



Education and Preparedness Efforts Produce Results Adams County, Wisconsin 2005

Adams County is a fire-prone rural county in Central Wisconsin dominated by red pine and jack pine forests. The wildland-urban interface area in Adams County is growing in part due to the subdivision and sale of small tracts by an industrial forest land company. Landownership in the county is a mixture of primary and vacation homes within hazardous fuels conditions.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has used National Fire Plan (NFP) funding provided by the USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management program, to reduce fuels, better prepare for wildfires, and educate the public. The Wisconsin DNR conducted mock fire exercises with local wildland and structural firefighters in the Adams County area to improve their preparedness. Incident



The wildfire never touched this home and outbuildings in Adams County, WI, because the homeowners created and maintained a defensible space. Photo courtesy WI DNR

Management Teams have been established to train and prepare for large fires throughout the year, operations plans are made and distributed each day during fire season, and Fire Action Plans are developed for each of nine fire areas of the state every year before fire season.

In spring 2005, NFP funding was used to print and distribute Structure Zone Map books for use by emergency services personnel in Adams County. These maps document both structural and wildland resources to help protect life, property, and natural resources during emergencies.

Wisconsin DNR has used NFP funding for several educational projects within Adams County. These projects include local newspaper advertisements, a fire prevention billboard, statewide radio announcements, WUI calendar, a Firewise workshop, the "Point of Origin" newsletter, a "Living

with Fire" newspaper insert, and a homeowner wildfire protection flyer mailed with every property tax bill. NFP funding provided training in prescribed burning and wildfire suppression techniques for two hand crews.

On May 5, 2005, Wisconsin DNR firefighters responded to a human-caused fire that had escaped and became one of the most devastating wildfires in nearly 25 years. There were significant structural and natural resources losses in the community, but no fatalities or serious injuries. Within 11 hours, the "Cottonville Fire" burned 3,410 acres. The wildfire damaged 15 homes and destroyed 30 homes and 60 structures valued at approximately \$1 million. It also destroyed timber valued at nearly \$4 million.

Despite the devastation nearly 300 homes were saved, and over 125 people were evacuated safely as a result of thorough preparedness and education efforts. A post-fire assessment concluded that losses would have been greater without the preventive measures undertaken by the Wisconsin DNR and local firefighters. Three homes were saved because of specific Firewise actions taken by homeowners after they received information from the Wisconsin DNR about living in fire-prone ecosystems.

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