

Forest Fire Protection in Ruidoso, NM

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Introduction

- In 2000, Ruidoso most at risk to wildfires in NM
 - And second-most at risk in nation
- Since then, it has become a national showcase
 - Possible starting point or template for others
- Surrounded by tribal, state, and federal lands
 - A mosaic of overlapping forest and wildfire policies
 - Focus on Ruidoso's part of the mosaic
- Begin with its incremental process

Incremental Process 1

- Citizens created Forest Health Coalition, 1995
 - Succeeded in changing tree ordinance, 1996
 - Village buys first “grappling” truck, 1998
- Urban interface wildfires began
 - Cree fire, May 2000
- Village hired urban forester Delaco, Nov 2000
 - To develop a Community Forest Management Plan
- Greater Ruidoso Urban Interface Working Group

Incremental Process 2

- More urban interface wildfires
 - Trap and Skeet fire, June 2001
 - Kokopelli fire, March 2002
- Village created Forest Task Force, March 2002
- Council enacted fuel ordinances, June 2002
 - Tipping point, leading to more resources, more steps
 - Assess 13K acres of private land for fire hazards
 - Estimated 6 to 8 years to treat that much land
 - Authorized Forestry Dept & staff, 2 grappling trucks

Incremental Process 3

- Contracted to recycle 100% of forest debris, 2003
- Progress recognized with awards, 2003, from
 - Firewise Communities/USA
 - US Forest Service
- Ordinances amended in 2004 and 2006, at least
- Treatments of private land in Village continues
 - An open-ended process of maintenance
- Another track: treatments of public wildlands

How Did It Succeed?

- First, a *sparkplug*, like Rick Delaco
 - Who has time to foster creation & coordination of a successful working group, a full-time job
- Second, a *political champion*
 - Who understands, is enthusiastic, and willing to present developed plans to the overall community
- Third, a *nucleus of individuals*
 - To proceed with what is agreed upon...
 - ...while maintaining flexibility
 - Plans will have to be adapted

In Addition...

- Getting the whole community involved from the start, articulating & protecting community values:
 - In Ruidoso, public safety, economics, watershed values, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, healthy ecosystems, scenic vistas, historical sites, community peace of mind, & public support...
- Wildfires boosted support for Ruidoso's initiative
- Good timing also played a role
 - Village Council meeting, June 2002