



IDAHO STATE FIRE PLAN WORKING GROUP

3780 Industrial Avenue S.
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815
www.idahofireplan.org

208-666-8646
Fax: 208-769-1524
skimball@idl.idaho.gov

News Release

Idaho Communities Work Year-round to Prepare for Wildfires

Steve Kimball, Idaho National Fire Plan Coordinator

July 7, 2008

While wildfires again threaten homes in California, many in Idaho are looking around their communities and public lands asking, "What is being done to prevent wildfire losses here?" Wildfires scorched 1.9 million acres in Idaho in 2007; one of the worst fire seasons on record. As fire managers brace for another season, they are concerned about the increased complexity, risk, and costs of fires in the "wildland urban interface." One of the fastest growing states with plenty of wildlands and wildfire, Idaho faces some of the greatest community wildfire challenges in the nation.

"There's a lot of preparation work going on throughout the year in Idaho," says Steve Kimball, Idaho's Coordinator for the National Fire Plan. "Each of our forty-four counties has a wildfire mitigation plan that identifies risk areas and priority activities to lessen that risk." Planned actions range from home site work (such as replacing flammable home materials and thinning dense yard vegetation) to large fuel breaks around communities and hazardous fuels treatments across broad landscapes.

Community wildfire protection work is authorized and supported by The National Fire Plan of 2000 and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act 2003. These have brought agencies and residents together to develop and implement wildfire protection projects. About \$2 million per year has been available in Idaho to fund hazardous fuels projects on private lands.

Since 2001, over 16,000 acres of hazardous fuels have been treated on private lands, and more than a million acres of Idaho's federal lands have been treated. This work helps control scale and intensity of wildfires and makes communities more resilient to impacts of wildfire. In addition, National Fire Plan assistance funds have provided Idaho's fire departments and districts with approximately \$31 million for equipment and training.

Recent fires have shown that preventative work can make a difference when a wildfire burns through a community. One example is last summer's Poe Cabin Fire which roared through the Deer Creek subdivision near White Bird. In 2004, Deer Creek residents removed flammable materials and debris, expanded lawns, and thinned dense tree cover in surrounding forests. The Poe Cabin fire moved at a rate of two miles in ten minutes and scorched trees surrounding these homes; however, all structures protected by the work in 2004 were left intact. A video about the work and success of the Deer Creek subdivision, *Are We Safe from Wildfire; Protecting Idaho's Communities*, will soon be available on the Idaho National Fire Plan website: www.idahofireplan.org.

(Continued on Reverse)

A collaborative effort of the following member agencies and organizations:

Idaho Department of Lands ♦ US Forest Service ♦ Idaho Association of Counties ♦ Bureau of Land Management ♦ US Fish & Wildlife Service ♦ Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor ♦ Idaho Fire Chiefs Association ♦ Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security ♦ Idaho State Fire Marshal ♦ National Park Service ♦ Bureau of Indian Affairs ♦ Nez Perce Tribe ♦ Coeur d'Alene Tribe ♦ Shoshone-Bannock Tribe ♦ Office of the Governor ♦ Idaho Resource Conservation & Development Councils ♦ Idaho Emergency Management Association

“Most communities in Idaho are paying attention to their wildfire risk and doing something about it,” says Lemhi County Commissioner Robert Cope. “In Idaho, Counties are taking the lead with wildfire mitigation and community protection. Counties are using interagency county groups to plan and implement mitigation projects across ownerships. We’re making progress, but there is much more to do.” Some of the additional work needed, according to Steve Kimball, is within and beyond community boundaries to remove hazardous fuels and restore fire-adapted landscapes. An Idaho Firewise program is being developed to educate citizens about wildfires and home protection.

Recent work to protect communities from wildfires includes:

Bonner County has developed BONFIRE, a county-wide wildfire mitigation and education program. Work on over 745 structures has been completed in a 3-year period. A fuel break is being constructed along the Schweitzer Mountain access road.

Kootenai County has an aggressive program to educate and support homeowners in creating defensible space around their homes. Defensible space work has been completed on over 5,000 homes. The County uses news articles, radio shows, and homeowner visits to educate residents about wildfire protection.

Boundary County has worked with the Forest Service and other agencies and citizens on a collaborative project to protect the Bonners Ferry’s municipal watershed. Over 1,300 acres of hazardous fuels treatments are planned on national forest lands within the Myrtle Creek drainage. On private lands in the county, over 400 structures have been protected and 564 acres of fuels have been treated.

Bannock County has developed ordinances and building codes to guide new development in high risk areas. Fuels reduction has been completed in subdivisions nestled in heavy juniper trees bordering public lands near Pocatello; these include Johnny Creek (about 700 homes) and Lava Ranch Estates (about 500 homes).

Idaho County has a part-time fire mitigation manager who assists landowners with education and grants for fire mitigation work. Treatments have been completed near Grangeville, Elk City, Dixie, Secesh, Syringa, Warren, and other areas.

Adams and Valley Counties are integrating hazardous fuels treatments with biomass projects such as the “Fuels for Schools” program. Timber blown down from a tornado near the community of Bear was recently salvaged. Hazardous fuels work was completed last year near Burgdorf hot springs. Woody debris that once littered the forest floor is now being chipped and used for energy at Council High School, while other products are contributing to a burgeoning small-diameter timber industry.

Lemhi County is completing large-scale fuels and restoration projects near Gibbonsville and Hughes Creek (north of Salmon). A grant-funded collaborative project has brought together federal agencies, conservation groups, landowners, and others. The group has designed treatments for thousands of acres of national forest and private lands to protect communities, restore fire-adapted forest systems, improve wildlife habitat, and provide forest products.

For a complete listing of Idaho’s National Fire Plan accomplishments, please visit www.idahofireplan.org.