



Firewise West Virginia 2005

The eastern counties of West Virginia, which are in close proximity to the Washington DC metro area, are experiencing a population influx from both primary and secondary homeowners. Subsequently, large forested tracts are being subdivided resulting in an expansion of the wildland-urban interface. As the interface zone increases, so does the threat from wildland fire to the people and their property in that zone. As a result, both wildland and structural firefighters face an increasingly difficult time protecting life and property.



Typical home built in wildland urban interface areas of eastern West Virginia. Photo courtesy WV DOF

Using National Fire Plan funding, the West Virginia Division of Forestry developed the Firewise West Virginia program to encourage residents in higher wildfire risk areas to adopt Firewise concepts and promote overall fire safety. Working with local fire departments and residents, the Firewise West Virginia program conducts a hazard assessment in the community and prepares a report that includes the survey results and recommendations to reduce fire risks. National Fire Plan funding also provides funding for a public

awareness campaign directed toward residents and training of cooperators who perform assessments or suppress fires.

Nine communities throughout the focus area have been recognized by the state as Firewise West Virginia communities: Coolfont Mountainside Association, Morgan Co.; Lake Ferndale, Hampshire Co.; The Woods Resort, Berkeley Co.; Summit Oaks, Hardy Co.; Snowshoe Mountain, Pocahontas Co.; Buck Ridge, Pendleton Co.; The Preserve, Grant Co.; Cass, Pocahontas Co.; and Black Bear Woods Resort, Tucker Co. The community of Taylor Lake, Mineral Co. has recently joined the Firewise West Virginia effort. As these communities implement Firewise concepts and report recommendations, the overall fire safety of the community improves.

The Coolfont Mountainside Association has begun implementing the recommendations from the hazard assessment report. As a result of this work, for two years the community has been recognized as a Firewise Community USA.

The Firewise West Virginia program has been very successful because the program locates individuals within the communities who take an interest in the program and work with the state and their local fire department to develop the community report. The hazard assessment report that is prepared for the community is the basis for a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or other Firewise plan. The communities are encouraged to implement the report recommendations and apply for national recognition with the Firewise Communities USA program. The WV Division of Forestry continues to provide technical support to communities as needed in development of CWPPs and implementation of Firewise practices.

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