





Dear Lincoln County Resident,

Twenty-one years ago this summer Libby came within a whisker of burning to the ground.

Longtime residents will recall that the town was surrounded by wildfires and that – in hopes of averting disaster – the Forest Service railed fire trucks from Cleveland, Ohio. The trucks sat on a rail siding near the Burlington Northern train station for several days.

A change in wind direction saved us – not just Libby but Troy, Trego, Rexford and possibly Eureka. If you've moved here since 2000, you probably have no idea how much danger we face from the enormous accumulations of dying and dead trees standing in the Kootenai National Forest.

This booklet is designed to [1] help you understand the risks we are facing in Lincoln County, [2] encourage you to get involved in supporting Forest Service efforts to reduce our wildfire risk and [3] help you take the practical steps necessary to protect your home, family and property.

The map on the facing page outlines the Wildland Urban Interface [WUI] in our county.

Although the red outlined areas include all public and private lands ownerships, the areas at highest risk lie within the 2.2 million acre Kootenai National Forest. It is easily the most dominant land feature within our beautiful county.

A 2019 WUI study ranks Lincoln County in the 97th and 98th percentiles for existing and potential wildfire risk. Our WUI area is the largest in Montana and we also have the largest percentage of primary and secondary homes within a Montana WUI. Clearly, we are living on borrowed time.

The bar graphs on Page 7 in this report quantify annual gross growth, mortality and net growth for the Kootenai National Forest. The Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis [FIA] program gathers this data from survey plots that it monitors on every national forest in Montana, including the Kootenai.

The news is frightening. 363,433,844 board feet of timber die annually on the Kootenai. Equal to 236,611 cords of wood. Converted to gallons of gasoline, 226,556,163 gallons stacked on our doorstep. Every gallon packs the explosive power of 83 sticks of dynamite! In total, 18,804,991,529 sticks of dynamite – a powder keg search of an ignition source: a lightning strike or an errant campfire.

The bar graphs on Page 5 reveal that the news is even worse for all national forests in Montana com-

bined. Net growth is negative 1,412,884,770 billion board feet! 919,847 cords of dead wood. Unimaginable but sadly true.

We believe the Forest Service wants to do a better job of managing Montana national forests in its care, but it needs a strong showing of public support for doing the thinning and stand tending work necessary to reduce the high risk of wildfire in our forests.

Fortunately, Congress has provided several regulatory tools that permit the Forest Service to increase both the pace and scale of urgently needed thinning work. These include the Forest Service's Shared Stewardship Initiative, the Cohesive Fire Strategy, our Governor's Focus 2.0 Initiative, Firewise, our county's cooperative agreement with the Forest Service and the Montana Forest Action Plan.

Although these tools provide both hope and incentive, your strong support is critical. The centerfold of this booklet contains a citizen check-off card we hope you will complete and return to our office. We will share your responses with the Montana Department of Natural Resources, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Forest Service and Montana's state and federal elected officials.

This booklet features many QR codes like those you find on packaging in grocery stores. A tutorial on Page 20 explains how to use these codes. Click on them with your cell phone and you will be taken to additional information documenting our wildfire crisis plus information you can use to safeguard your home, family, property and health. A recent EPA report pegs the health hazards associated with wildfire smoke at 12 times greater than the equivalent risk from cigarette smoke. And then there is asbestos and the tragedy of mesothelioma.

Lincoln County is at the most important crossroad since its creation in 1909. Reducing the wildfire risk inside our WUI will bring us new wood processing infrastructure and with it, family-wage jobs that we have not had since 2002. A bright future awaits us. Let's seize it now!

Sincerely,

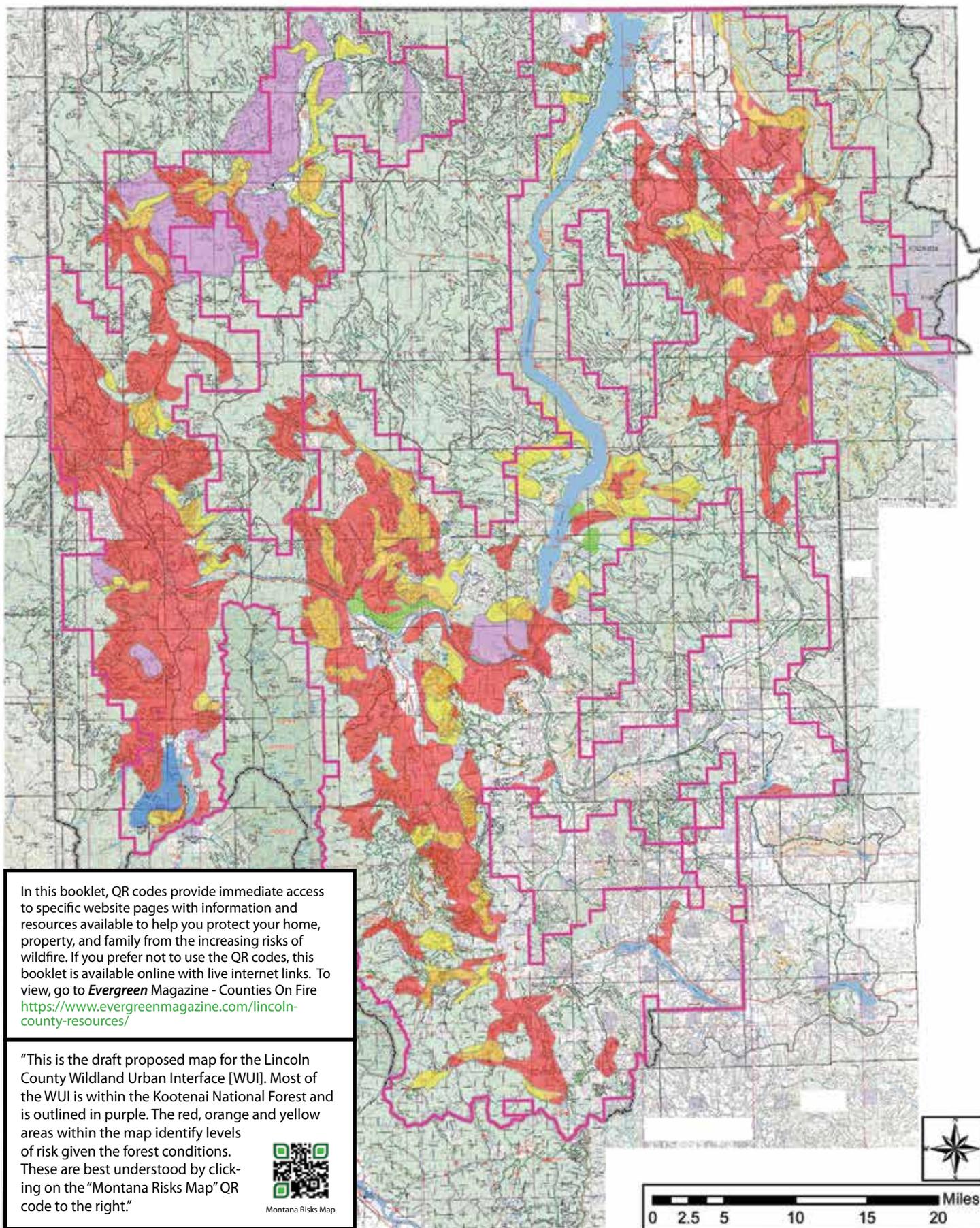
Mark Peck, Lincoln County Commission Chairman

Jerry Bennett, Commissioner

Josh Letcher, Commissioner

You can read this publication online! Go to Evergreen Magazine: <https://www.evergreenmagazine.com/lincoln-county-resources/> to open the publication. Click on the QR Codes to follow the links for more information.

Draft Proposed Lincoln County Wildland Urban Interface



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA



June 2021



Photo: Bill Langhorne, Western News

Montana Governor Greg Gianforte touring the 90-acre Skidale Good Neighbor Authority project at Libby on May 21.

Montanans know too well how important it is to actively and meaningfully manage our forests. When forests are too heavy with fuels, we experience catastrophic fires that threaten lives and property, destroy wildlife habitat, compromise watersheds, and leave our forests unhealthy.

I'm committed to using all available tools, like the Good Neighbor Authority and collaborative stewardship agreements, to increase active forest management to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, improve forest health, protect homes and communities, and create more good-paying Montana jobs. Completing this work in the Wildland Urban Interface, or WUI, is key.

I appreciate Lincoln County's vision and leadership in developing this proposal. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation will continue to work actively with the county, the Kootenai National Forest, the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and landowners on projects to improve conditions in the WUI. Our focus includes the interagency update of

the County Wildfire Protection Plan, projects on trust lands like Swede Mountain Road, projects on private lands like Pipe Creek, the Joint Chief's proposal, and the Skidale and Clay Day projects.

The state recently completed our Montana Forest Action Plan. The planning process brought together key stakeholders to assess our forest conditions, identify priority areas for treatment, and develop a cross-boundary plan to achieve landscape-scale forest restoration. The findings were alarming: Montana has over 9 million acres at high risk. Our forest action plan recognizes that, because fires, insects, and disease don't stop at fence lines, our management approach can't either. Collaborative work across partners and landowners is critical to reduce fire danger.

With its framework for shared stewardship, Lincoln County has lifted us from concept to action. This agreement will be a model for other counties looking to do the same within their own priority areas.

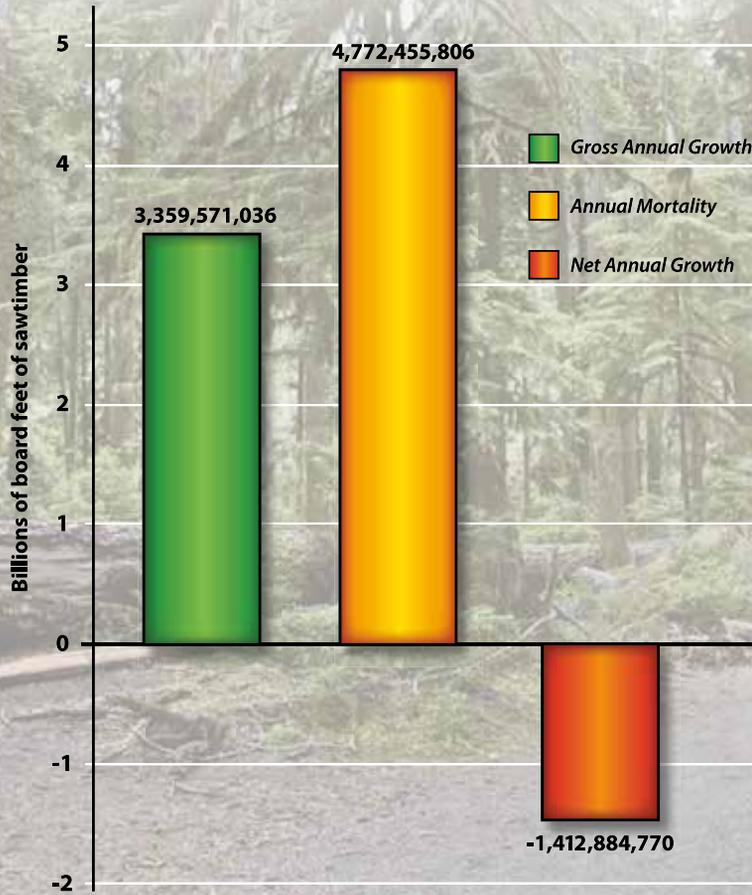
We look forward to working with Lincoln County, the Kootenai National Forest, NRCS, and other partners on critical cross-boundary work to expand the pace and scale of forest management and restoration.

Sincerely,

Greg Gianforte
Governor

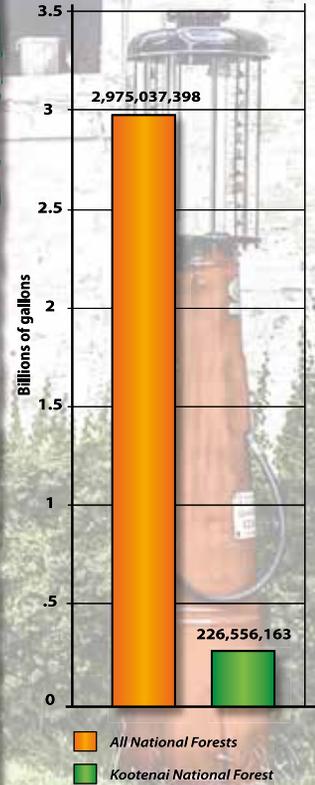
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MONTANA NATIONAL FOREST COMBINED (11 National Forests = 17 million acres total)

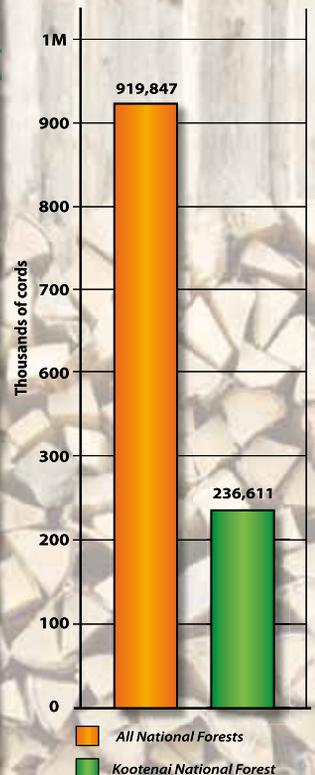


Charts: E.T. Hinchcliffe

MORTALITY IN GALLONS OF GAS



MORTALITY IN CORDS OF WOOD



Sustainability – as in sustainably managed forests – is a term that has been with us for many years. It mandates that today’s forest management practices do not compromise management options for future generations. This bar graph underscores the fact that we are missing the mark in Montana’s 11 national forests. Mortality exceeds growth by a frightening margin.

Annual mortality will continue to outpace growth until the pace and scale of forest restoration work expands significantly. Our two best tools for sustainably managing our national forests are thinning and prescribed fire. We describe their uses on Pages 11–14.

Although Congress seems to recognize our forest health-wildfire crisis, the Forest Service is still billions of dollars short of the funding it needs to increase workforce capacity and increase boots on the ground restoration work.

One nearby QR code on this page leads to a well-footnoted Forest Service workforce capacity study prepared by the National Association of Forest Service Retirees for the Trump and Biden administrations.

A second QR code leads to a detailed “problem-solution” essay written by Forest Service retiree, Michael Rains. Mr. Rains held key management posts in research and administration for 44 years.

The conversion tables used here are based on Kyle’s Converter.

- 1 cubic foot = 12 board feet
- 1 board foot = 0.62 gallons of gasoline
- 1,000 board feet = .65 cords. Thus one log truck load [15,000 board feet] = 9.77 cords



Kyle's Converter



BTUs

“Nature” Doesn’t Care!

Lincoln County’s forests, communities, homes and people are in big trouble. The bar graph on the facing page proves this point.

More than 360 million board feet of timber dies each year. This is very much like stacking firewood around our communities. If you could convert this loss to 1-foot by 1-foot by 1-foot wooden blocks and stack them on any high school football field in our county, the stack would be 1,052 feet tall – four times the height of our nation’s capital building! In five years the stack would stretch one mile skyward.

Among the powerful lessons this bar graph teaches is that we can’t stop trees from growing. We are adding both new growth and tons of dead trees to our landscape each year. We have two choices when it comes to dealing with this reality:

- 1 We can let nature manage our forest.
- 2 We can carefully remove some trees from our forest.

Removing some trees reduces the spread of insect and disease infestations that fuel these fires.

Both choices have consequences. Fortunately, we know how to control the impacts of tree removal, but we have little control over nature, which is why the frequency and intensity of western wildfires in so much greater today than it was 10 years ago.

The hard truth is that nature doesn’t care about the things we care about today: clean air, clean water, abundant fish and wildlife habitat, a wealth of year-round recreation opportunity, our homes and family-wage jobs.

Nature doesn’t play by our social and cultural rules, so when we neglect our forests – as we are now – we get stand replacing wildfires that incinerate most everything in sight: watersheds, trees, habitat, homes, lives and the organic soil layer in which new seeds germinate.

It is reasonable to ask what our forested landscape would look like if we let nature do the managing. We really don’t know because, across Montana, people have been “managing” landscapes for thousands of years using tools they either found or made.

Nature has persisted using its tools: insect and disease infestations, wildfire,



photo: Noah Berger/AP

Chris and Nancy Brown among the remains of their home in Paradise, California.

windstorms, ice, and floods.

We’ve all grown accustomed to the dense forests we see today around our county but this snapshot in time is just that – a snapshot.

Our area has not always been blessed with a carpet of ever-growing trees. In fact, our towns were buried beneath mile-deep glacial ice some 15,000 years ago. We have no idea what forests were here before the ice buildup, but roots buried in frost-covered tundra tell us that redwoods once grew inside the Arctic Circle. Clearly, the climate was much warmer than today and our forests would certainly have been different.

The Native Americans that inhabited our area as the ice receded used fire to clear pathways through forests and to keep trees from encroaching on meadows where they hunted wild game and harvested herbs, forbs and berries – all vital sources of food, clothing and shelter.

Long-term management by Native Americans created the forests that European explorers saw as they pushed west. The diaries of the Kootenai’s two earliest white explorers - David Thompson and Finan McDonald – describe a forest landscape marked by the chaos of intermittent fire and populated by fifty to sixty thick barked, fire-resistant trees per acre.

Our 21st century forests look nothing like the 18th century forest. Much of our forest is now holds hundreds – and sometimes thousands – of trees per acre. Far too many for the natural growing capacity of any Montana forest.

A mature tree can pump up to 200 gallons of water a day, so having too many trees for the available water supply is a problem, especially during prolonged droughts. It’s the same with soil nutrients and sunlight. Trees stressed by the presence of too many competitors attract insects and diseases. Dying and dead trees are fueling wildfires that also kill trees that are still alive and growing. This is our current reality in Lincoln County. We must constructively address it now.

Lincoln County, the Kootenai National Forest, the State of Montana and large private timberland owners are proposing we strategically manage the forest to reduce the wildfire risk, enhance forest resiliency and protect our watersheds. The focal point of our management strategy is the Wildland Urban Interface [WUI], a blend of public and privately owned forests that blanket Lincoln County. About 1.1 million WUI acres are in the Kootenai National Forest.

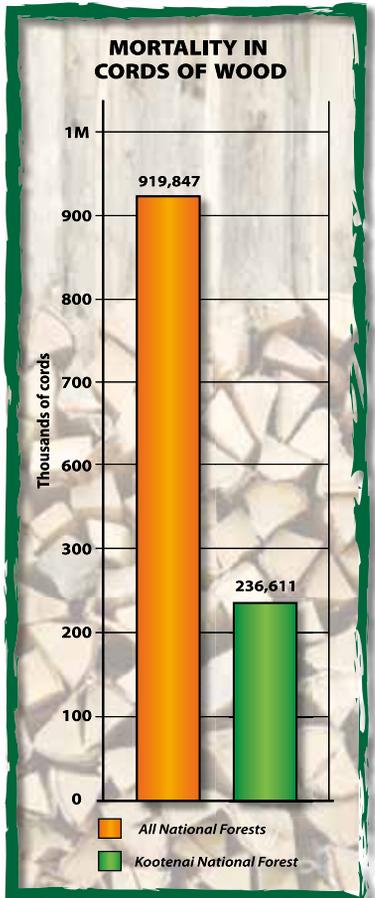
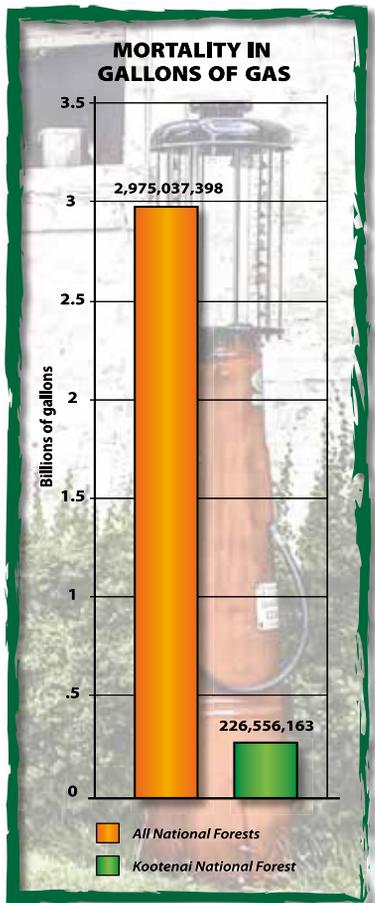
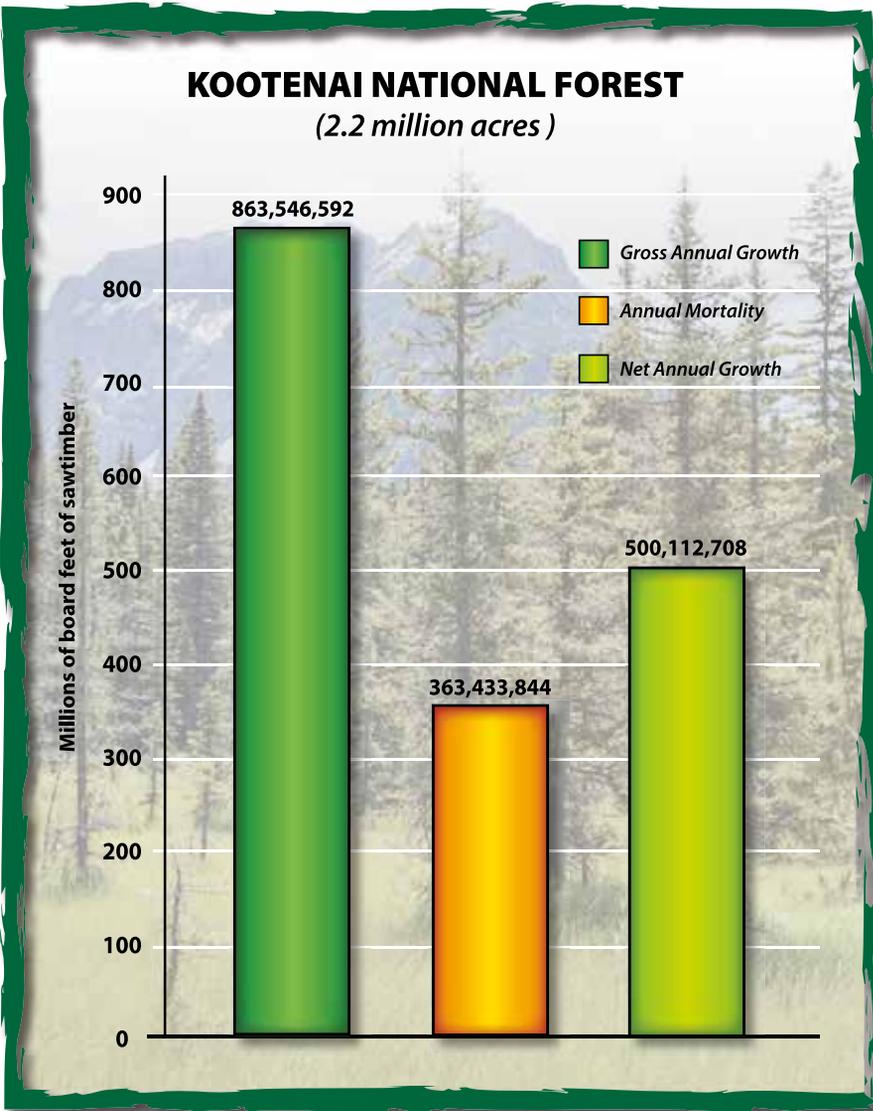
Our two best management tools are [1] thinning in forests that hold too many trees for the natural growing capacity of the land and [2] prescribed fires purposefully lit when there is little danger that these fires will escape. Thinning promotes growth in residual trees and prescribed fire consumes woody debris that collects on the forest floor, including the limbs, stumps and tree tops that thinning generates.

We are excited to embark on a journey that will heed the call-to-action asked for by Libby High School history teacher, Jeff Gruber, in an essay he wrote before he retired. “It is time for us to start a new conversation with government, one that reverses the death throws we are witnessing in our Lincoln County communities. It is our deep desire as citizens of this county, the Kootenai National Forest and the State of Montana to be at the forefront of an optimistic conversation that can foster real and positive change.”



Structures Destroyed

Charts: E.T. Hinchcliffe



These bar graphs illustrate and quantify growth and mortality on the Kootenai National Forest. The Kootenai is Montana’s most productive national forest – meaning that soils are fertile and trees grow faster than they do on more arid national forests in Montana.

This said, Kootenai tree density and mortality are of great concern to our Lincoln County Commissioners, the U.S. Forest Service, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and our county’s private forest landowners, including Stimson Lumber and the Green Diamond Resource Company.

Homeowners living inside our county’s Wildland Urban Interface are at increasing risk from catastrophic wildfire. See Pages 18-19 for information you can use to protect your family, property and home.

The QR code on this page leads to a treasure trove of information developed by the Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis program housed at the agency’s research stations in Portland, Oregon, Ogden, Utah, St. Paul, Minnesota and Knoxville, Tennessee. The Montana data sets were developed by FIA’s Ogden station. Using these QR codes you can actually find your house and judge the wildfire risk facing you and your property. Another nearby QR code leads to a well-footnoted report by the National Forest Service Retirees Association concerning our nation’s massive forest management crisis.



Map

You can read this publication online! Go to Evergreen Magazine: <https://www.evergreenmagazine.com/lincoln-county-resources/> to open the publication. Click on the QR Codes to follow the links for more information.

We can store carbon in our lungs . . .

In his recent book, *First, Put Out the Fire*, forestry writer Jim Petersen asks a timely question.

“How many cigarettes are there in a burning tree?”

The answer depends on the size of the tree, but his question wasn’t designed to be a math quiz. He asked knowing that most people don’t know that wood smoke is deadly – so lethal that the EPA recently estimated that the cancer risk from wood smoke is 12 times greater than from an equal amount of tobacco smoke!

We’ve all experienced the unpleasant frustration that comes with driving around for weeks on end with our headlights on in broad daylight because the smoke is so thick that other drivers have trouble seeing us.

In July and August of 2019 the air was so thick with smoke that outfitters hosting tourists on the Kootenai River couldn’t see across it. These situations are not good for healthy people, let alone those living in our county who have compromised lungs.

The array of QR codes at the bottom of this page lead to several government-sponsored reports that demonstrate that wildfire smoke is harmful because of the long lists of chemicals released that are often the same as those contained in cigarettes.

Some say that summers dominated by huge smoke plumes is “the new normal.” There is an element of truth in this statement but it is irresponsible to assume that nothing can be done to manage forest fuels in ways that mitigate the potential harm from smoke.

Certainly, some smoke from wildfires or from prescribed burning is to be expected since we live in a forest that is defined by fire. But the wildfire pandemic we are witnessing across the West is also releasing billions of tons of carbon per year into the atmosphere.

When we breathe wildfire smoke, deadly microscopic particles settle in our lungs, but our plight was ignored by news and health care organizations until putrid smoke descended on large west coast cities. Now we’re seeing lots of re-

ports concerning new medical research that identifies the significant health risks linked to wildfire smoke.

Wildfires release millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the air we breathe, but by itself carbon isn’t our enemy. In fact, it is a building block of life. Likewise, fire is a natural component of our fire-dependent forests. But the billions of tons of smoke that killing wildfires belch into western skies every year are not healthy for humans or other creatures that live in forests. Better that we store carbon in trees and wood products, not our lungs.

Lincoln County government and our partners plan to proactively address this crisis with our plan for managing dense forests in the WUI that surrounds our homes and communities. For many of us who live here, wildfire and its deadly smoke have become “environmental justice” issues. Reducing the amount of smoke we breathe by first reducing the risk of wildfire rights a wrong not of our doing that Lincoln County residents have lived with for too long.



Wildfire Emissions



Stanford Wildfire Research



Stanford Health Impacts



Smoke Composition



Air Quality

You can read this publication online! Go to Evergreen Magazine: <https://www.evergreenmagazine.com/lincoln-county-resources/> to open the publication. Click on the QR Codes to follow the links for more information.

... or we can store carbon in our forests!

Before white settlement began, Lincoln County's forests were a source of food, clothing and shelter for Native Americans. European explorers and settlers relied on Kootenai forests for the same essentials.

Today, we expect even more from our forests. Spring, summer, fall and winter, we value their timeless beauty. They are as much our home as the house we live in. This is why the forest stewardship discussion is so important to all of us: old-timers and newcomers alike.

Here at home and around the world, people are also developing an appreciation for yet another forest quality: the miraculous ability of healthy forests to store or sequester carbon while simultaneously releasing oxygen into the air we breathe.

Our oceans hold more of earth's carbon than any other source, but carbon is also stored in rocks, soil, plants and trees. For decades global political leaders have been discussing a variety of climate change initiatives that revolve around sequestering carbon and other harmful greenhouse gases that otherwise escape into our atmosphere.

Photosynthesis is the process by which trees and other green plants store carbon by converting light energy into chemical energy. Light energy – the sun or grow lights – drives the conversion of water, carbon dioxide and minerals into oxygen and organic compounds, including cellulose that forms the walls in all

plants. Cellulose is the basic ingredient in wood.

Trees are literally tubes of sequestered carbon. They grow upward and outward in layers using the same cell division process that drives all living organisms. The outer layers of trees are living tissue. Most of the trunk is dead tissue – wood that supports the increasing height and weight of growing trees.

Trees store about 25 percent of atmospheric carbon. The rate of carbon uptake varies widely with species, age, soil quality, elevation, aspect, heat, cold, sunlight and rainfall. Older, larger trees store lots of carbon in their wood but younger trees produce and store carbon at a much faster rate. As trees age, the rate at which they store new carbon slows and eventually stops.

Tree mortality on the Kootenai National Forest is increasing, so the carbon sequestration discussion is very important. We must strike a better balance between new growth, slowing growth and harvest. We must carefully remove as many diseased trees as possible before they burn – before they release the last of their stored carbon into the air we breathe.

With forest stewardship goals shared by all of our partners – the Forest Service, our state and our private forest landowners – we can sequester lots of carbon. To see what this process looks like on the ground, study the two photographs on the next page. They

were taken from Pipe Creek Road near its intersection with Sheldon Mountain Road just north of Libby.

The top photo shows thinning in the foreground and a dense thicket behind it. There are countless “dog-hair” forests like this one within the Lincoln County Wildland Urban Interface.

The bottom photo was also taken from Sheldon Mountain Road. This is what most of the Lincoln County WUI should look like – carbon sequestration at work in a well-managed forest. This site burned in the early 1900's and has been repeatedly thinned by the Forest Service for more than 100 years.

The work we envision won't take wildfires out of our forests. Nor should it. But it will reduce their size, frequency and killing force. It will also bring our communities new wood processing technologies capable of transforming the smallest trees into useful products. More on this in “Back to the Future” beginning on Page 15.

The environmental and economic benefits are many, but the ones that come immediately to our minds are clean air, clean water, abundant fish and wildlife habitat, a wealth of year-round outdoor recreation opportunity and family-wage jobs that are a by-product of our shared stewardship work.

We can do this in Lincoln County. Failure is not an option. We must stop storing carbon in our lungs and start storing it in our forests.



Call to Action

The Kootenai River near the Forest Service's Canoe Gulch Ranger Station. The bright green western larch and lodgepole trees across the river are growing in a 1978 Jennings Burn. It was started by lightning.

Photo: Julia Petersen



Photo: Julia Petersen



Top photo: a lodgepole pine thicket on the east side of Pike Road near Sheldon Mountain Road in need of immediate thinning. **Bottom photo:** an adjacent Forest Service thinning with a century-long history. Land inside Lincoln County's Wildland Urban Interface should look like this.

Our best tools: Thinning and prescribed fire

The best tools we have for reducing wildfire risk are [1] thinning in forests that hold too many trees for the growing capacity of the land and [2] prescribed fire to clean up forest floor woody debris and keep fires from climbing into treetops and creating forest-killing crown fires.

These tools are often used to meet the mission statements for the major landowners in our county. Mission statements reflect the owners desire to manage lands to maintain for overall forest health, including managing to minimize the dangers that come with wildfire.

The Forest Service's mission is, "To sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

The mission statement of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation [DNRC] is "To ensure the sustainability of Montana forests, rural lands and communities through cooperative

wildland fire protection, sound forest management practices and by promoting a viable forest-based economy." DNRC has an office in Libby and manages 50,000 acres of trust land in its Libby Unit. Timber harvested from trust lands helps fund Montana schools.

Stimson Lumber Company owns about 130,000 acres within the Kootenai National Forest – much of it within the Wildland Urban Interface. Stimson's mission statement tells us they are, "Committed to growing trees and operating mills in a sustainable manner to create value for Stimson and the communities in which we operate."

Green Diamond Resource Company recently bought 291,000 acres of forestland that has a storied history of management by Weyerhaeuser, Plum Creek Timber, Champion International, St. Regis and J. Neils Lumber Company. Some of these forested acres are in the Wildland Urban Interface. Green Diamond

tells us its mission is, "To improve all aspects of the world in which we operate across a triple bottom line: People, Planet and Profit."

If you own a parcel of forested lands, whether it is 2 acres or 200 acres, it would be wise to develop a forest management plan for your ownership. Your plan would probably be similar to the other, larger landowners and speak to your desire to have your land and forests meet the needs of yourself and future generations.

The FireSafe program outlined and illustrated on Pages 18 and 19 of this booklet lists numerous professional resources that are available to help you define and implement your forest mission.

While some of the forest owners of our area been able to achieve their vision, many have not and the lack of management on hundreds of thousands of acres near our homes has generated a crisis that our Shared Stewardship proposal intends to address.

This Stimson Lumber Company thinning on east side of the Bull River Highway backs up to U.S. Forest Service land and the Cabinet Mountains. A similar thinning is planned for the west side of the highway.

Photo: Julia Petersen



National Interagency
Fire Center



Good Neighbor
Authority



DNRC Facts

Lincoln County is, tragically, not alone. The U.S. Forest Service, our county's largest landowner, estimates that between 80 and 90 million acres in western national forests are in Condition Class 3 or 2 – meaning it is ready to burn or soon will be. Here is a QR code that leads to a map that illustrates and pinpoints wildfire risk in Montana national forests, including the Kootenai. A short tutorial on the use of QR Codes appears on the back page of this pamphlet and we urge you to learn how to use them.

This data – including satellite imagery - was collected by the agency's Forest Inventory and Analysis [FIA] staff in Ogden, Utah. It is frightening. Once you have mastered QR codes and FIA's website, you will be able to find your own home on FIA's website. If you live within the designated Wildland Urban Interface, your home and family could be in danger.

The solution to this ongoing problem – large-scale, long-term thinning projects that lower the wildfire risk – is what Lincoln County is proposing.

Good examples of what needs to be done can be found on some private lands, some lands cared for by the Montana Department of Natural Resources, and on some Forest Service lands. Their work in the landscape throughout our county improves wildlife habitat, protects our watersheds and improves the ability of our forests to withstand disease, drought and wildfire.

Part of the solution to our forest health issue will also require localized processing facilities that can economically receive the material removed from managed lands. These facilities will not be copies of the mills of the past but may ultimately provide career opportunities for fu-



Andrew Miller, President and Chief Executive Officer, Stimson Lumber Company

“Stimson Lumber Company is highly supportive of Lincoln County's plan to provide additional resources that address the mounting wildfire risks in the Wildland Urban Interface in Lincoln County.

Stimson has committed resources to this effort because it is the right thing to do for the landscape, private property owners, public resources and the citizens of Lincoln County.

Absent a concerted effort to increase the pace and scale of forest treatments that remove fuels from the forest and make lands more resilient, wildfire risks will continue to increase at an alarming rate.

Stimson supports the county's initiative and resolves to keep Lincoln County a special place to live and work.”

Andrew Miller,
President and CEO
Stimson Lumber Company

ture generations of Lincoln County children and families.

Thinning trees from overstocked forests can be messy. It may cause you and your neighbors to wonder if you have done the right thing for your forest. Prescribed burning blackens the mess and fills the air with smoke.

It's all temporary. Your forest will “green up” the following spring. Wildflowers you didn't know you had will bloom again and the trees you kept in your forest will begin to grow larger.

Remember that a big part of your mission is to avoid catastrophe – the loss of your home and all your trees in a much larger wildfire you cannot control.

The forests around us will not stay “pretty” if we do nothing. The pictures on these pages show that the failure to manage forested lands can yield an ugly outcome. That tough lesson has been learned in dozens of small and large communities across the West.

We do not need to relearn the lesson here – and we do not want a repeat of the Great 1910 Fire. Three million acres were lost across northern Idaho and western Montana – much of it in a 48-hour firestorm that leveled several small towns.

Lincoln County was not spared. We cannot stop trees from growing, but we can control our future by carefully managing forest growth in ways that reduce the risks posed by insects, diseases and unnaturally large and destructive wildfire.

Much like painting the Golden Gate Bridge, the “job” is never done. Paint fades in the sun and trees grow in it, so you keep painting and you keep thinning. The only thing we can think of that could break this cycle is a return of the mile-deep icefield that once blanketed Lincoln County.

Photo: Noah Berger/AP



Photo: Jim Petersen



Top photo: Destruction from the Camp Fire in California. Vehicles torched to bare skeletons of metal. **Bottom photo:** Fire is not our enemy when used properly by trained professionals.

Photo: Jim Petersen



Photo: Steve Arno



Top photo: Roadside thinning in dead and dying timber near Missoula. **Bottom photo:** Peter Kolb's 2021 thinning on his Tree Farm near Evaro. Kolb is Montana State University Extension Forester. The PhD forest ecologist also teaches at UM in Missoula.

Change is the only constant in Lincoln County's forests and communities.

Change can be challenging, but we sense great opportunity – a marvelous future for all of us.

Our roadmap to the future is embedded in our Shared Stewardship proposal for managing forests within our Wildland Urban Interface. Lincoln County must lead this effort.

We have solid backing from our major private timberland owners, Montana DNR, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Governor Gianforte. Congress has provided the administrative tools we need to move forward and the Forest Service has signaled its willingness to do its part. This is key because about one million acres of our Wildland Urban Interface lies within the Kootenai National Forest.

For more than 100 years, Libby, Troy, Eureka, Rexford and Trego were thriving communities. As late as the mid-1980's Lincoln County led the state in per-capita income. Very few truly wealthy people lived here but family-wage, blue-collar jobs were abundant because we were home to a thriving timber industry. Forest growth on the Kootenai National Forest exceeded harvest and tree mortality by a wide margin.

Growth still exceeds mortality on the Kootenai but the gap is narrowing at a frightening rate because we aren't caring for our forest as we did for more than a century. Our communities are in no better shape. Lincoln County now ranks 43rd in per capita income in Montana. Storefronts are boarded up and family-wage jobs are so scarce that most of our high school graduates – our future – are forced to leave to find work.

In our struggle to reinvent ourselves, we have overlooked our greatest opportunity. It's the forest that fed and clothed us and educated our children for more than 100 years. The forest that brought us hope and prosperity. The forest that needs us now in the same way we need it.

The forest restoration plan envisioned in our Shared Stewardship proposal will not fix all of our economic problems, but it can provide a diverse foundation of sustainable hope, growth and opportunity for our families and businesses.

Careful management of the Wildland Urban Interface will reduce wildfire risk and improve forest resiliency. Small diameter trees and woody biomass are byproducts of this process. If history

BACK TO THE FUTURE!



Photo: Jim Petersen

Much of the beautiful Yaak River drainage faces significant wildfire risk because its forests hold too many trees for its growing capacity. Towering giants like this old western larch will be lost for centuries.

is our guide, the fiber we remove from our Wildland Urban Interface will be processed in Lincoln County because it's the most efficient way to do it.

There is also a wood-fired power-plant somewhere out there in our future. We need one because the Kootenai holds millions of tons of woody biomass too small to be made into lumber. Air pollution technologies will soon be capable of removing even microscopic particles from the steam the facility generates..

We have no way of knowing how many family-wage jobs can be created over the next decade. Much depends on our ability to attract new investments in wood processing. But this much is certain: Every economic sector in our county will benefit.

None of this will happen overnight and our future won't look like the past. New technologies make it possible for us to manufacture value-added wood products that did not exist a decade ago. Nanotechnologies will soon allow us to reconstruct wood fibers that can now only be seen under powerful microscopes.

We are working hard with our partners to match investment capital with the wood fiber supply that can be removed from our Wildland Urban Interface in perpetuity. There is no other way to reduce the insect/disease/wildfire risk we face to safe levels – and hold it there.

With the rising acceptance of remote working and with the pandemic and cultural unrest, many Americans want to move from their urban realities to more peaceful rural environs. Montana and Lincoln County look like miracles to these families.

Some of our new neighbors are already here and many more are coming. With them come new ideas, new money and new energy. These are the ingredients that built Lincoln County, so we think it is vital that we warmly embrace them. Much like the old Welcome Wagon days, we should thank them for choosing the wonderful area we love and work to help them become a part of our culture.

Our new neighbors will most likely buy homes or property in our Wildland Urban Interface. But it's unlikely that they've ever heard the term "WUI." They won't know that their new home, property and businesses face the same increasing wildfire risks we've faced for 30 years. It's our job to share our knowledge with them and to assure them that

we can all live safely within the "WUI" by doing a much better job of caring for our forests.

The graphs, photographs and QR codes in this booklet tell two stories. One reflects the reality of the grave danger and challenges we and our forest landscapes face. The other reflects our hopes for a healthy and vibrant future for our forests and communities.

Former Lincoln County Commissioner, Mark Peck, will lead the charge from his new post with the Lincoln

County Port Authority. He will be the county's liaison with state and federal forest management agencies. His new post has been funded by the Stimson Lumber Company. He is already working with investors who have expressed interest in developing new wood processing facilities in our county.

Mark is a Libby native and knows our county very well, but he will need our help and support in his work with the Montana Department of Natural Resources, the Kootenai National Forest

staff and the Forest Service's Region 1 office in Missoula.

A bright future awaits us, but we need to roll up our sleeves and get to work. Start now by making sure your family and home are safe in the event a wildfire approaches your property. The next two pages list professional resources that are available locally to help you develop your own fire protection plan.

Don't forget to return the envelope in the center of this booklet.

Thanks for doing your part!

Photo: Jim Petersen



Photo: Eli Shotola



Top photo: Dave Ehrmantrout's forwarder, "Turtle," winds its way through a Forest Service thinning project near Bonners Ferry, Idaho. **Bottom photo:** Sophie Petersen with her first fish caught on a fly rod. That's Kootenai Angler guide, Dave Blackburn, holding her fish.

Photo: Julia Petersen



Photo: Julia Petersen



Top photo: A Montana Department of Natural Resources thinning on Swede Mountain east of Libby reduces the risk of stand replacing wildfire, protecting water quality, habitat and nearby homes. **Bottom photo:** An adjacent Forest Service thicket that – if thinned – would look more like the top photo.

SUMMARY: We have a growing wildfire crisis In Northwest Montana. The health of our forests, watersheds, communities and families are at risk.



Questions? We've got answers...

Q What is Lincoln County doing to protect forests and communities from wildfire?

A The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), developed through the FireSafe Council, is a community plan that identifies areas at a high risk for wildfire. This plan is periodically updated and is based, in part, upon the recently released Montana Forest Action Plan.



CWPP

Lincoln County has proposed a shared stewardship initiative between public and private landowners to address wildfire and safety.



Firesafe Council

Lincoln County has long been the coordinator of Lincoln County FireSafe Council. The Council prioritizes areas at high risk for wildfire and assists in coordinating desired management with a focus on the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) – where communities meet the forest.



DNRC

Montana DNRC Lincoln County Service Forester - 406 293-2711

Lincoln County has a forester on staff at 406.283.2322.

Explore other resources:



WUI



Montana Forest
Action Plan



Montana
Risks Map

Q How can I increase safety for my family, my property, our forests and our community's firefighters from wildfire?

A The Fire Adapted Kootenai website is the main source of current information on living with wildfire in Lincoln County. It offers many tools and resources on wildfire safety – including how to create a “zone of protection” or “defensible space.” This website is continuously updated. Check often for new information.



Fire Adapted
Kootenai
Landowner

MSU Extension - Forestry and Landowner Program

Contact the Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) at 404.283-3536 to arrange a free home assessment.

Explore other resources:



MSU Extension



Firewise USA



Firesafe Montana-
Landowner



Ready Set Go
Montana

To report any type of fire: Dial 911

You can read this publication online! Go to *Evergreen Magazine*

<https://www.evergreenmagazine.com/lincoln-county-resources/> to open the publication.
Click on the QR Codes to follow the links for more information.



Q I want to reduce fire hazard on my property. Can I get help?

A Cost-Share Grants

Yes, you may be able to get financial assistance. Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) and other Cost-Share Grants are often available to help landowners off-set the costs of fuel reduction work on their property. Grants vary but can pay up to 100% of the costs. **To learn more, contact your Lincoln County Forester at 406.283.2322.**

Explore other resources:



DNRC Grants



Firesafe Montana
Landowner



Fire Adapted
Kootenai Landowner

Q What is a Firewise Community?

A In Firewise Communities, community members work together to lower wildfire risk. The goal is to create a “zone of protection” by reducing hazardous fuels – creating “defensible space” that helps keep wildfire away from homes and people.



Firewise USA

If you are interested in starting a program in your neighborhood, contact the Lincoln County Forester: 406.283.2322.

 **For additional information and resources on living with wildfire:**



Evergreen
Resources



Fire Adapted
Kootenai Resources



US Forest Service
Wildfire



Kootenai National
Forest



DNRC Resources



DNRC Wildfire
Risk

 **For information on current wildfires and conditions:**



Counties on
Fire



Wildfire Today



Inciweb

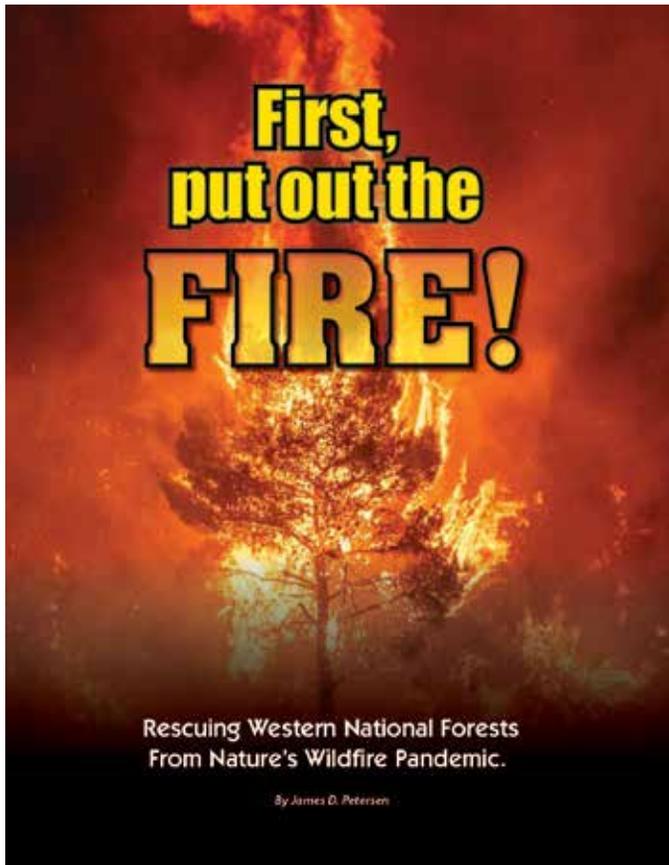


AirNow Air
Quality



Disaster
Response

To report any type of fire: Dial 911



Praise for *First, put out the Fire!*

Those who read *First, put out the Fire!* will not look at America's trees and forests the same way ever again...I loved reading this book. I know you will, too.

Michael Rains, U.S. Forest Service retiree,
Broomall, Pennsylvania

First, put out the Fire! is a fast-paced treatise about the devastating impacts of wildfires in western national forests. Jim's grasp of forest history is exceptional. He avoids the usual wildfire traps by treating thinning and fire tools to be used in combination to help reduce the severity of much larger fires. This is an excellent book that deserves its own niche in forestry and forest policy classrooms.

Phil Aune, U.S. Forest Service retiree, Nine
Mile Falls, Washington

Jim Petersen is the best writer the forestry world has ever had. *First, put out the Fire!* gives voice to ideas and frustrations that I've packed around my entire career. He expressed what I think and believe in ways I never could. Buy this book.

Danny Dructor, American Loggers Council,
Hemphill, Texas

To order Jim's latest book -
First, put out the Fire! -
scan this QR code



This is a QR Code

www.evergreenmagazine.com

- QR codes are simply a live link to another website that your phone can scan. Many smart phones already have an app for QR codes.
- If your phone doesn't have one you can download a QR code app for free.
- Go to Google Play for Android or the Apps Store for iPhone. Use the app to scan the QR code with your phone and you will be directed to a website with more information on what you are reading.
- You can also read this publication online!
Go to <https://www.evergreenmagazine.com/lincoln-county-resources/> to open this publication.
- Click on the QR codes to follow the live links for more information.



“Many thanks to the organizations and individuals who contributed their time and money to this project. Montana DNRC, Lincoln County, Stimson Lumber Company and Green Diamond Resource Company.

We appreciate the strong support for what we hope will become a state-wide campaign focusing on the Wildland Urban Interface in Montana's forested counties.”

The Evergreen Foundation

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