



National Fire Plan

Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment

Pennsylvania- Firewise Communities

■ The Challenge

Pennsylvania faces enormous development pressure in its Wildland Urban Interface, especially in the Pocono mountain region. Developers are buying vast tracts of land, building expensive houses, and selling to urbanites who do not understand the risks of living in the wildland/urban interface.

Many developers are also unaware of the potential for wildland/urban interface fires and how to lower the risk.

■ The Solution

The PA Firewise Community Advisory Council was created to develop a Prevention/Suppression Model for communities in the Pocono Northeast Area. The DCNR Bureau of Forestry, PA Emergency Management Agency, and the State Fire Commissioners Office administer the Council.

The project has three phases. In *Phase I*, the Council:

- Contacted developers and builders in the northeast Pocono region, sharing the benefits of a Pennsylvania Firewise Community.
- Conducted hazard assessments for existing communities.
- Developed emergency plans for each community, providing methods to mitigate risk and procedures to follow should a wildfire threaten.

In *Phase II*, the Bureau of Forestry used National Fire Plan Hazard Mitigation funds to expand the program throughout Northeast PA. In *Phase III*, additional National Fire Plan funds allowed the Bureau to take the PA Firewise Community Program statewide.

■ Resulting Benefits

- Currently, eight Firewise Communities have been established in Pennsylvania. Most are located in the Northeastern area of the state.
- The Laurelbrook development was planned and built using Firewise guidelines. It has roads wide enough for firefighting equipment, structures with survivable space and building materials, and underground utilities.



Laurelbrook: Road designed using Firewise Guidelines

The developer used a fire mitigation grant to construct a fire pond, including a dry hydrant to service local fire departments as well as the Bureau of Forestry. A well also fills the pond with water when necessary. Electrical service to the pump is located underground to minimize potential outages in the event of a wildfire.

The developer said: “Using the PA Firewise Program helps prospective buyers see that fire protection concerns are addressed before the community is developed. We emphasize fire prevention concepts to people who are not acclimated to wildland/urban interface situations.”

Based on the success of Laurelbrook Community, the developer plans to use Firewise for another project elsewhere in the county. He says: “The PA Firewise Program is the first fire program I have seen which can be incorporated in planning an attractive community.”

■ Sharing Success

State Forestry agencies within the Northeast/Midwest U.S. have modeled, or are considering modeling, Firewise Community programs within their respective states after the PA Firewise Communities Program.

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