



# Firewise Communities® “The How-To Newsletter”

*This quarterly provides articles and helpful hints on how to incorporate Firewise principles.*

Summer 2010



## THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY — Engaging Absentee Owners & Part-Time Residents

While only the state of Maine is known as “Vacationland,” the concept of the vacation home or second home is common in states throughout our nation. Many Firewise communities are situated in locales that attract the part-time resident. These individuals could be landowners who are largely absent and rent their property to others or who own vacant lots. They could be homeowners who primarily visit on the weekends or during “high” season, or who own homes within resort properties. Then, too, there are foreclosed properties, for which ownership is in limbo. And finally, there are the tenants – part-time or full-time – who are not necessarily responsible for the upkeep of the property even though they are the primary or sole resident.



Regardless of which of these scenarios may exist within your community, the concerns are the same: how can you encourage the involvement of these individuals in addressing wildfire mitigation needs to assure that your entire community will not be adversely affected in the event a wildfire strikes?

Indeed, these absent owners and part-time residents pose unique challenges to communities working hard to implement Firewise practices to protect their properties in the event of an approaching

wildfire. This issue of *How-To* offers insights on how you and your neighbors can engage absentee owners and part-time residents, so that you all can live harmoniously with each other and within the wildland/urban interface.



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## THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY — EXAMPLE

ENGAGING ABSENTEE OWNERS & PART-TIME RESIDENTS - JIM THORPE, PENNSYLVANIA



Carbon County is about 90 minutes west of New York City and about the same distance north of Philadelphia. Along with Monroe and Pike Counties, Carbon is considered part of the Pocono Mountain Region of northeastern Pennsylvania. In the winter, there are many ski resorts; there are three in Carbon County alone. These resorts offer cross-country and downhill skiing, along with other winter sports. In spring and summer, there are miles and miles of mountain bike trails to challenge all levels, as well as numerous state parks, state forest and state-owned game lands for hiking, fishing, white water rafting or picnicking. In the fall, the area is known for its colorful foliage and sees its highest rate of activity during hunting season. Added to this mix are the thousands of acres that are owned by water authorities as water shed lands. These properties tend to be in the most natural state and are typically opened up to the public for hunting and hiking.

Surrounding much of these public lands are the communities comprising Carbon, Monroe and Pike counties. Many consider the area to be a vacation destination, typically visiting over a weekend or a week. As a result, these counties have many second and vacation homes, as well as first-time countryside homeowners nestled in the forest and shrub lands of northeastern Pennsylvania.

Set within Carbon County, Towamensing Trails, in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, covers more than 3,000 square acres of old and new forest, with 4,096 property owners and approximately 2,300 homes. Presently, about 450 are permanent residents which is just a little more than one-tenth of homeowners in the Trails. The majority use their homes on weekends, and a small group are strictly seasonal residents.

“Engaging these part-time and seasonal owners regarding the need for ongoing maintenance of a fire-safe home environment has been a challenge,” notes Wesley Keller, Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor for Forest District 18 of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry.

The Firewise community has employed a variety of approaches to meet this challenge. Some of the tactics include producing a bi-monthly newsletter that is mailed directly to property owners’ homes or can be accessed on the community’s website, and using the two most-attended events – their annual meeting and a Fun Day held in mid-summer – for disseminating critical Firewise information and encouraging voluntarism.

“We typically hold meetings during weekends and holidays,

when the part-time residents are in residence,” says Ron McCuen, a member of the Firewise Committee for the Community. Between 250 and 350 attend the annual meeting, while Fun Day attracts as many as 500 to 600 participants.

“At the Fun Day we focus on reaching the children who, in turn, encourage their parents to get involved,” says Keller. The event consists of all three volunteer fire companies — Penn Forest # 1, Penn Forest # 2 and Albrightsville. They bring various equipment to show the kids and parents and a safety trailer offering information and interactive activities, along with a costumed fire dog named Sparky, a motorized fire car with a dog, and Smokey the Bear to entertain and educate the kids.



Additionally, throughout the year, property owners must obtain a fire permit before having an open fire. The permit explains the fire regulations along with information about whom residents must contact and what equipment they must have on-hand. If the the association declares a fire ban, its leadership posts 26 entrance signs announcing the ban as well as large bulletin boards at the entrance and trash facilities. A fine of \$500 is imposed for any violators, with no possibility to appeal.

“Last year, we offered residents a service at a very low cost to clear downed limbs and small trees from their lots,” says Keller. “A number of lot owners, many of whom had not seen their lots for years, took advantage of this opportunity. And, with a grant from the state, the community teamed with Youth Services to

*Community Example – Continued on page 3*

provide chipping services in common areas throughout the development.”

He adds, “Overall, the biggest challenge is to teach the city dweller who is new to the wildland urban interface about fire-safety rules for living in such a region. While you don’t have to cut down every tree in your yard to be safe, you do have to prepare your property to make it safer from wildfire, especially since you are living in an area that has an all-volunteer fire department.”

**How-To Newsletter** thanks Wesley Keller and Ron McCuen for the information and photographs provided for this Community Example. Keller is Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor for Forest District 18 of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and McCuen is a member of the Towamensing Trails Firewise Committee. Visit [www.towamensing.com](http://www.towamensing.com) for additional information about this Firewise community.



Crew working on Firewise Project.



Firewise Committee have photo op with Smokey.



Kids learn how nozzle works during Towamensing Trails Fun Day.



The Experience Trailer is popular during Fun Day.

## Around the Firewise Home

### Information Sharing on MyFirewise

When Michele Steinberg, Firewise Communities Manager at the National Fire Protection Association, posted an invitation on *MyFirewise* for community members to share how their Firewise community works with absentee landowners and part-time residents, a couple of individuals weighed in:



Julie Rogers, of the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council, in California, noted: "This is a continuing problem in our county, and we have not yet made good progress in resolving it. Many property owners do not visit with any regularity or during certain seasons. So, I am eager to hear others' ideas and successes!"

Jim Normark, of Seeley Lake, Montana offered both ideas and successes, sharing, "The Double Arrow Ranch Landowner's Association (DARLOA), in Seeley Lake, MT, works with absentee/seasonal landowners in a number of ways. We have an active website where Firewise efforts that are ongoing on the Ranch can be viewed, along with all minutes of the Fire Safety Committee and other documents of interest regarding fire safety. Our Fire Safety Committee identifies properties in need of fuels mitigation, contacts landowners and assists them with grant applications and finding qualified contractors to do the work. We hold our annual "Firewise" event to capture as many seasonal residents as possible. This year, we'll be hosting a joint community event in June, working with the USFS, MT Department of Natural Resources, the Seeley Lake Fuels Mitigation Task Force (SLFMTF) and the Seeley Lake Volunteer Fire Department. The event will include activities such as re-planting trees in recently mitigated common areas, a SLFMTF update on their efforts to mitigate fuels in the primary line of defense, a speaker and a demonstration (tour) of recommended Firewise landscaping techniques, and a barbecue."

*MyFirewise* offers an avenue for Firewise communities throughout the U.S. to share information about common issues. If you've got additional suggestions or successes to share with Julie Rogers and others like her, visit *MyFirewise* and add your two cents to the discussion. In addition to helping your own community, you might just help others, as Jim Normark has done. Simply visit *MyFirewise* at <http://network.firewise.org> and register for your free account. You can see the issues that concern others that also may concern you, find helpful information, or share an approach that has worked for your community.

### Advice on Successful Outreach

When you set out to reach absentee landowners and part-time residents, you have to attend every association meeting that you get invited to and you need to pick your community sparkplug, the person who will take charge of that development's program, says Wesley Keller, Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor for Forest District 18 of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, regarding working with different homeowner associations and community groups. "Every development has a ruling body of some type. If there is no one to spark interest this year, try again next year when there is new blood in the office."



## Around the Firewise Home (Continued)

### In New Mexico ...

#### Certifiable Compliance and Incentives Motivate Landowners



The Village of Ruidoso has an ordinance that requires its citizens to come into compliance with the fuels management criteria we have adopted, notes Dick Cooke, director of forestry in the Village. He explains, "We have about 13,500 properties within the Village limits. The sheer size of the project is multi-year, so we have divided the Village into what we call implementation areas. We started with the areas we determined were the greatest fire threats and have systematically progressed through the Village." He reports they have currently completed about 50 percent of the project.

He adds, "We also have a certification program. The way it works is, once we have examined a property and determined that it meets the ordinance criteria, we certify that property for five years. When the five years are up, we re-examine and recertify the property. When we have established an implementation that needs to be addressed, we send the landowner of record a letter telling them that they have a time frame for meeting the fuels management standard. If they don't meet the time frame, they are sent to court." The Village also has a provision through which the court can enable it to do the work needed and put a lien against the property.

Cooke notes, "We use the newspaper and local radio to keep everyone informed about implementation areas, grant money we have for cost share, and other helpful information. We also have a yard waste fee for handling all of the green waste from the thinning and maintenance projects. And we have two rates that are charged with the water bill — one is a base rate that is charged for properties that have a current certification, and the other rate, which is higher, is charged for properties that have not been certified or whose certification has expired."

### Scout's Honor

In the spring issue of *How-To*, we talked about how to involve youth in Firewise activities. Recently, Michele Abe posted an entry on *MyFirewise* about a young Boy Scout who conducted a Firewise Eagle Scout Project in order to fulfill his Eagle Scout project requirements. The Boy Scout worked with Abe during the 2009 season, performing brush hauling and clearing for some infirm and elderly folks and was awarded his Eagle in a ceremony, along with three other members of his troop.



For additional information on the Eagle Scout Projects go to: <http://www.eaglescout.org/>

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### Chat with Larry Herzog (Continued)

allow landowners to rezone their land for suburban subdivision. In 1998, a citizen group — opposing this move for its overuse of water and fire hazard dangers — sponsored an initiative called the Rural Heritage Watershed Act. It was defeated after the building lobby spent tens of millions of dollars to defend suburban lot zoning.

The Rural Heritage Watershed Act's arguments about suburban subdivision and wildfire dangers have since proven prophetic — both the 2003 and 2007 mega fires in the San Diego regions burned right in the heart of the suburbanizing eastern wildlands. But, sadly, the region has not learned its lesson. Elected officials are still mainly counting on massive armies of fire trucks and tanker planes as the main answer to future wildfire threats. There is still no comprehensive, hard hitting planning approach to the management of southern California's wildfire-prone natural landscape.

## Q & A Chat with Larry Herzog



*In this issue of How-To Newsletter Lawrence Herzog, Ph.D., professor and chair of the Graduate Masters in City Planning Program in the School of Public Affairs at San Diego State University, offers insights about planning new developments in the wildland/urban interface. Professor Herzog is the author/editor of eight books on cities and planning, including **Return to the Center** (University of Texas Press, 2006), and a new book in progress on urban culture and sustainability. He has been an urban planning consultant to U.S. and international agencies, and has lived and taught in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, the United Kingdom, France, and Spain. As a resident of California, some of Professor Herzog's responses address issues pertaining to that state, but communities in other regions throughout the U.S. may want to learn whether guidelines or zoning have been established in their own state. Be sure to contact your state liaison to learn about such matters in the state where you reside.*

**H-T:** *Are there guidelines that builders, landowners, and residents should know and follow when planning a development in locales where severe fires can occur?*

**LH:** The critical problem of wildfires is that state, regional and municipal governments have been reluctant to establish hard-hitting guidelines on development in the Wildland/Urban Interface (W/UI), the primary zones between the coast and the mountains in California, where the wildfires have tended to occur. CALFIRE, the California agency involved in wildfire management has established Fire Hazard Severity Zones and is crafting guidelines for development, including road widths, water supply, and signage to assure firefighting capability. However, it is not presently clear if and how CALFIRE standards will be enforced in city and county general plans. There have also been some attempts to increase funding to provide more fire stations in rural areas. But, beyond this, the status quo in most of California continues to be to encourage growth without significant wildfire protections, and then hope that firefighters will come to the rescue when the inevitable Santa Ana winds blow through residential communities.

Most of the future growth of coastal California will occur precisely in the arc of exurban space that is most vulnerable to wildfires. For example, in the San Diego metropolitan area, over one million people will move to the region by 2030. Of that cluster of growth, more than 50% will be located either in the unincorporated east County, or in the northeast and eastern sectors of the City of San Diego, precisely where the 2003 and 2007 mega-fires caused the most damage.

Instead of an urban planning approach to wildfires, our local government has put its faith in building materials for individual homes, pruning vegetation (defensible space) and a military attitude that equates fire-fighting with a kind of "war" against nature. Very little emphasis is placed on recognizing the importance of site design and subdivision development. Local governments continue to allow developers to flatten hillsides, build right up against the edges of fire-prone ridges and otherwise blur topography in direct contradiction to the forces of nature.

**H-T:** *When individuals are considering purchasing a home in a wildfire-prone development, what are the questions they should be asking to be sure they fully understand their home's vulnerabilities?*

**LH:** They should, of course, have the house itself evaluated in terms of its materials—obviously things like wooden roof shingles and inadequate vent covers for fire embers must be addressed. Secondly, they should have a fire ecologist evaluate the vegetation around the property, and assess for clearance of shrubbery near the home. Third, and most important, the location of homes must be evaluated on several levels. These include: the site itself and the general location of the community. Questions concerning the site should include: "Is it on the edge of a steep slope where wildfires will burn upward and hottest on that edge (especially eastern facing slopes)?" and "Is it located along the edge of a canyon which may act as a wind and heat funnel during the hottest wildfire burns?" Regarding the community's location, some important questions include: "Is it a fire-prone area in the WUI?;" "Have there been wildfires in or near this area?;" "What kind of firefighting capacity exists in the immediate area?;" "Does it lie in a [CALFIRE-designated] Fire Hazard Safety Zone?;" "What kind of evacuation routes exist to leave the site in the case of an emergency?;" and "Is there more than one way out, should a main road be blocked?"

**H-T:** *Given that many homes in the WUI are second homes or vacation homes, what role can zoning play in making sure such communities can remain safe even when residents aren't there full-time?*

**LH:** Zoning can be a powerful tool in wildfire management. Zoning could raise and lower densities where appropriate. It could help preserve agricultural areas, wilderness zones, and especially, create open space buffers on the tops of mesas or steep hills where fires would explode and burn hottest during wildfire episodes. Zoning also can regulate the rate and scale of suburban subdivisions in the name of sustainability. But zoning policy for wildfire management would require backbone from city and especially county elected officials, and that has not been their track record. Indeed elected officials have made every attempt to steer the wildfire narrative away from the problem of uncontrolled suburban growth – and its form, scale, location, and design.

**H-T:** *What is the Rural Heritage Watershed Act and how would such an act help address the threat of wildfire?*

**LH:** For decades in San Diego County, rural estate zoning (20 or 40 acre lots) was the norm in the eastern backcountry. Beginning in the 1990s, the building industry began lobbying to

*Q & A Continued on bottom - page 5*

## FIREWISE BY THE NUMBERS

The saying “*The more, the merrier,*” is certainly applicable to Firewise Communities/USA. Only with Firewise, it also means greater awareness and safety for your home and community. In this issue, we’re pleased to report on ever more communities joining the program. The more Firewise Communities/USA sites there are, the more of you there are who are preparing to prevent fire from reaching your homes and property.

During the past quarter, 24 new communities received recognition status, for a total of 565 communities with Firewise status. *How-To Newsletter* is pleased to welcome the following communities:

Alabama – Alapine Village Subdivision Unit 2

Arkansas – Avoca, Beaverlake, Hector, Hickory Creek, Newton Springs, Piney Point, Price Grove, Rock Springs, Welcome Home

California – Banner Mountain, Lakeshore Park Homes, Mountain Lakes Estates

Florida – Riverwood

Idaho – Hidden Lakes Subdivision , Moose Creek Estates, Norwood Subdivision

Oregon – Awbrey Glen

South Carolina – The Farm at Carolina Forest

Texas – Long Canyon

Washington – Blue Mountain Estates, Decatur NW, Guard/Park, South White Point Road



If your community or you know of a community that is thinking about becoming a Recognized Firewise Communities/USA®, please visit [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org). Remember, you can contact your state forest service liaison for assistance; he or she is an excellent resource for guidance in formulating your plan and offering activities that can energize your community or visit the Firewise web site for more information. To help jump start the process, you may want to download a copy of, “A User Reference Guide to the Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program” at <http://www.firewise.org/files/FirewiseUserGuide.pdf> or order a copy at no charge from the Firewise online catalog at <http://www.firewise.org/catalog/index.htm>.

# THE FIREWISE LEADER

## Implementing Activities that Engage All Members of Your Community

Summertime is a popular time for communities to hold their Firewise activities. This year, as you set out to plan your annual activity, keep in mind that summer is typically the season when your seasonal residents are most likely to be in residence. Staging your activity while they are present optimizes your opportunity to reach these individuals and include them in achieving your community's Firewise goals.

As Wesley Keller and Ron McCuen shared in our *Community Example*, the Towamensing Trails community, in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, always includes an annual activity during summer for exactly this reason. The Fun Day that they stage attracts 500 to 600 individuals from throughout the community – including many part-time residents.

Some additional summer activities include:

- Offering a chipper day or other service connected to property preparation concerning the home ignition zone
- Inviting local youth to pitch in, whether to earn community service hours or work toward a Boy Scout or Girl Scout badge, and assist all members of the community — particularly part-time residents – with their Firewise preparations
- Establishing a website that homeowners can access whether they are in residence within the community or at another home; the site can include information about important dates and goals pertaining to the community's Firewise goals and reminders about properties needing to take care of fuels mitigation

- Hosting a joint community event with other entities, such as the event noted by Jim Normack on *MyFirewise*, which will be held in conjunction with the USFS, Montana Department of Natural Resources, the Seeley Lake Fuels Mitigation Task Force (SLFMTF) and the Seeley Lake Volunteer Fire Department

- Staging an activity such as re-planting trees in recently mitigated common areas, to remind all community members of the fuel mitigation efforts they can undertake on their own properties

- Hosting a speaker or a demonstration focused on Firewise practices that can easily be implemented by residents

- Holding your community's annual meeting

You can do these activities individually or combine several, depending on your goals and volunteer power. Whatever you do, be sure to report on the activity during the renewal process. And, if you think it can benefit others, share your success on *MyFirewise*. Your success might just spread to other Firewise communities... like wildfire! (Only with better, safer results!)



**Editor's Note:** If you would like to share your community's efforts or think you have a unique activity that could benefit other Firewise communities, please share the information with "How-To Newsletter" by submitting a description of your activity and how it has helped with wildfire mitigation in your community to Michele Steinberg at [msteinberg@nfpa.org](mailto:msteinberg@nfpa.org).

## FIREWISE RESOURCES



### Web Sources

To access information addressed in this issue of *How-To Newsletter* about, visit the following websites:

Towamensing Trails (Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania) website – [www.towamensing.com](http://www.towamensing.com)

MyFirewise – <http://network.firewise.org>

Double Arrow Ranch Landowners' Association – <http://www.darloa.com/cgi-bin/index.pl?action=main>

### Firewise — Online Course Offering

The Firewise Learning Center offers a wide range of wildfire safety topics for audiences including homeowners, forestry professionals, and firefighters. Course design and length varies, but all courses are structured to allow you to learn at your own pace. Once you have enrolled in a course,

you can return to the Firewise Learning Center at any time to continue a course you have started or take a new course.

- Conducting a Community Assessment in the Wildland/Urban Interface:
  - Beginning the Firewise Process
- Firewise Landscaping
- Firefighter Safety in the Wildland/Urban Interface
- Water Training

Take a few minutes to visit [http://www.firewise.org/fw\\_youcanuse/learningcenter/index.htm](http://www.firewise.org/fw_youcanuse/learningcenter/index.htm) and check it out!



### Reading Up

Interesting reading about wildfire can be found in the October 26, 2009 issue of *The New Yorker*. That's right, *The New Yorker*. In its "Reporter at Large" section, Christine Kenneally reports on "The Inferno," a look at Australia's assessment of wildfire following its deadliest fires, which burned early 2009. The article includes discussion of the choices to leave early or stay and defend that are typically employed in the event of wildfire in Australia, the same issues, which were discussed in the winter issue of *How-To*. To view The New Yorker article, visit [www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/.../091026fa\\_fact\\_kenneally](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/.../091026fa_fact_kenneally). To view the Winter 2009 issue of *How To*, as well as previous issues, visit [http://www.firewise.org/usa/fw\\_guides.htm](http://www.firewise.org/usa/fw_guides.htm).

For additional information on wildfire and Firewise articles, visit the Firewise Article Archive at [www.Firewise.org/library/index.php](http://www.Firewise.org/library/index.php). You'll have access to countless Firewise articles at the click of your mouse!

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