

# Town of Rome Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) 2013-2017

AN ACTION PLAN FOR WILDFIRE MITIGATION  
Adopted: January 24, 2013



Prepared By: Amy Luebke, Wisconsin DNR  
Date: January 17, 2013



## PLANNING COMMITTEE

The following report is a collaborative effort between various entities. The representatives listed below comprise the core decision-making team responsible for this report and mutually agree on the Plan's contents.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
John Frantz	Chief, Rome Fire Department
Jane Gervais	Director, Adams County Emergency Management
Dwight Gilbert	Board Member, Lake Camelot Property Owners Association
Deena Griffin	Clerk, Town of Rome
Darrin Johnson	Environmental Consultant, Wisconsin River Power Company (WRPCO)
Brian Luebke	Forester Ranger, WI Department of Natural Resources
Amy Luebke	Wildland-Urban Interface Specialist, WI Department of Natural Resources
Tom Osborne	General Manager, Lake Arrowhead Association
Kevin Ponsler	Forester, Plum Creek Timber Company
Jon Sonnenberg	Superintendent of Highways & Public Works, Town of Rome
Dave Trudeau	Board of Directors, Lake Sherwood Property Owners Association

## PLAN CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Community Background and Existing Situation
3. Risk Assessment
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Issues Identification
6. Mitigation Strategies
7. Mitigation Action Plan
8. Plan Implementation and Maintenance

## 1) INTRODUCTION

The Town of Rome is designated as a very high Community at Risk for wildfire because of the flammable vegetation of the area, the housing density and the risk of wildfires occurring. To help mitigate the risks, a Community Wildfire Protection Plan was created by the Town and adopted in 2007. Plan implementation has taken place over the last several years and an evaluation of progress was conducted in 2012. The results of that evaluation were incorporated into the creation of the new mitigation action plan for the next five year period, 2013-2017. Planning meetings were held on July 25, 2012, September 19, 2012, October 31, 2012 and December 5, 2012.

## 2) COMMUNITY BACKGROUND AND EXISTING SITUATION

### Community Description

The Town of Rome is located in the northwest corner of Adams County, Wisconsin. The majority of land in the town is owned by Plum Creek Timber Company and consists of thousands of acres of red pine plantation. The Town reports that there are 7,306 parcels with approximately 5,000 property owners. The 2010 census reports a population of 2,720 people. Approximately 60% of the homes are seasonal residences. Many non-resident property owners use their properties solely for camping. The majority of homes are located in densely populated housing communities around the "tri lakes" of Lake Camelot, Lake Arrowhead and Lake Sherwood. There are several smaller subdivisions and homes scattered throughout the town as well. The Town of Rome is known as a recreational area with many folks buying property in the area to enjoy boating, golfing, riding ATVs, snowmobiling, and hunting. Rome is also the new home of the Wisconsin Trapshooting Association.

## Fire Protection

The Wisconsin DNR (Nekoosa Fire Response Unit) provides wildland fire protection out of the Wisconsin Rapids Service Center and the Rome Fire Department provides structural protection to the Town. They partner on wildland fire suppression and jointly respond to wildfires within the Town of Rome. The DNR responds to wildland fires with a ranger in a 4x4 truck which has a pump and a 180 gallon tank. The Department may also respond to wildfires with heavy units carrying tractor plows. Tractor plows can create drivable firebreaks giving access to the fire as well as stopping its spread by making a furrow in the ground which exposes mineral soil. To promote quick suppression of wildfires, the DNR staffs the Nursery Fire Tower in Wisconsin Rapids and the Dyracuse Fire Tower in the Town of Rome when the fire danger is elevated. Fire detection is also enhanced through the use of a DNR patrol plane which passes valuable intelligence to firefighters on the ground. The Rome Fire Department has all the standard structure protection equipment including three engines, three tankers, and a rescue truck in addition to two UTVs, a brush truck and personal protective equipment for all firefighters especially designed for wildland firefighting.



DNR Wildland Firefighting Equipment



## Emergency Response & Access

There are many dead ends or cul de sacs within the tri lakes communities which could make it challenging for outside fire agency resources, who would not be familiar with the local community, to respond quickly to fires. It can also present an issue in the event of the evacuation of homeowners from the area. On a positive note, flag-format fire number signs have already been posted, which can help incoming resources identify the locations of fires. In terms of local resources, the Rome Fire Department has newer GPS technology in their engines which can make responding to fires easier. The Adams County Emergency Atlas is another useful tool used by firefighters to get to homes quickly.

For the most part, driveway access in the tri lakes area is adequate, with a few exceptions of homes that would benefit from providing adequate width and height clearance from surrounding vegetation. Outside of the tri lakes, however, there are more issues with driveways that are long, with sharp curves and inadequate clearance from surrounding vegetation. Overall the Fire Chief reports that they are able to get to all homes in the Town, however, homeowners should continue to be careful to maintain their driveways to keep them accessible to emergency responders.

## Description of Predominant Forest Cover

The Town, as a whole, is very wooded. It is dominated by sandy soils which are an excellent soil for supporting red pine plantation. Red pine plantation is the predominant forest cover in the Town and covers many square miles (Plum Creek). Overall, the pine fuels represent the greatest risk for carrying crown fire, which is the most difficult type of fire to suppress. Outside of the pine plantations, the forest cover is generally a mix of scrub oak and jack pine, which is predominant surrounding the homes in the lake communities.

## Wildfire Hazard

The Wisconsin DNR conducted a statewide wildfire risk assessment in 2008. According to the Communities at Risk assessment, the Town of Rome is at "very high" risk to damage from wildfire due to the concentration of structures and proximity to flammable vegetation.

The Town of Rome falls in Fire Landscape 4: Central Wisconsin Sands which is described as containing extensive areas of jack and red pine, with dry, sandy and organic soils. It is characterized by extensive wildland-urban interface areas. There is a great history of and potential for a 10,000 acre fire.

There have been four fires greater than 2,500 acres in size since 1975 including Brockway (15,471 ac), Saratoga (6,159 ac), Cottonville (3410 ac) and Lyndon Station (3,177 ac). This fire landscape has a higher structural load than any of the other pine dominated landscapes in Wisconsin.

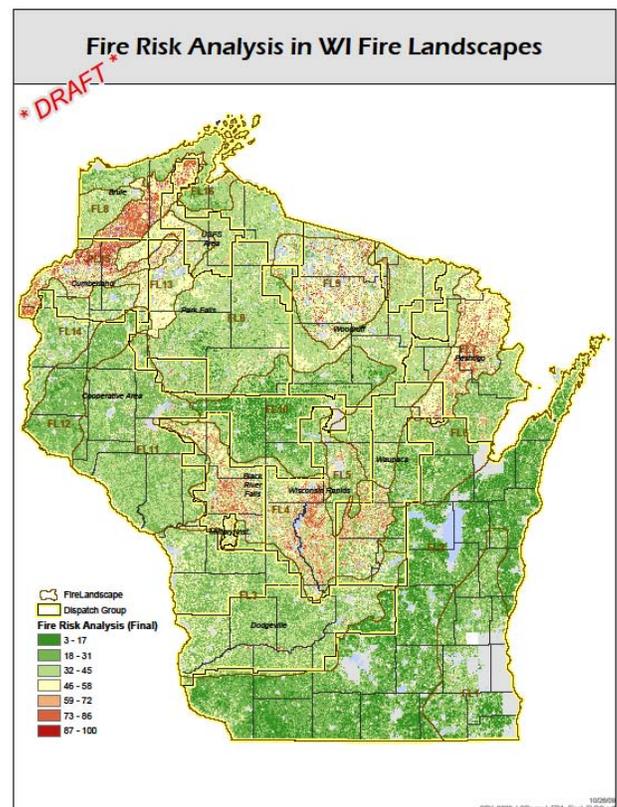
### Community Wildfire History

Historically, there have been a fair amount of fires throughout the Town. In recent years the Town of Rome has averaged about 7 wildfires per year. Fortunately, the average size for a fire has been under one acre however, there is the potential for large-scale forest fires which could burn hundreds or thousands of acres.

In terms of fire causes, there is a perception that campfires post a great risk in the Town, however the leading cause of wildfires in the Town from 2008-2012 was debris burning (25%). Campfires caused only 3 of the 36 wildfires during that time period (8%). There is also a perception that a major challenge in preventing wildfires is related to the large number of non-resident property owners that visit the Town. The data supports this perception. Over the last 5 years, non-residents caused 42% of the fires whereas residents caused 25% of the fires (unknown responsible party 22%; non-human caused 11%).

In the last 10 years, there have been 78 wildfires in the Town of Rome burning a total of 32 acres. Out of those 78 wildfires, the great majority (92%) were less than an acre in size. Of those less than an acre in size, over half (65%) were quite small (less than .10 acre). Six fires (8%) were larger than 1 acre in size.

The largest wildfire in the last 10 years was on a hot day in May 2010. A nearly 13 acre fire burned on wooded Plum Creek land in close proximity to Lake Arrowhead. The cause was not determined. The fire was suppressed using resources from the Wisconsin DNR and Rome and Big Flats Fire Departments.



6 acre wildfire in April 2010

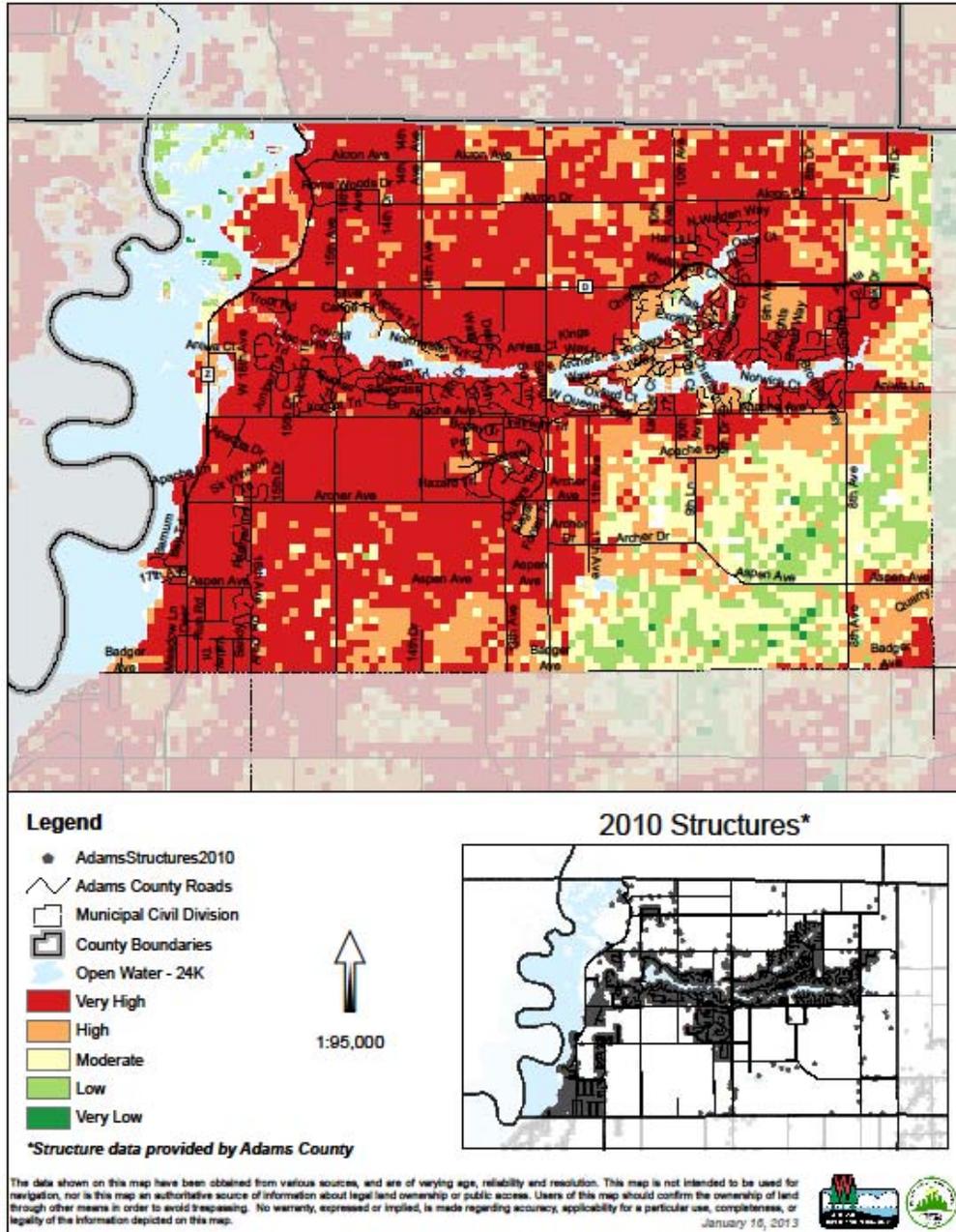
Another larger fire was the Campsite Fire on April 17, 2010 which was 6.12 acres in size and caused by a campfire which was not extinguished the night before. This fire could have been much worse. Fire danger was extreme that day. The fire started early in the morning when fire conditions weren't as bad as they were later during the heat of the day.

Over half the fires (55%) occurred during the months of March, April and May, which is typically the busiest time for wildfires in Wisconsin. Most of the fires (63%) occurred during the weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday).

### 3) RISK ASSESSMENT

Due to the high risk nature throughout most of the town, the entire Town of Rome is designated as being a wildland-urban interface area. The greatest areas of concerns are the densely populated subdivisions around the three lakes of Lake Sherwood, Lake Camelot and Lake Arrowhead as well as several other non-designated subdivisions, which are densely populated. According to a risk assessment conducted by the Wisconsin DNR, the Town of Rome is identified as being at very high risk to wildfire, as shown on the map.

TOWN OF ROME: COMMUNITIES AT RISK



#### 4) GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**Goal:** The goal of this Plan is to set clear priorities for the implementation of wildfire mitigation in the Town of Rome.

**Objectives:** The objectives of this Plan are to:

- Reduce hazardous fuels so that when wildfires do occur they will be less intense and easier to suppress
- Reduce structure ignitability so that homes are more Firewise and better able to survive a wildfire
- Conduct education and outreach to raise awareness of wildfire risk to prevent wildfires and encourage property owners to prepare for wildfire
- Improve emergency preparedness and fire response capability for protection of homes

#### 5) ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

The Rome CWPP Planning Committee identified the following as being issues of concern in the Town of Rome:

##### **Hazardous Fuels**

The accumulation of hazardous fuels on privately owned lots, lake association common areas, and public properties is a hazard to surrounding homes. Concentrations of dead and downed woody material burn readily and are difficult to extinguish. Should this material ignite, the heat can affect surrounding homes as well as throw off embers that can cause homes to ignite. Concentrations of fuel can also serve as “ladder fuel” providing a means for a fire burning along the ground to move into the treetops where it can be more difficult to suppress. It can lead to limited resources being used to extinguish or monitor areas of intense fire activity instead of being able to focus on suppression of the wildfire. Seasonality of property owners may play a role in this issue. Folks coming to the area for weekend visits may not be willing to spend their time working on the removal of dead trees when they could be recreating. However, it’s interesting to note that when we conducted a survey after the fall 2008 trial curbside chipping project, we found that the greater participation came from non-residents.

##### **Structural Ignitability**

Some people assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their home if a wildfire approaches. This is incorrect. During a busy fire day when a major wildfire is burning or when several smaller fires are occurring at the same time, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. That’s why it is so important for homeowners to do their part to protect their home by making it Firewise. The goal is to prepare homes in such a way that they are able to survive a wildfire even without the intervention of firefighters. Seasonality of property owners may be an issue. Folks that visit the area for recreation may be less likely to have homes that are Firewise due to the time investment it takes to maintain a Firewise home. The 2006 Adams County Wildfire Perceptions Survey found that more seasonal residents (47%) listed time as a constraint than permanent residents (26%). However, surprisingly, 67% of seasonal property owners had pruned or removed vegetation around buildings compared to 58% of the permanent residents. This clearly shows that the seasonal population is not as inactive in vegetation management as often thought.

##### **Risk Awareness**

Although many projects have been conducted since 2007 to raise awareness of the risk of destructive wildfires, Town of Rome property owners may not be fully aware of the potential for destructive wildfires, especially with folks visiting from out of the area who may not be aware of local conditions.

We have a good idea of the need for increased awareness of wildfire risk as a result of the public survey which was conducted in August 2012.

- Number of wildfires in Wisconsin: 90% of respondents underestimated the number of fires we have on average each year in DNR protected areas. (On average 1,500 wildfires burn 4,000 acres every year in DNR protected areas.)
- Risk in Town of Rome: The vast majority of folks underestimated the risk of wildfire in the Town of Rome.
  - Only 18% correctly said that Town of Rome rated as being at “very high” risk (Community at Risk

- ranking).
  - Only 35% answered correctly that the number of fires in Town of Rome over last 5 years was 30-59 (actual number of fires: 33). Almost half the people that responded thought there had been fewer fires.
- Personal Risk: Even though most people underestimated the level of risk, they considered their property to be at risk to wildfire and were concerned about wildfire.
  - 64% said they considered their property to be definitely at risk or somewhat at risk from wildfire.
  - 72% said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned that a wildfire could affect their property in the next 5 years.
  - People responded that the possibility of a wildfire caused them to take dead trees and brush to the Town's Transfer Site and maintain a Firewise home.
- Causes of Wildfires: Only 41% of respondents correctly identified debris burning as the leading cause of wildfires in Wisconsin. In 2012, debris burning caused 23% of wildfires followed closely by equipment at 22%. In the survey results, campfires were the next most popular choice followed by lightning. In reality, campfires and lightning cause relatively few wildfires in Wisconsin. In 2012, 3% of wildfires were caused by lightning and 5% by campfires.

### **CWPP Communication**

It is important that Rome's property owners are aware of the mitigation activities and projects undertaken by the Rome CWPP Work Group. Projects carried out by the Work Group are approved by the Town Board so they are aware of the activities that take place but the entire town should be able to celebrate the successes as well.

### **Fire Prevention**

Over the last 10 years, the leading cause of wildfires in Rome was debris burning. The best way to avoid the devastation of wildfires is to avoid fire ignitions. Seasonality might be an issue. Folks from out of the area may not be aware of the risk and therefore become complacent when using fire. People might not be aware of the burning permit system and local burn restrictions. Also, many folks camp on their lots and there is often a great desire to have a campfire when camping, regardless of risk.

### **Evacuation**

Evacuation is an important safety issue. Both emergency responders and residents need to understand what it means to them, long before a wildfire threatens. Rome property owners should be aware of the role they play in preparedness and early evacuation, if called for by local officials. A good understanding of issues surrounding evacuation can improve safety for both residents and responding firefighters.

### **Driveway Access**

Brush along driveways may impede accessibility to emergency vehicles. Driveways need to be wide enough to accommodate a large fire engine and have adequate overhead clearance. Tree branches and other plant vegetation above and along driveways should be trimmed back on a regular basis.

## **6) MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

Wildfire mitigation can be defined as those actions taken to reduce the likelihood of loss due to wildfire. Effective wildfire mitigation can be accomplished through a variety of methods. For every issue identified by the Planning Committee, possible strategies were developed to address them. The Planning Committee prioritized the solutions during an exercise in which the strategies were scored along a priority scale from 1 (we should not do this project) to 3 (this is a high priority project).

2.5 - 3.0 = This is a high priority project we should definitely try to complete during the next five years. (High priority)

2.0 - 2.4 = This is a good project to do during the 5 year plan period if time allows. (Medium priority)

1.0 - 1.9 = We should not pursue this project in the next 5 years. (Low priority)

**Hazardous Fuels Reduction Strategies**

- Continue to offer curbside brush pick-up projects throughout the Town on a rotating basis. (High 3.0)
- Create a publication called "*Guide to Hazardous Fuels Reduction in the Town of Rome*". (High 2.6)

**Structural Ignitability Reduction Strategies**

- Promote the Firewise Video "*Wildfire in Wisconsin: Would YOUR home survive?*" (High 2.9)
- Offer a presentation on recommendations for the home ignition zone during the summer. (High 2.7)
- Continue to offer home ignition zone (HIZ) assessments in conjunction with curbside brush pick-up projects. (Medium 2.4)

**Education and Outreach Strategies**

## Risk Awareness

- Post the map which shows the footprint of the Cottonville Fire over the Town of Rome at the Wildfire Information Spaces. (High 2.7)
- When ground is not completely snow-covered, put an image of Smokey on Channel 300 with web address and phone number to find out the fire danger for the day. (Medium 2.3)
- Put up a poster size Community at Risk map of the Town of Rome at the Wildfire Information Spaces. (Medium 2.3)
- Set up a Firewise display at local events. (Medium 2.1)
- Create a map that shows Rome's wildfire history and post at Wildfire Information Spaces and on Firewise webpage. (Medium 2.1)
- Mail wildfire information packets to new property owners and make them available for pick up at the Wildfire Information Spaces. (Low 1.7)

## CWPP Awareness

- Develop and maintain a Firewise webpage on the Town's website. (High 2.7)
- Create a Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update publication and mail it to all property owners in Rome. (High 2.6)
- Create an annual summary of CWPP progress at the end of the calendar year and share with the public. (Medium 2.3)

## Wildfire Prevention

- Maintain Wildfire Information Spaces for CWPP information and updates at the Rome Town Hall, Pritzl's, and three lake lodges. (High 2.6)
- Plan an outreach project during Wildfire Prevention Week in April for each year of the Plan. (Medium 2.3)
- Make fire prevention packets available at the Wildfire Information Spaces for pick up and take advantage of opportunities to make the public aware of their availability. (Medium 2.1)

**Emergency Preparedness and Fire Response Capability Strategies**

## Evacuation

- Ensure the viability of the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue Dam evacuation route. (Medium 2.4)
- Create an evacuation publication for the Town of Rome. (Medium 2.3)

## Driveway Access

- Hang fire engine banners on Rome's fire equipment during community events and hand out driveway access brochures along with information on the home ignition zone and driveway permits. (Medium 2.1)

**7) MITIGATION ACTION PLAN**

Out of all the strategies discussed, those of highest priority were included in the Mitigation Action Plan to be implemented during the time period of 2013-2017.

<b>ROME'S MITIGATION ACTION PLAN 2013-2017</b>			
<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Lead</b>
<b>ANNUAL PROJECTS</b>			
Curbside Brush Pick-Up	Offer curbside brush pick-up throughout the Town on a rotating basis. Include an offer for a home ignition zone assessment.	Think about setting up a predicable schedule, offering summer projects, and increasing the number of days offered. Promote projects through use of Channel 300, Town Firewise webpage, association newsletters and by posting at Wildfire Information Spaces.	Rome Public Works
Wildfire Prevention Week	Plan an outreach project during Wildfire Prevention Week in April each year.	Some ideas are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wildfire placemats at lodge restaurants and local restaurants</li> <li>▪ Wildfire banners displayed at town hall, Pritzls, and lodges</li> <li>▪ Give out Pritzl's cloth grocery bags with wildfire prevention/Firewise message</li> <li>▪ Firewise tip of the day on Fire Department marquis sign outside the town hall</li> </ul>	WUI
CWPP Annual Summary	Create an annual summary of CWPP progress at the end of each calendar year and share with the public.	Share through use of Channel 300, lake association newsletters, Firewise webpage, and at Wildfire Information Spaces.	WUI
Driveway Access Information	Hang fire engine banners on Rome Fire Department equipment during community events.	Hand out driveway access brochure along with information on the home ignition zone and information regarding driveway permits.	Fire Chief
Wildfire Information Packets	Mail wildfire information packets to new property owners and make them available for pick up at Wildfire Information Spaces.	Conduct a GIS query annually (maybe through county GIS) to identify new property owners.	Nek Rgr
Firewise Display	Set up Firewise display at select local events.	Rome Annual Meeting (April), Environmental Day (April), Taste of Rome (July), Fire Department Open House (October). Show Firewise Video when appropriate. Fire Department will hand out information at other community events.	Rome Public Works
Firewise Communities (FWC)	FWC representatives will keep their association members informed regarding issues related to wildfire.	Each FWC representative will maintain the Wildfire Information Space at their lodge; ensure there is a link on their websites to the Town's Firewise page; and keep their membership aware of activities occurring at the town level.	FWC Reps
<b>2013 PROJECTS</b>			
Firewise Webpage	Develop and maintain a Firewise webpage on Town website.	Associations and Adams County will provide links to the Town's page. Include: PDF of CWPP, link to fire danger, link to Firewise video, survey results, local fire statistics,	Rome Public Works & Rome

		promote CWPP projects, and annual CWPP updates. Also: map of footprint of Cottonville Fire, map of Rome wildfire history, and Rome Community at Risk map.	Clerk
Wildfire Information Spaces	Maintain Wildfire Information Spaces for wildfire information and CWPP updates.	Set up a bulletin board or kiosk at the town hall, Pritzls, and three lake lodges to post information on wildfire risk, fire prevention, and current projects. Include: map of Cottonville footprint over Rome; poster-size Community at Risk map of the Town of Rome; and CWPP Annual Updates.	Rome Public Works
CWPP 5 Year Update	Create a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Update publication and mail it to all property owners in Rome.	Publication will be full color, with information on last 5 years, plans for next 5 years, and other relevant wildfire information.	WUI
Evacuation Route	Ensure the viability of the 10 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Dam evacuation route.	Work with Adams County to firm up procedures. Can the Town do the maintenance necessary to ensure access to the Dam route? Post evacuation signage where needed.	EM Dir
Fire Danger Update	When ground is not completely snow-covered, put an image of Smokey on Channel 300 with web address and phone number to learn fire danger for the day.	Website: <a href="http://dnr.wi.gov">dnr.wi.gov</a> search "fire danger" Phone Number: 1-888-WIS-BURN	Nek Rgr
Community At Risk Map	Create a Community at Risk map of the Town of Rome.	Post a poster size map at Wildfire Information Spaces and put an 8.5 x 11 version on Firewise webpage.	WUI
Rome Wildfire History Map	Create a map that shows Rome's wildfire history.	Post at Wildfire Information Spaces and on Firewise webpage.	Nek Rgr
<b>2014 PROJECTS</b>			
Evacuation Information	Mail a general publication on evacuation to all property owners with a cover letter from the Fire Chief.	Encourage folks to make a personal evacuation plan and make them aware of the evacuation process including what to take with them.	EM Dir & Fire Chief
Hazardous Fuels Publication	Create a publication called " <i>Guide to Hazardous Fuels Reduction in the Town of Rome</i> ".	Topics to include: transfer site, nuisance ordinance, confusion between Firewise/CWPP groups, contractors. Make it available on website and as a hand out.	Rome Public Works
Firewise Presentation	Offer a presentation on recommendations for the home ignition zone during the summer.	Choose a Saturday morning (9-11 a.m.) (Not the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Saturday in July and not a holiday weekend.) Advertise on marquis signs in front of Town Hall and put up posters.	WUI

## 8) PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTENANCE

The Rome CWPP Work Group will meet as needed, but at least quarterly. The Plan will be updated by the end of 2017, if not before.