



## National Fire Plan

When Carl Schwope heard that residents at Summer Mountain Ranch were concerned about the potential threat of wildfire striking their Texas community, he recognized it as a Firewise USA opportunity.

Schwope, fire management officer for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, realized this was a great chance to do some public education about prescribed fire and get some fuel reduction projects started in the community, which borders the refuge. He met with interested landowners and after the initial four signatures, ended up with a Memorandum of Understanding signed by 34 private landowners in the community. This all started in 2003 and three years later the community completed eligibility criteria and was formally recognized as a Firewise USA community at an April 22, 2006 ceremony.

With funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- and information from South Hayes Texas Fire Department Chief Joel Cliett, who is responsible for protection of the Summer Mountain Ranch community -- work began via contractors to clear brush and make defensible space around residences. The objective in creating a Firewise USA community is to encourage and acknowledge action that minimizes loss of homes to wildfire. It teaches residents to prepare for a fire before it occurs. The program adapts especially well to small communities, developments and residential associations of all types.

In the case of Summer Mountain Ranch, 185 acres were treated on 37 tracts of land. The average tract size was about five acres. When other property owners in the community noticed the visually pleasing fuel reduction treatments and realized the increased protection it could offer from wildfire, more wanted to become involved. P. J. Pearson of the Texas State Forest Service helped these property owners meet the criteria for Firewise USA eligibility.

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