

Draft Proposal- October 2, 2008

Idaho Firewise Education Program

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A. Introduction

This is a proposal for developing a new statewide wildland fire education program for Idaho, to be called *Idaho Firewise*. The goal is to build a program to heighten awareness about wildland fire management, home and community protection, fire prevention and fire ecology. We're striving to build a culture where these principles are understood by a broad audience, and appropriate preparation actions are routine for those living in fire-prone areas.

This proposal addresses purpose and need for the program, target audiences, key messages, delivering the program, organizational structure, development schedule, and costs.

Background

The Idaho Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan (NFP) has focused primarily on reducing hazardous fuels and increasing capability of local fire departments. The Idaho NFP program is delivered through a collaborative partnership between the State Fire Plan Working Group and County Working Groups. The State and County Working Groups have diverse participation and include county representatives, local fire chiefs, and federal, state, and tribal representatives.

In 2007, the State Fire Plan Working Group surveyed counties to learn about progress and needs with the National Fire Plan program. In these surveys, the counties highlighted the need for a statewide education and prevention program. The attached Figure 1 shows how the education and prevention goal fits with the Idaho National Fire Plan program.

It has been said that the best education programs are developed and delivered at the local level. This has certainly been true in Idaho as there are many shining examples of fire education initiatives across the State. There are also areas in Idaho that are just beginning to develop educational programs and materials. The intent of this proposal is not to duplicate or take away from these local efforts at the state level, but rather to provide better coordination and support for them. There would be considerable efficiency and value in providing common access to a statewide clearinghouse of education materials, so that local educators do not need to develop materials that already exist. The state program may also recommend high quality materials for specific local audiences.

The state program would provide support and resources for workshops, project planning and implementation, and other county, group, and individually-led efforts. It would maintain a committee comprised of state, federal, and local representatives as well as other public and private groups and organizations.

B. Purpose and Need:

The **purpose** of the Idaho Firewise program would be to:

- 1) Provide a coordinated, consistent, interagency, and ideally consensus-driven approach to wildland fire education in Idaho.
- 2) Define the target audiences, messages and methods of delivery and match audience needs with existing materials or develop new materials.
- 3) Establish and grow partnerships with private and public entities that have a stake in wildfire prevention and education.
- 4) Inventory, catalog, and provide a web-based clearinghouse of the existing fire education materials.

- 5) Coordinate the development and delivery of key messages.
- 6) Facilitate information sharing across agencies and jurisdictional lines.
- 7) Develop resources and support for educational and other community led activities across the state.

Need:

Unlike other States, Idaho lacks a statewide program dedicated to wildland fire education. This makes it difficult **to share information effectively and to develop consistent messages and themes that are easily recognizable to the public.** There is also a need to support and strengthen local programs that are just starting out, and compliment those that already exist. A statewide program can also serve as a vehicle for bringing in new partners with a vested interest in wildfire prevention, education and mitigation. A statewide clearinghouse program is an effective and efficient way to make quality resources available for many to use and avoid duplication of funds and resources.

C. Target Audiences

Target audiences will be selected with thought and care. Successful programs start small with narrow audience targets and few locations. The proposed program will grow with success adding new target audiences and expanding throughout the state.

Initial **target audiences for the education program include:**

- **Home and landowners**
- **Emergency responders & managers**
- **Planning and Zoning officials**
- **Elected officials (county commissioners & others)**

- **Fire Chiefs**
- **Public land user groups**
- **Insurance agencies & associations**
- **Realtors & Developers**
- **Master Gardeners, Horticulturists, and Nurseries**
- **Building Materials Retailers (Home Depot, etc.)**
- **Landscape Architects**
- **Special Interest Groups**
- **Schoolteachers**
- **Children (K through 12)**
- **Service Organizations (Rotary Clubs, etc.)**
- **State, federal and local fire agencies**

D. Key Messages

Selected key messages for will provide for consistency and continuity in building awareness and understanding of wildfire principles. Key messages would include:

1. **Homeowner/Community “Firewise” Education:** Along with our hazardous fuels reduction efforts, education for those living in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) is our best way to mitigate losses from wildfire. The Idaho Firewise program would use innovative approaches to ensure Idaho’s communities understand there will always be wildfires, but we don’t have to lose homes if we are prepared. An emphasis will be placed on personal responsibility. It has been proven that a home’s survivability during a wildfire is largely determined by how it is built, maintained, and landscaped. All these factors are directly under the homeowner’s control. Educational initiatives will be aimed at:
 - creating survivable space for homes in the wildland/urban interface

- developing fire-wise landscaping and building materials
- how to organize and become a Firewise USA community information landowners should look for and what to do after a fire
- developing a directory of resources for products (gel, foams for structure protection, etc), services, (site triage, brush removal, etc and programs (NFP grants) available for Idaho's communities.

The educational program would emphasize working with county commissioners, planning and zoning officials, and emergency coordinators to encourage and engage developers in including "firewise" principals in new developments. The programs would address both mandatory and voluntary approaches including zoning ordinances and building codes.

The program would also address planning for actions before, during, and after wildfire events. For example, homeowners will need to understand and be prepared to commit to "stay and defend", or "leave early" approaches.

Many individuals, groups, and agencies are involved with wildfire home and community protection. Each has roles and responsibilities. Idaho Firewise would help people understand the best actions to use to prepare, and how their actions would compliment work of others in community protection.

2. **Fire Prevention:** Idaho consistently has one of the highest numbers of human-caused fires in the western United States. Preventing fires saves lives, money, homes, and our natural resources. Prevention will always be part of our education package. There are several fire prevention programs and messages currently being delivered across the State by counties and local coalitions (co-ops). These efforts are highly valuable as they are tailored to local citizens and actual fire causes in a

given area. We can make these programs even better by providing information and materials that fit local needs.

There is also a statewide fire prevention initiative called Keep Idaho Green (KIG) that began in 1946. The KIG campaign will be revitalized and refined to include new partners and messages to meet the growing need for awareness and prevention of wildfires across Idaho. We proposed to roll KIG into the Idaho Firewise program and retain this as a statewide campaign focused on fire prevention messages.

Another focus area will be working with County planning and zoning commissions or county commissioners to encourage or require developers to apply firewise principles as part of the review and approval process for new development.

3. Fire Ecology: Fire ecology provides the scientific basis for fire management. This includes messages about the natural role of fire on the landscape, prescribed fire, fire effects, invasive species, fire behavior, fire research, fire use, good fire/bad fire (school programs), etc. An emphasis will be placed on the human impacts of wildfire (per the Wildland Urban Interface issues described above), with the landscape and fire adapted ecosystems that are so common in Idaho. All aspects of fire management play a role on fire ecology including prevention, suppression, fire use, prescribed fire and mechanical fuel reduction. The focus with this key message is to allow a deeper understanding of interagency management roles.

4. Fire Management: Integrated with fire ecology is the question of how is fire managed in Idaho? What agencies are involved and who is responsible? What can I expect as a private land or home owner? This topic will include information on Idaho's fire agencies strategy and tactics of fighting a wildland fire, their respective roles and responsibilities and ways the public can help firefighters when a fire starts. The full

spectrum of response options will be presented, ranging from wildland fire use to full suppression.

E. Delivering the Idaho Firewise Program

Create a Web-based Clearinghouse of Materials

The proposed Idaho Firewise program would use public and intranet web sites to provide a clearinghouse of educational materials for local use. The website would include online print media (PDF's, etc), streaming video, interactive dialogues (blogs), PowerPoint presentations, learning modules, online classes, pictures, and more.

The website, www.idahofirewise.org, would be the premier communication tool for this program. It would serve as the first stop for inquiries, serve as a clearinghouse for resources and information, and facilitate exchange of ideas and information.

The lack of high speed internet access in some areas in Idaho creates a challenge for a state web-based clearinghouse of educational resources. However, it is expected that over time broadband access will increase. There simply is not a more cost effective delivery mechanism and means to link educational materials across the state than the web clearinghouse. Certainly the clearinghouse is not an educational panacea, but it is an important first step towards a sustainable statewide wildland fire education program. Figure 2 (attached) shows elements of the Idaho Firewise program in development.

Continue existing programs

We already have many successful statewide wildfire education efforts. *Idaho Firewise* would be the umbrella organization that would support these established programs, as well as encourage communities to develop new programs that address their individual needs.

Workshops

The program would promote workshops for local audiences. It would also include learning modules for web self study or presentation to groups and communities.

Use of New Technology

The program would innovate with video conferencing, satellite downlink conferences, and other technology.

Expand use of hardcopy media.

Use publications, posters, and CD/DVD's.

Seek distribution points

Use public libraries, county fairs, public TV, public radio, and local media (TV, radio).

Elected Official Briefings

Provide presentations to local, county, state and federal officials on the goals of the Idaho Firewise program and the options available for their consideration.

Agency Briefings

Provide Idaho Firewise program briefings to better coordinate the mission and partnerships.

Program Support Needed for Delivery

- **Materials:** publications, PowerPoint presentations, posters, flyers, DVD/CD's, traveling displays, etc.
 - Development
 - Reproduction
 - Distribution
 - Storage

- **Equipment:** laptop computers with projectors to give presentations; “boxes” with presentation materials for targeted audiences.
- **Transportation**
- **Travel** (Per diem, housing)
- **Facilities for workshops**
- **Web support**
- **Support Staff and experts**
- **Fulfillment** (a method to ship/deliver requested materials)

F. Organizational Structure

While this program would introduce a new organization, it would be chartered to work within the existing framework of state and county interagency working groups. The new organization would be a subcommittee of the state working group with the purpose of providing support to county working groups in their local educational efforts.

Start-up Phase: All agencies that are members of the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group would be invited to participate. These participants would make up an Idaho Firewise Education Committee (IFEC) that would elect a chairperson and report directly to the ISFPWG. The IFEC would meet regularly, assign tasks, and report back to the ISFPWG. During this start-up phase, this committee will develop a Charter, action items, Web Site, Clearinghouse, and an inventory of all the current, local education products and programs around the State.

Implementation Phase: Once the organization is established and projects identified, a person responsible for implementation of the program would be needed. It is recommended that an Idaho Firewise Director (IFD) be hired to fill this role. The IFD will become the Chairperson for the Idaho Firewise Education Committee and report directly to the ISFPWG. This position could be a term or temporary position that is contracted on a yearly basis to assure there are available funds from year to year, though a permanent position would guarantee program continuity and longevity.

Volunteers: A key way to get messages out to the communities is to visit them. This takes staffing. Although there are good people currently working in the arena of fire education, they are tied to agency or organizational mandates, schedules and personal job descriptions. For Idaho Firewise to be successful, a strong volunteer program is critical. *Idaho Firewise* has the opportunity of working in partnership with the University of Idaho, the AmeriCorps program and other agencies and groups. AmeriCorp volunteers attend graduate school for the nine month school year and would be available to deliver programs in the field during the summer months.

Additional volunteers could be recruited from:

- University of Idaho student chapters of professional organizations (e.g. SAF), groups, clubs, and services organizations (other Universities and community colleges as well)
- Boy Scout/Girl Scouts
- Church groups
- Garden clubs

Coordination and supervision is a job in and of itself and with a strong program it would likely be more than a program director could handle with other program leadership duties. It is recommended that a paid volunteer coordinator eventually be hired. Experience has shown that volunteer coordinators are well worth the money spent.

G. Next Steps & Funding:

Once development of the program is approved, the ISFPWG should convene the Idaho Firewise Education Committee and designate a Chairperson. The Committee should look for funding and expertise to develop and maintain the new website. The University of Idaho and FRAMES has expertise in managing fire websites and developing information clearinghouses. There is potential to develop an agreement with this group to develop and maintain the new website.

Other early steps include inventorying statewide materials and resources, developing the clearinghouse, and developing delivery and fulfillment mechanisms.

Potential sources of funding would begin with the agencies that make up the ISFPWG. Other sources could include:

1. **Private businesses.** Agencies/partners with a vested interest in mitigating loss from fire including, but not limited to, insurance, realtors, developers, lenders, utility companies, and professional associations
2. **The State Legislature.** Both Nevada and California get annual dollars earmarked for their Fire Safe Councils. If we are successful, this may be a possibility down the road for Idaho.
3. **Non Profit entities.** The American Red Cross may be able to provide in-kind services and possibly funding.

H. Proposed Idaho Firewise Program Development Schedule

The Firewise Program would be phased in over the next 3 years. The following areas are the total program needs for a sustainable program. Cost estimates for the following items will be presented at the October 7th meeting.

- I. Websites, Firewise (public) and Working Group (Intranet): CLEARINGHOUSE / INVENTORY
 - a. Who: UI
 - b. When: launch site by June 1, 2009
 - c. Estimated Start-up costs
 - d. Estimated annual costs

- II. Education Material / Inventory & Organization (survey for user and provider): CLEARINGHOUSE / INVENTORY
 - a. Who: Subcommittee
 - b. When: Begin planning November 2008; materials launched with website; inventory & organization ongoing
 - c. Estimated Start-up costs

- d. Estimated annual costs
- III. Printing and Warehouse / Education Material Fulfillment
- a. Who: To be determined
 - e. When: Planning begins January 2009; Contract initiated November 2009
 - b. Contracting start-up costs
 - c. Estimated annual costs
- IV. Field Volunteer Program
- a. Who: Pilot with UI
 - b. When: Planning November 2008; Pilot launched 2009
 - c. Pilot project costs
 - d. Estimated annual costs
- V. Support to Local Education & Prevention Programs
- a. Who: Counties and Coops
 - b. When: Begin 2009
 - c. Start-up costs:
 - d. Estimated annual costs:
- VI. Program Leadership and Coordination (Potentially two positions: Idaho Firewise Director and Volunteer Coordinator)
- a. Who: Recruitment by Subcommittee
 - b. When: Job announcement for Idaho Firewise Director October 2009; Job announcement for Volunteer Coordinator October 2010
 - c. Salaries, travel, and operating costs

Figure 1. Idaho National Fire Plan Statewide Program



Figure 2. Idaho Firewise Clearinghouse

