



## **Statewide Wildland/Urban Interface Hazard Reduction Strategy South Carolina Forestry Commission ~ 2004**

The South Carolina Forestry Commission's original National Fire Plan grant requests were based on 12 project areas identified as high risk because of a history of wildfire occurrence and an expanding wildland/urban interface. Each project area includes between six and 150 communities.

More than 4,000 wildfires occur each year under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Commission, and the number of communities threatened and homes lost increases each year. But because the state is predominantly rural and because national and local media focus on Western fires, most residents are not aware that wildfire could affect them. Thus, in formulating a strategy for mitigating risk and reducing loss, the Forestry Commission's NFP team made education a primary goal.

The strategy has three stages: raise awareness of the risk of wildfire in South Carolina's interface communities, educate community planners and homeowners about wildfire behavior and hazard reduction, and assist with mitigation efforts.

Of the 507 communities in the 12 project areas, 137 have been assessed as very high or high risk. Using a template developed by the NFP team, prevention specialists and firefighters have worked with local fire departments to draft 35 community plans. The goal is to develop plans for all very high and high risk communities; the Commission discovered early in the process that a community must have some investment in its plan and key people to see it through.

Efforts to raise awareness of the wildland/urban interface problem have included: statewide and targeted radio campaigns, exhibits and speakers at planning, development, and landscaping conferences, and direct mail to neighborhoods recently threatened by wildfire. The latter has proved very effective, especially when reinforced by radio campaigns and news releases.

The Forestry Commission has held seven Firewise community leader workshops with a total of 455 participants. Last year ITM, a company that worked with the Florida Division of Forestry to develop an interactive training CD, was contracted to adapt the program to South Carolina and to plan and conduct *Living on the Edge* workshops in the remaining project areas. They have held seven additional workshops, and nine more are planned. By October 31, more than 1,000 people had attended interface education workshops.

One of the goals of the workshops is to motivate communities to apply for Firewise Communities USA status, which requires that the community make a commitment to hazard reduction and maintenance efforts. Savannah Lakes Village in McCormick County became the first Firewise Community on November 18, 2004.

**Jennie Morris, WUI Education Coordinator, SC Forestry Commission: [jmorris@forestry.state.sc.us](mailto:jmorris@forestry.state.sc.us)**