



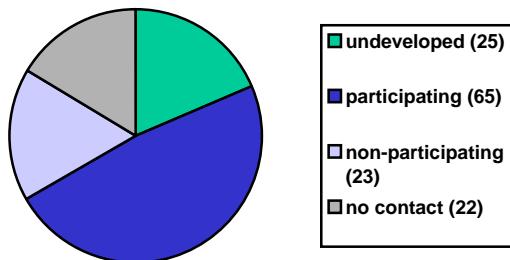
Point Reyes Fire Management News

Defensible space outreach provides insights to fuels program

For two consecutive years, Point Reyes National Seashore has hosted SCA interns in fire education. Since this program has been in place, important feedback gained through community outreach efforts has had a significant role in developing several directions within the fuels program.

The program was initiated in 2003 by a homeowners association which requested assistance with defensible space evaluation, and compliance with the correlating public resource code requirements. This HOA represented 135 properties, and had experienced a wildfire within the past 8 years, resulting in the loss of 45 structures. Residents in this group received substantial encouragement to participate from their Association's Board of Directors and several neighborhood leaders.

After evaluation methods were developed, property owners were contacted by phone to explain the program and offer an evaluation. A diligent effort was made to contact owners for each of the 135 properties by phone, e-mail, and through neighborhood liaisons. The evaluation methods used were based on local county requirements and recommendations from the California Fire Chiefs Association. Detailed evaluations were conducted and illustrated reports were provided to participants with copies provided to the local fire department.



In a subdivision of 135 parcels near Point Reyes National Seashore, 65 owners participated in an opportunity to have their home evaluated for defensible space, 25 owners had no structures to defend, 23 directly declined the opportunity, and 22 did not respond.

The primary objective of this project was education, not fuel reduction.

Significant outcomes for 2003 were:

- The park demonstrated a sincere effort to provide fire safety, and fuels treatment recommendations to 135 property owners.
- Owners of parcels adjacent to NPS land communicated their confusion about the location of the park boundary and responsibility for treatments that extended onto park land.
- Concerns about lack of enforcement of defensible space requirements, especially in regard to non-compliant neighbors was communicated.
- The need for brush pick-up for those without a truck was identified.

- The Fuels Management Specialist visited adjacent parcels where residents expressed concern about fuels, and began planning a treatment for a boundary area.
- The GIS Specialist acknowledged the need for more survey data to properly mark the park boundary, and developed a project proposal. The Fire Education Specialist identified the need for a targeted outreach to owners of adjacent parcels and began to identify a method for locating these individuals.
- The local fire department was provided with 65 detailed defensible space evaluations within their jurisdiction which fulfilled their obligation to inspect properties for compliance with the public resource code.

In 2004, defensible space evaluations were offered openly to multiple communities. A mailing announcing this opportunity was sent to approximately 4,200 residents. In response, there were 37 phone requests for additional information, and 8 evaluations requested and conducted.

The most apparent accomplishment during this second phase, was concurrent outreach to four rural fire departments which were not involved in the 2003 work.

Significant outcomes for 2004 were:

- The park demonstrated a sincere effort to provide fire safety, and fuels treatment recommendations to over 4,000 residents, and received a minimal response.
- Rural fire departments were educated about the public resource code requirements for defensible space and the specific guidelines published for the county.
- Rural fire departments received demonstrations of defensible space evaluation methods, provided comments, and were asked if they wanted copies of the reports for the evaluations in their jurisdiction.
- Community concerns about defensible space evaluation reports being provided to fire departments surfaced numerous times, despite repeated attempts to distinguish between evaluations for education and inspections for enforcement.
- The Fire Education Specialist determined an open panel discussion on community fire preparedness, including defensible space issues should be conducted at the outset of fire season the following year.

Interaction between land management agencies and communities provides a feedback loop that can inform management decisions. This type of adaptive management is responsive to park neighbors, encourages dialogue, and builds relationships.

The primary goal of this project has been to help property owners make informed decisions about wildland fire hazards on their properties, to understand how their fuels may effect their neighbors, and to accept responsibility for the consequences if they choose No Action.

There is no question that numerous educational opportunities were created, and important dialogue on many interrelated social aspects of defensible space was achieved through this defensible space outreach effort over the last two years.