

Community Forestry Assistant



Northwest
Management, Inc.

Newsletter August 2008

Idaho Communities Work Year-round to Prepare for Wildfires

Article adapted from news release written by Steve Kimball, Idaho National Fire Plan Coordinator, for the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group on July 7, 2008. Article available at <http://www.idahofireplan.org/images/July%20Press.pdf>.

While wildfires again threaten homes in California, many in Idaho are looking around their communities and public lands asking, "What is being done to prevent wildfire losses here?" Wildfires scorched 1.9 million acres in Idaho in 2007; one of the worst fire seasons on record. As fire managers brace for another season, they are concerned about the increased complexity, risk, and costs of fires in the "wildland urban interface." One of the fastest growing states with plenty of wildlands and wildfire, Idaho faces some of the greatest community wildfire challenges in the nation.

"There's a lot of preparation work going on throughout the year in Idaho," says Steve Kimball, Idaho's Coordinator for the National Fire Plan. "Each of our forty-four counties has a wildfire mitigation plan that identifies risk areas and priority activities to lessen that risk." Planned actions range from home site work (such as replacing flammable home materials and thinning dense yard vegetation) to large fuel breaks around communities and hazardous fuels treatments across broad landscapes.

Community wildfire protection work is authorized and supported by The National Fire Plan of 2000 and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act 2003. These have brought agencies and residents together to develop and implement wildfire protection projects. About \$2 million per year has been available in Idaho to fund hazardous fuels projects on private lands. Since 2001, over 16,000 acres of hazardous fuels have been treated on private lands, and more than a million acres of Idaho's federal lands have been treated. This work helps control scale and intensity of wildfires and makes communities more resilient to impacts of wildfire. In addition, National Fire Plan assistance funds have provided Idaho's fire departments and districts with approximately \$31 million for equipment and training.

Recent fires have shown that preventative work can make a difference when a wildfire burns through a community. One example is last summer's Poe Cabin Fire which roared through the Deer Creek subdivision near White Bird. In 2004, Deer Creek residents removed flammable materials and debris, expanded lawns, and thinned dense tree cover in surrounding forests. The Poe Cabin fire moved at a rate of two miles in ten minutes and scorched trees surrounding these homes; however, all structures protected by the work in 2004 were left intact. A video about the work and success of the Deer Creek subdivision, *Are We Safe from Wildfire; Protecting Idaho's Communities*, will soon be available on the Idaho National Fire Plan website: www.idahofireplan.org.

"Most communities in Idaho are paying attention to their wildfire risk and doing something about it," says Lemhi County Commissioner Robert Cope. "In Idaho, Counties are taking the lead with wildfire mitigation and community protection. Counties are using interagency county groups to plan and implement mitigation projects across ownerships. We're making progress, but there is much more to do." Some of the additional work needed, according to Steve Kimball, is within and beyond community boundaries to remove hazardous fuels and restore fire-adapted landscapes. An Idaho Firewise program is being developed to educate citizens about wildfires and home protection.

A partial list of Idaho counties that have conducted work to protect communities from wildfires includes: Bonner, Kootenai, Boundary, Bannock, Idaho, Adams, Valley, and Lemhi. A complete list of Idaho's National Fire Plan accomplishments, can be found on the Idaho National Fire Plan website listed above.

If you have questions about this newsletter or the Community Forestry Assistance Program, please contact Tera King with Northwest Management, Inc. at 208-883-4488 ext. 133.