cedar and mustard weed.

The area has many uses, but the number one use is seasonal recreation from September to April when the population can grow to a reported million and a half visitors.

Land Use

La Paz County land area is 4,518 square miles the primary land uses are recreation and mining. The County's resident population averages 4.4 people to a square mile; the local industry is predominantly tourism. The remainder of the land falls into grazing and farming. Ramifications of fire on these uses could be devastating to the local economy.

Infrastructure

The communities are moderately populated and the infrastructure is at risk from wildfire. Above ground power and telephone poles and numerous below ground pipelines serve neighboring states of Southern California, Nevada, other parts of Arizona, and Mexico. Other resources and critical areas that may be damaged from wildfire include habitat for endangered species or species of critical concern, cultural and historic sites, air and water quality, views, other critical sites such as wireless communication sites, and could include state and local highway closures due to smoke.

Transportations

The main roads serving the communities are Interstate 10 and Arizona State Highways 95, 72, and 60. County maintained roads are Plomosa and Alamo Lake Roads. Some roads are paved and some are unpaved. The main roads could be temporarily closed due to wildfire and smoke. Any dead end roads or weight limits on bridges of concern to fire fighting are marked.

Wildfire Risk Assessment

Historical occurrences of wildfires in the area

1. The native vegetation is not fire dependent and fires were most likely rare.
2. Grazing, wildlife, and periods of drought helped to control vegetation historically.
3. The current vegetation is mustard weed and native and non-native grasses. The extreme rainfall in the fall of 2004 and winter, spring of 2005 caused or help cause rampant growth of mustard weed and native and non-native grasses.

Ramifications of the current vegetation mix and the ignitability in the spring to fall 2006 will range from moderate to extreme, based on National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS). Common fire size will be class C (10-99.9 acres), very intense and very hard to contain and control. Current vegetation type and fire-fuel loadings are .5 or 1 ton per acre about within the desert communities. Our fuel hazards and wildfire occurrence are greatest along the transportation corridors. Ninety percent of the homes, businesses, and essential infrastructure are within a ¼ to ½ mile from the corridor. Also refer to BLM Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy which has rated the desert communities as at Medium risk.

Firefighting Equipment

Currently there are limited amounts of firefighting equipment stationed within the CWPP area.

Quartzsite Fire District has the only type 6 engine within the desert communities. Quartzsite is about 15 miles away from Brenda, 26 miles to Vicksburg, and 30 miles from Hope.

McMullen Valley Fire Department (Salome) has two stations and is an all volunteer rural fire department providing service for Salome, Wenden, and Gladden. This fire department possesses limited wildland capable engines with a response time of 45 minutes or greater to the community

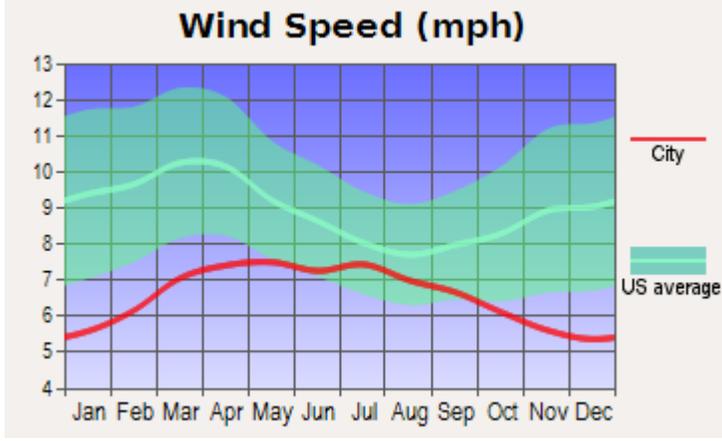
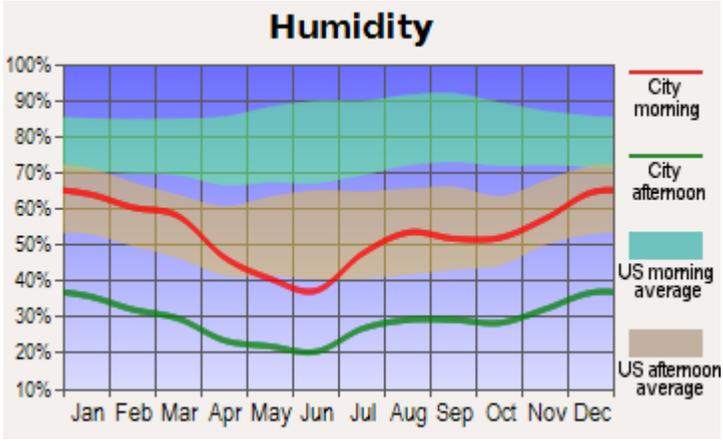
La Paz County Public Works Department has one D-7 dozer, four motor graders, four front end loaders, four 4000 gallon water trucks, two transports, and three 10-wheel dump trucks available for fires in the county.

The desert communities have dedicated fire crews and equipment stationed at the BLM Yuma/Lake Havasu Field Offices. Two type 6 engines, three fire boats, incident command personnel, Interagency Dispatch Center, are stationed at Yuma Field Office; one type 6, one fire boat are stationed at the Lake Havasu Field Office .

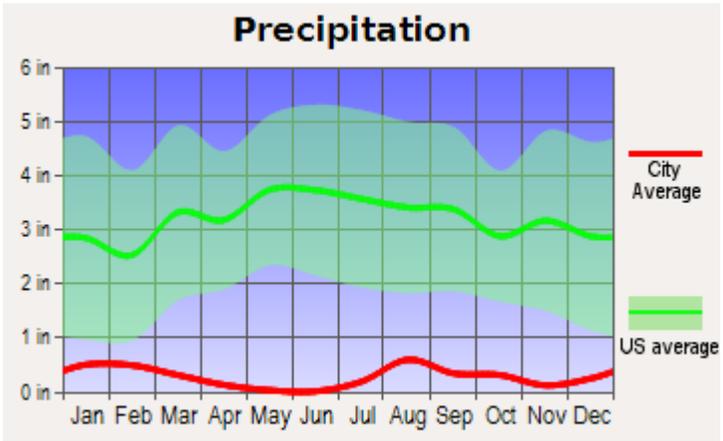
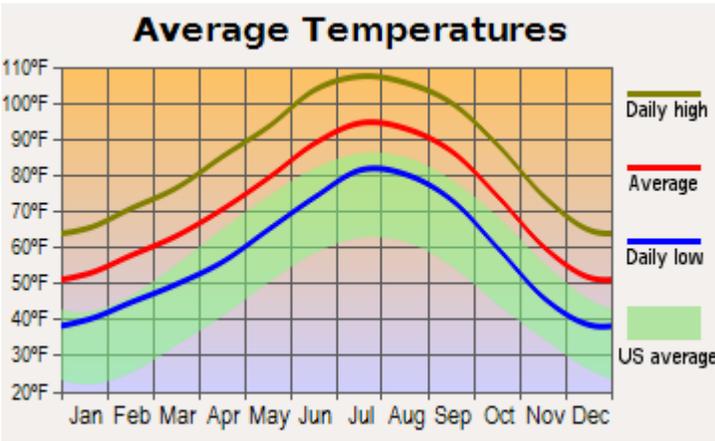
Colorado River Indian Tribes has two type 6 engines, one type 2 tender, and two type 2 dozers.

Escape Routes/Safety Zones

Current vegetation has a high density layer of dead fine fuels mixed with live fuels (.5 or 1 ton per acre) making line construction within the Desert community with crews using hand tools and chainsaws moderate at 12 chains per crew hour (1 chain = 66 ft.). An average desert fire will be a wind driven fire at 10 to 15 miles per hour with unlimited available area to run, while making line construction, escape routes, and safety zones hard to construct and use. Average summer temperatures can range from mid 90s to 110s increasing the danger to firefighters.



Weather



Mitigation Strategy

Prioritizing Treatment Areas

The greatest wildfire threat to the county is a major fire moving across the county from Highway 95 northeast and east to Highway 72 and 60. A lightning strike or human ignition could start a fire that could move in the direction of prevailing winds. Some fuels treatments have been accomplished to mitigate this risk as of the date of the plan, either federally or by other funding. The most probable points of human ignitions are recreation sites/human congregation areas, such as transportation corridors with rest stops or pull offs and developed and dispersed recreation sites.

It is also probable that a fire occurring within a group of houses and rapidly spreading to nearby homes, BLM, and other lands before firefighters could arrive on-scene. Firewise defensible space principles need to be in place and planned for further developments.

Quartzsite Fire Department Mitigation Projects

Quartzsite Fire Department (QFD) has been working in collaboration with local groups such as the Chamber or Commerce to help put the word out about wildfire prevention. They have done bulk mailings to residents in the area to help provide weed control around their properties. QFD has only 6 full time line personnel, and this helps as far as urban interface is concerned.

The town of Quartzsite also has a yard debris ordinance which QFD helps enforce. The Fire District allows individuals the opportunity to have controlled burns three days per week, so that they can keep the brush and weeds under control on their properties. QFD asks that they provide fire breaks, clearing to bare ground, if continuity exists between parcels.

QFD has been on several small brush fires already this season (spring 2006), luckily they have been easy to extinguish, but QFD expects the large ones are yet to come.

The county has been blading along the roads to allow for a fire break; QFD has 174 square miles and this will help in a big way.

It is QFD's goal to get personnel and P.O.C. staff out and about in the district to look for problem areas, compile lists, and define what needs to be done about it.

Treatment methods to reduce vegetation

The majority of the problem vegetation, fire prone vegetation, and non-native vegetation that cause high fire intensities or rapid fire spread is native annual grasses and non-native weeds. QFD has been moderately successful with fuels treatments from past or present along roads. QFD has an idea of what types of modifications of treatments need to be used in various stages of the problem vegetation's lifecycle to assist in success of fuels treatments, such as continuing long term maintenance. Chemical, mechanical, RX fire, and biological treatments hold promise

to help manage and control problem vegetation. QFD would like to remove all non-native vegetation.

Firewise Programs and Structural Ignitability

One proven method for protecting homes from a wildfire is to create defensible spaces. Homeowners can visit the Firewise Program at <www.firewise.org> to learn more about protecting their homes, some basics are:

1. Clear all dead and densely accumulated fire-prone vegetation, debris piles, and other flammable material within thirty feet of your home.
2. Keep the weeds mowed down, trim branches on trees to at least four feet in height, and move stacks of firewood away from buildings.
3. Homes with wood siding, shake roofs, and wooden porches and/or decks are especially susceptible to fire.

Education

Fire prevention, Firewise materials, talk with homeowners, door to door visits about home fire protection are ways to educate the public about fire prevention.

Currently La Paz County and the BLM have been collaborating on a county wide prevention and education effort at local schools, fairs, and civic meetings. Last year the BLM Firewise traveler was in La Paz County for 10 days visiting La Paz County fairgrounds, providing information on defensible space for homeowners and property owners and what they can do to help protect their home or property from a wildfire. All local fire departments support State and Federal fire restrictions or Closures during extreme fire seasons. For the last two years the BLM Yuma/Lake Havasu Fire Management Program has been working with the La Paz County Emergency Management Services to provide information and education to the residents of La Paz County in the form of Firewise booklets, checklists, and videos on how to protect their home or property. BLM also provides Basic Wildland Fire training to the county departments when requested.

Action Plan

Once the plan is approved, La Paz County would like to continue collaborating with Federal, State and Tribal agencies to improve the safety to its residents and visiting public by addressing our hazardous fuels and Wildland Urban-Interface problems.

La Paz County would like for the BLM to continue to assist them as technical advisors and work with each District Fire Chief to ensure cohesiveness on the ground. Funding levels could be at 90% by the Department of the Interior with only 10% matching funds. While improving the land, La Paz County would like to set up a monitoring plan to ensure the assessment strategy will be effective over the next 10 years. La Paz County would like to start the funding for the

projects this fiscal year (2006) and to start hazardous fuels and Wildland Urban-Interface removal during fall 2006, so the first prescribed fire would be during the winter 2006-2007 to prepare for summer of 2007.

La Paz County Transportation and Fire Occurrence Map

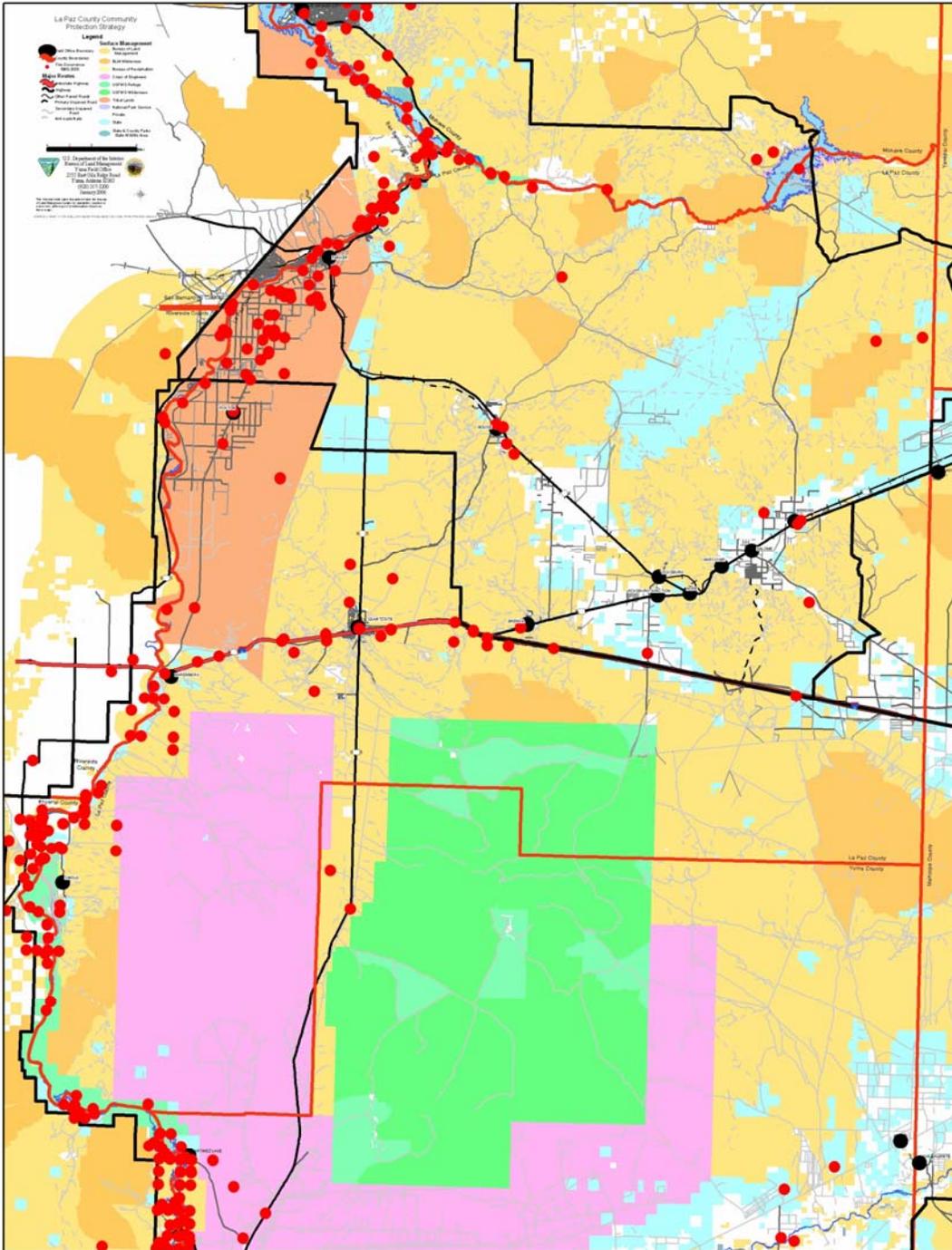
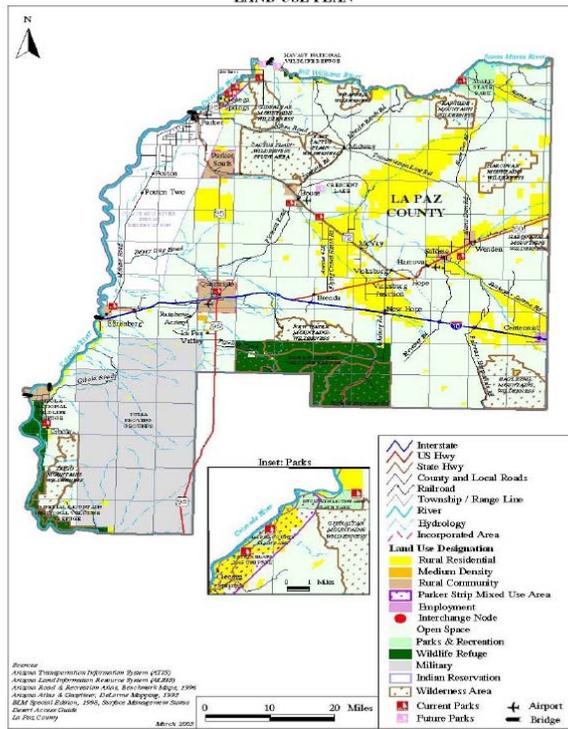




Figure 3.3
LAND USE PLAN



Adopted May 2, 2005







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Reference Material

La Paz County Board of Supervisor Meetings

Arizona Department of Commerce, Community Profile

Southwest Community Wildfire Protection Plan Guide

U.S. Census Bureau

Federal Emergency Management Agency, Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan

Bureau of Land Management, Fire Reporting System, Fire Department Contact List

La Paz County Comprehensive Plan

La Paz County Board of Supervisors February 21, 2006, Regular Meeting, 10:00 a.m.
Partial Minutes

Presentation: "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" by James Stewart with the Bureau of Land Management

Glen Burkhart, Fire Mitigation Specialist with the Bureau of Land Management, spoke regarding the process of forming a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), requesting support and assistance from the Board. He introduced James Stewart, Mitigation and Education Specialist, to give a presentation regarding the benefits of the program and how to implement it.

James Stewart gave a power-point presentation that explained how the project started, the steps required to create a CWPP in a community. He noted that the County had initiated the first steps in that direction.

Discussion ensued regarding what had been accomplished thus far and Chief Deputy Major Biro added that a draft of a hazard mitigation plan was not yet ready to come before the Board.

Chairman Fisher asked the public if they wished to comment on the presentation given.

Darryl Bump from Bouse announced that there would be a barbeque at the Bouse Park on Saturday, February 25, 2006, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and suggested that the representatives from BLM attend to inform the public about the CWPP process.

Angela Masales from the Quartzsite Chamber of Commerce asked if the Board had a weed abatement program.

Chairman Fisher suggested that she talk to the Community Development Department regarding weed regulations to find out whether it was what she had in mind regarding a "program."

Assessor Nault asked if anything had been done in the Wenden area regarding Centennial Wash in which a life was taken during a previous flood.

Discussion ensued and Interim Public Works Director Simmons stated that they are currently waiting on information from the Corps of Engineers, which he would follow up on.

Mr. Burkhart added, that by forming a CWPP in a community, it makes it possible for La Paz County and the local fire districts to be able to receive, in priority placement, rural fire assistance funding from BLM and the Department of Interior, for fire equipment, training, and personal protection equipment for fire fighters. He added that, without this designation, funding for fire protection is difficult to obtain. He further added that 90% of the funding would be provided by the Department of the Interior with only a 10% match required by the County.

Chairman Fisher stated that he would like to see some public meetings occur in the outlying areas where the concerns are. With the barbeque in Bouse coming up, the timing is right for this type of input.

Judy Bump from Bouse thanked the BLM representatives for their presentation, noting the various fires that occurred in the Bouse area, and thanked those who helped in the past.

La Paz County Board of Supervisors April 3, 2006, Regular Meeting, 10:00 a.m.
Partial Minutes

Community Development Director Bernhart requested approval to move forward with the creation and implementation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). He read aloud a letter dated March 22, 2006, from Rebecca Heick of the Bureau of Land Management, stating the purpose of the CWPP to “provide the County with the planning, documentation, and collaboration to prepare for the threat of wildland fire entering the communities within La Paz County”. He noted that the first step is to obtain a decision from the Board of Supervisors to move forward with the creation and implementation of a CWPP, and then to identify specific people to participate with BLM in this process. He further noted that the CWPP designation would be advantageous to the County in obtaining certain grants enabling the County to protect its citizens from wildfires, and explore the possibility of clearing out areas where brush might produce increased hazards.

James Stewart, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist with the Bureau of Land Management stated that the CWPP is a tool to help bring in State and Federal funds into the County, and the next step is to be eligible for the 2007 grant funds.

In answer to Chairman Fisher’s question, Mr. Stewart stated that La Paz County will be the first county among the river counties to move forward with implementation of the CWPP designation.

SUPERVISOR SCOTT MOVED to approve to move forward with the creation and implementation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Motion seconded by Supervisor Edey; passed unanimously.