

Maine Defensible Space Chipping Program

National Fire Plan Funds Support Community Mitigation Projects

The Challenge

Two-thirds of Maine's population or about 780,000 residents live in the "wildland-urban interface" or "intermix." In these areas structures intermingle with natural vegetation, and wildfire threatens lives, homes, and property. The Maine Forest Service – Division of Forest Protection established a Wildland-Urban Interface Committee in 2004, to facilitate completion of Community Wildfire Protections Plans (CWPPs) in these areas. More than 4,500 homes were assessed to determine their risk factors. Of the homes surveyed, 88 percent were at extreme or high risk of ignition in a wildfire, due to fuel buildup.

The Solution

The solution was to create defensible space around homes by removing fuels and clearing vegetation. Through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program of the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, the Maine Forest Service used National Fire Plan Funds to acquire a wood chipper in 2008 and a truck in 2009 for the Defensible Space Chipping Program.

To participate in the Statewide program communities must complete a CWPP, to identify and prioritize hazardous areas. Maine forest rangers inform homeowners about ways to reduce the chance of structure fires. Residents who improve their defensible space may leave the brush they remove at the roadside. Maine forest rangers, local fire department personnel, and community volunteers collect the brush and turn it into chips, which are used for community projects or converted to wood pellet fuel.

Several communities have also used the Forest Protection Division's brush cutters, which are carried on the chipper truck, to clear vegetation around dry hydrants and along rights-of-way.

The Defensible Space Chipping Program is available to communities to help implement their Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Communities reduce the risk of wildfire by creating defensible space around homes.



Crews from the Maine Forest Service and Lake Arrowhead Community Public Works worked with the Waterboro Fire Department for a successful "brush chipping" day in May 2010. (Photo: Kent Nelson, Maine Forest Service)

Resulting Benefits

The Defensible Space Chipping Program is instrumental in implementing CWPPs. This program educates and assists homeowners. In 2 ½ years more than 300 homeowners have increased defensible space, 944 acres have been treated, and 368 tons of hazardous fuel have been removed.

The chipping program has increased homeowner and community awareness, which resulted in Lake Arrowhead and Indian Point receiving recognition as Firewise Communities USA (www.firewise.org). Participating homeowners now understand "Firewise" terms and share their knowledge with neighbors.

Sharing Success

The Maine Forest Service continues to build partnerships with local fire departments, community groups, and the media, to promote awareness of the need for homeowners to maintain adequate defensible space and efficiently dispose of hazardous fuels. [Click here to view a local media story on the 2008 Mapleton chipping program.](#)

For additional information about the program go to the Maine Forest Service Web page at www.maineforestservice.gov.



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