

**WILLOW CREEK (WUI # 12)
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN
A Supplement to the
CATRON COUNTY
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**



**A Continuing Effort
by and for the Citizens of Catron County, New Mexico**

Ed Wehrheim, Chairman, Catron County Commission
Don Weaver, Coordinator, Catron County CWPP Core Group
in partnership with the New Mexico State Forestry Dept. and Catron County Rural Fire Departments

Assisted by the San Francisco Soil & Water Conservation District, the U.S. Forest Service, the US Bureau of Land Management, Southwest Center for Resource Analysis at Western New Mexico University, University of New Mexico, and Northern Arizona University School of Forestry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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SIGNATURES

DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT AND CONCURRENCE

The following partners in the development of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan have reviewed and do mutually agree or concur with its contents:

Ed Wehrheim, Chairman, Catron County Commission Date

Doug Boykin, Forester, New Mexico State Forestry Department Date

Donal R. Weaver, Catron County Wildfire Prevention Coordinator Date

Fred Wey, Chief, Mogollon Volunteer Fire Department Date

Concurrence

Rogers Steed, District Ranger, Reserve Date

Pat Morrison, District Ranger, Glenwood Date

Alan E. Koss, District Ranger, Wilderness Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement.....	2
Signatures	3
DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT AND CONCURRENCE	3
Table of Contents	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction.....	5
Overview:.....	5
Goals And Objectives.....	5
Future Desired Condition and Relevant Fire Authorities	6
Relevant Authorities	6
Planning Area Boundaries	6
Planning Process	6
History	6
Collaboration.....	7
Methodology.....	7
Public Involvement.....	8
Community Profile	8
WUI Description	8
Planning for the Future.....	12
Recap Of Objectives.....	12
Implementation/Mitigation	12
Appendix Volume 2	15
Table: Vegetation Types.....	16
Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP.....	17
Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP, Appendix Volume 2.....	18
Appendix Volume 3	19
Map 1: Steepness of Slopes	20
Map 2: Vegetative Type Groups.....	21
Map 3: Land Ownership	22
Map 4: Threatened and Endangered.....	23
Map 5: FireThreat.....	24
Map 6: Fire Regime Condition Class	25
Map 7: FRCC Abundance Class	26
Map 8: FRCC Risk of Vegetative Condition Not Being Sustainable	27
Map 9: Machine Accessible Areas.....	28
Map 10: Final Treatment Priorities	29
Map 11: WUI Relative to HUC 6 Watersheds.....	30
Map 12: Treatment Priority by HUC 6 Watershed	31
Map 13: Regap Vegetation Types.....	32
Map 14: Proposed Mitigation Priorities	33

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Willow Creek Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a supplement to the Catron County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The County CWPP completed in October, 2005 assesses the wildfire threat and hazardous fuels treatment priorities on a landscape scale. The Willow Creek CWPP uses the data and findings of the County CWPP to assess the wildfire threat and treatment priorities specific to the Willow Creek Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) (#12). Mitigation which will reduce the threat of wildfire damage to property, life and the land are proposed. Project scale data from the County CWPP and other sources is presented to aid in planning and design of the proposed projects.

INTRODUCTION

Overview:

The Willow Creek WUI #12 as delineated in the County CWPP is located primarily in Indian Creek and Willow Creek Canyons on the north edge of the Gila Wilderness. A small portion of roadless study area, some of the Gila Wilderness, Gila National Forest and some private land is included within the boundaries. Besides about 60 private summer homes on the private land there is a Forest Service cabin with barn, a NM State Game and Fish cabin, summer special use cabins, a popular Wilderness trailhead and several developed campgrounds on the National Forest. Willow Creek is a popular recreation and fishing area. There are many very steep slopes and generally very high fuel loads. These characteristics are the reason the Willow Creek WUI area rated second in treatment priority in the County CWPP.

The County CWPP contains a thorough presentation of how determinations of values at risk, risk of occurrence and fire threat were used to locate the areas and values most at risk from catastrophic wildfire in the County and to prioritize treatment needs. Please refer to the County CWPP for more information. It is not the intent of this plan to duplicate the County CWPP. The general outline of the County CWPP is followed in this CWPP, except where there is no supplement necessary to the County CWPP.

Goals And Objectives

As a supplement to the County CWPP, the main objective of the Willow Creek CWPP is to propose work needed to reduce and mitigate fire threat. To accomplish this objective

this supplement continues the collaboration started in the County CWPP, coordinating the needed work with past efforts, the various land owners and other interest.

Future Desired Condition and Relevant Fire Authorities

The desired condition for WUI areas as stated in the County CWPP will be difficult to obtain: "The desired condition for WUI areas is a fire safe environment around protected improvements that will provide "defensible space" for firefighters in the event of a wildfire in the surrounding area". The combination of high fuel loading, high elevation forests, steep slopes, Wilderness and Roadless Study areas and environment concerns such as the Mexican spotted owl complicate matters considerably. Although it may not be possible to obtain the level of protection and degree of defensible space desired by many concerned parties, this plan seeks to propose the mitigation that will do the best that can be done under the circumstances.

Relevant Authorities

The Willow Creek summer home area lies in a canyon at the foot of an extremely steep north facing slope with the boundary of the Gila Wilderness on the ridge top. Since the Wilderness lies south, southwest and west of this WUI and contains extremely high fuel loading, the legal options for treatments is of concern. Research of these options resulted in the following findings:

Wildland fire use and limited prescribed fire can be used in the Wilderness.

Planning Area Boundaries

The Willow Creek WUI boundary is modified slightly by this supplement. The boundary is redrawn to include The Gilita Creek Campground.

PLANNING PROCESS

History

The original road to Willow Creek and the trailhead for the trail to White Creek Cabin crossed the flat ridge tops on "Willow Creek Mesa" and north of Indian Creek. The "old timers" tell about how the flat areas north and south of Indian Creek were all open Ponderosa pine with long sight distances under large timber. The "trail" to White Creek Cabin was actually a road. A generator was pulled in and out each field season for use using a small tractor. Many of the structures in this WUI are near 50 years old. An old CCC cabin at the USFS site is on the National Registry.

The first major timber sale activity was in the 1960's with some salvage of wind throw following that sale into the early 1970's. The Indian Timber Sale located either side of Indian Creek was in the 1980's. The Adam-Hoague timber sale was mostly cable yarding on steeper slopes that closely followed the Indian Sale.

The 65,000+ acre Bear Fire of June, 2006 covered all but the southwest 1/3 of this WUI. The largest 100% mortality areas were all to the north of this WUI. There are numerous smaller high mortality areas in the WUI area, but since these areas are scattered and relatively small, the original priorities for treatment in the WUI are not significantly different from what was proposed before the fire. The fire did reduce the amount of fuel treatment work needed since ground fuels and varying amounts of thinning was accomplished. In priority area 2 on the south facing slope for instance, the fire did some thinning in the smaller trees but mostly the fire remained on the ground reducing the ground fuels without high mortality in the large timber. This was partly because of burn-out operations done by smoke jumpers at a time of day when lower temperatures and higher humidity was most favorable to burnout. Priority area 7 received little large tree mortality because this area was thinned well in the old Indian Sale. Priority 6 area received the most mortality because of the denser understory. Priority 1 was not in the Bear Fire. Priority 5 did not receive much mortality. The portion of 8 that was in the Bear Fire burned hot in patches with maybe 1/3 of the burned area with large tree high mortality. These burned patches should help provide control points if there is an opportunity to use fire use in 8. The extreme fire threat SW of the Willow Creek summer home area is still the same.

Collaboration

Besides the meetings held around the County for the County Wildfire Protection Plan including a couple of meetings on-site for agency collaboration, a public meeting was held for this specific CWPP on May 27, 2006 at the Willow Creek summer homes. Comments from all these meetings and contacts were incorporated in a rough draft. Comments on the rough draft were incorporated in a draft which was sent out for a last review by the involved agencies before the final was signed.

Methodology

Most of the data used for this CWPP is from the County CWPP and was scaled to fit this WUI, Although the County CWPP was a landscape scale analysis, much of the data originated at a scale that fits the purpose of this CWPP (30x30 meter satellite imagery for example). In addition collaborative input from the various cooperators and interested parties was obtained through group meetings and individual contacts.

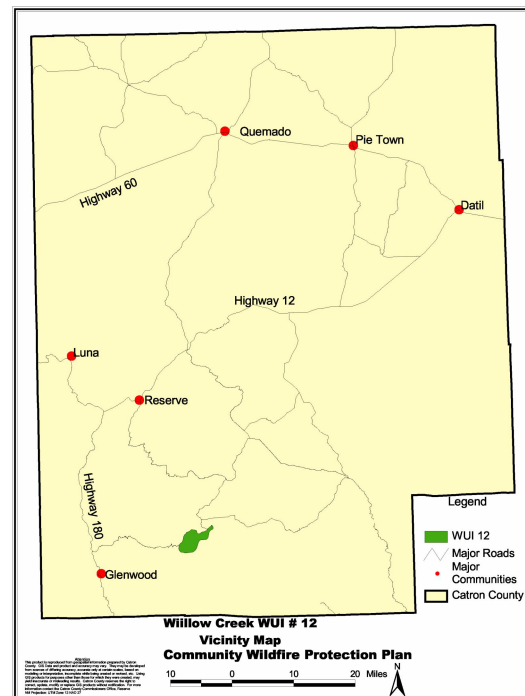
Public Involvement

In addition to the public involvement for the County CWPP, a meeting with Willow Creek on 9/5/05 was held by Forest Service representatives. There have been several meetings and contacts with the land owners upon the occasion of fuels work being done by fire crews or during forest fire activity in the general area. See comments under above Collaboration section.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

WUI Description

The Willow Creek WUI area is about 30 air miles southeast of Reserve and about 30 miles east of Mogollon. Access to the area is generally closed during a portion of each winter due to deep snows especially out to Mogollon as the road crosses elevations over 9000' and is on a north facing slope for a long distance. Most of the land is National Forest. Only a narrow strip of private land is in Willow Creek. Two Ranger districts on the Gila NF are involved, Glenwood and Reserve. The Glenwood District is basically the Wilderness on the south and Roadless area on the west. Reserve District administers the remainder except the Mineral Creek grazing allotment which is administered by the Glenwood district, although a portion of the allotment is on the Reserve District.



Elevation ranges from 7800 to 9720 feet within the WUI so the area straddles the transition zone between ponderosa pine and mixed conifer types. The mixed conifers include some ponderosa pine but are mostly Douglas fir, white fir and Engleman spruce along with some Colorado blue spruce, southwestern white pine and quaking aspen. As can be seen in the table below 93% of the area is in a "closed" canopy condition with

only about 7% of the area in an "open" canopy or grassland condition. See maps for Forest Type, Structural Stage and Regap Cover Types.

Willow Creek WUI (#12) (revised from County Plan)
Machine Accessibility by Ownership, Cover Type and Density

Machine Accessible	Owner	Acres by Cover Type and Density							Grass/ Shrub Other	Total
		Ponderosa Pine Open	Ponderosa Pine Closed	Mixed Conifer Open	Mixed Conifer Closed	Pinyon Juniper Open	Pinyon Juniper Closed			
no	FS	77	1,331	20	3,268	0	1	165	4,862	
no	PVT	2	26	0	1	0	0	0	29	
yes	FS	271	1375	8	729	0	0	6	2,389	
yes	PVT	10	35	0	1	0	0	0	46	
	Totals	360	2,767	28	3,999	0	1	171	7,326	

Closed Density Summary

Machine Accessible	Closed
no	4,627
yes	2,140
Total	6,766

Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) within the WUI boundary is 89% class 3 and most of the remainder class 2. This gives some indication of the generally "unnaturally" dense existing condition of the vegetation. More information on FRCC can be found in the County CWPP. Briefly, fire regime condition class is a classification of the amount of departure from the natural regime. The three classes for FRCC are:

1. Low, class 1, <=33% departure
2. Moderate, class 2, >33% to 66% departure
3. High, class 3, >66% departure

FRCC mapping of the abundance classes shows that most (84%) of the Willow Creek WUI area is rated high. Abundance class is a slightly different view of FRCC and is the amount of a vegetation-fuel class compared to the reference condition amount, classified into rare, similar, moderate and high. The management implications are recruit for rare, maintain for similar and reduce for moderate and high.

1. Rare, < -25% difference
2. Similar, > -25% and < +25% difference
3. Moderate, >= +25% and <= +75% difference
4. High, > +75% difference

FRCC mapping of the risk classes shows that most (89%) of the Willow Creek WUI area is rated high. The risk of a vegetative condition not being sustainable is shown by risk class which is an index based on the difference of vegetation-fuel class amount from the reference amount. Classified into low, moderate and high, it indicates the level of key ecosystem component risk of sustainability from unplanned disturbances, such as wildfire.

1. High, < -75% or > +75% difference
2. Moderate, -25% to -75% or +25% to +75% difference
3. Low, -25% to +25% difference

**Catron County Wildfire Protection Plan
Fire Regime Condition Class Mapping Summary**

	Class	Acres	% of Total	Total Check
FRCC	0(null)	159	2	7,327
	1	9	0	
	2	612	8	
	3	6,546	89	
			100	
Risk	Null	159	2	7,327
	Low	9	0	
	Moderate	624	9	
	High	6,535	89	
			100	
Abundance	Null	159	2	7,327
	Rare	390	5	
	Similar	9	0	
	Moderate	612	8	
	High	6,157	84	
			100	

**Willow Creek WUI
Slope Classes**

In the County CWPP, slope steepness was mapped in 4 classes. The area of each slope class in this WUI is as shown in the following table. Also see map Slope % Classes.

Slope%	Acres
0-10	1188
11-20	1490
21-35	2468
35+	2181

Fire threat was modeled and mapped in the County CWPP to rate the fire threat within each WUI area as compared to the fire threat in other WUI areas. The Willow Creek WUI is mostly in the top 1/3 of the rating for fire threat. See map for Fire Threat.

Past occurrence of lightning and man-caused fires was mapped and considered in determining treatment priorities in the County CWPP. This WUI is all in high lightning occurrence area and mostly all in high man-caused occurrence area. See Map 6, "Risk of Human and Lightning Caused Wildfire" in the County CWPP.

Treatment priority was modeled and mapped in the County CWPP to rate the fire threat within each WUI area as compared to the treatment priorities in other WUI areas and also to show a weighted average of the fire threat ratings for each WUI. The weighted average fire threat places the Willow Creek WUI as second in need for treatment out of 196 WUI areas in the County. The Willow Creek WUI is mostly in the top 1/3 priority for treatment. See map Treatment Priorities. There is other consideration on determining treatment priorities not considered at the County CWPP landscape scale.

One of these considerations is proximity to endangered structures. There is a need for some balance between treatment priorities as determined in the County CWPP and other concerns about priority such as proximity. In determining the priority of proposed projects in this plan, the priority generally decreases with increased distance from the value at risk. Completion of all proposed mitigation in this WUI before moving to projects in lower priority WUI areas would not be wise.

There are three Threatened and Endangered species in this WUI, the Mexican spotted owl, loach minnow and leopard frog (see T&E map 4 in Appendix Volume 3). Certain Threatened and Endangered species was considered as part of the other values at risk in the modeling of treatment priorities in the County CWPP. There may be other T&E species present in this WUI. The NEPA process will have to deal with the restrictions, guidelines and protection of those species. It is not within the scope of this plan to resolve the conflict between the actions needed to return the vegetation to a more natural condition and the restrictions meant to protect species by preserving the existing condition.

Recreational use is by far the most important human use of this area and is an important contributor to the economy of the County. Recreational use was rated over the County in the County CWPP. See map Recreational Use for the ratings in this area as compared to the remainder of the County.

The Willow Creek subdivision survey platt of 90 lots as filed in the County Clerk office is dated 1962. There are presently 62 addresses recorded in the County E911 address GIS records. All structures in the Willow Creek subdivision are located in the canyon bottom on a narrow strip of private land of about 74 acres and about 1.5 miles long. Safe evacuation in the event of a fast moving wildfire burning under high or extreme fire danger is definitely a potential problem under the present conditions. The dead-end road into the subdivision is the only vehicle access with no good safety zones that would assure survival under severe burning conditions. A few structures might survive such a fire if prepared with foam, etc. but firefighters definitely could not remain in the area during such an event. The Willow Creek mesa road (FR 28) is not far to the north, but is at the top of a steep slope of mostly dense ponderosa pine. Willow Creek is a perennial stream and an excellent source of water for fire fighting. Options for building an alternate road for escape are near non-existent because of Wilderness and steep slopes. Evacuation and structure protection plans have been completed for Willow Creek.

Downstream from the Willow Creek subdivision is the U.S. Forest Service Administrative site with a cabin, barn, the old CCC bunkhouse and several other outbuildings. A short distance further downstream is a cabin owned by the NM State Game and Fish. One developed USFS campground is between the USFS admin site and Willow Creek subdivision and two are downstream from these two administrative sites. The two lower sites received severe flood damage following the Bear Fire. Development in the campgrounds consists of small toilet buildings and tables with parking spots. Evacuation and safety zones are not as great a problem for these areas as the area upstream in Willow Creek subdivision. In the event of a wildfire, pre-treatment

of the structures would have a good chance of success, although fire fighting personnel would probably not want to be in the area during a worst case wildfire. There are safety zones available in open meadows that would probably be survivable but risky.

There were four special use cabins located in Indian Creek which is the next large drainage north of Willow Creek. One of these cabins burned in the Bear Fire. These cabins are small. Evacuation is one-way out to the west that could easily be blocked by a wildfire, however there is an escape route to acceptable safety zones in the meadow below the cabins. These cabins are under special use permit by the USFS.

This WUI is entirely within two HUC 6 watersheds with 2 or more State 303d listed water bodies.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Recap Of Objectives

The objectives of the Catron County Community Wildfire Protection Plan were:

- Create a county-wide, landscape level plan
- Locate the highest areas at risk from catastrophic wildfire in the County
- Prioritize these areas based on the values of the citizens of the County
- Suggest mitigation actions for the protection of life, property, critical infrastructure and wildlands in the County, based on
 - Optimum treatment efficiency
 - Lowest treatment cost
 - Highest benefit to local economy
- Follow-through to on-the-ground level by developing local Wildfire Protection Plans for implementation of objectives of this County-wide Plan

The objective of the Willow Creek Community Wildfire Protection Plan is to propose work needed to reduce and mitigate fire threat.

Implementation/Mitigation

Several mitigations are proposed to reduce and mitigate fire threat within the Willow Creek WUI and are summarized in the following 2 tables. Mitigation needs are listed by priority in the first table and are as shown on Map 14: Proposed Mitigation Priorities in Appendix Volume 3. Proposed mitigation projects are listed in the second table.

Mitigation Needs by Priority for the Willow Creek WUI (# 12)

Last update: 08/30/07 ZDM

MITIGATION PRIORITIES			
No.	Mitigation Name	Owner	Description of Needs
1	West Fuel Break	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, prescribed burning, small amounts of commercial size material but not likely economical
2	Willow Creek Slopes	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, prescribed burning, commercial cutting economics doubtful except near road on S side
3	Willow Creek Subdivision	PVT	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal Owner Education
4	Indian Creek Cabins	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, Bear Fire Salvage, commercial harvest
5	Lower Willow Creek	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, prescribed burning
6	Indian Creek	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, Bear Fire Salvage, commercial harvest
7	Willow Creek Mesa	NF	thin, pile/burn, chip, pruning, removal, Bear Fire Salvage, commercial harvest
8	Wilderness/Roadless	NF	Much of west end is very steep & dense MC nearly impossible to Rx Burn. Some less steep PP and MC could be burned but expensive due to line construction required, however the hot burn spots from the Bear Fire could provide some good anchor points.
Other	Fire Department		explore and implement seasonal fire department capabilities. may be some interest in Willow Creek Subdivision

Mitigation Projects for the Willow Creek WUI (# 12)

Last update: 08/30/07 ZDM

PROJECTS					
Mitigation Priorities Included	Name or Description	Status and Remarks	Acres	Estimated Cost/ac.	Total Estimated Cost
1,2, 5	Willow Creek WUI	NEPA process starting (EA), Thin and prescribed fire slopes not too steep in 1 and north facing slope of 2, all of south facing slope of 2 and same for upper 1/2 of 5.	1224		
3	Willow Creek Subdivision Needs Survey	Survey to determine work still needed for specific properties. Most lots still need work post-Bear Fire.	69		
3	Willow Creek Subdivision Owners Education	To follow Needs Survey to educate specific Owners of specific needs on their property.	69		
4,6,7, small parts of 2,5	Willow Creek Salvage	Salvage of dead trees killed in the Bear Fire 6/06	1800		
4,6, small parts of 2 & 7	Indian Creek Restoration Project	planned for this area and areas to north & east in the Gilita/Indian Creek drainages.	1350		
8	Wilderness	Multi phased prescribed fire to prepare the Wilderness adjacent to private property. To allow the safe use of Wildlnd Fire Use fires in the Wilderness.			
All	Fire Use	Fire Use Planning done for entire WUI. Fire Use near homes except under best conditions needs completion of above projects	7327		
Other	Willow Creek Fire Dept. Feasibility Study	Largely dependent on interest of subdivision residents but if interested, alternatives need analysis	N/A		

The above tables are subject to change for numerous reasons such as funding limitations, funding source, fire use and wildfire. The above tables will be updated as needed to reflect current priorities, proposals and status. The proposed mitigation may be implemented in stages, split up, or combined to form projects either entirely or partly within the WUI.

Funding for the above proposed mitigation will be coordinated between the USFS, County and State Forestry.

**WILLOW CREEK
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**

APPENDIX VOLUME 2

Data

**Supplement to the
CATRON COUNTY
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**

Acknowledgement	2
Signatures	3
DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT AND CONCURRENCE	3
Table of Contents	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	5
Overview:	5
Goals And Objectives.....	5
Future Desired Condition and Relevant Fire Authorities.....	6
Relevant Authorities.....	6
Planning Area Boundaries	6
Planning Process	6
History.....	6
Collaboration	7
Methodology.....	7
Public Involvement	8
Community Profile.....	8
WUI Description.....	8
Planning for the Future.....	12
Recap Of Objectives.....	12
Implementation/Mitigation.....	12
Appendix Volume 2	15
Table: Vegetation Types.....	17
Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP.....	18
Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP, Appendix Volume 2	19
Appendix Volume 3	20
Map 1: Steepness of Slopes	21
Map 2: Vegetative Type Groups.....	22
Map 3: Land Ownership.....	23
Map 4: Threatened and Endangered	24
Map 5: FireThreat	25
Map 6: Fire Regime Condition Class.....	26
Map 7: FRCC Abundance Class	27
Map 8: FRCC Risk of Vegetative Condition Not Being Sustainable	28
Map 9: Machine Accessible Areas.....	29
Map 10: Final Treatment Priorities.....	30
Map 11: WUI Relative to HUC 6 Watersheds	31
Map 12: Treatment Priority by HUC 6 Watershed.....	32
Map 13: Regap Vegetation Types.....	33
Map 14: Proposed Mitigation Priorities	34

Table: Vegetation Types

Cover Type Values						Precent Composition					
Regap class	CWPP class	PNVG	Cover Type	0-24 Value	Base 3 Value	PNV/GIS Code	Early	Open	Closed	Acres	
22	MC	MCAN	S023	18	2.2500	340	10	80	10	663	
26	MC	SPFI7	S028	19	2.3750	360	25	30	45	77	
28	MC	SPFI7	S030	16	2.0000	360	25	30	45	539	
30	MC	MCAN	S032	22	2.7500	340	10	80	10	1196	
32	MC	MCAN	S034	21	2.6250	340	10	80	10	1552	
Mixed Conifer Totals and Weighted Average=								12.29	72.35	15.35	4,027
41	PJ	PPIN7*	S046	11	1.3750	120	20	10	70	1	
Pinyon/Juniper Totals and Weighted Average=								20	10	70	1
34	PP	PPIN7	S036	23	2.8750	330	15	80	5	3,127	
Ponderosa Pine Totals and Weighted Average=								15	80	5	3,127
5	Other	ROCK	S006	0	0.0000					163	
71	G/S	MGRA1	S085	2	2.5000					8	
Other Total and Weighted Average=											171
										7,326	
*listed under PPIN7 in one NF crosswalk and under CHAP5 in another. Type is definitely more a PJ woodland type than a Ponderosa Pine type.											

The above table summarizes information about the regap cover types, relative fire threat and structural stage reference conditions. The column CWPP class shows the grouping of the regap classes into the groups: Ponderosa pine, Mixed Conifer, Pinyon/Juniper, Grass/Shrub and Other. Potential natural vegetation group (PNVG), Cover Type and GIS Code are designators used in various reference information. The 0-24 Value is a relative fire threat value assigned in the County CWPP analysis, i.e. the higher the value the higher the fire threat. The Base 3 Value is the 0-24 Value divided by 8. The reference condition is shown in the Percent Composition columns. Weighted average percent compositions are shown for each Cover Type group (except for the Other group). The weighted average is useful since there is most often an intermingled mix of regap classes. The “reference” condition is just that. It is one of the sources of reference information about the condition necessary for reduction of fire threat and sustainable ecological health.

Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP

Signatures	Vegetation Cover Type
DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT AND CONCURRENCE	Insects And Diseases
Table of Contents	Values at Risk
Preface	Structures, infrastructure
Introduction	Economic values (business, industry)
Overview:	Wildlife Habitat
Goals And Objectives	Watershed And Wetland Resources
Building together to a common goal	Fire Risk/ Risk of Occurrence
Collaborative assessment of values at risk and protection priorities	Fire Regime Condition Class
Future Desired Condition and Relevant Fire Authorities	Treatment Priorities
Desired condition	Summary of the Analysis Results
Relevant Authorities	Summary of the Analysis Results
Planning Area Boundaries	Planning for the Future
Definitions of areas	Recap Of Objectives
Planning Process	Implementation/Mitigation
History	Environmental Justice
Collaboration	Catastrophic Wildfires and Environmental Justice
Methodology	Prescription Guidelines
First Stage Public Involvement	Hazardous fuels reduction
Analysis: Design of analysis and determination of data needed	Education And Community Outreach
Collection and Preparation of Data	Additional Recommendations
Analysis Model Development	Reduce ISO
Model Validation	Current Projects And Policies
Second Stage Public Involvement	Structure Ignitability
Draft Plan	Funding
Public Comment	Project specific funding
Final Plan	Planning Summary
Community Profile	Monitoring and Evaluation
County Description	Who Will Monitor and Evaluate
Fire Threat	What will be evaluated
	Funding For Monitoring And Evaluation
	Appendix
	Endnotes

Subject List from Table Contents for Catron County CWPP, Appendix Volume 2

Relevant Authorities
Federal
State
County
Village of Reserve
Planning Area Boundaries
Methodology for Establishment of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Boundaries
Table - Count of E911 Addresses and Model Value per WUI
Table: Evacuation and Communications Site Model Values per WUI

Planning Process: Table of Partners
Methodology
Public Involvement: Stage One
Brochure
Script for Public Meetings
Analysis
Model Development
Flow Diagram
GIS Data Analysis Methodology
Fire Threat
Table: Fuel Hazard (Fire) Threat Values Crosswalk (sort by regap class)
Table: Acres by Regap Vegetation Data
Table: Vegetation Types
Risk of Occurrence
Values at Risk
Table: Count of Addresses and Model Value per HUC 6 Watershed

Table: Subdivision Data
Table: Community Subdivision Ratings of Various Attributes by Fire Dept.
Column Keys for Table Community/Subdivision Ratings by Fire Dept.

Diagram: Weighting Constants for Analysis Model
Final Determination of Treatment Priority
Treatment Priority Determination by WUI and HUC6 Watersheds

Assignment of Threatened and Endangered Species Values
Table: T&E Species Values
Assignment of Downstream Damage Values
Assignment of Recreation Use Values
Assignment of Water Quality Values
Assignment of Access Values
Machine Accessibility, Determination of Net Acres of Closed Density To Be Treated
SW New Mexico Interagency Fire Regime Condition Class Mapping

Table: FRCC Mapping Summary
Vegetation Species
Insects
Diseases
Noxious Weeds
Fish & Wildlife Concerns/Threatened And Endangered Species
Cultural Resources
Watershed And Wetland Resources
Table: Final Priority Rating Weighted Average per WUI
Table: Final Priority Rating Weighted Average per HUC 6 Watershed

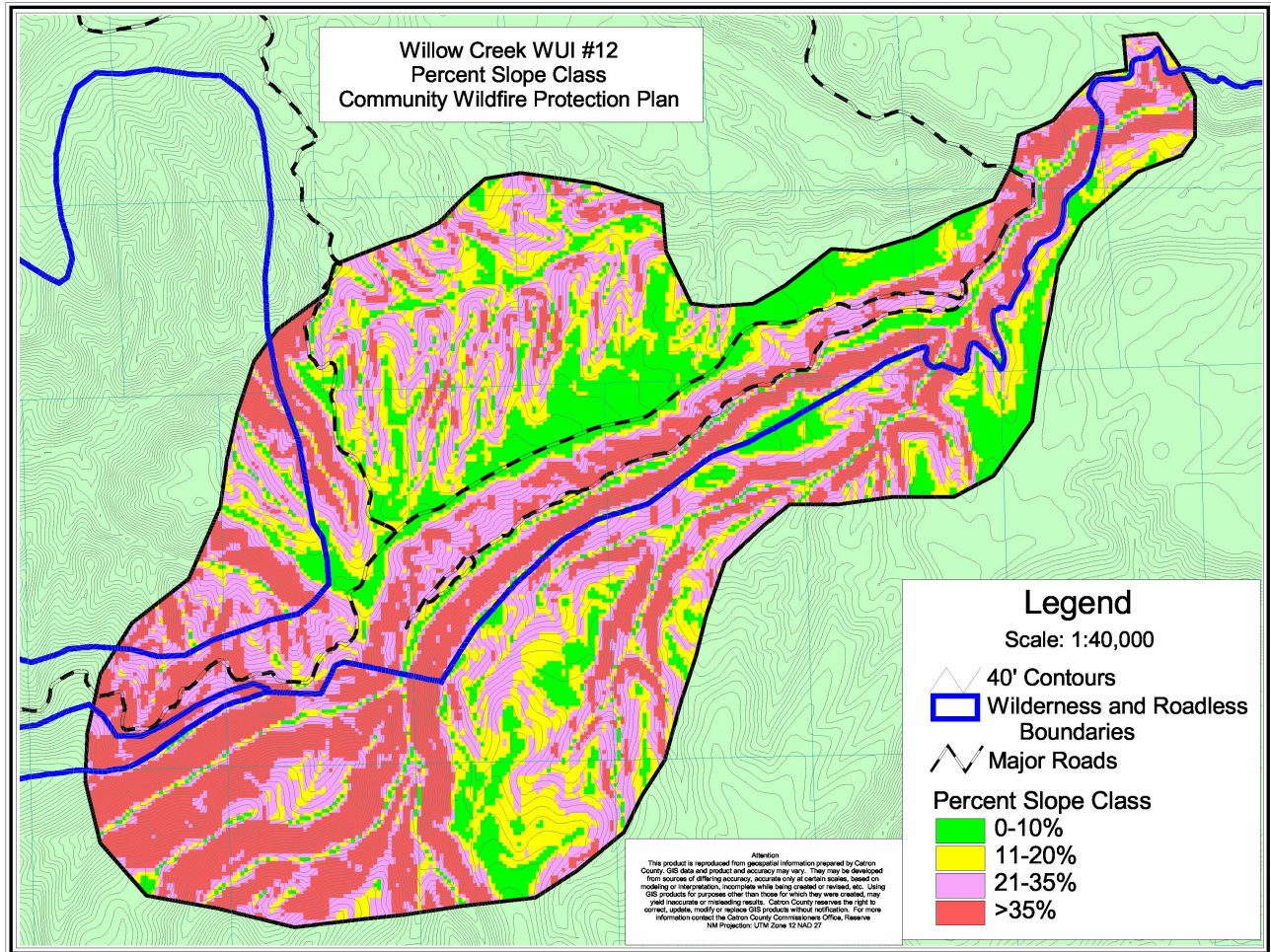
Table: Summary of Various Analysis Results
Individual Data for Eleven Highest Priority WUI Areas
Public Involvement: Stage Two
Public Comments on Final Draft
Treatment Recommendations
Prescription Guidelines
Stewardship Contracting
Monitoring
Rough Draft Monitoring and Assessment Plan (7/8/04 INA team meeting)
Final Plan – letters of approval
Acronym List
Glossary
Bibliography/References

**WILLOW CREEK
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**

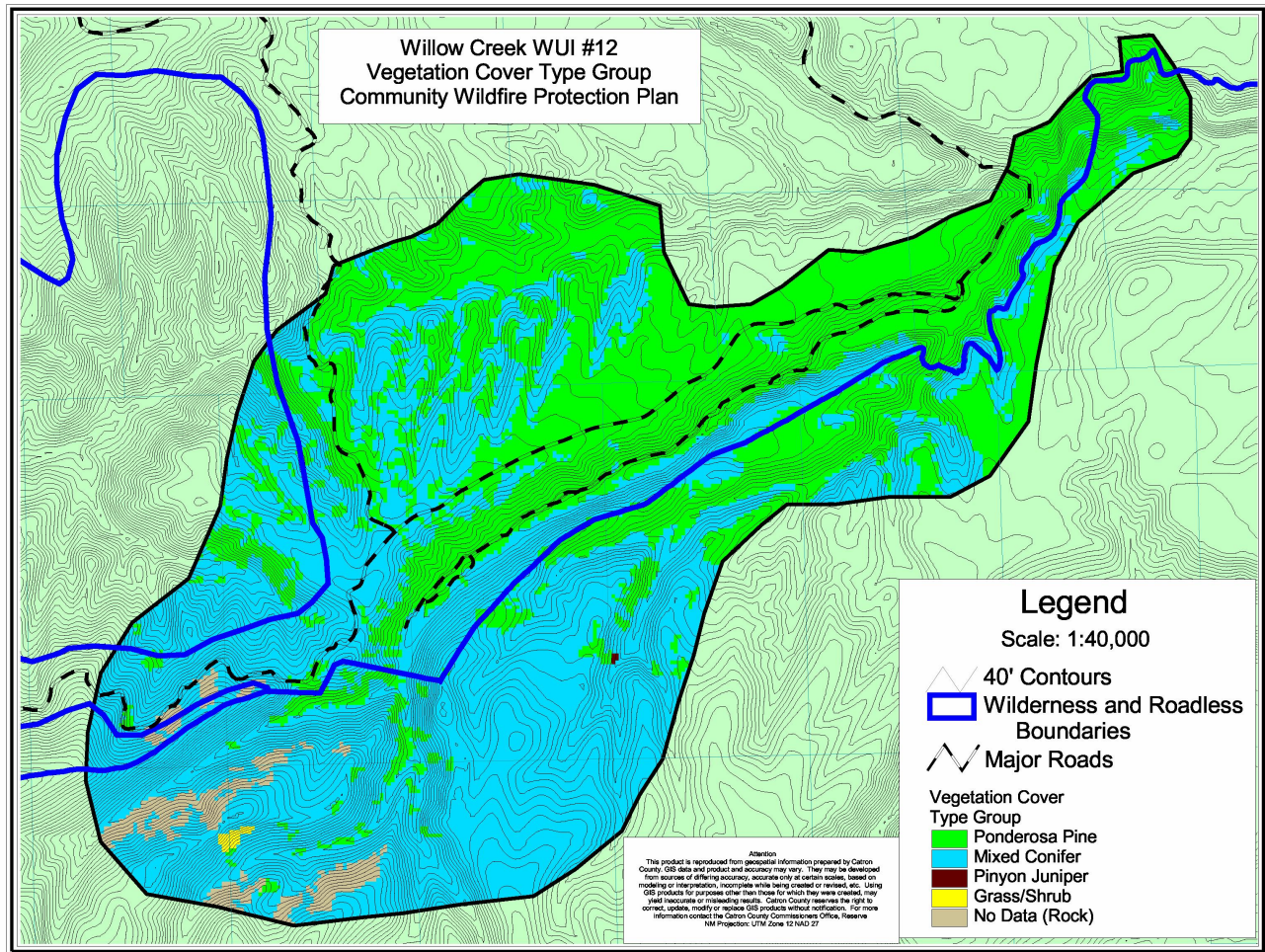
APPENDIX VOLUME 3

Maps

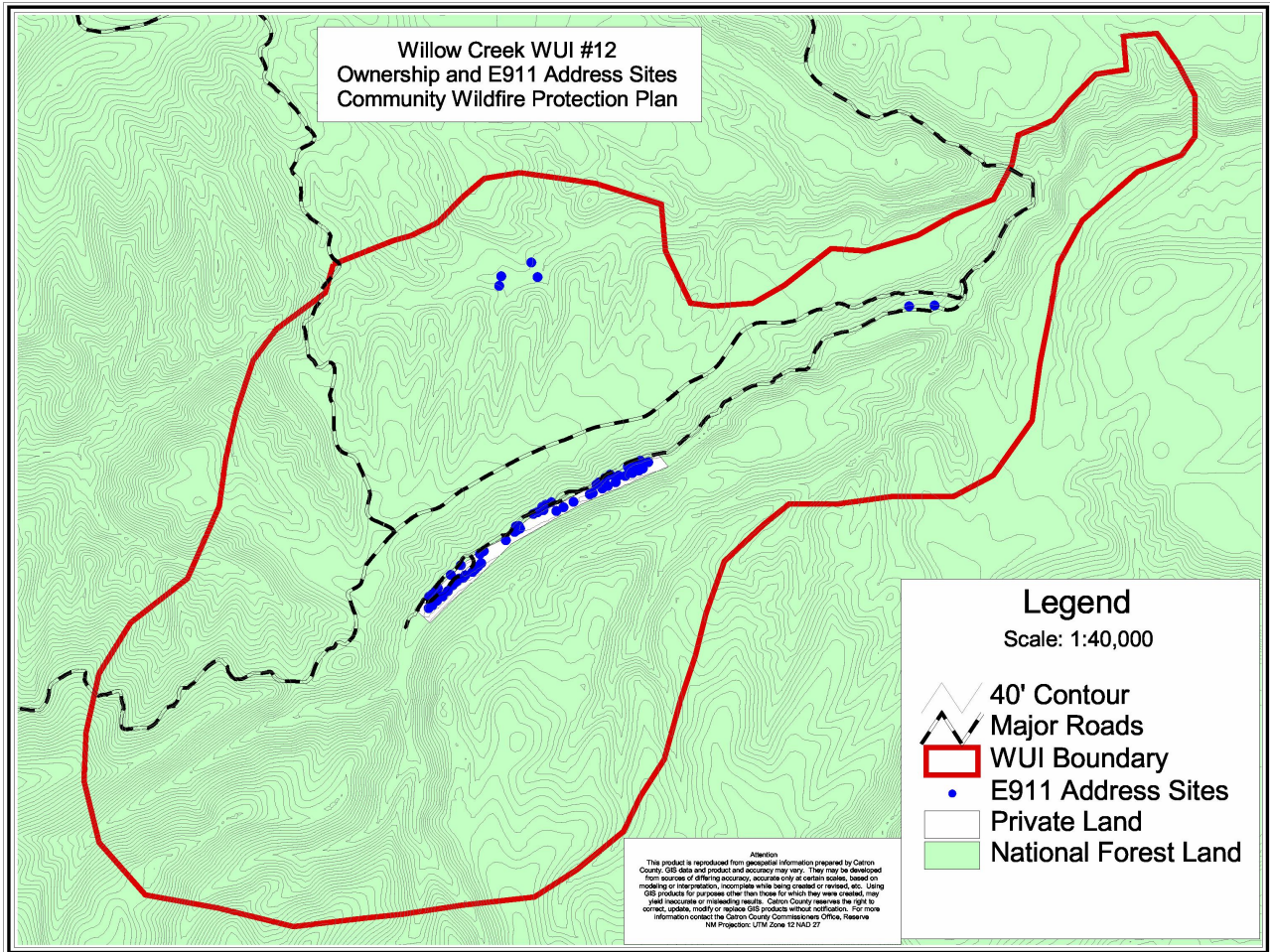
**Supplement to the
CATRON COUNTY
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**



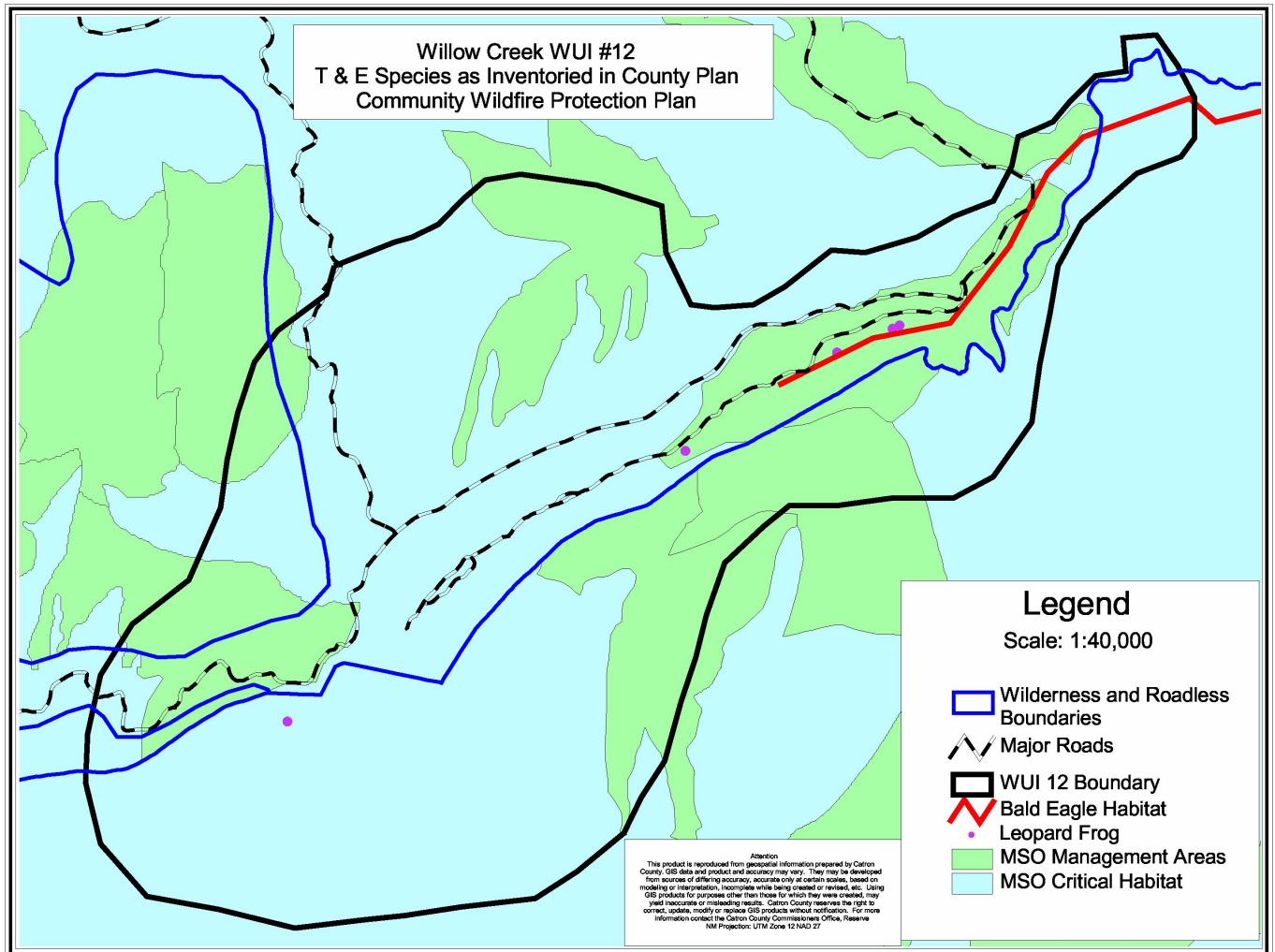
Map 1: Steepness of Slopes



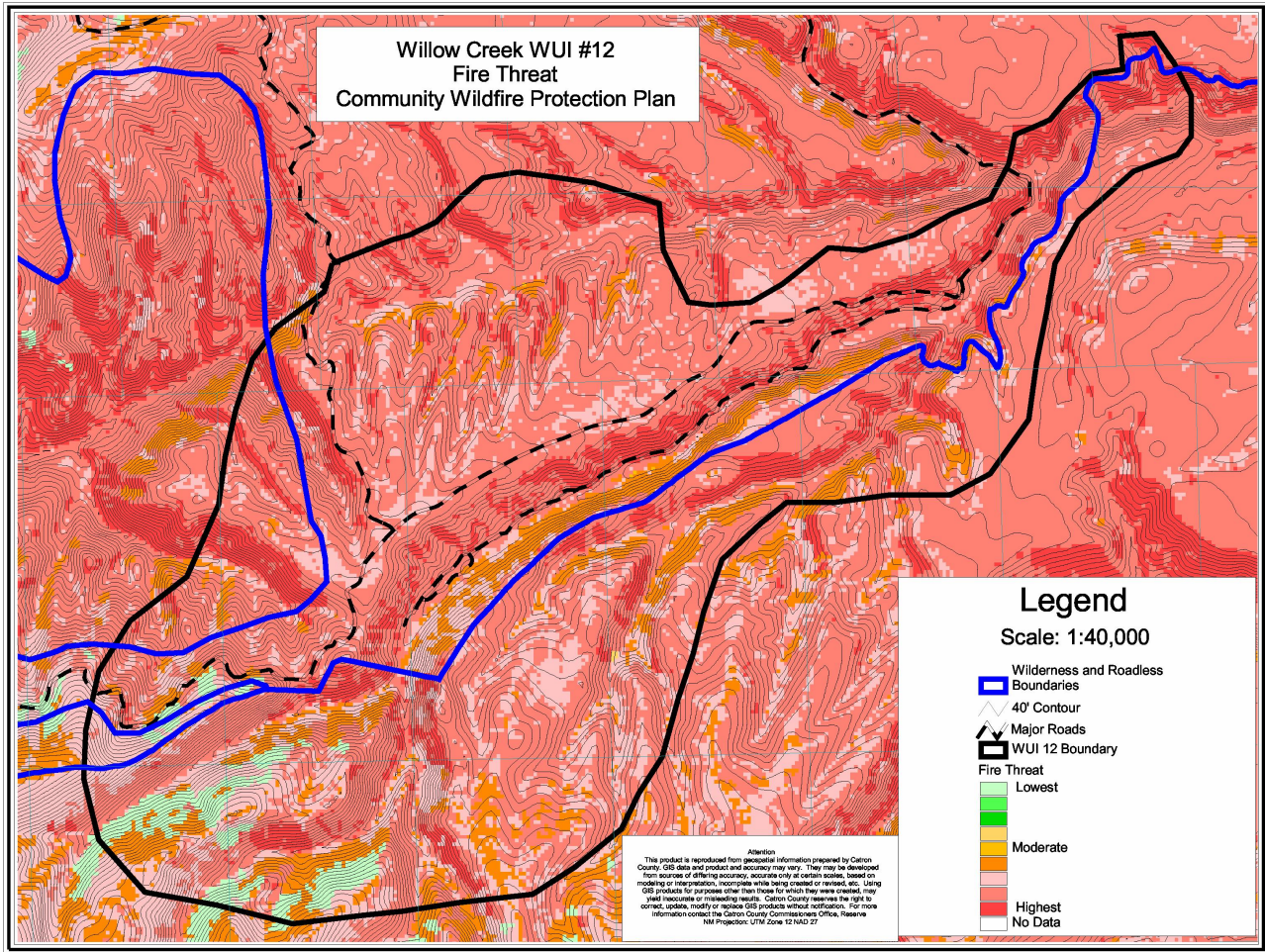
Map 2: Vegetative Type Groups



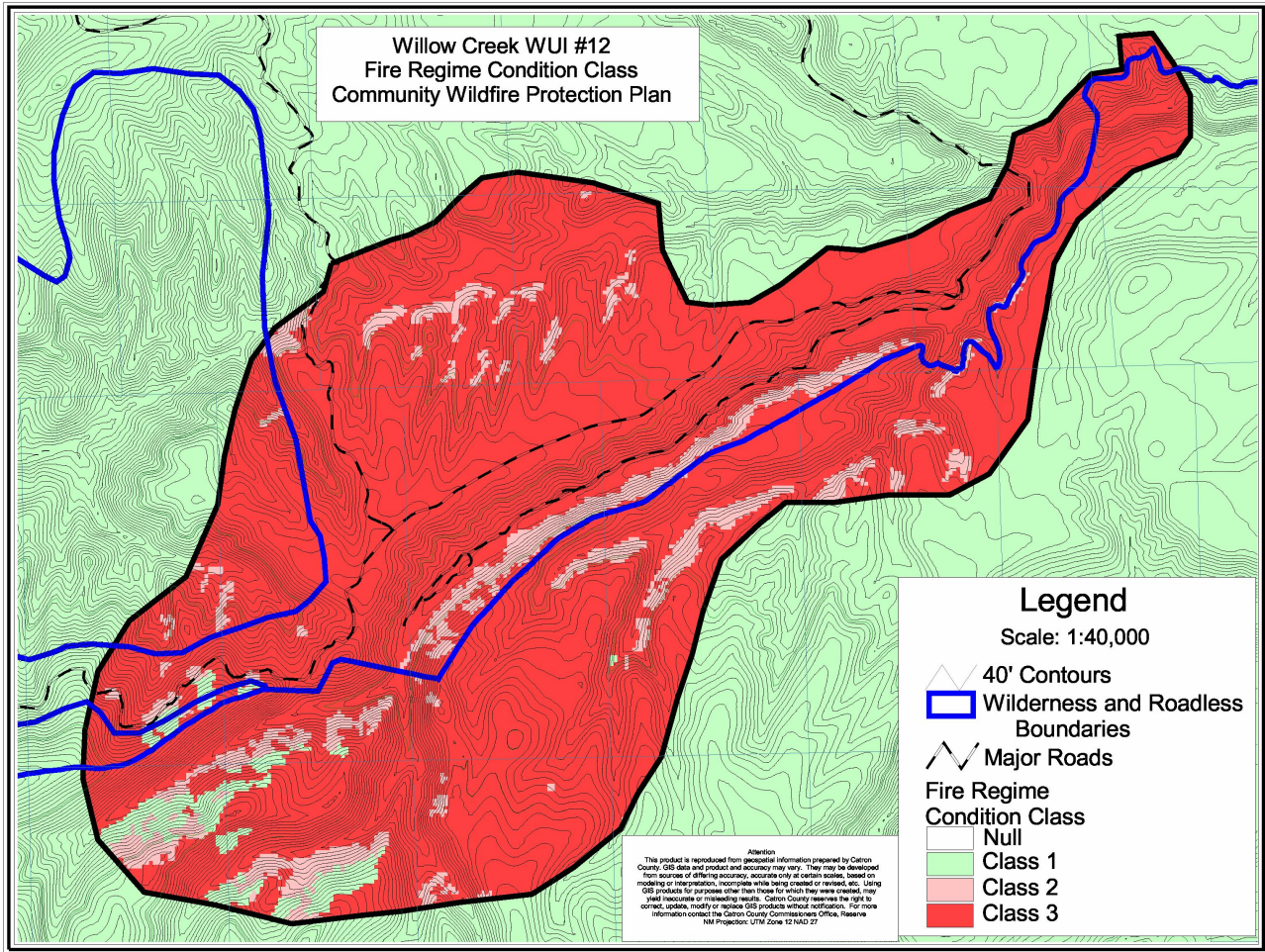
Map 3: Land Ownership



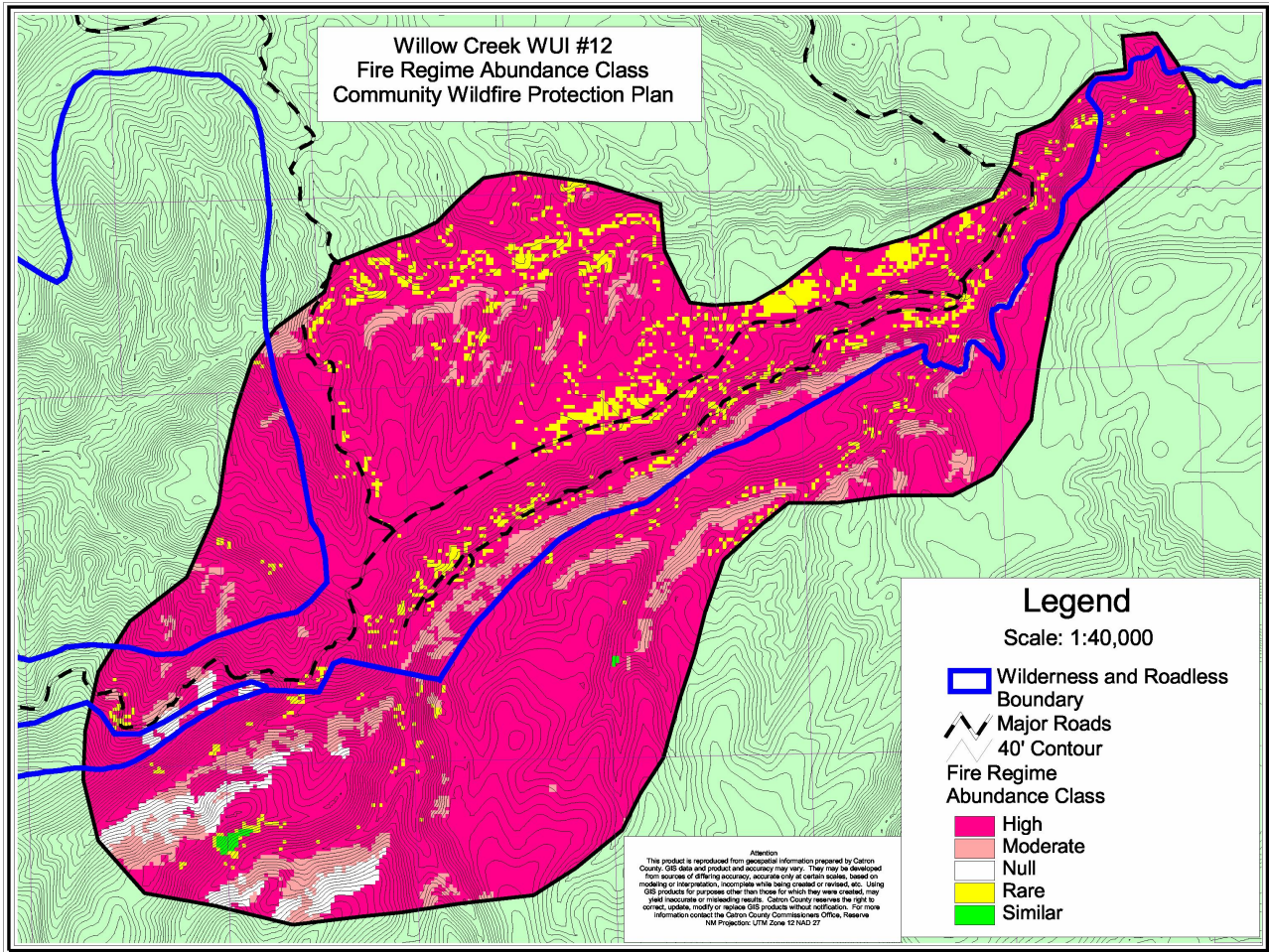
Map 4: Threatened and Endangered



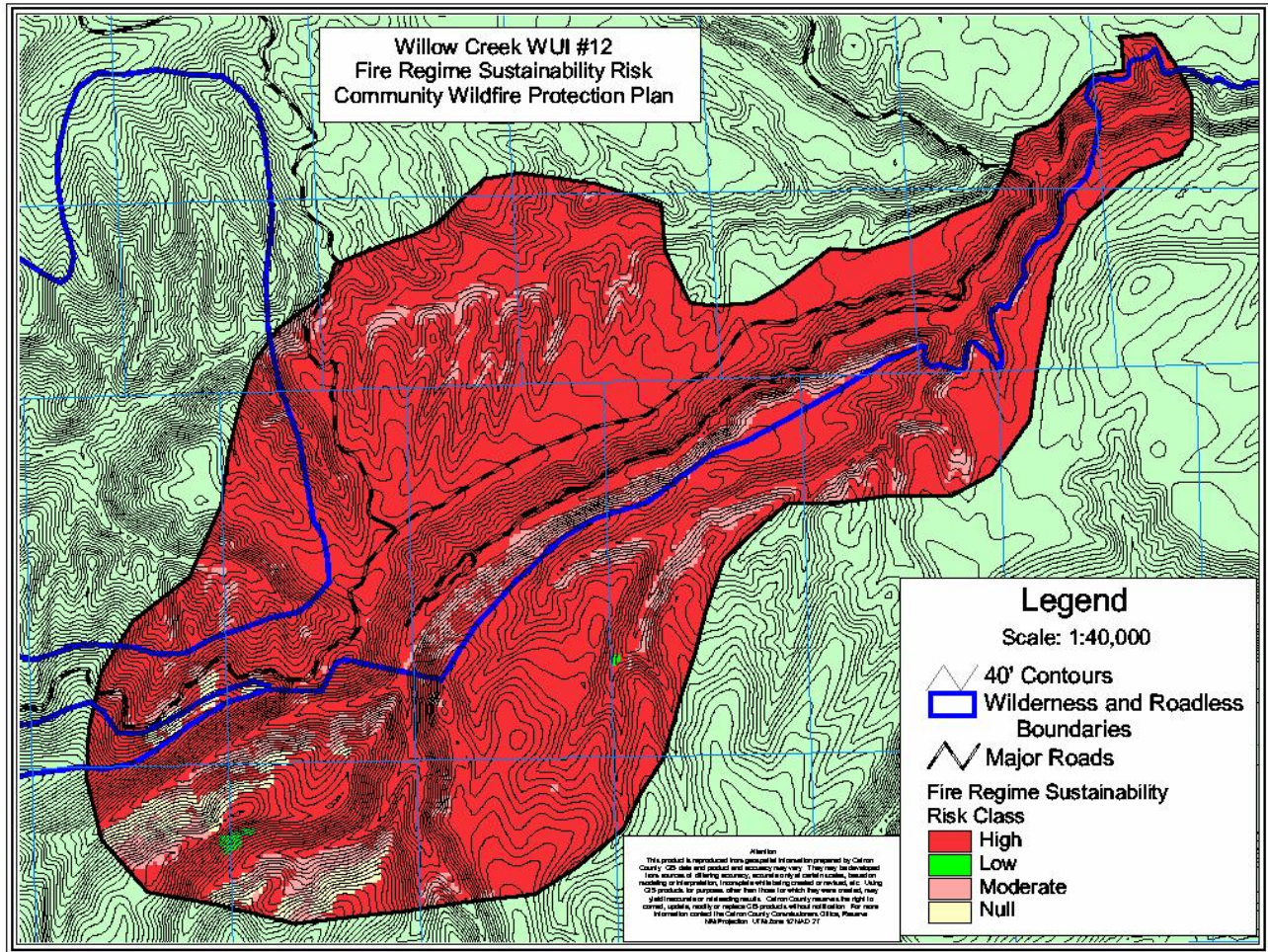
Map 5: FireThreat



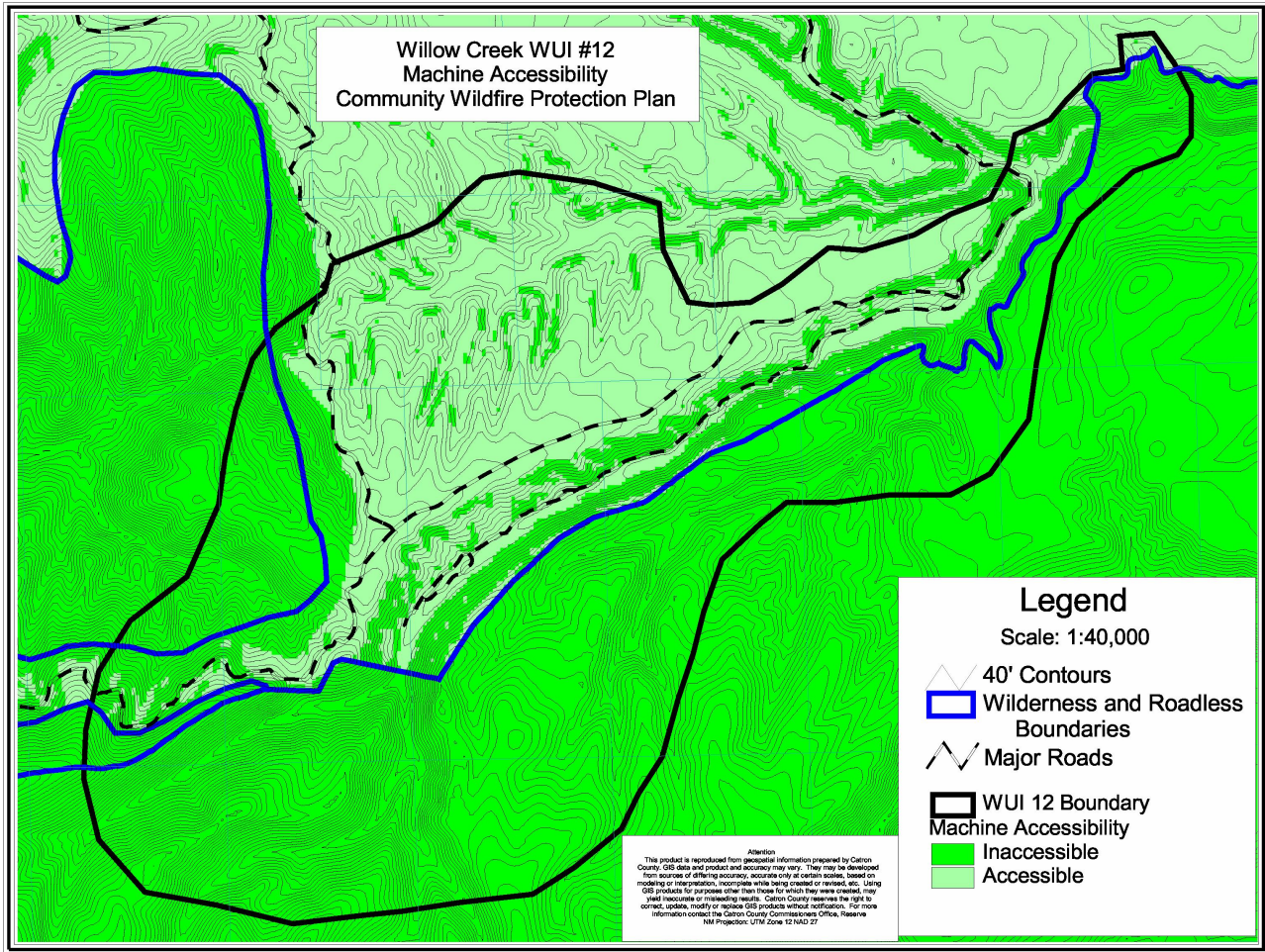
Map 6: Fire Regime Condition Class



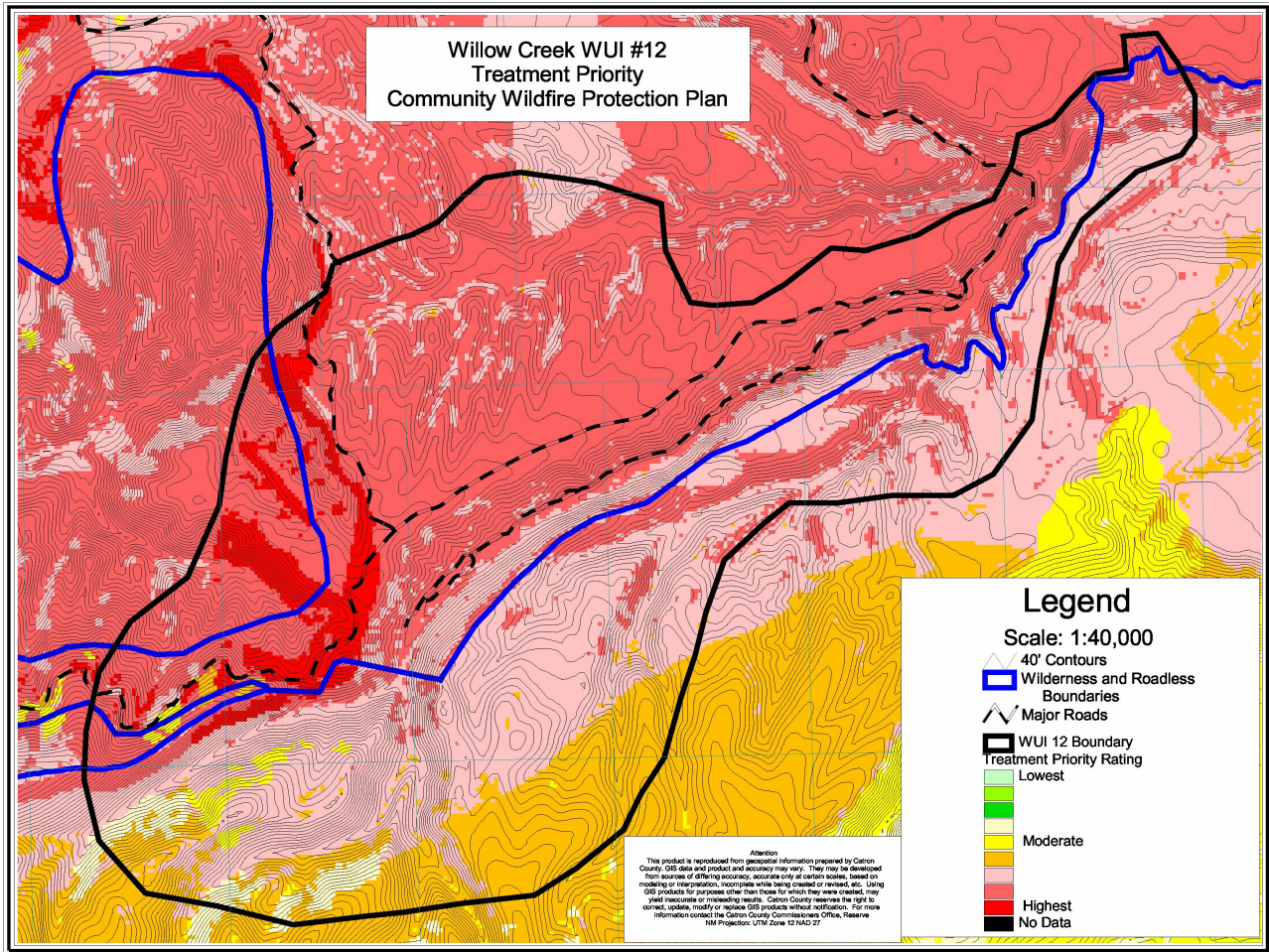
Map 7: FRCC Abundance Class



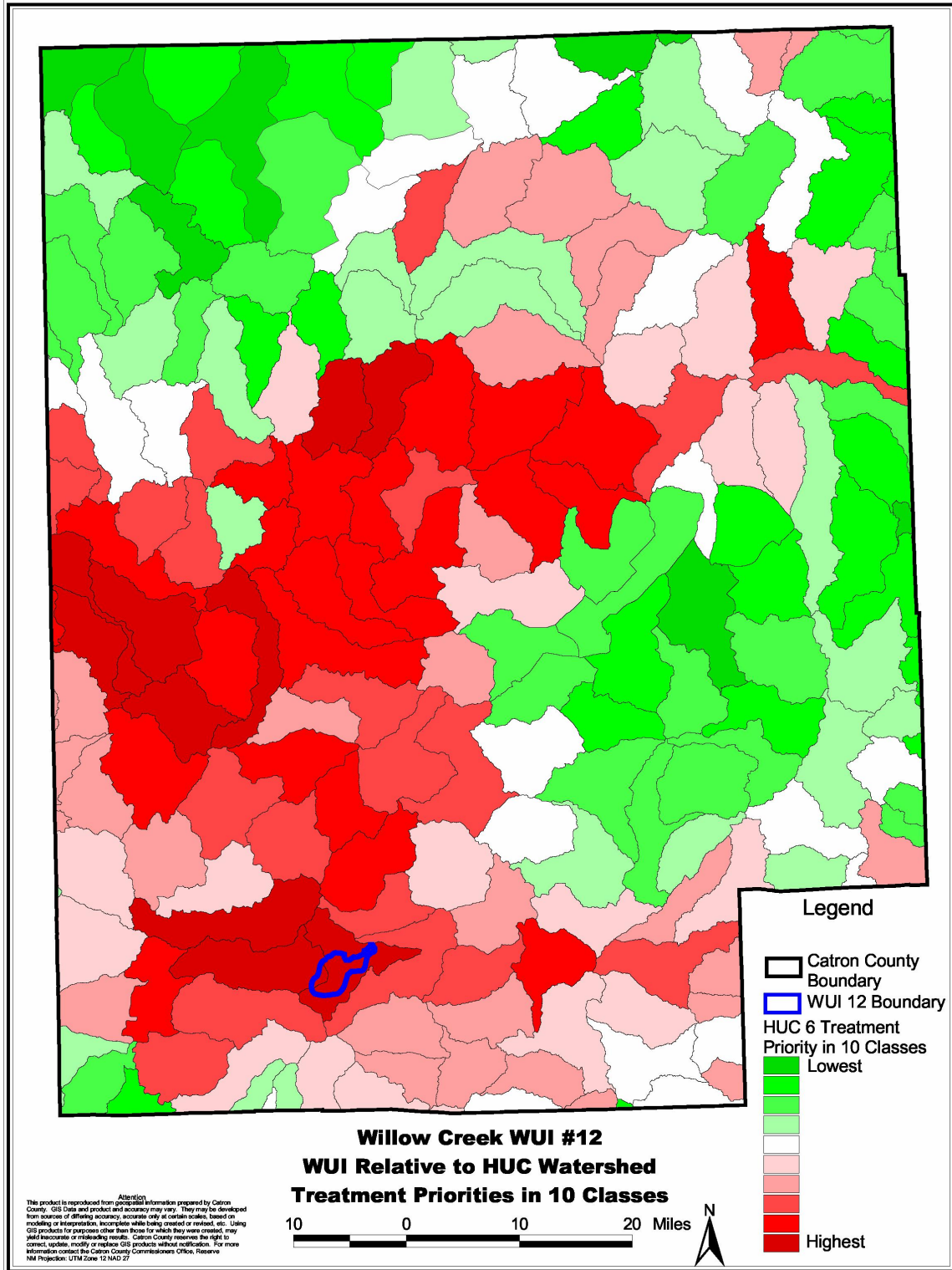
Map 8: FRCC Risk of Vegetative Condition Not Being Sustainable



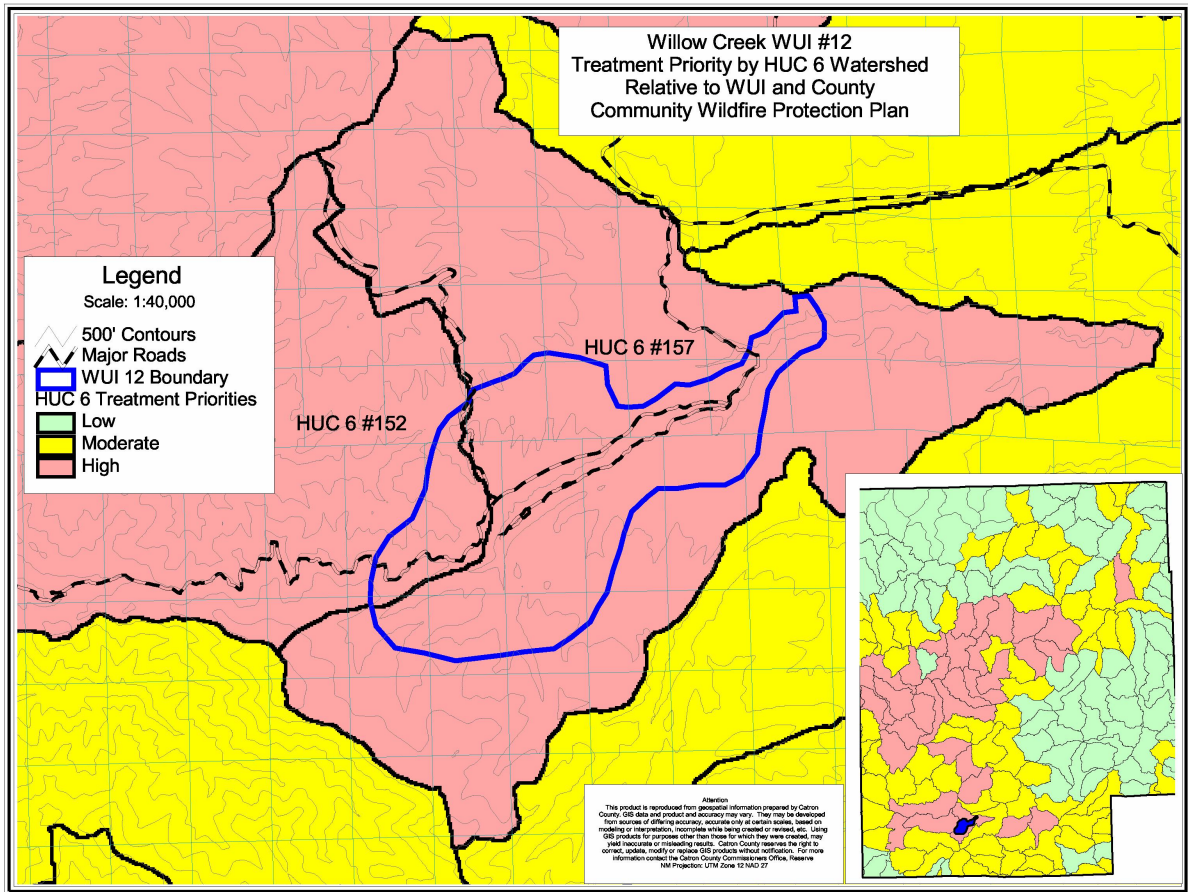
Map 9: Machine Accessible Areas



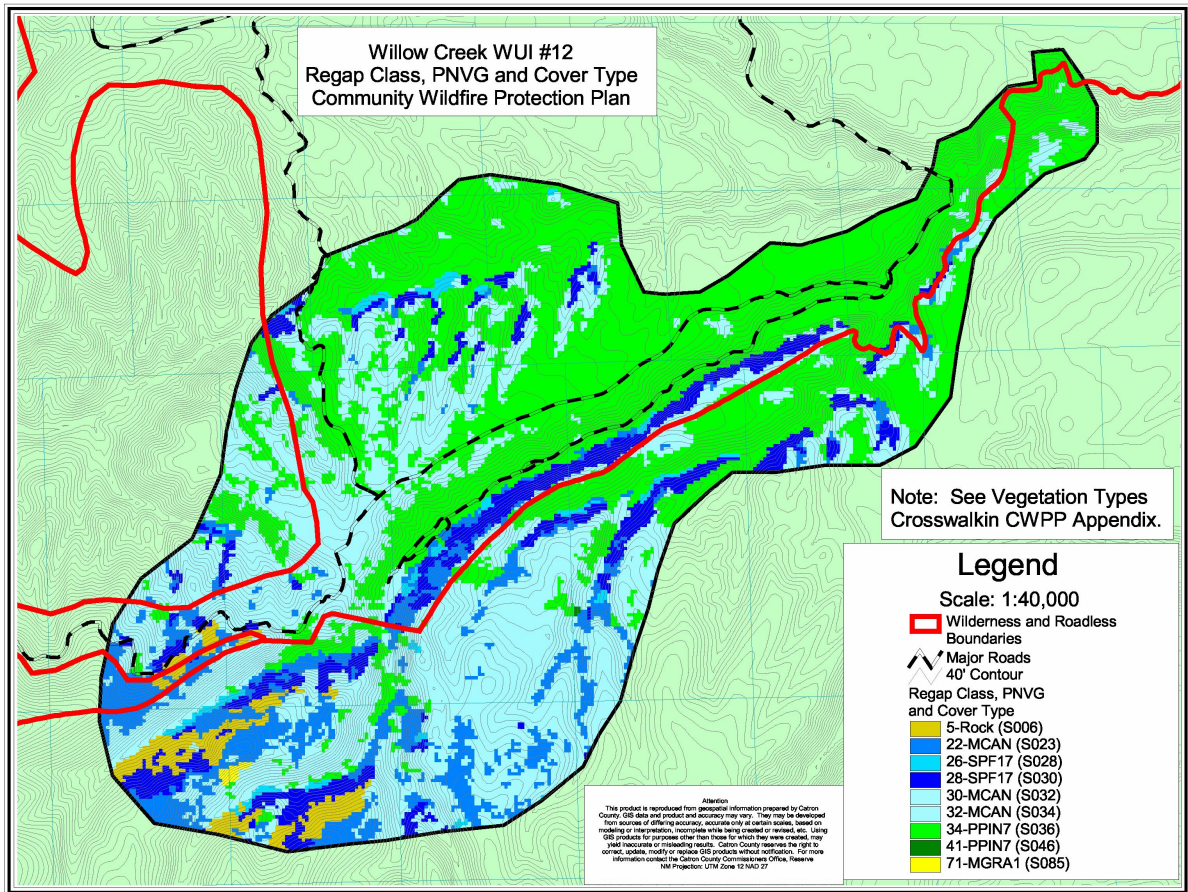
Map 10: Final Treatment Priorities



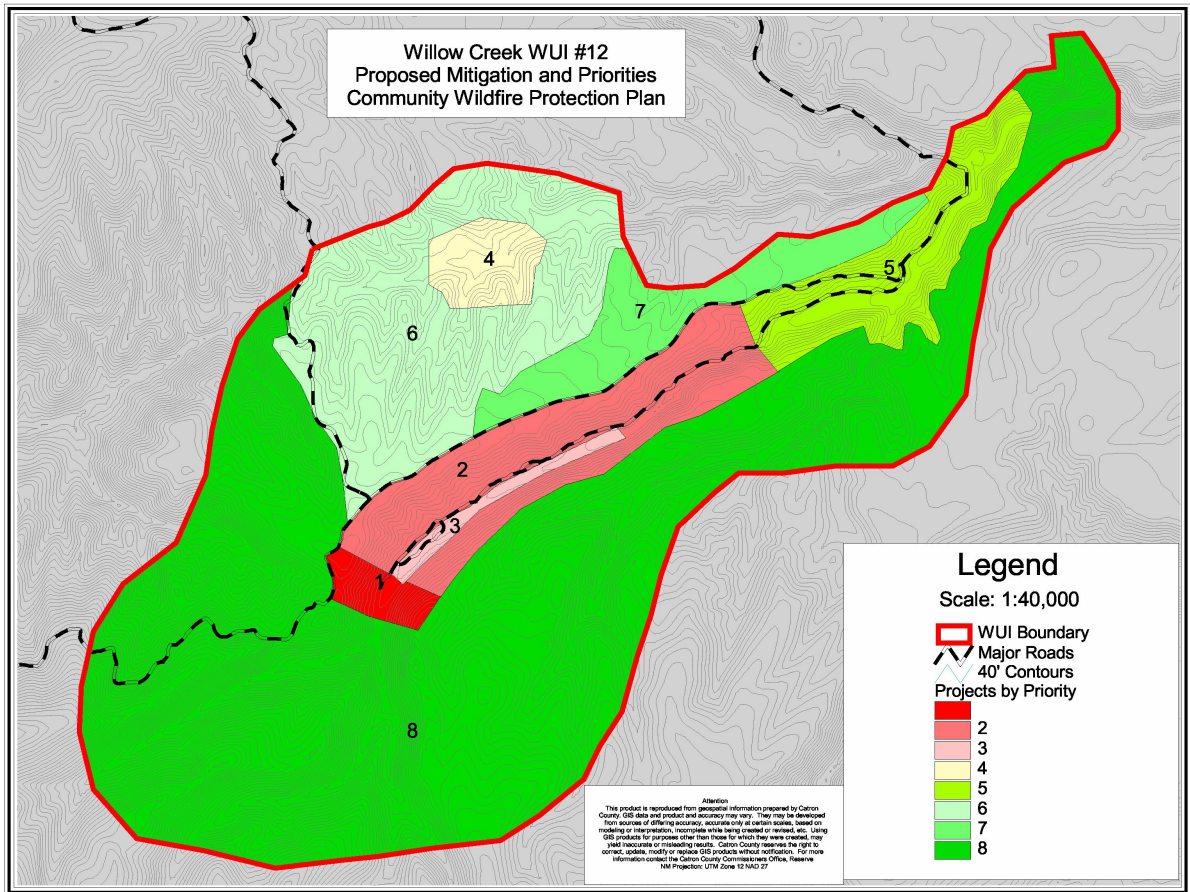
Map 11: WUI Relative to HUC 6 Watersheds



Map 12: Treatment Priority by HUC 6 Watershed



Map 13: Regap Vegetation Types



Map 14: Proposed Mitigation Priorities