



## Local Community Based Approach

### Minnesota Firewise Project Briefing

January 2003



*The Stillwater Fire Chief works with a Stillwater High School senior doing local L1 assessments.*

The Minnesota Firewise Project is working with local communities by passing federal Fire Plan funds through to local communities as grants for various “on-the-ground” activities including home owner mitigation education, home site assessment, access improvement, and dry hydrants. It involves community groups including fire and emergency services, local schools, city staff (ie. foresters, planners), and local interest groups.

Assessment-based education focused on homeowners is a keystone of Minnesota’s Firewise Project. Currently being undertaken by dozens of local fire departments, home sites are inspected and rated by local fire fighters and volunteers. Homeowners receive information on their “Firewise rating” and advice on how to improve the defensibility of their home. Each home is located with GPS and the resulting data being recorded into a GIS database.

The community has access to this data in either map form or as data files. This information is used for tactical and strategic planning for activities ranging from wildfire risk mitigation and suppression to community development.

*Brainerd firefighters undertake a L2 Firewise evaluation on a local property.*



Rural fire departments will begin to install dry hydrants in 2003 utilizing National Fire Plan grants. These hydrants will be strategically placed in the community to significantly improve both wildland and structure fire suppression capabilities in areas not serviced by a public water supply. It is expected that some 40 communities will install over 90 dry hydrants under this program.



Few activities in communities require as much cooperative effort as fuel treatments where conifer trees around homes need thinning and pruning. A

typical operation can occur in a 50-year old abandoned Christmas tree plantation of 20 acres with 12 homes nestled in the trees. In an environment where aesthetics and safety are paramount, this activity requires individual homeowner participation, a safe and enthusiastic harvester, community organization, careful attention to details, and a market for the wood.

If a fire occurs, efficient evacuation of residents and effective deployment of suppression resources are critical. Minnesota Firewise is working with communities to address these issues by improving access roads and signage. Good access roads are critical to evacuate residents and speed the arrival of engines for protection. Old, substandard culverts have been identified and are being upgraded to permit passage of heavy equipment, water tankers, and fire engines. Mutual aid agreements, common in rural areas, make good, clear signage critical if outside fire fighters are to find homes to be protected.



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Forestry, Fire Management Section  
Wildland Urban Interface Project

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