

SB131: California or Bust?

DNRC/Local Government Efforts to Delineate
a WUI Boundary for Montana

February 2010



SB131 & WUI Issue are Controversial

B2 - Missoulian, Friday, February 19, 2010

MONTANA

Critics of Ravalli fire response plan voice concerns

By JEFF SCHMERKER
Ravalli Republic

HAMILTON - Critics of a proposed fire response plan packed a Ravalli County Commission meeting Wednesday to tell commissioners they are distrustful of local efforts to map hazardous fire zones.

After more than an hour of explanation and public comment, commissioners decided to table adoption of the community wildfire protection plan. Commissioners will take up the matter again on April 5 at 9 a.m.

The plan, mandated by the state Senate, must be adopted by 2012. If not, the state may write its own plan for the county.

The current draft plan, said Byron Bonney, a Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development forester, who helped write it, is an update of the existing plan, which was written in 2003.

The new plan, Bonney said, was written using detailed imagery and on-the-ground reporting both with foresters and fire chiefs and describes in precise detail the boundary where urban development and wildlands meet.

"We felt like it was very important for us to establish that under our own terms," Bonney told commissioners, "rather than have someone come in and establish that line for us."

The vast majority of public funds spent fighting fires, Bonney said, are spent protecting structures, and the presence of homes - many not built to modern fire safety codes, on streets where access by fire trucks is difficult or dangerous, and in forests where dangerous fuels have not been mitigated - in that wildland-urban interface zone that presents a significant risk to firefighters.

Adoption of a current plan opens the door for property owners to receive assistance reducing fire fuels on their land. Since 2001, some \$2.6 million in federal funds have been used to treat fuels on 2,500 acres within the wildland urban interface.

"If we did not have the community wildland protection plan, we could not get grant funds for fuel treatment programs within the county," Bonney said, "and that kind of spurred us along."

Such assistance, however, is little solace for county residents concerned that adoption of the community fire plan will serve as a backdoor attempt to regulate the value out of private lands.

"I don't have a problem with the assessment, but with the effect the assessment has," said Matt Kamenwisher, who said the plan would "effectively

designate 70 percent of the land in the county as unsuitable for private development."

Loxi Faber, who lives off Golf Course Road in Hamilton, told commissioners something this important ought to be voted on by the public, not adopted by the commissioners. She questioned the need for a plan to tell firefighters what areas are dangerous and what areas aren't. Firefighters, she said, face danger as a part of their jobs.

"I'm not quite sure I understand where your concerns are," she said.

Resident Niki Sardot, who said she owned 1,000 acres in the valley, suggested other means to protect properties, like fire-retardant house wraps. Such actions could be used to help narrow the interface boundary.

"This plan will take all the value out of my land," she said.

That's not true, said former forester Sonny LaSalle. Nothing in the plan limits development or property rights. What it does do, he said, is let firefighters know what properties have already been defended against flames. Ideological beliefs about government, he said, are clouding perceptions of what's otherwise a smart plan.

"View your property in the eyes of the people who have to defend it," he said. "All this conjecture about what might happen if you approve this is just that - conjecture."

Rather, he said, personal concerns for private property, taken to the extreme, endanger others.

"If you focus on your property, and all you think about is your property, then you are myopic," he said. "If you don't treat your fuel, then you put your neighbor at risk."

Commissioners said the

time leading up to the April meeting would give the public and officials a chance to learn more about the plan.

Commission Chairman Greg Chilcott said that, according to state law, location of a property within the wildland urban interface zone may not be the sole reason to enact fees. The county can't stop people from building within the zone, he said, but officials can require that such building be fire-wise.

Vito Ciliberti, a former Bureau of Land Management hydrologist, said he wanted to see a plan that had more coordination among agencies and officials.

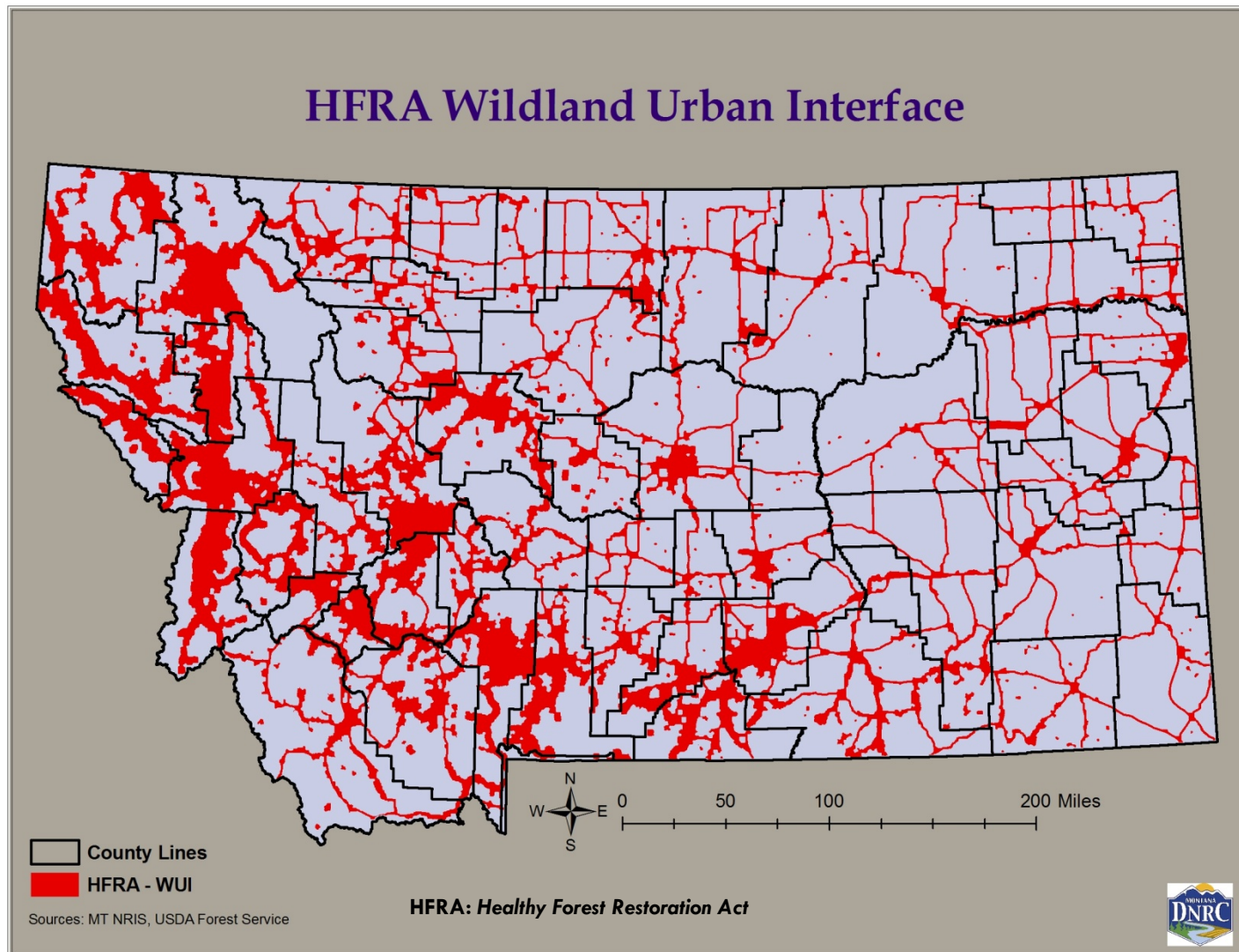
"I don't want the government telling me what I can and cannot cut on my property," he said. "We need a lot more coordination on this."

The draft plan can be viewed at www.bitterrootcd.org.

Definitions and Statistics

- **WUI Definition**
 - "Wildland-urban interface" means the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels." 76-13-102 MCA
- **Who Owns the WUI?**
 - Private (43%)
 - Federal (37%)
 - Tribal (10%)
 - State (9%)
 - Local Govt (<1%)
- **Investment in Fuels Reduction on in WUI**
 - \$18 million (2001-2010)
 - US Forest Service \$\$\$ passed through DNRC
 - State and Private Lands Only

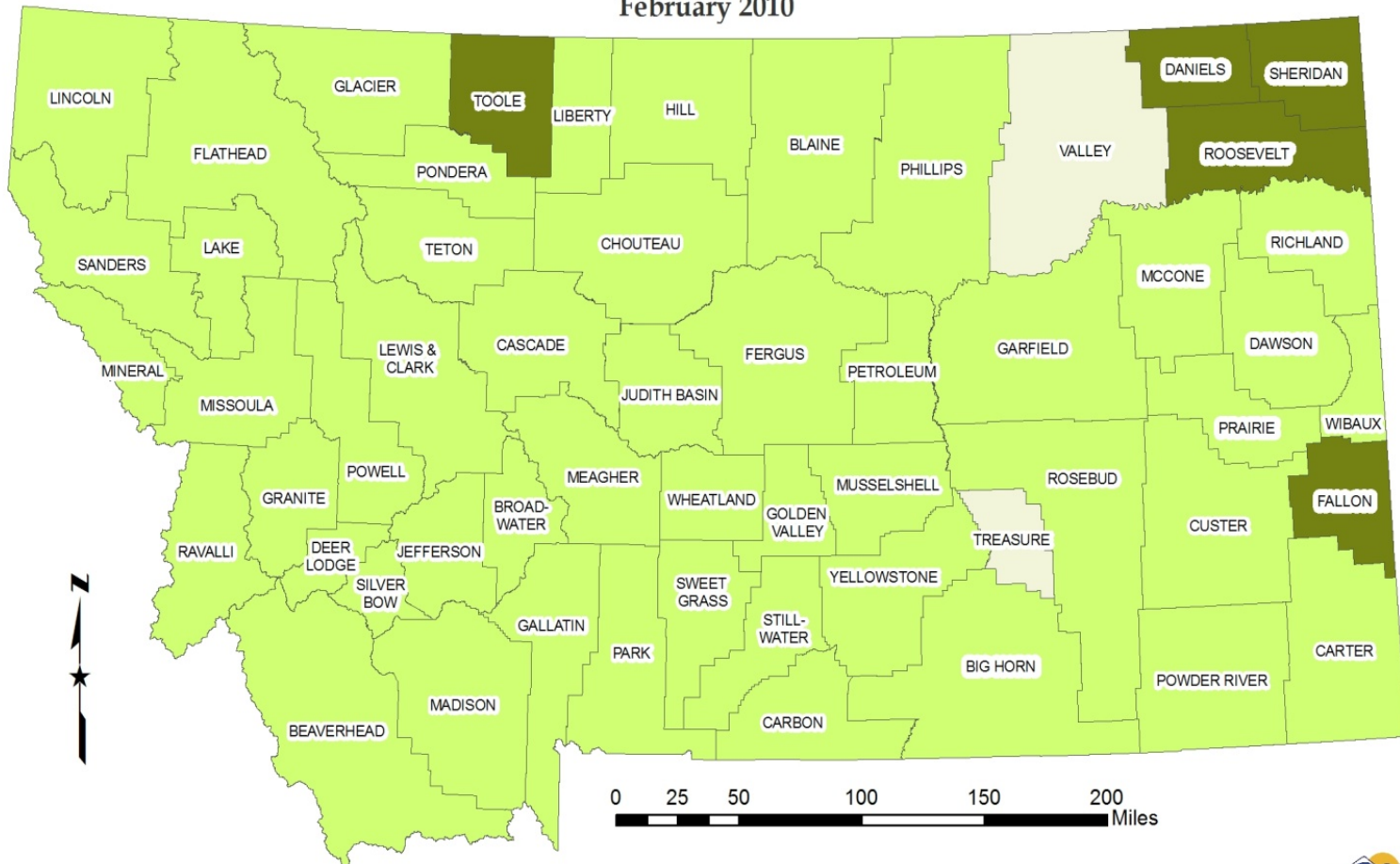
Where is the WUI?






Community Wildfire Protection Plans

Acquired by DNRC Fire and Aviation

February 2010



-  CWPP acquired
-  CWPP assessment pending*
-  No CWPP

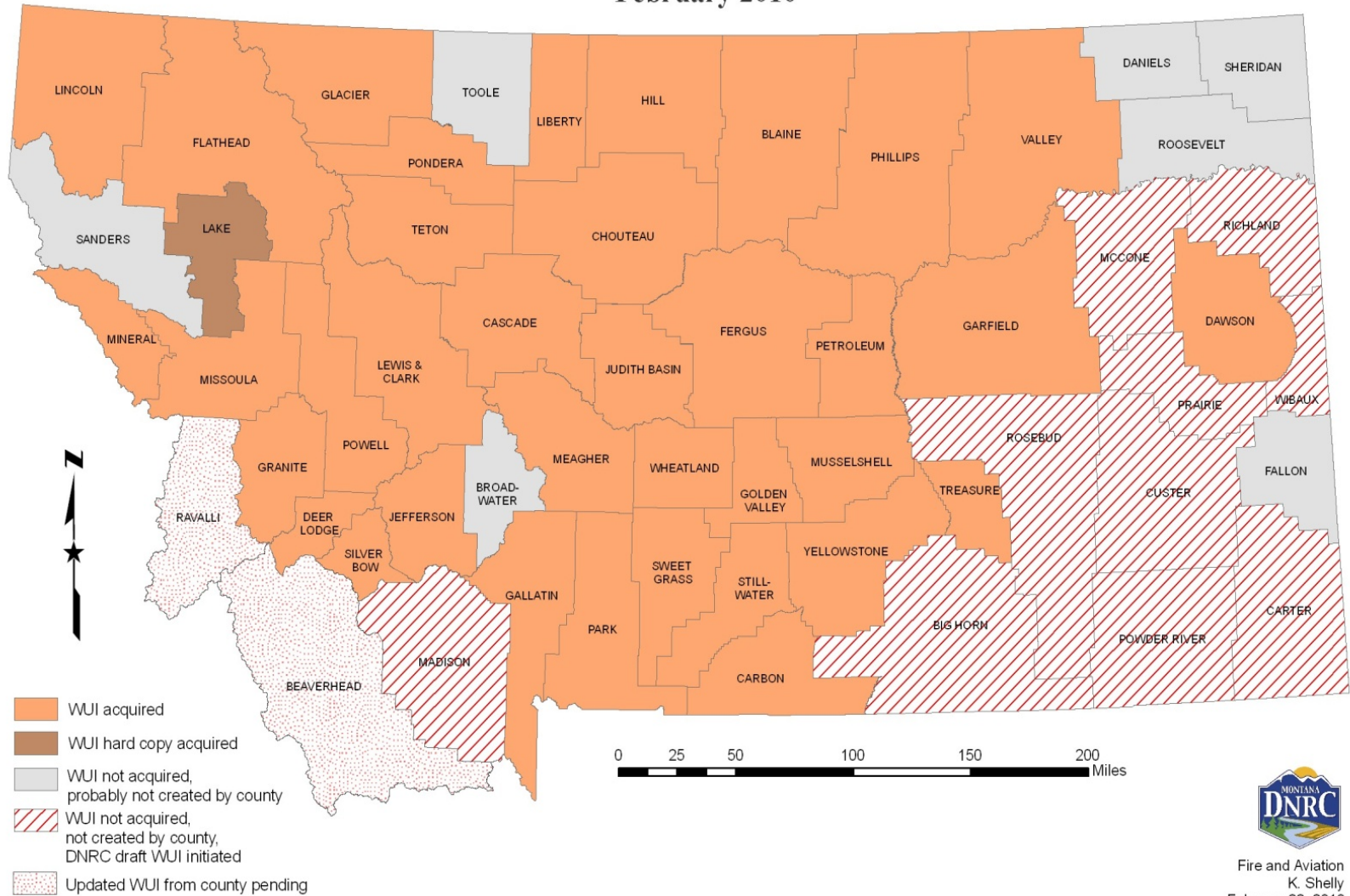
*Some counties have combination Pre-Disaster Mitigation/Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Determining if HFRA requirements are met using the combination as a CWPP is in progress.



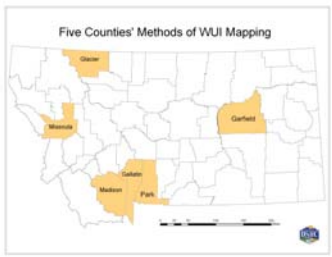
Fire and Aviation
K. Shelly
February 23, 2010

Wildland Urban Interface

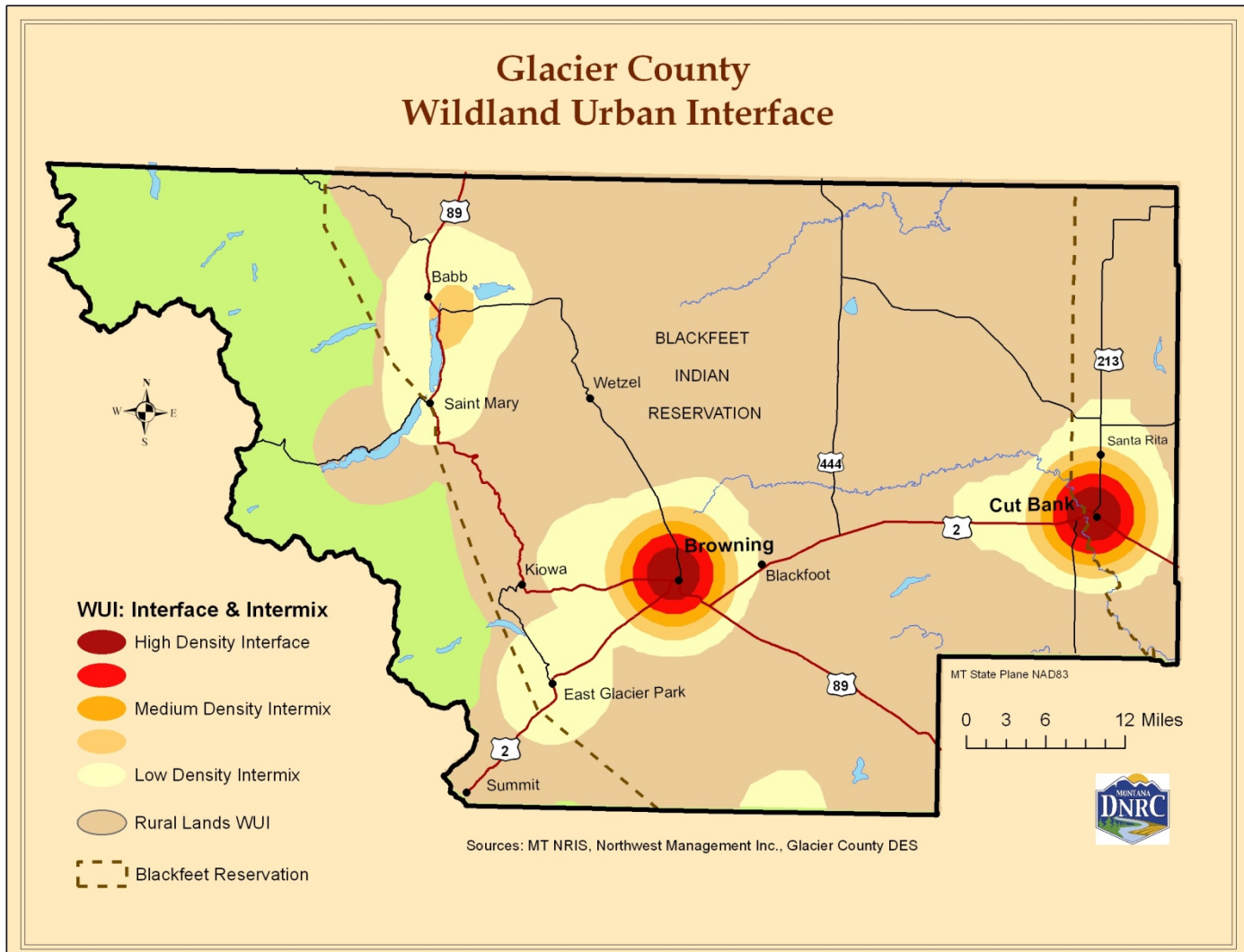
County Files Acquired or Drafted by DNRC Fire and Aviation February 2010

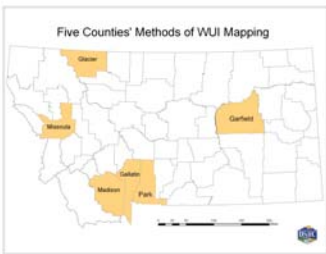


Fire and Aviation
K. Shelly
February 22, 2010



Comparison of County WUI Maps

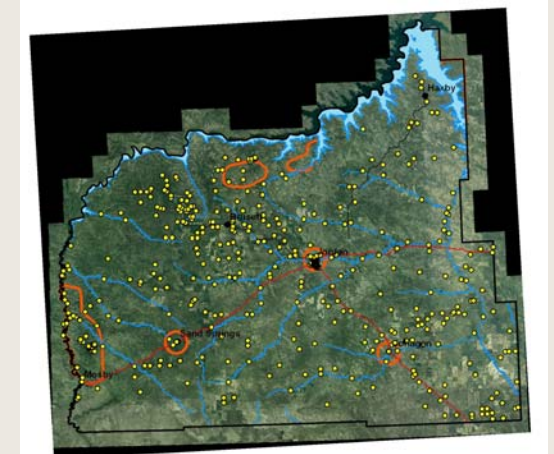
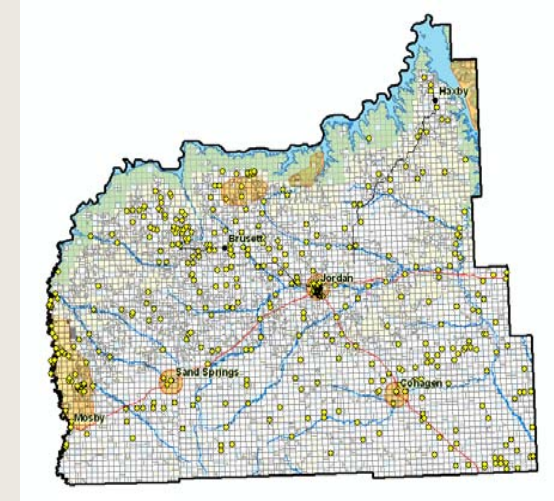
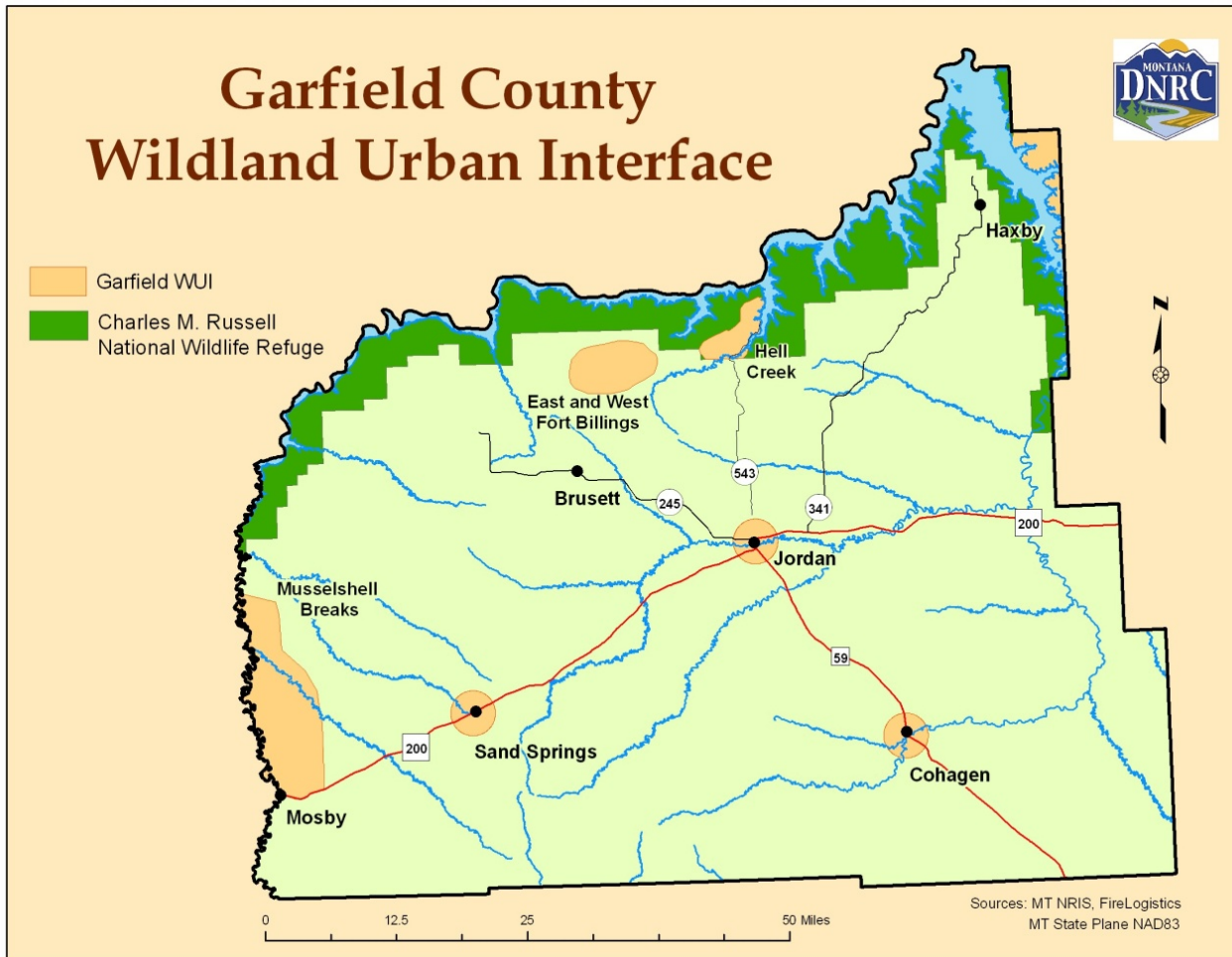
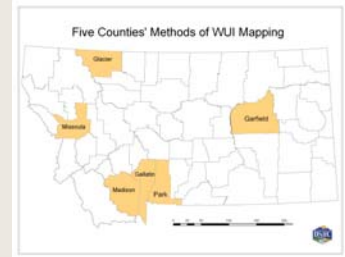




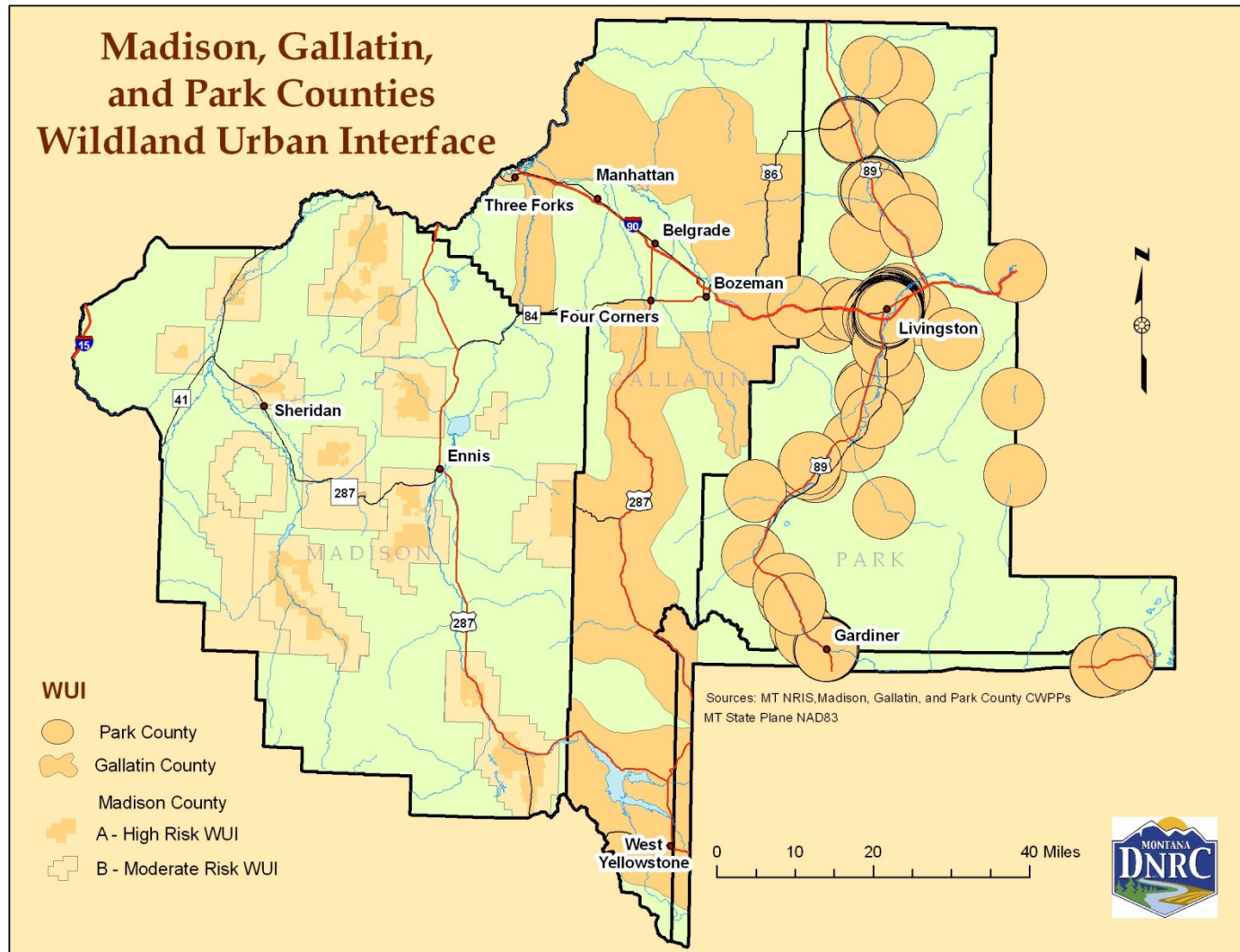
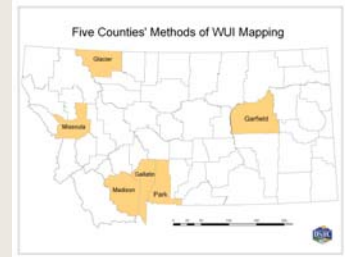
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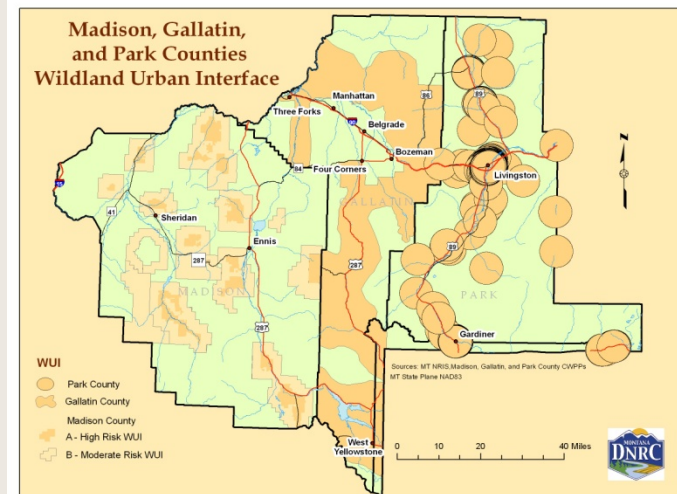
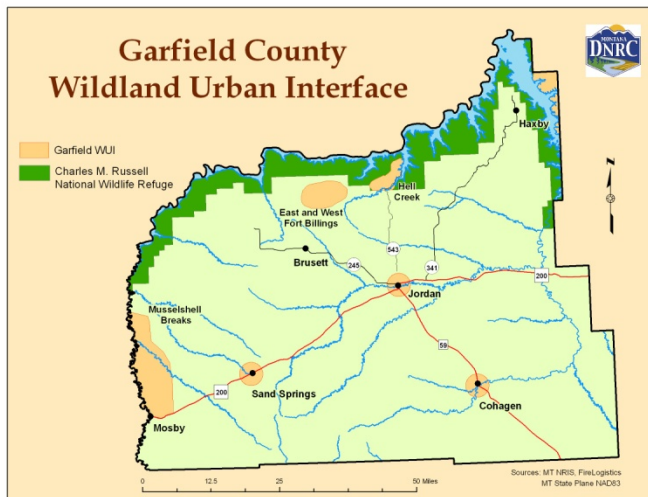
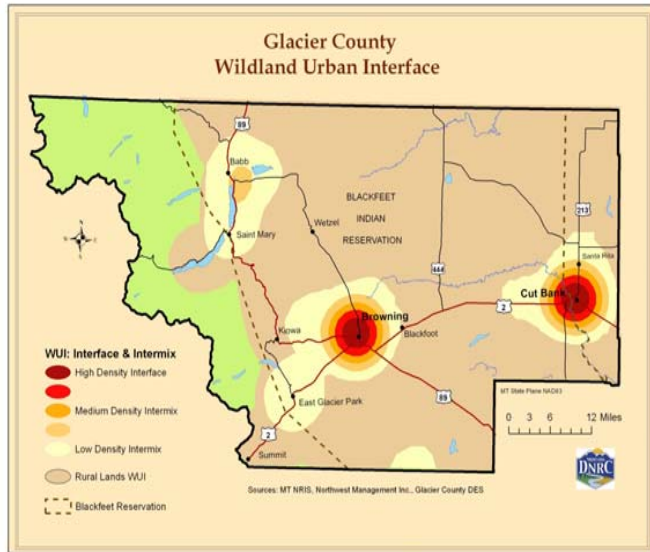
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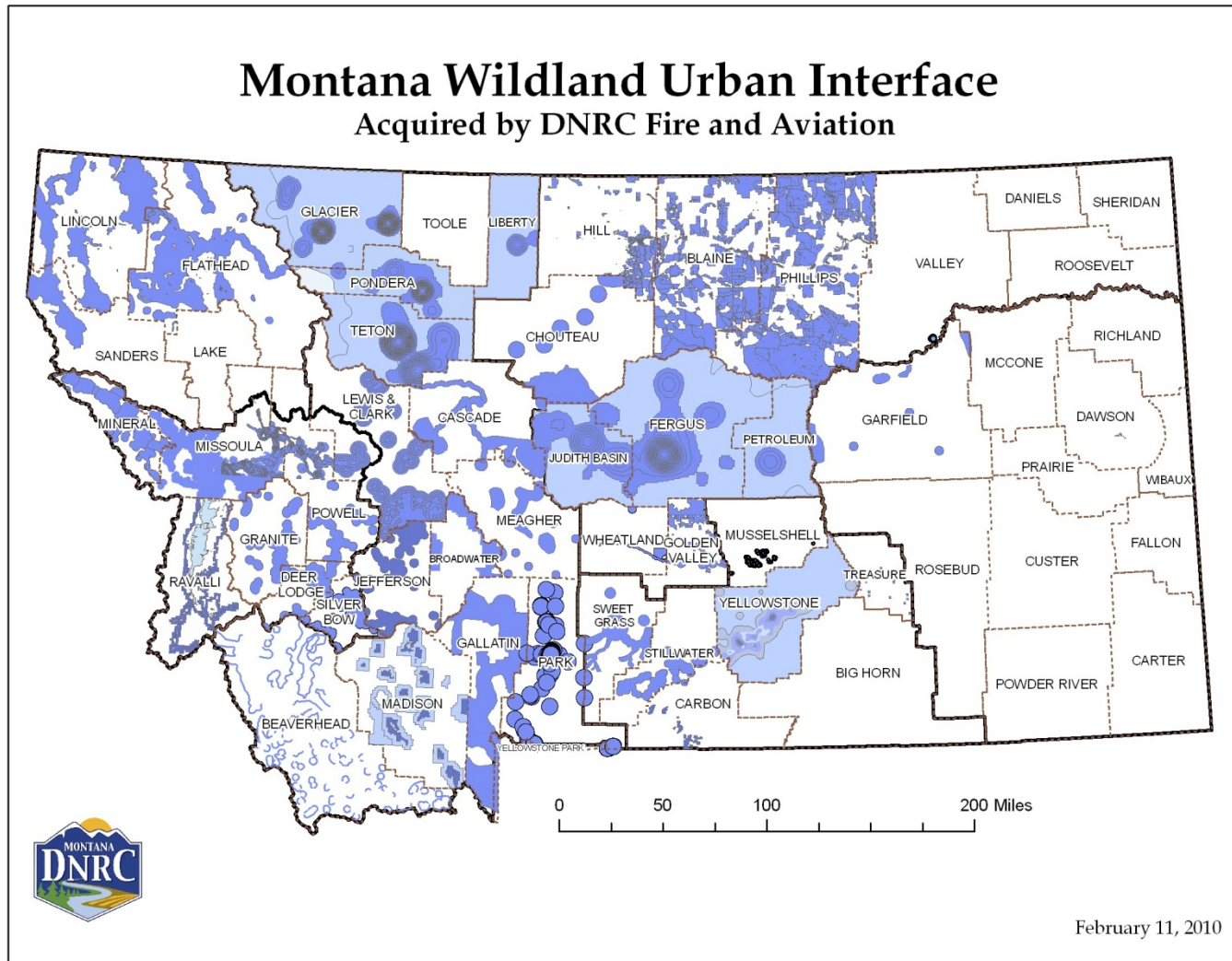
Comparison of County WUI Maps



Different Methods Yield...



...Different Results: Current SB131 Montana WUI Map



Next Steps

- Collect Remaining CWPPs and WUI Layers
- Work with Counties w/o CWPP or WUI to create WUI boundary
- Complete State WUI Map & Post on Website
- Annual Maintenance/Revisions
- Focus on Implementation



Questions?



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