

Wildfire Awareness in Iowa's Urban/Rural Interface

The Challenge

Iowa's urban/rural interface is growing as metro areas expand into natural forest, prairies and agricultural areas that are in permanent vegetative cover through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The state has the largest number of CRP contracts in the nation, totaling over 1.5 million acres. Most of this land is planted in cool and warm season grass plantings, tree plantings and riparian buffer strips. There is an additional 230,000 acres are in federal ownership and conservation easements. The threat of wildland fire in the urban interface is greater now than it has been in more than a century and the problem is compounded by homeowners formerly from urban area that do not understand that all of the services generally taken for granted in the cities are not equally available.

The Solution

- Assist the rural and volunteer fire departments with their wildland fire equipment needs.
- Increase wildland fire and urban interface awareness of homeowners, community leaders, conservation groups, developers, and state and local emergency services agencies.
- Adapt Firewise concepts to localized, Midwestern scenarios.

Resulting Benefits

- Coordination and partnering between federal, state and local agencies to build awareness of risk factors, expectations and capabilities
- Communities have been prioritized by risk factors.
- Federal Volunteer Fire Assistance funds directly available to rural and volunteer fire departments for wildland fire equipment needs have been significantly increased.

Adapting universal fire concepts to localized, Midwestern scenarios improved wildfire protection in Iowa.



The Loess Hills of Western Iowa

Sharing Success

- Discussions between all manner of interested conservationists stimulated work on prescribed fire issues incorporating urban/rural interface issues.
- A bus tour provided opportunities to see areas in a rural/urban interface with a diversity of prescribed fire issues at each one. This was well attended by private and public conservationists.
- Presentations to a variety of groups have resulted in greater awareness of not only the existence of the issues but also simple steps homeowners can take to protect themselves.
- Work on the difficult issue of liability insurance for prescribed fire contractors has been an outgrowth of increased awareness of urban/rural interface issues.
- The Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy was chosen to participate in the Fire Learning Network. The Iowa Loess Hills region was chosen as a demonstration project, which strives for landscape prescriptions, as opposed to ownership prescriptions. The Iowa DNR is a partner in this effort.



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