

Missouri Ice Storm Mitigation Plan

USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry



Fire and Aviation Management helps state develop plan

Description: In January 2007, Southwest Missouri was hit by a record-breaking ice storm that left tons of tree debris on the ground. As a result of the storm, 29 counties were declared natural disaster areas by USDA. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and property owners face many challenges within the impact zone: how to dispose of debris; accumulation of fuel for wildfires; potential for property damage from wildfires; and a large, and growing, wildland urban interface area in Southwest Missouri. To address these challenges, the state requested assistance to develop a plan that would develop awareness among residents of the impacted area on safe debris burning, alternatives to burning, and the severe conditions created by the accumulation of fuel.

Key Issues:

- For many residents in the suburban and rural areas, debris burning is the most widely used option for disposal of downed, woody debris.
- Improper or unsafe debris burning is a leading cause of wildfires in Missouri. Most residents who burn debris never intend for their fire to spread and cause damage.
- Escaped debris fires were responsible for one third of the total acreage that burned in Missouri in 2006.
- The increase in population and home construction throughout the Southwest Missouri Ozarks significantly increases the potential for property damage, injury and loss of life due to wildfires.

Accomplishments:

- A Fire Prevention Education Team, supported by the Northeastern Area, was dispatched to Southwest Missouri in July 2007 to develop a mitigation/prevention plan with the MDC.
- The team developed a campaign and plan for the state to implement in the winter/spring of 2008.
- It was designed to educate residents on how to manage and dispose of damaged trees using alternatives to debris burning and safe debris burning practices and includes new campaign materials such as billboards, fact sheets, and door hangers; media contacts using press releases and public service/paid advertising; partnerships with fire departments and local businesses; and MDC participation at high visibility events.
- NA provided MDC a \$15,000 grant in FY 2007 to implement the campaign and plan.



Future Direction:

- The MDC will implement the plan in the winter/spring of 2008. The department plans to monitor the number of escaped debris fires and structures lost as a result of these fires before, during and after project implementation.
- NA is following the implementation of the plan to determine effectiveness and the utility of providing similar assistance to other NA states.



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