

Hazard Mitigation Burning in Lewes, Delaware

The Challenge

Lewes is a beach-front community within the wildland urban interface (WUI) of Delaware and is designated as a Firewise Community USA. Within the community is a marsh area which has been taken over by phragmites, a non-native invasive species. Phragmites grows in dense stands to a height of 15 feet and chokes out most native plant species. After the growing season ends, the plants cure and remain standing, creating a significant fire hazard for the surrounding homes. The fuel loading is multiplied by the dead vegetation which remains for up to five years. The phragmites is such a successful invader that there is a lack of biodiversity within the marsh and a reduction of the native flora and fauna in the area.

The Solution:

The City of Lewes Fire Department regularly burned the area during the 1960's and 1970's to control the phragmites and reduce the fire hazard. In 2004, the community and the Delaware Forest Service decided to reintroduce fire to the area along with mowing and applications of herbicide in order to reduce the amount of dried fuels in the area while at the same time stimulating a conversion of the marsh area back to its native species. Using National Fire Plan funding provided by the US Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, the City of Lewes along with the Delaware Forest Service and other local and federal partners, has worked to implement a hazard mitigation project to control the invader through the use of fire, mowing and herbicides.

Benefits:

Since 2004, hazard mitigation has been implemented on approximately 100 acres of marsh area within the town of Lewes. In the course of this work, the city has developed a program to educate residents and business owners about wildland fires and mitigation techniques to reduce their vulnerability to wildland



A firefighter ignites the phragmites at the edge of the mowed control line. *Photo courtesy City of Lewes, DE.*

fires. The project has established defensible space between structures and heavy fuel load areas and mowed and conducted a prescribed burn in the project area. The city is currently developing a monitoring and maintenance plan for the restoration of the native vegetation in the marsh area.

Sharing Successes:

This project has enabled the City of Lewes to develop strong partnerships with the residents and the cooperators who are participating in this long term effort: Delaware Forest Service, Delaware State Police, police agencies in Lewes, the State Fire Police, the University of Delaware, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Delaware Fish and Wildlife Service, Lewes Fire Department, Rehoboth Beach Volunteer Fire Department, Milton Fire Department and the US Geological Survey. Since the inception of this project, the City of Lewes was also designated as a Firewise Community USA.

For more information, contact:

Kathryn P. Maloney, Area Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
E-mail: kmaloney@fs.fed.us

Billy Terry, Assistant Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4145
E-mail: bterry@fs.fed.us

Fire and Aviation Management

The City of Lewes, Delaware, has developed and is implementing a hazard mitigation plan to control the invasive species, phragmites.



USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

April 2007
Visit us on the web at:
<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/>