



UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

Fire No. 13

The Idaho Firewise Program

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The old warning of Fire in the Forest! is now being replaced with a new refrain - Fire in the Wildland/Urban interface! Today, as more people build in the forests and rangeland ecosystems of Idaho they become part of the growing wildland/urban interface - where the urban environment meets the wild.

Being a resident of the wildland/urban interface has benefits as well as risks. A higher level of personal responsibility for the safety of their families as well as their property, pets, and livestock occurs when the choice is made to move into or near a wildland environment. And one of these responsibilities is try and make your home and surrounding landscape as safe from being ignited by a wildfire as possible.

Over the years, many different organizations across Idaho have worked hard to implement partnerships and educational programs to raise awareness on all aspects of fire. Whether it is taking time to work with homeowners to assess their hazards and risks or introducing Smokey Bear's prevention message to children, each time we engage with individuals or communities we decrease the challenges and costs of managing wildfires that affect us all.

In 2008, local, state, and federal organizations embarked on a new initiative: to establish a col-

laborative wildland fire education program to be called Idaho Firewise. Our hope is that through the development, implementation, and support of existing educational programs that we will achieve a "firewise" culture in Idaho, one that accepts and acknowledges the roles and responsibilities of living in fire-based ecosystems.



The primary goals and objectives of the Idaho Firewise program are to:

- promote a strong, coordinated interagency educational approach to wildland fire, including prevention and protection strategies, a greater understanding of the ecology and role that fire plays in Idaho's ecosystems, and illustrating the negative impacts caused by wildland fires.
- increase citizen awareness, responsibility, and accountability by promoting knowledgeable behaviors when using fire, using recommended standards for protecting your home and property from wildland fire, and increasing the understanding of personal accountability for those living in fire-based ecosystems.
- advance the knowledge and use of standard, science-based methods of hazard reduction treatments.
- increase the effectiveness of local wildfire prevention programs by supporting and

enhancing existing relationships with county fire and emergency services, fire prevention cooperatives, and decision making personnel, as well as with national, regional, state, tribal, and local partners.

As a result the citizen' of Idaho will have an increased awareness of the personal responsibility one bears when choosing to live in a fire-based ecosystem, especially those living in the wildland/urban interface. They will have knowledge of recommended standards for protecting your home, property, and family from losses to wild-fire and a of science-based understanding of the role of fire in Idaho's ecosystems and of hazard reduction methods and management techniques to decrease wildland fire risks. And they will become a member of a growing statewide "fire-wise" culture, a community of people that accepts and acknowledges the roles and responsibilities of living in fire-based ecosystems.

Statewide Collaboration.

Idaho Firewise is a strong, collaborative statewide effort which currently consists of members from Idaho Department of Lands, Bureau of Land Management, University of Idaho Extension, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Homeland Security, and Bureau of Indian Affairs - Nez Perce Tribe. Other collaborators include the Idaho Office of the State Fire Marshal, Idaho Association of Fire Chiefs, the Idaho Association of Counties, Idaho Association of Insurance Agents, the Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute and the AmeriCorps program, Idaho Resource Development Councils, USDA Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, and the University of Idaho College of Natural Resources.

Idaho Firewise is now.

What can you do to become a part of the growing Idaho Firewise community? Fire preparedness

starts at home. You don't have to live in or near a forest to be at risk from wildland fire - Idaho's rangeland ecosystems are just as fire-prone. And you do not have to be in the path of the actual fire to lose your home and property. New research has shown that most home ignitions are caused by flying fire brands and embers which can travel miles from the actual fire. Wood-shake roofs are especially susceptible to wildland fire embers and brands, and ignite well after the apparent danger has passed.

What to do? Here is a list of a few things that you can do around your home and property now:

- Remove flammable debris by pruning, raking, mowing and removing.
- Keep your lawn and plant materials well watered and trimmed.
- Clean your roof and gutters.
- Move your firewood pile away from the house.
- Walk around and look for the little things that embers could lodge in and smolder - brooms leaning against the house, natural fiber door mats, boot scrapers, planters, as well as other patio and porch accessories like dried pine cones and flower arrangements, newspapers, wood patio furniture and fabric covered pillows.
- Remove debris from under decks - a clean, litter free soil surface is best.
- Remove flowerboxes from under windows when a fire threatens.
- If it touches the house it is part of the house - look at wooden fencing and consider putting in a non-combustible section of fence or a gate for at least five feet from the house.

When a wildfire threatens.

- Well before fire season, decide what you will bring with you when you need to evacuate. Immediately upon hearing of a wildfire in your area:
- Put clothing, food, water, valuables and pets in car.
- Load horses or other livestock to be evacuated.
- Park in the direction you will escape. Leave the key in the ignition so you don't waste precious time looking for it.
- Take down flowerboxes from under windows and remove flammable porch and deck accessories.
- When it is time to go - leave early! Sixty percent of wildland fire fatalities are from people who stay to wait and see and then evacuate when it's too late.

Resources.

Want to learn more? Go to the Idaho Firewise website at www.idahofirewise.org

You can also order a copy of the publication "Protecting and Landscaping Homes in the Wildland/Urban Interface" by contacting Agricultural Publications, University of Idaho, P.O. Box 442240, Moscow, Idaho, 83844-2240, (208)885-7982 or by e-mailing agpubs@uidaho.edu.

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