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This editorial was written by \*Thomas Zimmerman for FireSafe Montana's Enough is Enough campaign. The Enough is Enough campaign focuses on the many issues of wildland fire in the urban interface. For more Enough is Enough Editorials go to [firesafemt.org](http://firesafemt.org).

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**Can We Prepare and Live with Wildland Fire?**

Wildland fire management has been an indispensable element of natural resource management. But, in today's changing environment, it has become firmly intertwined in the mix of social, ecological, and management requirements and needs. Wildland fires today more frequently occur in areas where structures and human development blend with undeveloped wildlands - the wildland urban interface (WUI). The results of past trends and actions have caused changes across all fire-environments with the WUI environment serving as a microcosm of magnification of its seriousness. The challenges WUI presents have gained enough prominence to become one of the most important considerations in wildland fire strategic and policy documents.

What is needed? Future issues and emerging situations directly clash with the belief of successful protection through aggressive suppression. Reversion to a reliance on past experience or a return to the suppression of all fires can only result in a backslide in performance and efficiency. In recent national and regional planning activities (The National Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy), challenges and opportunities for positively addressing the future national situation have been identified as: restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes, creating fire-adapted communities, and responding to wildfires. These challenges recognize the necessary components of societal, ecological, and management issues. Questions within this framework that must be answered include how to:

- Sustain a vigorous landscape-scale vegetation management and fuels reduction program.
- Implement better pre- and post-fire rehabilitation.
- Make populations and infrastructure better able to withstand wildfires without loss of life and property.
- Improve understanding and use of noncombustible materials and vegetation in building construction and landscaping at the structure and subdivision level.
- Conduct detailed fire risk mapping.
- Consider and implement the full spectrum of fire management activities and the full range of wildfire responses.
- Improve collaboration and communication among all affected parties and stakeholders.

Recent discussion focused on WUI has identified some very aggressive and sweeping changes that include considering wildfire in the processes of:

- Altering insurance and zoning procedures.
- Denial of home loans in high-risk wildfire zones.
- Implementing tiered homeowner insurance rates.
- Drafting and implementing focused zoning tools.

It is readily apparent that business as usual is not going to be as successful. Recognition of the interdependence of social, ecologic, and management issues in managing wildland fire is imperative. An increased understanding of what this means and appropriate actions are necessary building blocks for improving awareness. An inventory of the state of our knowledge and capability shows that we now have greater awareness of the natural role of fire and fire ecology, greater understanding of fire behavior, fuel dynamics, fuel characteristics, and the fire environment, and greater science and technology advancements and support than ever before. We have the most flexible fire policy providing the most comprehensive basis of policy elements and affording the greatest range of options in program history. We have the most highly trained and capable workforce, the most advanced equipment and technology, and the most sophisticated logistical support system ever.

So, as wildland fire has become more complex, our knowledge and capability has steadily expanded. How then, are we struggling to plan for, respond to, and live with wildland fire and a changing fire environment? Are we passively accepting more frequent and increasingly damaging fires as unavoidable events? Are we steadfastly adhering to acceptance of protection capabilities alone as the answer? Are we refusing to understand and accept ecological knowledge? Are we resigned to regressive and inactive thinking? Is situation blindness clouding understanding of the full level of risk and hazard for firefighters, the public, and community values in WUI areas? If we are to be successful, the answers to these questions can only be no. Social awareness of the situation, opportunities, and capabilities must increase. Collaborative activities must determine courses of action. Only then can we answer yes – we can prepare and live with wildland fire and use actions listed above, as well as others, to actively drive the recognition and understanding of what this means and how to safely sustain it.