

Kootenai Forest Stakeholders express gratitude for wildfire protection work

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While smoke is in the air, it is a good time to recognize that, in Lincoln County, major progress is being made in taking action to reduce wildfire risk by the Forest Service and other land managers.

A strong focus by local officials to identify priorities for treatment, and get work done on the ground, is really paying off and showing results.

A great many people in our community are working on these efforts and they surely deserve our gratitude.

Many acres of fuels treatments are already underway, additional projects have been recently approved and more large-scale projects are in the works.

Treatments typically include thinning plus reduction of understory and ladder fuels, sometimes in conjunction with prescribed margins along roads.

This work is prioritized to focus on the Wildland Urban Interface. Landowners in the WUI can expect to see harvesters, masticators and other equipment near your backyards, working to create conditions that are unfavorable for dangerous fires.

In addition, there are considerable resources available to landowners to design and execute projects on their own private property.

Much information can be found at

www.fireadaptedkootenai.org

Thanks to extensive work in recent years to inventory and analyze the best opportunities to take action, our community is now in a good position to utilize extra resources provided by Congress to address wildfire threats in the West.

A prime example of this is the news that the Kootenai was one of only 10 areas in the West to receive one of the Initial Landscape Investments from the Infrastructure Bill, \$19.3 million to expand local risk reduction projects.

Another key example is the U.S. Forest Service's decision to grant \$1.2 million in 2022 Joint Chiefs funding to the Kootenai for the Libby Surround Stewardship Project.

These projects will address priorities identified in the Lincoln County Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Montana Forest Action plan, which were developed with the help of local experts and advisors.

Homeowners also have an important role to play in community wildfire protection, by ensuring their structures and landscaping are clear from flammable materials, and less vulnerable to flying embers which are the main cause of home ignitions.

The Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition wishes to express our appreciation for the many people and agencies who are pitching in to help protect our community and its resources.

Tim Dougherty and Doug Ferrell

KFSC Co-chairmen