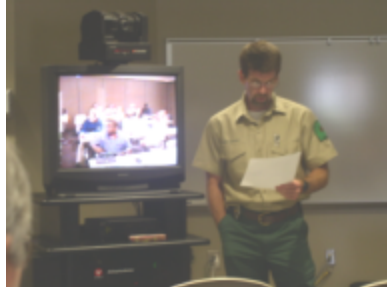




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## Southeast Fire Management Success Story



### First Firewise Communities Workshops Conducted in Alabama

The Jefferson-Shelby Wildland Urban Interface Advisory Council sponsored Alabama's first-ever Firewise Communities workshops last month. These workshops bring together members of the community and provide them tools to enable participants to take an active role in preventative Firewise community planning. "Protecting homes from wildfire is everyone's responsibility," said Firewise Coordinator Joe Lynch.


While much of the nation's attention focuses on wildland-urban interface fires in the west, "more houses burn in the Southeast each year," said Lynch. He explained that the reason the west gets more attention is that more homes tend to burn at once. In the southeast, we tend to lose one or two homes at a time, Lynch said.

The southeast has dealt with catastrophic fires as well. Of the 1,400 homes lost in the fires of 1985, 600 were in Florida and 400 of those were lost in one day. These staggering statistics are reminders of the importance of taking preventative action now. "Fire is a naturally occurring phenomena. It may cause damage, but [Firewise Communities] will survive," Lynch explained.

On June 26, students in Gadsden and Birmingham participated in an innovative Firewise Teleconference. Participants learned about fire in the southeast and Firewise principles. They were then able to incorporate their new knowledge with their own expertise and that of their peers during an interactive Firewise community planning activity. Participants benefited by sharing and discussing the results of their group recommendations with groups at both sites.

The teleconference format allowed participants to achieve a broader perspective of Firewise issues by gaining insights from different officials and professionals from the community and recognizing different regional concerns. Over 40 representatives from both communities took part in the workshop, including local technical college students, city planners, local fire departments, USDA Rural Conservation and Development Program, Alabama Forestry Commission, and National Park Service.

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A similar Firewise orientation workshop was conducted in Little River Canyon National Preserve at the DeSoto State Park Lodge in Fort Payne on June 27. Thirteen participants were in attendance, including representatives from State Farm Insurance, the Alabama Forestry Commission, and the National Park Service.

Several workshop participants will be incorporating workshop principles and skills as members of the Clay Firewise Community Coalition. They are working with the community to help designate the new community of Clay, Alabama as a Pilot Firewise Community.

The community coalition approach has many advantages. In taking steps to make communities fire-safe, residents are also helping to ensure their neighborhoods are resistant to other natural disasters. The community will also benefit in the long-term, as the teamwork is already in place to address similar issues such as managing the drinking water supply or establishing zoning.

The Jefferson-Shelby Wildland Urban Interface Council is a non-profit organization that conducts and promotes fire and prevention programs in areas with wildland interface problems. These workshops were made possible through funding provided by the National Park Service. Both organizations are dedicated to providing future Firewise Communities programs in the future.

For more information about Firewise visit <http://www.firewise.org>.

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