

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Clearwater County, 208.476.4434
Fax: 208.476.4111
2200 Michigan Ave., Orofino, ID 83544

Preparing landowners for the 2013 fire season

The Situation

Wildland fires have increasingly gained national attention due to their increasing severity and acres affected. Historical data indicate that over the last 20 years wildfires have increased dramatically in the western states to historic levels. In 2012 more acres burned in the 11 western states than at any time in history, with 1.75 million acres burned in Idaho. In the Nez Perce – Clearwater Forest of North Central Idaho, more acres were burned in 2012 than at any time since 1934.

In the spring of 2013, the Interagency Fire Center in Boise, predicted another severe fire season for Idaho.

Our Response

Given these data, Extension, in consultation with the Idaho Department of Lands, Clearwater County Emergency Management, and the Clearwater-Potlatch Timber Protective Association developed a new curriculum for a workshop to inform landowners about wildland fire and what they could do to protect their property. This workshop was presented in Orofino in May and Kamiah in June.

The workshop curriculum included introducing attendees to the historical and ecological context for the increased incidence and severity of wildland fire; presentations on wildland fire behavior (particularly the extreme fire behavior witnessed in recent years); how firefighters made decisions on whether or not to protect structures; fire insurance for rural properties; how to make homes and properties more fire resistant; and emergency response plans for evacuation and emergency vehicle access during fires.

Presenters included individuals with many years of wildland fire-fighting experience, including work on the 2012 and 2013 fires in Colorado, as well as video



2013 Orofino Fire, a wildfire immediately behind the Clearwater County Extension Office in July.

and pictures of extreme wildland fire behavior that demonstrate how quickly structures can be lost to wildland fire if not properly protected.

Program Outcomes

The 27 attendees of the two workshops reported an average 59% increase in knowledge, with 100% indicating that they would (or probably would) implement the practices learned to make their property more resistant to wildland fire. The attendees represented 1,265 acres of the wildland-urban interface in the Clearwater valley. In addition, some of the workshop attendees contacted weeks after the workshops indicated that they had already implemented property protection measures learned.

The 2013 fire season followed predictions of being a significant one, with many local wildfires in the Clearwater Valley including large fires in Lolo Creek in Clearwater County, a wildfire directly behind the

Extension office on Michigan Ave. in Orofino that required the evacuation of several residences, and several wildfires along the Highway 12 corridor along the Clearwater River between Lewiston and Orofino.

The Future

Attendees will be contacted by phone this fall to find out what percentage of attendees actually implemented changes to their property to make it more resistant to wildland fire. In addition, new ways of marketing and delivering wildland fire information for property owners will be explored to reach more landowners, including recorded webinars and online video.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bill Warren, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Clearwater County
2200 Michigan Avenue
Orofino, ID 83544
Phone: 208.476.4434
Fax: 208.476.4111
E-mail: williamw@uidaho.edu

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