



## **Education and Hazard Reduction in the Wildland-Urban Interface Maine 2006**

Increasing population growth and development in Maine has enlarged the wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas on the mainland and increased pressure in the interface areas on the coastal islands. On the mainland, rapid growth in home construction in woodland areas has increased the potential for wildland fires. In most cases, developers and new homeowners are unaware of this wildland fire potential and how to lower their fire risk. Communities on Maine's many coastal islands face challenges in the WUI that mainland communities do not. Examples of these challenges are extended response time, type of response vehicles, limited mutual aid, extensive fire hazards due to diseased coastal spruce, lack of fresh water for aircraft, seasonal fluctuation of populations, and island politics.

The Maine Forest Service created a Wildland-Urban Interface Prevention Committee in 2003 to develop a model program for communities to follow in assessing fire risks and planning mitigation strategies. In a cooperative effort with the National Park Service, this committee uses the Wildland Hazard Assessment Methodology Program in this statewide hazard assessment project. In 2004, the committee completed its first assessment and mitigation strategies for Peaks Island.

Since 2004, using National Fire Plan (NFP) funding, the Maine Forest Service has completed 14 hazard assessments and Community Wildfire Protection Plans for communities at risk from wildfire. There are currently 14 other hazard assessments in process and approximately 30 requests for hazard assessments from selected communities. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy, the state of Maine is using NFP funding to implement a hazard fuels reduction program on State, Federal and private lands. In 2005, these cooperative efforts resulted in 280 acres of hazard fuel reductions within critical wildland-urban interface areas. The state has also implemented an educational program that includes a media campaign and distribution of materials to increase wildfire awareness and mitigation efforts within critical interface areas.



*Wildland firefighters use prescribed fire to reduce hazardous fuel loads in WUI area. Photo courtesy Maine Forest Service*

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