NWCG Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team 2005-2009 Strategic Plan

Prepared for

National Wildfire Coordinating Group
Wildland/Urban Interface
Working Team

by

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FINAL REPORT

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Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team 2005-2009 Strategic Plan

This report contains the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for the Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team. The plan refines the Working Team's vision and is intended to serve as a framework for the development of annual work plans and budgets.

BACKGROUND

In 1974, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was formed to expand operational cooperation and coordination of the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior and the various member agencies within these departments and the National Association of State Foresters.[1] Working Teams were established by the NWCG to examine specific problem areas in fire management and recommend solutions. It was deemed necessary to develop a team to address the Wildland/Urban Interface issues. In 1994, the NWCG tapped the existing Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Advisory Group to form the basis of the Working Team and added member entities with an interest in this issue.[2]

The Wildland/Urban Interface Advisory Group grew from a partnership developed in 1986 between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association following the catastrophic fire season of 1985. The group's initial goal was to promote firefighter and homeowner safety in the wildland/urban interface.[3]

As the Working Team evolved, it became clear that it would benefit from a five-year strategic plan. In Fall of 2003, the Working Team hired ECONorthwest to assist in the development of a strategic plan that includes priorities to make the team an effective and viable group well positioned to address the complex issues surrounding Wildland/Urban Interface Fire, now and into the foreseeable future.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN MATRIX

The strategic plan matrix (next page) is intended to serve as an easy reference guide to the strategic plan. The matrix includes the strategies and actions for each

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[1] Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002.

[2] See the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002, for a full list of member entities.

[3] The current National WUI Fire Program is funded by the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior (BLM, BIA, NPS, and FWL), and the National Fire Protection Association, and is managed through a cooperative agreement between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association.

goal. It also includes a brief description of each strategy, the target timeline, and how each action aligns with core Working Team program activities. The actions are generally classified as short-term (1-2 years) or mid-term (3-5 years). Some actions are ongoing throughout the plan implementation period. The matrix is intended to serve as a tool to review the annual work plan. Staff will be responsible for monitoring progress towards strategic plan goals.

IMPLEMENTATION

The strategic plan provides the framework for activities the Working Team will focus on over the next five years. The Working Team already develops annual work programs that are reviewed by the USDA Forest Service as part of the funding requirements. The annual work programs provide considerable detail about what tasks staff will focus efforts on during the next 12-month period. Moreover, the annual work plan ties tasks to budget figures.

Because the cost of desired tasks almost always exceeds resources, the annual work program requires the Working Team to make difficult decisions regarding what tasks to prioritize and how to spend limited financial resources. The strategic plan provides a tool that can help the Working Team make decisions regarding the annual work program. Every task in the annual work program should relate to at least one action, strategy, and goal in the strategic plan.

In summary, the strategic plan provides guidance for the annual work program, but does not identify annual priorities. This architecture is intentional: the Working Team developed the strategic plan in a manner that allows flexibility to respond to emerging issues and redirect resources on an annual basis as necessary.

The annual work program generates outputs (i.e., number of meetings, etc.) and outcomes (i.e., changes in landowner behavior, etc.). The outputs and outcomes can then be compared to the vision, mission, and goals to assess how well the Working Team is implementing the plan.

Table 1. WUI Working Team five-year strategic plan

Strategy	Action Item
Goal 1: Promote community solutions to prevent or reduce the impact of WUI fires.	
Strategy 1.1. Provide information, educational materials, and technical assistance that promote societal and individual behavior change relative to the linkage between natural systems and the built environment.	
Strategy 1.1.	**Action 1.1.1.** Provide Firewise Community outreach and support.
Strategy 1.1.	**Action 1.1.2.** Reduce ignition vulnerability of structures by developing and disseminating targeted educational and outreach materials.
Strategy 1.1.	**Action 1.1.3.** Identify critical communication points and develop strategies that exploit these communication points.
Strategy 1.2. Promote community specific solutions that advocate for local ownership and responsibility of WUI problems and outcomes.	
Strategy 1.2.	**Action 1.2.1.** Develop resources and tools that help communities identify and implement local solutions.
Strategy 1.2.	**Action 1.2.2.** Provide technical assistance outreach (both passive, such as handbooks, or active, such as trainings) that support community actions to address WUI issues.
Strategy 1.2	**Action 1.2.3.** Promote the adoption of Firewise Communities/USA recognition status by small communities and neighborhoods in fire prone areas.
Strategy 1.2.	**Action 1.2.4.** Develop and disseminate media messages that focus on individual community responsibility for wildfire safety.
Goal 2: Develop and promote effective practices on the part of agencies and homeowners during WUI events.	
Strategy 2.1. Raise community awareness and encourage effective actions during WUI events	
Strategy 2.1.	**Action 2.1.1.** Collaborate with life safety specialists to develop a "WUI Advance Warning System" aimed at communicating actions residents can take prior to a WUI event.
Strategy 2.1.	**Action 2.1.2.** Develop Working Team protocols and communication strategies for supporting National and Regional agencies and Tribes needs during large WUI events.
Strategy 2.1.	**Action 2.1.3.** As part of a WUI press release packet, prepare success stories about structures that did not burn during WUI events. Explain why they did not burn and how property owners can find out how to protect their property.
Strategy 2.2. Advocate policy and practices of fire management and suppression activities to reduce risk to lives and property in the WUI.	
Strategy 2.2.	**Action 2.2.1.** Develop an outreach campaign that promotes effective practices, and on the ground activities to ensure firefighter safety.

Strategy	Action Item
Strategy 2.2.	**Action 2.2.2.** Develop information kit that can be distributed to elected official and community decision makers. The kit should include pertinent information regarding the WUI team and its activities as well as facts and figures on the problem the WUI has.
GOAL 3. Provide leadership and coordination among agencies, arganizations, and partners for implementing WUI strategies.	
Strategy 3.1. Pursue active participation and encourage support of WUI Working Team goals and strategies among Working Team organizations.	
Strategy 3.1.	**Action 3.1.1.** Develop and implement internal communication plans for each Working Team Member organization.
Strategy 3.1.	**Action 3.1.2.** Seek opportunities to present information about National WUI Fire Program activities to member organization leaders, line staff and field staff.
Strategy 3.1.	**Action 3.1.3.** Develop descriptive information about the benefits of National WUI Fire Program activities.
Strategy 3.2. Strengthen communication and coordination among WUI Working Team agencies, other NWCG working teams, non-profit organizations, and private sector partners to effectively deliver wildland urban interface programs and messages.	
Strategy 3.2.	**Action 3.2.1.** Coordinate with other NWCG working teams to communicate with local property owners (either directly or through local agencies) to reduce the vulnerability of homes.
Strategy 3.2.	**Action 3.2.2.** Where appropriate, develop formal agreements with partner agencies and stakeholder organizations.
Strategy 3.2.	**Action 3.2.3.** Establish consistent and frequent communication with all WUI players using appropriate conduits and delivery mechanisms (Working Team member agencies, NCWG agencies, Tribes, and stakeholders).
Strategy 3.3. Develop and support partnerships among non-member agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector that assist NWCG member agencies and organizations in addressing wildland urban interface issues.	
Strategy 3.3.	**Action 3.3.1.** Review existing programs and develop strategies to broaden distribution of key messages among stakeholders and other groups.
Strategy 3.3.	**Action 3.3.2.** Define stakeholders and their role. Document guidelines and expectations for how the Working Team will interact with stakeholders. Develop stakeholder communication tools.
Strategy 3.3.	**Action 3.3.3.** Working with state and local agencies, develop email listserve to communicate key messages to career and volunteer fire departments.

Introduction

This report presents the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for the Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team. The report provides background information on how the Strategic Plan was developed and how it will be implemented.

BACKGROUND

Since 1970, more than 10,000 homes and 20,000 other structures have been lost to wildland fire. The cost of suppressing wildland fires is staggering: government agencies have spent more than $20 billion on fire suppression in the past three decades.[4] The 2002 fire season was one of the worst wildfire seasons in history—a total of 64,433 fires consumed a total of 6.4 million acres. The 10-year average for the years between 1993 and 2003 was 3.8 million acres.[5] The 2003 fire season was more typical; as of September 10, a total of 47,082 fires consumed 3.1 million acres.

In 1994, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group tapped the existing Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Advisory Group to form the basis of the Working Team and added member entities with an interest in this issue.[6] The Wildland/Urban Interface Advisory Group grew from a partnership developed in 1986 between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association following the catastrophic fire season of 1985. The group's initial goal was to promote firefighter and homeowner safety in the wildland/urban interface.[7] According to the charter the Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Working Team's (WT) purpose is:

- To provide a forum to increase the public awareness of the wildland/urban interface fire problem, to develop local solutions to the issue, to form partnerships among problem solvers and interest groups, and to promote safety for firefighters and the public in the wildland/urban interface.

- To provide coordinated leadership for national interest groups, and Federal and State fire agencies in addressing issues regarding fire activity and potential vulnerability to disastrous fire activity in wildland/urban interface areas. These can include quality of programs, standards of development, information flow, operational continuity, training,

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[4] Firewise Communities web site: http://www.firewise.org/communities/overview.html

[5] *National Fire News,* National Interagency Fire Center, September 10, 2003.

[6] See the WUI Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002, for a full list of member entities.

[7] The current National WUI Fire Program is funded by the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior (BLM, BIA, NPS, and FWL), and the National Fire Protection Association, and is managed through a cooperative agreement between the USDA Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association.

implementation of technical changes, coordination with research, problem identification and/or needed system changes.

- To provide technical support, advice, information, and recommendations to NWCG on all matters concerning wildland/urban interface issues, activities, and programs.[8]

Additionally, the Working Team's responsibilities include preparing and submitting annual work plans to the USDA Forest Service that describe proposed projects and activities as well as the cost and timing of those activities. The Working Team is also responsible for coordination of wildfire/urban interface issues with other NWCG Working teams. The Working Team documents the activities and status of all projects and expenditures in an annual report.

As the Working Team evolved, it became clear that longer-term thinking was necessary to develop effective implementation strategies. Long-term strategies should address the broad array of issues related to the wildland/urban interface ranging from education to land use planning. A common organizational approach is to develop a strategic plan that outlines goals, strategies, and actions.

The Working Team initiated a strategic planning process in 2002. That process, facilitated by the Brookings Institute, led to the development of a set of alternative futures, but stopped short of identifying organizational goals, strategies, and actions. In fall of 2003, the Working Team contracted with ECONorthwest (ECO) to assist in the development of a strategic plan that includes priorities to make the team an effective and viable group well positioned to address the complex issues surrounding Wildland/Urban Interface Fire, now and into the foreseeable future.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan is to provide a framework for the types of projects and activities the Working Team will focus on over the next five years. The plan establishes goals, strategies, and actions that are intended to guide the Working Team's activities and help establish priorities. The strategic plan is implemented through the annual work plans that are developed by staff and reviewed and approved by the Working Team.

METHODS

Figure 1-1 provides a conceptual overview of the strategic planning process. The process began with a planning and data collection phase that included an environmental scan, operating assumptions (or scenarios), and priorities. The environmental scan phase answered the question "where are we now?" The second phase developed a vision of where the organization wants to be. The Working Team accomplished this by developing and discussing a set of

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[8] Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team Charter, amended October 29, 2002.

operational scenarios based on the environmental scan. The third phase identified strategies for achieving the organization's vision (the "strategic vision").

Figure 1-1. Project approach

| December 2003 | January 2004 | February 2004 | March 2004 | April 2004 | May 2004 | June 2004 |

Environmental Scan | **"What If" Scenario Workshop** | **Strategic Plan Development**

Establish project goals with NFPA → WUI Working Team Background research → Internal scan Working Team Members → External scan Programs & Projects

Report findings of the scan to Working Team at February Meeting → Develop "What If" Scenarios → Establish process and develop scenarios workshop → Implement Workshop

Develop Draft Strategic Plan & Recommendations

WUI Working Team's Draft Fire-Year Strategic Plan

Questions addressed:
- Who are the members?
- How do they see their role in the Team?
- What are the group dynamics?
- How are things operating, from a members perspective?

Questions addressed:
- Is the Working Team and the WUI program heading in the right direction?
- What are the trends and how do we address them?

End Goal:
WUI Working Team Strategic Plan that builds upon past successes, anticipates future challenges, and offers recommendations on how to address such challenges.

As shown in Figure 1-1, the strategic planning process was divided into three interrelated phases:

- *Phase I: Program Description and Environmental Scan* – ECO initiated the project by developing a program description that summarizes the Working Team's historical goals, objectives, and activities. ECO also completed an environmental scan of the Working Team's members and stakeholders to gain a further understanding of the relationships between internal and external partners.

- *Phase II: WUI Working Team Strategic Planning Workshops* – ECO worked with the WUI Working Team Strategic Planning Committee to develop and implement two Working Team strategic planning workshops. The first workshop was held in February 2004. ECO presented findings from the environmental scan to the Working Team and assisted the team through the process of reaffirming their mission statement and objectives. The second workshop was held in March of 2004. This workshop included the discussion of several operational scenarios that could affect the ability of the working team to meet its objectives. This part of the project evaluated trends and asked "what if" questions. It also built from the data

collected in the environmental scan to move the Working Team toward formulating and testing the team's strategic vision.

- *Phase III: Development of Strategic Plan* – The strategic plan documents the outcomes of the strategic planning process including an environmental scan, workshops, and team member and stakeholder interviews. The outcomes were used to develop the WUI Working Team strategic vision and plan for the next five years.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The strategic plan is presented at the beginning of this document. The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

Chapter 2: How to Use This Plan provides an overview of how the Working Team will use the strategic plan to implement its mission through development of annual work plans and ongoing monitoring.

Chapter 3: Environmental Scan and Strategic Issues describes the results of the evaluation of factors that are likely to affect the Working Team's activities over the 2005-2009 period and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that face the team.

Chapter 4: Monitoring and Evaluation describes approaches the Working Team can use to monitor implementation of the actions in the strategic plan and evaluate progress.

This report also includes two Appendices:

Appendix A: Surveys and Worksheets presents summaries of the data collection tools and strategic planning workshops.

Appendix B: Strategic Planning and Scenarios presents notes from the discussion of the six strategic planning scenarios.

How To Use This Plan

The 2005-2009 Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the Working Team's activities. It clarifies the vision, mission, and goals of the Working Team. The mission and goals are implemented through strategies; strategies are implemented through actions. The 2005-2009 Strategic Plan provides a framework for identifying and prioritizing the specific tasks that get implemented by staff on a daily basis. This chapter describes how the plan will be implemented.

DEFINITIONS

Any strategic plan must be based on a set of operational definitions. Different organizations use terms such as "vision," "mission," "goal," "objective," strategy," and "action" in different ways. The definitions presented here are derived from the literature and a review of other strategic plans.

- *Vision Statement* is a statement that describes the organization's preferred or desired future. The WUI Working Team's vision statement is:

  > *Wildland fires can occur in areas of residential development without the occurrence of disastrous loss.*

- *Mission Statement* is an action-oriented formulation of the organization's reason for existence. It serves to define how you propose to get from where you are to where you want to go and is <u>not</u> defined in expressions of goals or objectives, rather it reflects a realistic but farsighted determination of who the organization is, who it serves, what it does, and what it can accomplish. Finally, the mission statement is broad enough that it need not change unless the community environment changes. The WUI Working Team's mission statement is:

  > *To promote community-wide responsibility in the use of technology, policy and practices that minimize the loss of life and property to wildland fire independent of fire fighting efforts.*

The Working Team reviewed the organizational vision and mission statements during the February workshop. Discussions among Working Team members at the February workshop resulted in the conclusion that the Working Team has strong vision and mission statements that reflect the organization. A vision and mission, however, do not provide sufficient specificity to establish operational priorities.

ECO spent the March workshop focusing on presenting the *framework* the Working Team will use to *implement* the vision and mission over the next five years. The implementation will come through *goals, strategies, and actions*.
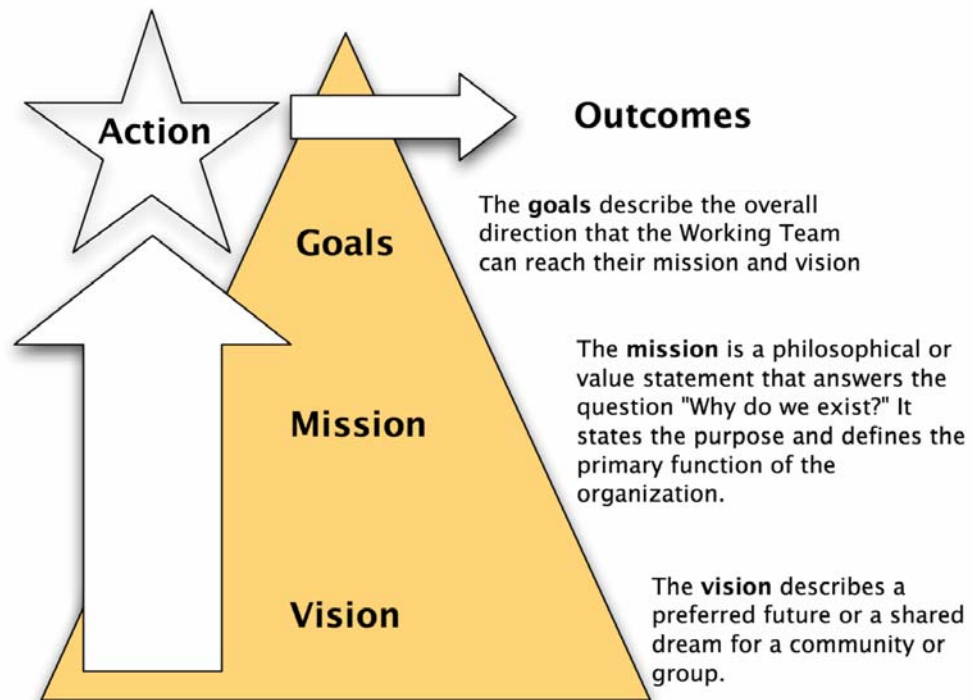
- *Goals* are intended to represent the general end toward which an organizational effort is directed. Goals identify how an organization intends to address its strategic issues, considering both its success factors and its core competencies, and in support of Mission and Vision.

  A goal should provide a sense of what level of performance is expected but it should not specify how the organization is to achieve the level of performance. Generally, there should be a goal assigned to each critical issue or programmatic area within the organization. Moreover, goals link "downward" to strategies. Every goal should have at least one strategy associated with it.

- *Strategies* are the directions, methods, processes, or steps used to accomplish or achieve organizational goals. Strategies link "upward" toward goals.

- *Actions* are defined activities or projects that implement strategies and are used to support the accomplishment of a goal and mission. They are linked to specific resources and have identified levels of responsibility.

- *Tasks* are the specific steps that staff take to implement actions. The Strategic Plan does not identify specific tasks; tasks are developed as part of the Working Team's annual work plan.

Figure 2-1 shows the relationship among the mission, goals, strategies, and actions. The figure shows that each planning element gets more specific as one moves up the hierarchy. Actions should relate to the vision, mission, and goals—and should lead to desired outcomes.

Figure 2-1. Hierarchy of strategic planning elements

Action **Outcomes**

Goals The **goals** describe the overall direction that the Working Team can reach their mission and vision

Mission The **mission** is a philosophical or value statement that answers the question "Why do we exist?" It states the purpose and defines the primary function of the organization.

Vision The **vision** describes a preferred future or a shared dream for a community or group.

# FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A strategic plan—even a good one—does not guarantee success, however. Success is measured by outputs and outcomes. The strategic plan provides the framework for activities the Working Team will focus on over the next five years.

A common framework for implementation is to use the strategic plan to provide the broad direction and to refine the implementation through a business plan or an annual work program. The Working Team already develops annual work programs that are reviewed by the USDA Forest Service as part of the Working Team's funding requirements. The annual work programs provide considerable detail about what tasks staff will focus efforts on during the next 12-month period. Moreover, the annual work plan ties tasks to budget figures.

Because the cost of desired tasks almost always exceeds resources, the annual work program requires the Working Team to make difficult decisions regarding what tasks to prioritize and how to spend limited financial resources. The strategic plan provides a tool that can help the Working Team make decisions regarding the annual work program.

Every task in the annual work program should relate to at least one action, strategy, and goal in the strategic plan. Figure 2-2 shows how the strategic plan relates to the annual work program.

Figure 2-2. Relationship of 2005-2009 Strategic Plan to Annual Work Plan
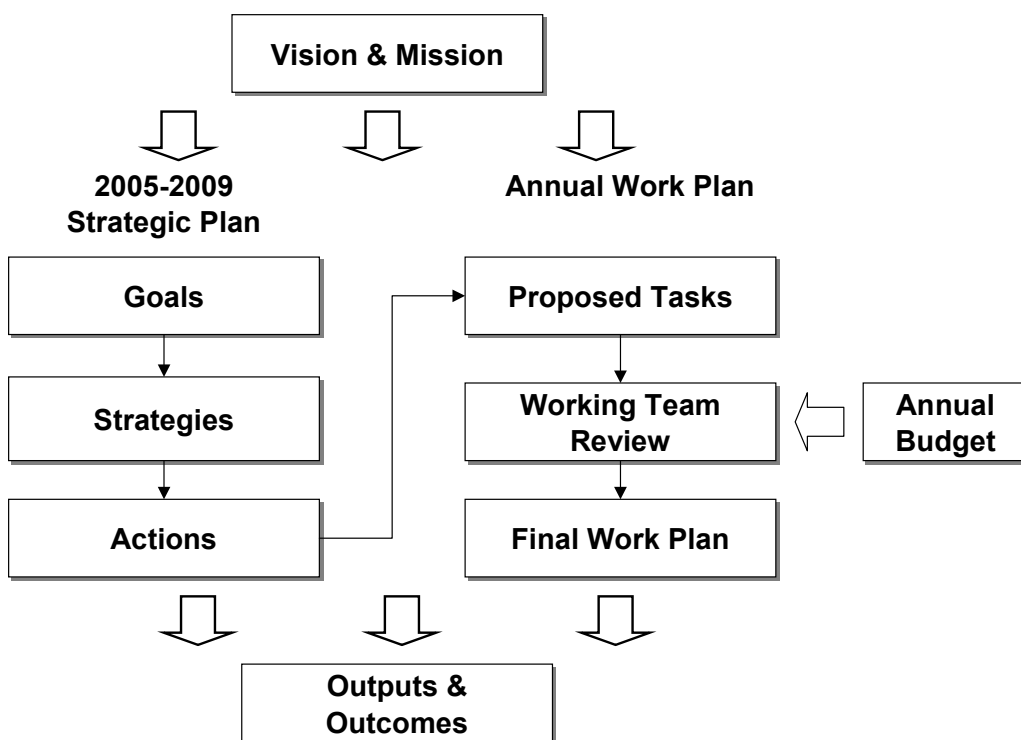
The process of developing the annual work program, in general terms, is as follows:

- Working Team members, member organizations, and stakeholder groups propose tasks (all proposed tasks must come through a Working Team member). Proposed tasks should include cost estimates.

- The Working Team reviews all of the proposed tasks at their mid-year meeting. The tasks are evaluated for consistency with the strategic plan and for their budget implications.

- The Working Team prioritizes proposed tasks and directs staff to prepare a draft work program.

- The draft work program is submitted to the USDA Forest Service for review and approval.

In summary, the strategic plan provides guidance for the annual work program, but does not identify annual priorities. This architecture is intentional: the Working Team developed the strategic plan in a manner that allows flexibility to respond to emerging issues and redirect resources on an annual basis as necessary.

The annual work program generates outputs (i.e., number of meetings, etc.) and outcomes (i.e., changes in landowner behavior, etc.). The outputs and outcomes can then be compared to the vision, mission, and goals to assess how well the Working Team is implementing the plan. A more detailed discussion of monitoring and evaluation is presented in Chapter 4.

Environmental Scan
and Strategic Issues

The strategic planning process included an "environmental scan." The purpose of the environmental scan was to identify key issues that may affect the Working Team's operations. The environmental scan assessed both the *internal* and *external* environment.

ECO began this process by conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. The results of the SWOT analysis were used to review the Working Team's mission and goals, and to develop a set of operational scenarios that were evaluated by the Working Team. ECO used the results of the environmental scan to identify a set of strategic issues which were then incorporated into six strategic planning scenarios. The Working Team reviewed and discussed the scenarios at the March workshop. The results of the environmental scan and scenario discussion was then used to develop a set of strategies and actions.

This chapter summarizes the results of the environmental scan, strategic issues, and action item development.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

An environmental scan is typically the first research step in a strategic planning process. As its name implies, the purpose of the environmental scan is to understand the environment in which the organization is currently operating, and the factors that are likely to affect operations in the near term. The environmental scan assess both the *internal* and *external* environments. The internal environment includes factors that are internal to the organization: staff and Working Team members primarily, but also budgets and other factors. The external environment includes everything else: factors that the Working Team does not have direct control over. ECONorthwest used several methods to conduct the environmental scan. The tools are summarized below:

WUI Working Team and Stakeholder Surveys. In January 2004 ECONorthwest distributed a survey to WUI Team Members and a separate survey to about 50 Stakeholders. As part of the internal scan, Team Members were asked to assess the current mission and goals of the Team. Working Team Members and Stakeholders were sent the same questions regarding an external environmental scan. ECONorthwest used the STAPLE/E approach for the external scan, which stands for:

- Social
- Technical
- Administrative
- Political

- Legal
- Economic
- Environmental

Working Team and Stakeholder members were asked about these variables as forces and/or trends that act upon the team and its ability to complete its mission. The following is a summary of the STAPLE/E findings:

Social

Almost 80% of the Working Team believes that programs or projects should take into account the communities' values, norms, and/or standards, compared to only 44% of Stakeholders. Stakeholders (39%) and the Working Team (29%) generally agreed that demographic and geographic distribution of projects was less important than other social issues. They disagreed on whether the programs should create or encourage social equity, with almost 25% of the Working Team reporting that it is unimportant (compared to 0% of Stakeholders).

Several Working Team members indicated that WUI programs need to address the unique needs of indigenous people. Both Working Team and Stakeholders commented that programs should include all socio-economic sectors. Respondents indicated that the program should concentrate efforts where there is the greatest need for program support.

Technical

The most critical technical issue identified by the Working Team (57%) and Stakeholders (56%) is the technical consequences the Working Team's programs and policies create for the end user. Most respondents indicated there is a need for both high tech and low tech planning and implementation of programs and policies. They emphasized the need for flexibility in implementation. One respondent argued that the Team should provide more sophisticated technology, arguing that the local communities catch up with the technology in a relatively short period of time.

Administrative

Stakeholders rated the need to understand administrative requirements for implementing the Working Team projects at the local level slightly higher (50% of Stakeholders rated this issue as critical) than the Working Team respondents (43% of Working Team rated this issue as critical). Comments from both the Working Team and Stakeholders focused on the need to understand what makes implementation of programs successful at the local level. Several Stakeholders noted that locals have administrative and financial constraints that the programs need to address.

Political

As one Stakeholder stated, "The working team should keep all aspects of the program development and delivery as apolitical as possible while

remaining politically sensitive to the local area it is affecting." This statement reflects the high percentage of respondents that indicated the Working Team's activities and policies should be politically neutral (Critical: 43% Working Team, 56% Stakeholders) and the Working Team should understand what makes a project politically viable for the community (Critical: 57% Working Team, 50% Stakeholders)

Legal

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of all respondents felt that the legal issues, including property rights issues as they relate to program implementation, liability issues, and tracking legislation, are critical, with another almost 30% to 50% indicating these issues are very important. One stakeholder that thought these were very important issues stated, "It is critical to understand the overlap or impact this program will have on property issues, as well as current and proposed environmental laws and regulations."

Economic

Over half of the Stakeholders and the Working Team indicated that it is critical that the Working Team document the benefits and costs of its programs and activities and the Working Team should consider its funding model as it relates to sustainability of its programs. One Stakeholder commented, "Programs should have a value-added advantage for the end user and (the Working Team) should realize that value-added often times will be an intrinsic, not monetary value."

Environmental

The greatest disagreement between the Working Team and Stakeholders was on environmental issues. Twenty-one percent of the Working Team felt that they should consider the environmental impacts of its programs and projects, compared to 56% of Stakeholders. They also disagreed regarding how critical it is for the Working Team to understand existing environmental regulations and their implications for implementing the Working Team programs (Critical: 14% Working Team, 50% Stakeholder). Almost 30% of the Working Team rated this issue as unimportant, compared to 6% of Stakeholders. The Working Team comments focused on the fact that most treatments are close to homes, which are less of an environmental issue than a landscaping issue.

IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIC ISSUES

One element of the strategic planning process was to identify strategic issues. Strategic issues are internal or external issues that are likely to affect the Working Team's operations in the next five years. The identification of strategic issues built from the STAPLE/E process and included an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). ECO used the SWOT analysis to develop a set of six operational scenarios that were intended to focus the discussion of strategies and actions.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT)

As part of the internal scan, ECO called each WUI Team Member and asked them specific questions about how they saw their role in the Team and what they thought were the most important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing the Working Team.

Interviews with Working Team members on the SWOT analysis identified a number of strategic issues (characterized as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) relevant to the planning process. Table 3-1 summarizes the SWOT analysis. A more detailed discussion is presented in Appendix A.

Table 3-1. Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

SWOT Component	Statement
Strengths	- Diversity of the Team - Funding - Staff - Leadership - Ability to make decisions and implement programs - Technical expertise of the Working Team - Cohesiveness of the team
Weaknesses	- Focus on the budget instead of the mission - Need to think outside of the box - Outside guests at meetings can inhibit productive work - Diversity of opinion and lack of buy-in - Turnover of members and inconsistent attendance - Too much of a focus on Firewise in relation to other WUI programs - Lack of coordination among other agencies and organizations
Opportunities	- Increased public awareness - Opportunities to broaden partnerships - Recruit new "retired" volunteers - Availability of funding
Threats	- Insufficient buy in from allied partners - Conflict among team members and funding source agencies/loss of funding - Agencies with conflicting vision - Firewise—increasing demand

GOAL REVIEW

The next step in the process was to review the Working Team's mission and goals. Findings from the questionnaire and February work session led us to the following conclusions:

- **The goal statements, as provided in the survey, are generally supported by Working Team members**. Over 85% of the Working Team agreed that the goals as stated in the survey, specifically goal statements related to protecting lives (86%), encouraging partnerships (86%), and focusing on development of local solutions (93%) are appropriate goals.

- **The existing goals don't reflect all of the Working Team's activities**. This conclusion is supported by both the survey results and group discussion at the February workshop. Half of the team believed the goals should be modified or changed and over 80% of the Team believed there should be additional goals. Team members also stated that goals should be flexible and should change as the needs of the WUI community change.

- **The Working Team does not have a collective understanding of how the existing goals were developed.** Discussions at the February workshop suggest that the goals were established at some time in the 1990s through a process that wasn't well understood. The fact is, the origins of the goal statements as they were listed on the survey are from the 1986 National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Protection Initiative. This may help explain why many team members thought the mission should be broader and the goals expanded to include the various working team activities.

The comments received through this process suggested that the Working Team's goals were in need of revision. ECONorthwest followed up on the February work session with a strategy worksheet to a subgroup composed of Team Members. This worksheet gave the subcommittee the opportunity to refine the strategies that they brainstormed at the meeting (the strategy worksheet is presented in Appendix A). The revised goals presented in Strategic Plan (at the beginning of this report) are based upon the Team's purpose statement in the Charter and the group discussion from the February workshop.

STRATEGIC PLANNING SCENARIOS

Many organizations today operate in a context of high uncertainty. Markets and processes are becoming increasingly unpredictable, despite attempts to forecast their behavior. If strategy is planning how to go from the present to a desired future point, what is the benefit of strategic planning if we cannot predict? The Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team operates in a similar environment of uncertainty. This uncertainty is a key consideration in the development of a strategic plan.

Scenario based strategic planning is a method to navigate uncertainty. Plans become more emergent and less prescriptive, more resilient to future unknowns.

But this requires a shift in mindset of both Working Team members and staff. In short, scenarios are intended to identify key risk factors that the organization may foreseeably face and to identify potential organizational responses to those situations.

The benefit of scenario planning is that it is a proactive method to identify risk and response. The scenarios pose the question "What If?" The obvious follow up question is "How would the Working Team respond to this scenario?"

The six scenarios that follow were generated from strategic issues identified in the February strategic planning work session. None of the scenarios represents an absolute certainty for the Working Team; however, our evaluation is that elements of all six scenarios have emerged in various forms in the Working Team's recent history.

- *Scenario 1: Working Team is marginalized as a leader in WUI issues and solutions*. This scenario envisioned a set of external and internal circumstances that marginalize the working team.

- *Scenario 2: Reduction or unstable funding*. This scenario envisioned a future where funding levels the WUI Working Team has enjoyed decline over several years.

- *Scenario 3: Firewise transition over the next five years*. In this scenario, Firewise would transition into a free-standing program. The Working Team would still be the umbrella organization for Firewise, but would cede most of the oversight to Firewise staff.

- *Scenario 4: Serious fire events that occur in a short time frame.* This scenario envisioned an environment where a sustained series of interface fires occur.

- *Scenario 5: Public safety response declines due to success of Firewise and political shifts.* This scenario envisioned the Firewise program becoming really successful and the agencies see the public awareness rising to a point where the agencies can no longer give the traditional responses and answers (public support for fire suppression wanes).

- *Scenario 6: Free marketing of the Firewise program.* This scenario envisioned the free marketing of the Firewise program.

The discussion of scenarios was intended to facilitate discussion among Working Team members of several of the strategic issues that present opportunities or threats to the Working Team. The discussion at the March workshop suggested that Working Team members believe that all of the scenarios have an element of reality to them. The scenario discussion helped clarify strategies and actions. Appendix B presents a summary of Working Team comments regarding the scenarios.

STRATEGY AND ACTION ITEM DEVELOPMENT

The revised goals and scenario discussion provided the framework for the identification of strategies and actions to implement strategies.

ECONorthwest followed up on the February 2004 Tucson Workshop with a strategy worksheet to a subgroup. This worksheet gave the subcommittee the opportunity to refine the strategies that they brainstormed at the meeting. Comments received from the subgroup resulted in a number of refinements that were then incorporated into the revised strategies.

The development and review of action items followed the review of strategies. In May 2004, ECONorthwest distributed an Action Item worksheet to all Team Members. Six team members responded with suggestions and comments on each of the action items.

The final goals, strategies, and actions were presented at the beginning of this report.

Chapter 4   Monitoring and Evaluation

As the Working Team implements the strategic plan over the next five years, the question of "how well are we doing?" will inevitably arise. This chapter provides a framework that the Working Team can use to monitor progress towards the strategic plan goals.

EVALUATING PROGRESS

At one level, implementation of the strategic plan is simple: use the strategic planning matrix as a checklist. As each action is accomplished, note what was done and check the action off the list. The limitation of the checklist approach is that it does not measure whether meaningful progress is being made towards the Working Team's mission and the goals stated in the strategic plan. Documenting how activities (called tasks in the Working Team's annual work plan) relate to goals, strategies, and actions, however, is a good first step in monitoring and evaluating progress towards the goals of the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan.

Most organizations begin evaluations by developing a "logic model." The logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share the understanding of the relationships among the resources the organization has (inputs), the activities to be implemented (outputs), and the changes or results the organization hopes to achieve (outcomes). In short, the logic model shows how programmatic activities relate to goals.

Figure 4-1. Sample logic model
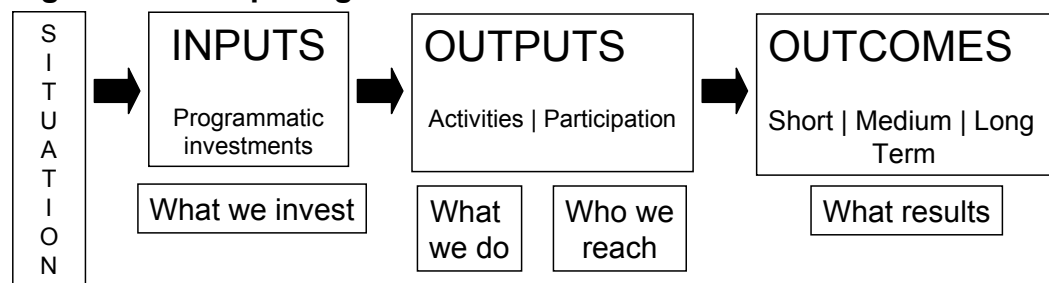
Inputs are materials, financial resources, and human resources that the activities take in and then process to produce the desired results. Those inputs include the resources from agencies represented by the Working Team, the Firewise program, knowledge, employees, and many more. The inputs make the next level of the logic model possible: activities.

The activities have an intention to make changes in the community. Those intended changes are identified as outcomes. Intermediate outcomes are the changes that occur at the individual or organizational level. For example, an output might be the number of people that attend a Firewise Communities workshop. The short term outcome might be that those individuals share their

experience and knowledge with others in their community. The ultimate outcomes include changes in norms, policies, or actions at a community-wide level. Those ultimately include reducing the ignition potential of structures in the interface.

The issue is how can the Working Team monitor progress — how it measures outcomes. The Working Team does not have to wait until it is ready to conduct an evaluation to develop a logic model based on the strategic plan and the annual work plan. One approach would be to use performance-based monitoring strategies.

PERFORMANCE-BASED MONITORING

Performance-based monitoring is a technique that involves the identification of "benchmarks"—a set of performance indicators with specific targets. Data on the indicators is gathered and reviewed on a continuous basis.

WHY BENCHMARKS?

Benchmarks provide the tool for measuring progress towards a vision. The Working Team's vision is that *Wildland fires can occur in areas of residential development without the occurrence of disastrous loss.*

In simplest terms, benchmarks provide numerical measurements of some part of the world in which we live. Whether they measure the amount of development in the interface or the percentage of residents with defensible space, benchmarks measure some element of our mission that is of value. As a measuring stick, they are vital to the long term visioning process. By assessing conditions in the present, benchmarks help guide policies and activities in the future. Through tracking benchmarks over the long term, benchmarking helps ensure that steps take the organization in the right direction.

HOW DO BENCHMARKS WORK?

Each goal should have one or more related benchmarks. Each benchmark should have an associated target that defines the desired future outcome. Each benchmark will have one or more indicators (data variables) that allow the benchmark to be measured over time. For example:

Goal: Develop and promote effective practices on the part of agencies and homeowners during WUI events

Strategy: Raise community awareness and encourage effective actions during WUI events

Action: Develop Working Team response plan and media kit for large WUI events.

Benchmark: Media use of Working Team speaking points on 100% of major interface fires.

Target: 100% for all interface fires

Data source: Media tracking.

This example does not necessarily mean that this is an appropriate benchmark, but underscores the types of data issues common in benchmarking. Many goals and benchmarks may not have data sources available to measure them.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BENCHMARKS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Most benchmarking processes are linked to a strategic planning process. Strategic planning can be thought of as an iterative, cyclical process which shapes the future by committing to a destination and the strategies required to get there (Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1. Strategic planning process
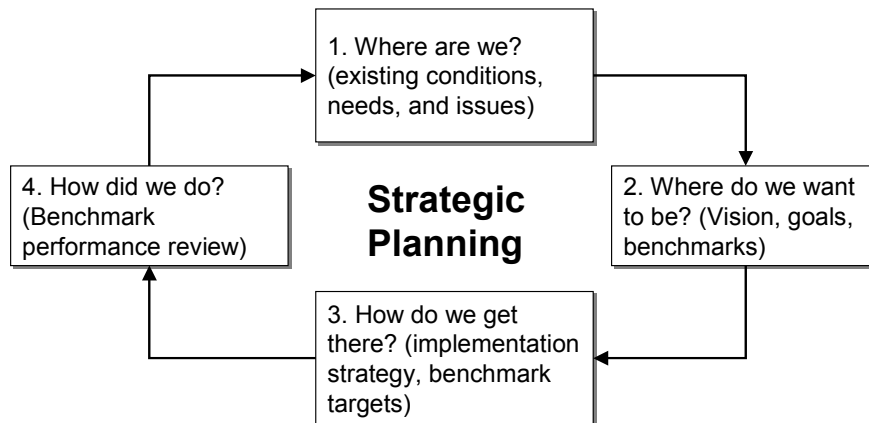
The 2005-2009 Strategic Plan addresses steps 1-3 in Figure 4-1. The Strategic Plan does not present benchmarks (Step 4 in Figure 4-1), however, the Working Team could choose to take the next steps in the process: translating goals into benchmarks, establishing benchmark targets, and identifying specific data indicators that allow for benchmark performance reviews.

WHAT ARE OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES?

Outcomes are *results*. Outputs are the *activities* that lead to results. Outcomes are frequently classified as "high-level" and intermediate. A high-level outcome typically represents a societal goal or statement of well being. Intermediate outcomes are steps that are taken to achieve the high-level outcome.

In the previous example, increasing property owner action was the desired outcome. An intermediate outcome could be increasing property owner awareness through trainings.

Outputs are the building blocks that achieve outcomes. Continuing with our awareness example, outputs might include: conducting X workshops; doing periodic media releases; or working with partner organizations to get the message out.

HOW ARE BENCHMARKS SELECTED?

Many potential approaches exist for selecting benchmarks. At least two criteria are relevant to this process. First, select benchmarks for which data are consistently and readily available or can be easily collected. Because it is important to show trends, it is vital that the data selected for the benchmarks will be available in the future. Second, benchmarks must reflect the goals contained in the Strategic Plan.

Recent efforts by the State of Oregon Progress Board have focused on linking the benchmark process to state programs and budgets.[9] The Progress Board's process also recognizes the linkage between outcomes, goals, and indicators. The steps that follow were adapted from the Oregon Progress Board process.

I.   Review the goal and make sure it is realistic (or sufficiently ambitious).

Examine current level and historic trends and comparisons with other national programs and countries. (Where are the best practices and results - what goals do we want to shoot for.)

II. If possible, identify the payoffs from achieving this goal in terms of the top-level outcomes identified in the Strategic Plan.

III. Examine recent efforts to address this problem.

- Programs and budgets, both by the Working Team and other entities.
- Who have been the key players?
- What successes? What setbacks?
- Have strategies already been developed to achieve these goals?

IV. Examine the best practices from other regions/countries.

Look widely for innovative new ways to achieve benchmarks. Don't presume that the goal can only be achieved by spending more money on current programs.

V.   Develop a work program (tasks) to implement the action. It could focus on one or more of the following areas:

- Programs
- Organizational change
- Incentives
- Budgets

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[9] The Oregon Progress Board has been establishing and monitoring statewide benchmarks in Oregon for more than 10 years.

VI. Summarize what it will take to achieve the goal and what different levels of effort can be expected to achieve.

VII. Identify specific indicators (data points) that are appropriate measures for the benchmarks and have data that is either readily available or could be easily collected.

Each benchmark should have an associated target. The target represents the desired value of an output or outcome at a given point in time. Targets should be ambitious but realistic. Targets should also reflect a level of commitment – how high are we willing to aim?

SUMMARY

The benchmarking process is intended to assist in monitoring the outcomes of strategic planning efforts. As such, it is closely tied to the strategic planning process, which requires organizations to make a number of normative decisions about future conditions. Benchmarks should reflect realistic goals and require data sources that are easy to obtain and, at minimum are published annually.