

Ruidoso Case Study – September 2008

The Village of Ruidoso is located in Lincoln County in south central New Mexico. Located at 7,000 feet elevation in the Sacramento Mountains, Ruidoso is a typical mountain community in the west. Dense stands of Ponderosa pine and other mixed conifers intermix with this growing, tourism based community. The Lincoln National Forest and Mescalero Apache Reservation surround Ruidoso along with other Federal and State lands. Ruidoso has a permanent population of 8,500 with an additional 40% absentee landowners residing within an area encompassing more than 8,000 acres. In addition, Ruidoso has almost 800 acres of public land in the form of parks and green space.

In 1998, Ruidoso began to formally address forest health and wildfire hazard reduction challenges by purchasing a “grapple” truck and offering a forest debris pick-up service.

In 2000, the Village added a second “grapple” truck and a forester to staff. The forester was charged with developing and implementing a *Community Forest Management Plan* (CFMP) that was used in developing its **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** in 2004.



Existing ordinances *restricting* thinning efforts



were relaxed

and forestry assessments and on-site visits were offered. The lot assessments emphasized forest health and landscape opportunities as well as fire hazard reduction. In 2002, Village Council enacted a suite of ordinances **mandating fuels reduction** on all lands within Ruidoso and a fire hazard rating standard for new construction with regard to structural ignitability and site development. The

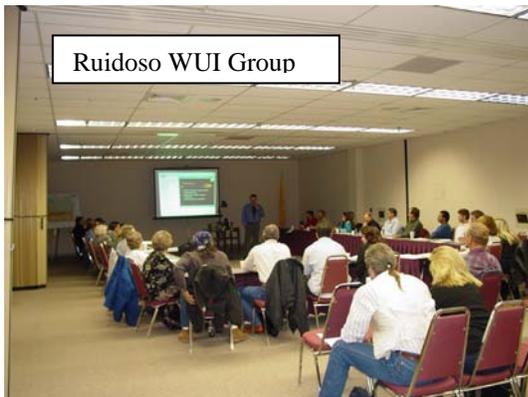
objectives of the ordinances are **ground fire management, forest health, and natural landscape opportunities**. Concepts from the *Firewise Communities USA* program and research done on home ignition zones were combined to establish objective fuels management standards. **(See Sect. 42-80)**



A municipal Forestry Department was created in 2003 and two additional “grapple” trucks were purchased as demand for services increased. The Village contracts with Sierra Contracting Inc., a local composting enterprise and recycles 100% of removed forest debris (upwards of 10,000 green tons/year). In 2004 revisions of the 2002 ordinances included protection of old and large trees, protection of root zones during site development, and establishing guidelines for bark beetle habitat reduction. In 2003, the Village was recognized with a **Firewise Communities USA** award and a **National US Forest Service Rural Communities Assistance Spirit** award.

Strong public awareness is essential to successful implementation. The Forestry Department has a webpage at the Village website www.ruidoso-nm.gov, has conducted Firewise workshops, ran TV “house make-over” spots on a local channel, and offers a community tool wagon for volunteer projects. Village Emergency Management has established wildfire evacuation routes and a reverse 911 telephone system, located at police dispatch, which can dial 500 numbers in 10 minutes delivering early warning messages for evacuation, etc.

With regard to public lands, Ruidoso hosts and coordinates the *Greater Ruidoso Area Wildland Urban Interface Working Group*. This working group has met monthly since 2000



and includes Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies and entities as well as a number of non-landholding participants. The group has prioritized projects in the southwest quadrant of the WUI and the goals of the group are to:

1) Encourage or establish and implement catastrophic fire mitigation measures on public, private, state, and tribal lands utilizing the best available science regarding wildfire hazard reduction; 2) Restore and monitor forest ecosystems and watersheds to maintain forest health and protect communities; 3) Engage private enterprise by supporting existing and emerging forest-based economic development; 4) Maintain the high quality of life in forest areas while sustaining and nurturing real estate and tourism-based economies.

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To date the combined group has treated more than 10,000 acres on public land. Ruidoso implemented a \$335,852.00 grant from the **Collaborative Forest Restoration Program** and \$502,587.00 from **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program** for fuels reduction projects on municipal lands and right of ways. **Wyden Authority** grants have been used on Ruidoso lands adjacent to USDA Forest Service land. Utilizing over \$2,000,000.00 in grant assistance through New Mexico Energy, Minerals, Natural Resources Department - Forestry Division’s “**Cost-Share**” program and State Fire Assistance programs, Ruidoso has treated more than 2,500 acres of private land.

Ruidoso participated in the Western Governors Association *Forest Health Advisory Committee* and the USDA Forest Service Region 3 *Southwest Strategies* in an effort to create recommendations for change and enhancement of current public land management policies with regard to forest health and wildfire hazard reduction issues. Ruidoso presented its story to the United Nations’ *North American Forestry Commission* in 2005.

Implementation of Ruidoso’s CFMP has promoted an increase in the number of forest contractors from 3 companies doing business in 2000 to more than 30 active companies in 2008. In addition, this community has created more than 60 natural resources related jobs. The overall effects of this community’s efforts are: reduction of risk to wildfire; a greater awareness and understanding of natural resource challenges; an increase in forest ecosystem health; and a boost to local economy and employment.