

Fuels Mitigation Grants and Projects in the Wildland Urban Interface

The USDA Forest Service through the funding of the National Fire Plan have allocated funds to the states to implement fuels mitigation work and to conduct educational efforts to reduce the risk to urban interface communities and to increase the awareness of its residents, respectively. Each year since 2000-01, the SCFC has conducted various projects to identify the communities at risk, to educate its residents and to support their fuels mitigation projects. Approximately half of the mitigation funds received are allocated to personnel in the form of salaries and matched in-kind by the hours dedicated to the program.

Community assessments have been conducted for 1136 communities with 595 action plans or Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) completed from these assessments. Those communities rating out at high to extreme receive higher priority as far as getting a CWPP written.

2000-01: Significant federal grants in the form of Mitigation funds were made available during the year to combat fire problems in the wildland-urban interface. Forestry Commission personnel identified five areas for initial study (Mountain corridor in Greenville and Pickens counties, Buist Tract in Horry county, Horsecreek Valley in Aiken county, Lugoff-Elgin corridor in Kershaw county and the Sun City growth area in Jasper and Beaufort counties). The areas represent various terrain, fuel, and development types.

2001-02: Additional mitigation funds through the National Fire Plan were made available during the year to address wildfire problems in the wildland-urban interface. Forestry Commission personnel identified an additional six areas for assessment and mitigation efforts (Spartanburg/Cherokee counties, McCormick/Abbeville counties, Georgetown and Waccamaw Neck, Santee vicinity in Orangeburg county, Darlington/Chesterfield counties, and Charleston/Berkeley counties). Workshops to educate community leaders and homeowners were conducted within these many project areas.

Funds were also allotted to Belle Baruch with Clemson University to conduct a fuels reduction mitigation treatment study. This study was funded over the next 4 years as they gathered data on the various fuel reduction treatments and observed the differences in vegetative regrowth/sprouting. The information was analyzed to help show the differences in the effectiveness of the various treatments which varied by time and application (mechanical vs. prescribed burning).

2002-03: The assessment of wildland-urban interface communities continued. A number of Firewise workshops were presented, including one each in the Aiken and Paris Mountain areas following significant interface fires in these communities. The Lexington/Richland counties project was also initiated.

Funds were also dedicated to gather data to be used to help verify a smoke model to be used to simulate and predict the movement of residual smoke. This project was known as the LUI (Linear Urban Interface) to be used primarily along Interstate 95 and other heavily traveled roadways. Training was conducted for personnel who will be involved in gathering information for this smoke model. Equipment was distributed to field personnel to effectively and accurately gather and document the data. A GIS person on staff was hired to assist with the modeling, data analysis and compilation.

2003-04: Field personnel get more acquainted with conducting assessments, assessing 507 communities, and of those 137 communities have been assessed at high to very high risk. Approximately 35 community mitigation action plans have also been developed. Three have been delivered to homeowners where *'How to Have a Firewise Home'* workshops have been conducted; two plans for Savannah Lakes in McCormick County and one for Calhoun Forest in Pickens County. Additional Firewise workshops, *Living on the Edge in South Carolina*, were presented in Horry County, Ridgeland, Mt. Pleasant, Jasper County, Lugoff/Elgin and at Table Rock. Total attendance at the workshops exceeded 500 community leaders and homeowners.

Mitigation funds were also used to spread the word to landscape professionals by providing training opportunities and educational materials. Exhibits have been designed and purchased to be used at various landscape trade shows.

Also, direct mailings were made to about 184,000 people in storm damaged counties and in areas where large devastating fires threatened communities advising them of the danger and instructing them on Firewise principles.

2004-05: Two additional communities were assessed and 26 community wildfire protection plans developed to the draft stage. One plan was delivered to homeowners of Calhoun Forest in Pickens County where a *'How to Have a Firewise Home'* workshop was conducted. Four other *'How to Have a Firewise Home'* workshops were conducted : Savannah Lakes in McCormick County, Rock Point in Pickens County , Carolina Forest in Horry County and one for the Georgetown Citizen Emergency Response Team. An additional six Firewise workshops specifically designed for community leaders in South Carolina known as *'Living on the Edge in South Carolina'*, were conducted throughout the state in the Camden/Lugoff/Elgin area of Kershaw County, Savannah Lakes in McCormick County, North Charleston area of Charleston and Berkeley Counties, Awendaw area of Upper Charleston County, Pawley's Island of Georgetown County and one in Lexington County. Total attendance for these 11 workshops was just under 600.

Other projects to get the word out about WUI and Firewise principles included presentations at the National WUI conference in Denver, the SC Prescribed Fire Council annual meeting, the Sumter County Forest Landowners Assoc., and the Clemson extension agent conference; exhibits were presented at the joint meeting of the SC Chapter of the American Planning Assoc and the SC Urban and Community Forestry Council, the SC Nursery and Landscaping Assoc. and at the SC Firemen's Convention. A flammable plant list produced on cardstock was also developed and delivered to homeowners at these workshops.

A fuels mitigation project in Beaufort County at Victoria Bluff was conducted with a gyro-trac machine to demonstrate its capabilities. Funds were also issued to Savannah Lakes Village to help offset the costs of purchasing a chipper to be used at their Firewise workdays.

2005-06: Promotion of the Firewise Program has increased as Keowee Key in Pickens County becomes the second Firewise Community/USA in South Carolina. ‘*How to Have a Firewise Home*’ workshops were conducted at Keowee Key, at Isaqueena and Waterford communities in Pickens County. Another ‘*How to Have a Firewise Home*’ workshop was conducted at the Blue Heron Learning Center in Ridgeland (Jasper Co.) in cooperation with the Low Country WUI Council. The Prescribed Fire Council; of which the SCFC is a member. The SCFC WUI council manned an exhibit promoting Prescribed Fire as a Fuels Reduction practice in the WUI at the SC Firemen’s Convention at Myrtle Beach.

2006-07: Work continued on assessing wildland-urban interface communities and their risks to wildfire. ‘*How to Have a Firewise Home*’ workshops were conducted in several communities across the state...Aiken; in Oconee County at the communities of Waterford Pointe, Wynward Pointe, Keowee Harbours, Chickasaw Point and The Woods; Pickens and Greenville FDs; Midland Valley Chamber of Commerce; in Jasper County at the communities of Honey Hill, Robertville, Pineland, Tarboro, Tillman and Wagon Branch communities;

A mobile exhibit demonstrating the WUI risks and how to mitigate these risks was purchased as a collaborative effort with the USFS, USFWS, and NPS. The exhibit will be housed and scheduled by the SCFC and displays Firewise landscaping, Firewise construction and the risks to wildfire in the urban interface. The Firewise mobile exhibit was also used at a Firewise Community workday. Fuels mitigation work was completed on nine different tracts in the form of fuelbreak installation and prescribed burning.

2007-08: Work continued on assessing wildland-urban interface communities and their risks to wildfire. *How to Have a Firewise Home* workshops were conducted in several communities across the state; (Indian Creek). The Firewise mobile exhibit and a table top Firewise Home exhibit were used on 16 different occasions demonstrating the wildfire potential and associated risks to communities and homeowners as well as how homeowners can mitigate those risks. The exhibit was used in cooperation with the USFS, USFWS, and NPS.

Mitigation funds were also allocated to the LowCountry WUI Council for their educational efforts primarily in Jasper County. Additional funds were also allocated to other communities around the state to conduct fuels mitigation work such as Blue Granite in Florence County and the Debordieu community in conjunction with Clemson University in Georgetown County.

Eight additional tracts conducted Fuels mitigation work in the form of fuelbreak installation and prescribed burning.

2008-09: Emphasis this year was on increasing awareness of homeowners to their responsibility to help reduce the risk of their homes burning in a wildland fire. This awareness was accomplished by conducting Firewise workshops such as ‘*How to Have a Firewise Home*’ and Firewise presentations (16) to interested communities and community leaders. The Firewise mobile exhibit and a table top Firewise Home exhibit were used on 12 different occasions demonstrating the wildfire potential and associated risks to communities and homeowners as well as how homeowners can mitigate those risks. The exhibit was used in cooperation with the USFS, USFWS, and NPS.

Fuels mitigation plans, workdays and home assessments were conducted on 15 different occasions. Honey Hill became the states 4th Firewise Community/USA. Keowee Key (States 2nd Firewise

Community/USA) was awarded funds towards the installation of an emergency exit as egress was limited for that community.

The Highway 31 fire has increased the interest in Firewise efforts as the affected and neighboring communities especially in Horry County has increased dramatically in an area we had previously little interest.

2009-10: Firewise communities' assessments and Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) have been given higher priority as a full-time Firewise field coordinator was hired to streamline the assessment and CWPP process. Three more communities have gained national recognition as Firewise Community/USA status: Keowee Harbours, Waterford Pointe, and Chickasaw Point (all in Oconee County) bringing the state's total to seven.

2011 – Present: A second full time Firewise Field Coordinator was hired for the Coastal Areas. We currently have 26 Firewise/USA Communities in SC. Homeowner/Community workshops are conducted at the request of communities interested in making their community Firewise.