

Michigan Expands Its Firewise Communities Project

The Challenge

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) established the Michigan Firewise Communities Project as a pilot program in 30 southern Michigan counties, but reduced budgets at the State and local level challenged its ability to expand the program statewide. At the same time, the wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas within the State continued to expand into fire-prone ecosystems due to population increases and changes in ownership patterns. These WUI wildfire risk areas include high-value and sensitive Great Lakes shoreline property, historically wildfire-prone Jack pine landscapes, developments in abandoned Christmas tree plantations, and rural forested lands in northern Michigan. There is a growing need to educate residents about how to manage their properties and protect their homes within these fire-prone ecosystems.

The Solution

Using National Fire Plan funding provided by the USDA Forest Service Northeastern Area Fire and Aviation Management Program, the Michigan DNR partnered with the Michigan State University Extension Service to expand the Michigan Firewise Communities Project to the entire State in 2005. In the first year of a 3-year plan, seven local Firewise projects were introduced across Michigan; public service announcements were aired on a leading urban television station and local stations; press releases were provided to newspapers; educational tools were developed, including bilingual Extension Bulletins, that illustrated hazard and mitigation techniques; and a comprehensive list of fire-resistant landscape plant species adapted to Michigan's climate was developed.

Resulting Benefits

- These local projects greatly reduced the risk of wildland fire to communities and the environment by educating Michigan residents about Firewise concepts and hazard reduction techniques.

By partnering with the Michigan State University Extension Service, the Michigan DNR successfully expanded the Michigan Firewise Communities Project across the State.



MSU Extension crew member videotapes a MDNR Fire Officer for use in Firewise television PSAs and documentary. The PSA and two others were aired over 900 times to over 30,000 Michigan residents. New PSAs have been developed for 2006.

Photo credit: Michigan State University Extension Service

- The Michigan Firewise Communities Project has successfully formed partnerships and communicated with property owners to further wildfire mitigation efforts in Michigan.
- Firewise presentations for local officials were offered as an "optional series component" in Michigan State University Extension Michigan Citizen Planner Workshops. Citizen Planner Programs are designed to provide training and technical knowledge to citizens serving on local land use planning boards and commissions. Firewise is promoted as a proactive approach to community planning, and a draft county ordinance is pending at this time in Wexford County.

Sharing Success

- Establishing relationships among emergency management offices, local fire departments, television and newspaper media, and regional governments across the State has alerted local officials to the growing wildfire problem. A solid statewide network now exists that jointly delivers a decisive Firewise message and wildfire preparedness theme.
- In light of recent State budget challenges, partnerships between the Michigan DNR, Michigan State University Extension, USDA Forest Service, local fire departments, and other State and local agencies have proven to be an effective way to address wildfire mitigation in Michigan.



USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

For more information, contact:

Kathryn P. Maloney, Area Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
Email: kmaloney@fs.fed.us

Billy Terry, Assistant Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4145
Email: bterry@fs.fed.us