



April 2004



Lochsa Ranger District
Clearwater National Forest

The summer of 2003 will long be remembered in north central Idaho as one of the hottest and smokiest in recent history.

Defending the wildland-urban interface

In 2003, while firefighters were on the offensive to control the Slims and Mile Post 59 fires, they were also defending the towns and surrounding areas of Elk City and Kamiah.

The wildland fires forced attention on increasing problems in Clearwater country: the health of our forests and the increasing number of homes built in forested settings, known as the “wildland-urban interface.”

Living with fire

The wildland-urban interface is any area where homes intermingle with natural vegetation.

Living in the wildland-urban interface means living with fire. Fire is nature’s way of recycling and rebuilding.

Fuel accumulations of brush and trees, coupled with drought and increasingly dense stands of trees, combine to create conditions ripe for highly destructive wildland fires.

Combined with growing development in the wildland-urban interface, this spells potential disaster.

New legislation, new tools

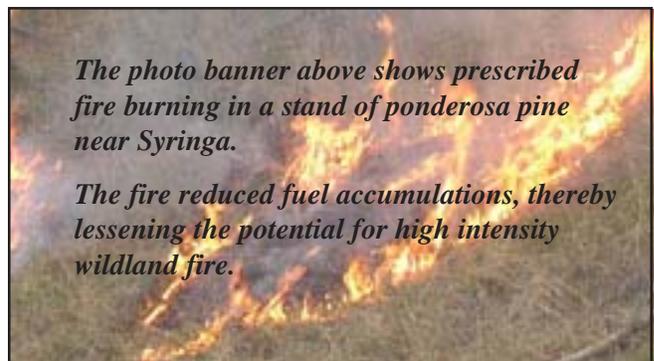
The National Fire Plan (2001) and, more recently, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (2003) have provided land managers more resources and legislative support to help deal with wildland-urban interface problems and forest health issues.

One of the tools fire managers can use is prescribed fire, the controlled application of fire under specified environmental conditions which allow the fire to be confined to a predetermined area.

The 300-acre Swan Creek Prescribed Burn Project completed last fall represents exactly what this legislation was designed to accomplish.

The photo banner above shows prescribed fire burning in a stand of ponderosa pine near Syringa.

The fire reduced fuel accumulations, thereby lessening the potential for high intensity wildland fire.



Local success in the wildland-urban interface



An underburn in ponderosa pine reduced fuels near private homes and land near Syringa last fall.

Clearwater National Forest managers are planning to continue fuels reduction projects around the communities of Syringa and Lowell.

Local landowners and land management agencies need to work together to create “defensible” space around homes and communities.

The Swan Creek project was an “underburn,” meant to burn any vegetation close to the ground with a low/moderate intensity. The area is located ½ mile west of Syringa adjacent to private land and homes.

The burn area is in primarily Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine forests. Objectives of the October 2003 prescribed burn were to:

- Reduce the overall “fuel loadings” and consequent wildland fire threat to Syringa and area residences.
- Reduce the amount of “ladder fuels” which help propel fire into the tops of trees.

The prescribed fire achieved these objectives and provided additional benefits, such as increased animal forage.

The Clearwater’s three-pronged strategy

Prescribed fire is one of three components of the vegetation management strategy Clearwater National Forest managers developed prior to the 2003 fire season.

The “three-pronged” approach emphasizes the use of natural and prescribed fire as well as timber harvest to manage vegetation.

The Swan Creek prescribed burn exemplifies the benefits of prescribed fire on the landscape. To ensure continuing, long-term success, fire managers will need to use prescribed fire periodically.

What’s next?

There are many opportunities and grants available to private homeowners who live in the wildland-urban interface. The following websites provide a wealth of information on creating defensible space and the opportunities available to help the private homeowner manage vegetation on their properties.

www2.state.id.us/lands

www.firewise.org