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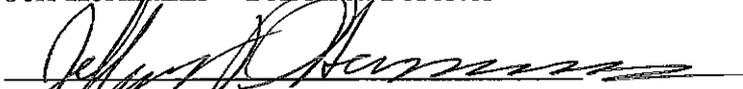
Nora David – Tribal Chief



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Dave Bergstrom - Chief, Tok VFD



~~Peter Butteri – FMO, TNWR~~



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No Signature required

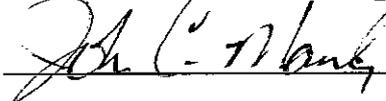
Ken Stump

~~Marsha Henderson – Northern Region FMO~~

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 3.28.2011

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 3/28/11

Mentasta CWPP

I. BACKGROUND

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process assists communities in developing an appropriate and desired wildfire protection plan that addresses elements of community protection. The Healthy Forest restoration Act (HFRA), enacted by congress in 2003, emphasizes the need for federal, state and local agencies to collaborate with communities to reduce the risk of destructive wildland fires. The community of Mentasta is within the Tok Area Fire Management Zone (TAS) and inherits the Critical Fire Management Option; it is located on the west side of Mentasta Pass, 6 miles off the Tok Cutoff of the Glenn Highway, 43 miles southwest of Tok Junction with an elevation of 2,231 feet. The Mentasta Lake area is an old, primarily Athabascan community, whose population, 98% Alaska Native, depends heavily on subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. The area was apparently the best-known Native migration route across the Alaska Range, and early village settlements have been located at various sites around the lake. The families who now live here came from Nabesna, Suslota, Slana and other nearby villages. The U.S. Army Signal Corps put a telegraph station at Mentasta Pass in 1902. A post office was established in 1947 but discontinued in 1951. The Post Office was reestablished in 1984.

There are three minimum requirements for a complete CWPP. These can be found in the Alaska Interagency Community Wildfire Protection Plan Guide:

- 1. Collaboration:** A CWPP must be a collaborative effort between local, state, and federal agencies and other interested parties.
- 2. Prioritized Fuel Reduction:** A CWPP must identify areas for hazard fuel reduction.
- 3. Recommend Measures to Reduce the Ignitability of Structures:** A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.

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II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mentasta Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a collaborative effort in response to the 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The HFRA act directs communities with a wildfire risk to conduct a risk assessment and create a plan to mitigate these risks. The Alaska Interagency Community Wildfire Protection Guide was used as a guide for completing the Mentasta CWPP.

Mentasta is at risk of lightning and human caused wildfire and this CWPP represents a collaborative effort between the Village of Mentasta and State of Alaska, Division of Forestry to mitigate that threat.

The assessment of the village of Mentasta reveals the need for Firewise education and hazard fuel reduction around structures and around the community. Increased wildland firefighter training for the Mentasta crew, a well maintained firefighting cache, and an active fire department will increase the community's ability to contain a fire. Fuel reduction and the need to reduce the ignitability of homes is priority. The hazard fuels are primarily dense White Spruce and Black Spruce that in many places is in large stands that lead to the edge of the community.

Input for this plan was received from the Mentasta Village Council, Ahtna Inc., State of Alaska Division of Forestry, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, TNWR.

Areas were prioritized for hazard fuel reduction by use of aerial photography, area use maps, local knowledge and ground survey.

Measures to reduce the ignitability of structures were determined by community members in conjunction with Forestry Firefighters and the Tok Volunteer Fire Department.

III. COLLABORATION

This collaboration process allows the community to work together in identifying ways to mitigate the threat from an urban interface wildfire and to address the priorities of the entire community in regards to wildfire safety. The CWPP process allows all interested parties to participate in the decision making process and to assist in the building of the plan to make the community safer from the effects of wildfire.

The State of Alaska, Division of Forestry in Tok has fire suppression responsibility for the area. Members of the Mentasta Village Council contacted Tok Forestry in the spring of 2007 and expressed interest in reducing the amount of wildfire hazard fuel in and around the village. These two entities are responsible for the development of this plan and US Fish & Wildlife TNWR also contributed. The Mentasta Village Council addressed the CWPP in several of their meetings and Division of Forestry personnel met with the Village Council, AHTNA and other residents in Mentasta many times during the writing of this plan.

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IV. ASSESSMENT TO PRIORITIZE AREAS FOR FUEL REDUCTION

This risk assessment system provides information about four primary elements contributing to or mitigating wildfire danger within or near a given Alaska community. These elements are

- 1) Risk/Hazard
- 2) Barriers
- 3) Fire Protection Response
- 4) Community Firewise Rating

A. A. Introduction: Areas were prioritized for fuel reduction by use of maps and satellite photos provided by Ahtna and the Village Council, local knowledge, and by area inspection on the ground. Local residents have a good understanding of the dangers of wildfire and the areas in Mentasta that have the greatest concentration of hazardous fuels. Some site inspections were conducted by Forestry personnel during the summer of 2007 and 2008.

B. Identification and Description of Community and Area

1. Describe the WUI boundary and how it was delineated

For the purposes of this plan the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundary is the area that inherits the Critical Fire Management Option as designated in the Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan.

2. Community Name: Mentasta Lake

3. Location:

Mentasta is located 6.5 miles west of the Tok Cutoff of the Glenn Highway, 43 miles southwest of Tok Junction.

4. General Geographic Location

Latitude 62° 55' 16" North, Longitude 143° 46' 9" West
Township 13 N Range 19E Section 6
Meridian; Copper River

1. Population:

The State Demographer estimates the 2007 population of Mentasta to be 128.

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6. Structures:

a. Homes

There are 20 primary residence homes and one 15 unit apartment building.

b. Community buildings

One clinic, Post Office, Tribal Building, Fire Hall, school with generator sheds, Community Center, recreation Center, Elder Care Center

c. Commercial

The generator shed and accompanying fuel tanks are owned and operated by Alaska Power and Telephone. Copper Valley Telephone has a structure in the village; the apartments are owned and operated by Copper River Basin Regional Housing Authority.

The apartments are owned and operated by Copper River Basin Regional Housing Authority.

d. Seasonally inhabited structures

There are 10 houses that are seasonally occupied.

e. Outbuildings

There are numerous outbuildings in the village and around each home.

7. Infrastructure:

Power is generated by a generator at the school that is owned and operated by Alaska Power and Telephone. Above ground power and telephone lines run the length of Mentasta road which leads from the Highway into the village. The power lines cross the road in many locations. The Mentasta road is chip sealed, all other roads are gravel. Copper Valley Telephone provides telephone service to the area.

8. Industry:

The school, tribal office building, apartments, and post office provide the bulk of employment within the village.

9. Natural Resource Values:

The subsistence lifestyle in Mentasta is customary and traditional. Moose, bear, caribou, sheep and other furbearing animals are harvested in the immediate area. Salmon, whitefish, and grayling are harvested from the water ways. The northernmost salmon spawning grounds for the Copper River are in Fish Creek which is located approximately ½ mile southwest of the village. Berries and roots are harvested in the immediate area. Important watersheds feed into and out of Mentasta Lake.

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The headwaters to the Copper River are in Mentasta and a green belt will need to be established to protect these waterways.

10. Cultural Sites:

There are 3 gravesites in the village and a fourth on the south side of the Lake. The old Mentasta Village site is located on the opposite side of Mentasta Lake from the current village. An old telegraph station is located on Station Creek within the village.

11. Dumps:

There is no dump in Mentasta. Refuse is hauled by a contractor from Tok using 3-4 dumpsters.

12. Hazards:

There are above ground fuel tanks at each structure and two 10,000 gallon fuel tanks at the generator site. Hazardous materials common with structures exist, such as vehicles, but not excessively so. The vegetation type is dense spruce mixed with willows and there are several areas along Mentasta Road where structures sit at the top of a hill that is thickly forested with spruce. The power line that runs the length of the Mentasta Road has spruce trees near it that can be a fire hazard, especially when windy.

13. Fire Equipment:

There is a "Code Red" box (A box of portable firefighting equipment) in the village and a fire hall for storing an engine. Tok Forestry plans to put a fire cache (a pump, hose, and hand tools) in place in the spring of 2009. The village of Mentasta has no operable fire engine.

14. Local Fire Prevention Efforts:

Tok Forestry prevention personnel visit the school in the spring/summer to conduct a presentation with the children of all grades.

15. Other community values:

The old telegraph station, situated on Station Creek, and the old village, located on Mentasta Lake are of historical value. The subsistence lifestyle depends on the areas berry fields and the area has several important waterways feeding into and out of the lake which is situated 1/8-1/4 mile from the village. (See Area Use Map, Mentasta Lake, "Nabesna D-6")

The Old Mentasta Lodge that sits atop Fish Creek and includes historical gravesites.

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B. Areas or Values to be Protected

The structures in Mentasta are located in the village itself and along the Mentasta Road, leading in from the Tok Cutoff, 6.5 miles away. They are the highest priority to be protected from the effects of a wildfire. Nearly all of these structures are vulnerable to wildfire. Mentasta Road is also the only way to exit the village in the direction of the highway and the hazard fuels along both sides of the road are a safety concern should a wildfire approach the village or the road. The power lines to the village also run along the Mentasta Road but crisscross it often, making it difficult to mitigate the threat that it poses. There are gravesites with the above ground spirit houses. Two of these gravesites are located at opposite ends of the village and one in the center of the village; another is on the south side of the lake. The value of green space to the community must also be considered. Although its long term affects could be argued, a fire that removed all of the trees surrounding the village would have a negative affect on the quality of life. The Village Council feels strongly about the need for a green belt along all of their waterways and Fish Creek is the northernmost salmon spawning grounds for the Copper River and is of great importance to the village. The berry fields are located on the edge of the village itself and provide blueberries, cranberries and raspberries. The historic and cultural sites of Station Creek and the Old Village of Mentasta are also vulnerable to the effects of a wildfire.

Areas or values to be protected prioritized;

1. Homes and other buildings within the village, including the cemeteries.
2. The Mentasta Road
3. Old Mentasta and Station Creek historic sites
4. Berry fields and other forested land and watersheds such as Bone Creek, Fish Creek, Mentasta Lake, Station Creek, Jake Creek, Sherman – Noyes Creek, Dead Moose Lake, Mineral Lakes, Trail Creek, Slana River.

D. Assessment of Risk/Hazard, Barriers, Fire Protection Resources, and Firewise

1. Fire Regime and Condition Class

Fire Regime 4

Condition Class 2

2. Rating Elements

a) Risk/Hazard Analysis

(1) Inside Community:

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The vegetation in and around the community is predominantly spruce, mixed with hardwoods and willows. Calamagrostis grass around the houses is also predominant.

(2) Outside Community:

The vegetation outside the community is Black and White Spruce Boreal Forest with much less hardwoods and willows than what can be found within the community.

b) Barriers

Mentasta Lake, Mentasta Road, Slana River and Tok Cutoff. Provide this community a fair rating (see chart).

c) Fire Protection Resources

The resources available for initial attacking a wildfire in Mentasta are Tok Forestry's helitack and engines, and the Mentasta Crewmembers. Helitack can respond within 30 minutes and engines within an hour. Additional resources such as Jumpers and Retardant are approximately an hour away. Mentasta is outside the response area of the Tok VFD. Forestry plans on installing a fire cache of pumps, hose and other equipment in 2009 to allow the crewmembers within the village a chance to contain a wildfire before the arrival of additional forces.

d.) Firewise Rating

The Firewise rating for this community is poor (see chart). Increased Firewise landscaping and clearing, and efforts to reduce the ignitability of structures is needed.

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RISK/HAZARD ANALYSIS CHART 1 Outside Community Area (1-10 miles)

FUELS (predicted fire behavior based on historic summertime weather with hot, dry conditions)	Alaska Fire Return Interval		
	High (0-99 years)	Moderate (100-300 years)	Low (>300 years)
Black Spruce Boreal Forest (CFFDRS=C2) <i>rate of spread: high</i> <i>intensity: high</i> <i>spotting potential: high</i>	H 80 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	M
Black Spruce Lichen Woodland (CFFDRS=C1) <i>rate or spread: moderate</i> <i>intensity: moderate</i> <i>spotting potential: high</i>	H 80 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	M
Grass (cured tall standing or matted; CFFDRS = O1a/O1b) <i>rate of spread: high</i> <i>intensity: moderate:</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	H 50 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	L
<i>Mixed Boreal Forest (may include white or black spruce, aspen and/or birch; CFFDRS=M1)</i> <i>rate of spread: moderate</i> <i>intensity: moderate</i> <i>spotting potential: moderate</i>	M 70-120 yrs FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	L
Hardwood Forest (includes aspen & birch; CFFDRS use D1 or M1, M2) <i>rate of spread: low</i> <i>intensity: low</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	M	L 116 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	L
Deciduous Brush (includes willow & alder) <i>rate of spread: low</i> <i>intensity: low</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	L	L 150 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	L
<i>Insect and Disease in Mixed Boreal Forest (may include white or black spruce, aspen and/or birch; rate of spread: moderate</i> <i>intensity: High</i> <i>spotting potential: High</i>	M N/A	H N/A	M N/A

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RISK/HAZARD ANALYSIS CHART 2 Inside Community Area (within 1 mile)

FUELS (predicted fire behavior based on historic summertime weather with hot, dry conditions)	Alaska Fire Return Interval		
	High (0-99 years)	Moderate (100-300 years)	Low (>300 years)
Black Spruce Boreal Forest (CFFDRS=C2) <i>rate of spread: high</i> <i>intensity: high</i> <i>spotting potential: high</i>	H 80yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	M
Black Spruce Lichen Woodland (CFFDRS=C1) <i>rate or spread: moderate</i> <i>intensity: moderate</i> <i>spotting potential: high</i>	H 80 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	M
Grass (cured tall standing or matted; CFFDRS = O1a/O1b) <i>rate of spread: high</i> <i>intensity: moderate:</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	H 50 yr avg FRCC Fireline Handbook	M	L
<i>Mixed Boreal Forest (may include white or black spruce, aspen and/or birch; CFFDRS=M1)</i> <i>rate of spread: moderate</i> <i>intensity: moderate</i> <i>spotting potential: moderate</i>	M 70-120 yrs FRCC Interagency Handbook	M	L
Hardwood Forest (includes aspen & birch; CFFDRS use D1 or M1,M2) <i>rate of spread: low</i> <i>intensity: low</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	M	L 116 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	L
Deciduous Brush (includes willow & alder) <i>rate of spread: low</i> <i>intensity: low</i> <i>spotting potential: low</i>	L	L 150 yr avg FRCC Interagency Handbook	L
<i>Insect and Disease in Mixed Boreal Forest (may include white or black spruce, aspen and/or birch; rate of spread: moderate intensity: High spotting potential: High)</i>	M N/A	H N/A	M N/A

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BARRIER RATING CHART

Barrier Type (list specific type under excellent, fair or poor)	Excellent	Fair	Poor
Water (may include lakes, rivers, streams and sloughs)		Lake and River	
Natural features (may include barren landscape, rock, topographic features)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Human-made features (may include airstrips or other clearings)			Mentasta Road, and Airstrip, Highway.
Overall Rating		Fair	

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FIRE PROTECTION RESOURCES RESPONSE CHART

Response Time	Risk	Kind of Resource (List kinds of resources available for initial attack)
Adequate initial attack resources are more than 75 minutes away and adequate extended attack resources are more than 12 hours away.	High	
Adequate initial attack resources are 30-75 minutes away and adequate extended attack can be in place in 8-12 hours.	Moderate	Tok Forestry Helitack Can respond in 30 min. State engines can Respond in 50 minutes VFD engines can respond in 75 minutes
Adequate initial attack resources are less than 30 minutes away and adequate extended attack can be in place in less than 8 hours.	Low	

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Total of Rating Sum / 25 x 100 = Community Firewise Rating
 Excellent greater than 65%, Fair 35-65%, Poor less than 35%

	Excellent Over 65% of homesites and community buildings meet standard Value =5	Fair Between 35- 65% of homesites and community buildings meet standard Value =3	Poor Less than 35% of homesites and community buildings meet standard Value=1
Landscaping			X
Construction			X
Water Supply			X
Access		X	
Clear of Flammables/ Refuse/Debris (flammables stored properly & area cleared)			X
Ratings Sums		3	4

STANDARDS FOR FIREWISE RATING

Landscaping: There is a clearing of flammable vegetation at least 30 feet around the home for firefighting equipment: coniferous brush and dead/overhanging branches are removed; trees are pruned 6-10 feet above the ground; lawn is mowed and watered regularly and ladder fuels are removed from the yard; remaining trees are spaced at least 30' apart at crowns; garden equipment (hoses and hand tools) are kept on the property.

Construction Guidelines: Home is made of fire-resistant or non-combustible construction materials (especially important for roofing); vents are covered with wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch; at least two ground-level doors exist; at least two means of escape exist in each room.

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Water Supply Guidelines: Home has a reliable water source, 3 to 4 sprinklers and enough hose to circle the home.

Access Guidelines: Access roads are at least 2 lanes wide and clearly marked; ample turnaround space exists for vehicles/fire equipment.

Clear of Flammables/Refuse/Debris Guidelines: Combustible materials are not located in the yard or under decks or porches; firewood is stored away (at least 30 feet) from the house; all debris or refuse is picked up regularly.

3. Overall Assessment Rating of Risk/Hazard, Barriers, Fire Protection Resources, and Firewise

OVERALL RATING CHART

Category	Rating
Risk/Hazard	
a) inside community	
a) outside community	
Barriers:	Fair
Fire Protection:	Moderate
Community Firewise Rating:	28 - Poor

4. Other Contributing Factors to risk and mitigation of wildland fire

Many of the adult residents of Mentasta are red carded and have experience fighting wildfires. Many of them are active in the Tok Forestry Initial Attack program and are often dispatched to large fires within the state. A well maintained cache of fire fighting equipment will give the residents an additional level of protection against a wildfire by providing Initial Attack capabilities within the village. The cache should be a good compliment to the code red box. The absence of a dump greatly decreases the risk of a human caused wildfire.

Due to the many watershed areas and important salmon spawning area, the Village Council feels strongly that there are no areas in or around the village where retardant can be used.

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V. WILDLAND FIRE HISTORY

A lightning strike within the village caused a 15-20 acre fire in the late 60's and while Mentasta has not had a large wildfire in almost 40 years, there have been several small fires in the area in that time, both human and lightning caused. A lightning strike within the village in 2003 caused a wildfire that was contained and controlled at 1/10 acre by local residents and a Forestry engine. There were numerous lightning strikes within and near the village on several occasions in 2008.

VII. MAPS:

VIII. APPENDICES:

Appendix A. Comments, Questions and Concerns.

Appendix B. References.

Anchorage Daily News, Wikipedia, Anchorage CWPP, Tetlin CWPP, Tok CWPP.

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MITIGATION PLAN

Executive Summary

The village of Mentasta, with a population of 128 people and approximately 30 homes is at risk of wildfire destroying cultural, historic, and natural resources as well as homes, due to the vegetation around and within the village. This vegetation consists of white and black spruce that is fairly continuous and on all sides of the village. There are also many homes on the Mentasta Road, some that sit on the apex of small hills. The power line that crosses the road many times is a concern.

The following actions are proposed in order to mitigate these threats:

- A Firewise education program
- Reduce the ignitability of structures
- A fuel break around the community and historic/cultural resources
- Increased wildland firefighter training for the Mentasta crew
- A well maintained firefighting cache
- Increased timber harvests in the area
- A shaded fuel break along the Mentasta Road
- Procure a fire engine and develop a fire department
- Install lightning rods at cabins that do not have electricity
- Remove the hazard fuel from between the power lines and the Mentasta Road where possible, and thin the fuels along the power lines where fuel removal is not practical.
- Conduct annual training with Forestry personnel on the use of the “code red” box.

Background

The location of Mentasta is such that initial attack resources are just within the moderate range of response time in the risk assessment part of this plan. Most of the community is easily defensible from a fire of moderate intensity that occurs near or within the village, with the houses close together and little unimproved land between the structures. The houses along the road are an exception to this.

Lightning is not common in this part of the Alaska Range although there were many ground strikes in the village in 2008 and most seasons do see occasional strikes, and wildfires associated with them, so the risk of wildfire as history shows, is also moderate. Intense fire behavior is possible when fires do escape initial attack and windy conditions are common in the summer. Hazard fuel mitigation measures need to take this into account.

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Goals and Objectives

The goal is for the Community of Mentasta to be able to withstand a wildfire that starts within or near the village with minimal loss to the structures, historic and cultural resources or natural resources of value; through hazard fuel reduction, improved firewise landscaping / home construction, and firewise education.

Strategic Plan/Desired Condition

Priority values to be protected are the homes within the village, historic and cultural sites, and the surrounding natural resources. Hazard fuel reduction and firewise education that leads to homes that will not ignite during a wildfire are the two primary methods to achieve this. A strong timber program including timber sales is an important tool to remove hazard fuels on Mentasta lands and to keep contractors involved in the process of hazard fuel removal in an effort to provide for a means to remove the hazard fuels in the future through utilization of the material. The current market for the 6" and above diameter material is as cordwood for the resident of the village but the overall strategy will call for a biomass program that can utilize the smaller, unmarketable material. AHTNA is currently working on the Forest Stewardship Plan and an energy plan for the region and the Mentasta CWPP will compliment that plan. Increased use of wood as a bio fuel is an important part of that plan.

Fuel reduction should be accomplished by use of equipment where possible and removed by hand where equipment cannot operate. Stand conversion consists of removing all the trees.

Fuel reduction by priorities is:

- A large clearing at the ball field on the northeast corner of the village to serve as a safety zone and helispot.
- A fuel break on the north side of the village, tying into the safety zone, some of this fuel break will be stand conversion and some will be mechanically or hand thinned.
- A fuel break around the remainder of the village, making a complete loop. Some of this will be stand conversion and some will be mechanically or hand thinned.
- A fuel break along both sides of the Mentasta Road, mechanical and hand thinned.
- Thin the trees along the power line easement and inspect for and remove trees that are hazardous

See fuel reduction map for breakdown of fuel reduction prescription by unit.

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Actions and Methodology (Tactical Plan)

- 300' wide hazard fuels break on all sides of the village with a large clearing near the ball field (see map) to serve as a safety zone and helispot/staging area.
- Create a shaded fuel break to a depth of 300' along both sides of Mentasta Road and the Tok Cutoff near the entrance of the Mentasta Road.
- Encourage Firewise landscaping
- Enhance fire protection capabilities by placing a fire fighting equipment cache consisting of pumps, hose and saws in the village.
- Acquire a fire engine, upgrade the fire station and establish a volunteer fire department
- Firewise education will need to be an ongoing process with the village council setting an agenda that includes reports of educational events and progress on home firewise efforts.
- Build a large helispot at the edge of Mentasta Lake.
- Increase training on the use of the "Code Red" box
- Increase Firefighter training

Roles and Responsibilities

The Village Council is the contact between the village and Forestry and they will monitor the progress and maintenance of the plan. A report should be given on the progress of the plan and prevention activities during each village council meeting. This report should include all wildfire prevention efforts in an attempt to show regular improvement on reducing the ignitability of homes and the incidence of human caused fires. A dedicated community prevention officer is needed to perform this function.

Funding Guidelines

The estimated cost of the fuel reduction is \$525,000

The establishment of a fire department may help in procuring funds for some of the necessary equipment.

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Monitoring Plan

Mentasta Village Council will have the responsibility of monitoring the plan with assistance from Tok Forestry personnel. These activities will include monitoring the hazard fuel reduction project, and monitoring and documenting the firewise education program. A continued emphasis should be placed on the efforts to reduce the ignitability of structures. The Council will also have responsibility for the maintenance of the fire cache and the fire station/fire engine. Tok Forestry and the Village Council will monitor the training for the firefighting crew, with Forestry documenting and charting the progress in personnel files.