

Rural Fire Protection Task Force

West Virginia uses Volunteer Fire Assistance funding to train wildland firefighters

The Challenge

Rural fire protection in the 20 states served by the US Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry relies heavily on volunteer fire departments (VFDs) and their members. While state forestry agencies are legally responsible for the prevention and suppression of wildland fires, local VFDs provide the initial attack capabilities on most wildland fires. For the local communities and the state forestry agencies, a well trained and equipped workforce is critical to the suppression of these fires.

The Solution:

In 2003 the West Virginia Division of Forestry (WVDOF) developed a program to train volunteer firefighters in the suppression of wildland fires. Using funding from the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program, the WVDOF trains VFD personnel and university students in three courses that will enable them to fight wildland fires more safely and effectively. Each participant completes the Basic Incident Command course prior to the classroom training. Participants then complete Fire Weather Behavior and Firefighter Training courses during both indoor and outdoor sessions. Upon successful completion of the courses, the firefighters each receive a set of personal protective equipment – yellow shirt and green trousers. Firefighters are also eligible to take the work capacity test and, if successful, receive a red card enabling them to participate on out-of-state fires with the WVDOF.

Benefits:

The WVDOF has trained more than 390 wildland firefighters under the VFA Training Grant. This



Volunteer firefighters and the WV Air National Guard are shown in personal protective clothing they received upon completion of the Wildland Firefighter Training course. Photo courtesy WV Air National Guard, Martinsburg.

includes members from more than 83 fire departments, 49 students from the Forestry Department of the West Virginia University (WVU) and 28 members of the WV Air National Guard. The WVDOF has been able to increase its firefighter workforce while instilling proper wildland firefighting techniques and safety procedures in the firefighters.

Sharing Successes:

This training program has increased personnel availability for the WVDOF's wildland fire crews for both in state and out of state assignments. Since 2003, the WVDOF has conducted eight pack tests and issued more than 180 red cards. In addition, the firefighter training program has become a permanent part of the WVU School of Forestry curriculum.

Fire and Aviation Management

Volunteer Fire Assistance program funds are used to train firefighters in order to more effectively assist the West Virginia Division of Forestry.

For more information, contact:

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

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



USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

April 2007
Visit us on the web at:
<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/>