



## Hazel Crest Open Lands Fuels Mitigation Illinois 2006

The Village of Hazel Crest is a small incorporated community located in northeastern Illinois, south of the city of Chicago. Situated amongst other suburban communities, the village has wildland fire concerns. Within the community boundary is the 53-acre Hazel Crest Open Lands, which are dominated by a stand of declining Siberian elm and thickets of buckthorn. The three parcels that make up these public lands are divided by a road and are adjacent to local park district lands and residential housing. In 2003, a 425-acre wildfire occurred in Northeastern Illinois, highlighting the vulnerability of the area.



*Cleared firebreak within the Hazel Crest Open Lands. Photo courtesy Karl Persons*

The Village has been engaged in hazard reduction within the Open Lands since 1995. Using volunteers and the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program, firebreaks were cleared and woody debris was mowed on a five-acre portion of the area. Since 2003, the community has been able to accelerate the hazard mitigation project. Using National Fire Plan funding obtained with the assistance of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, the community has been able to establish a local fuel reduction committee, develop a fire management and wildland fire hazard reduction plan with the local fire department, purchase additional equipment to continue fuels mitigation activities, and establish fuel breaks throughout the public site.

The goal of the committee has been to establish a model for hazard mitigation in highly urbanized areas using mechanical and chemical methods. By reducing the fuel load, they have also reduced the potential for interrupted transportation systems due to heavy smoke and the loss of community infrastructure, while increasing citizen safety.

In the "urban" portion of the wildland-urban interface, prescribed fire is not always a viable tool for communities even though they are potentially at risk from wildland fire. Fire management planning relies heavily on alternative means to mitigate fire risk including educating the community. Throughout the process, the committee has been working with homeowner groups and schools to increase fire awareness and prevention.

By providing direct assistance to one community, this grant also indirectly benefited seven neighboring communities.

For more information contact:

**Billy Terry**, Asst. Director  
USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry  
Newtown Square, PA 19073  
(610)557-4145 (-4154 FAX)  
[bterry@fs.fed.us](mailto:bterry@fs.fed.us)