

**2008 USFS State & Private Forestry
Competitive Grant Proposal
Tennessee**

Applicant Contact Information: Tennessee Division of Forestry
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Project Name: Fire Prevention Wins-Out Over Debris Fires in East Tennessee

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Abstract of Project Proposal: Annually, uncontrolled wildland fires pose a tremendous threat to lives, property, and natural resources across Tennessee. This threat is increased in Eastern Tennessee's rural and developing communities where the terrain and rapidly growing wildland/urban interface zones complicate prevention/suppression efforts and leave the area more vulnerable to loss. Over 40% of the fires in that area are caused by escaped outdoor debris burns and it is our goal to change public behavior regarding the use of fire and thereby reduce wildfire-caused losses to personal property and natural resources throughout the Division of Forestry's three eastern-most districts. We believe the implementation of an enhanced fire prevention approach in East Tennessee, which includes safe outdoor fire-use principles, will significantly reduce escaped debris burns in the area and serve to achieve this goal. This proposal provides a framework for a high profile fire prevention message and approach and provides the necessary means to achieve the beginnings of basic behavioral changes needed in the public's safe use of outdoor fire. The Division of Forestry (DOF), working along with other fire prevention cooperators will develop and continue to execute fire prevention programs and distribute fire prevention materials and programs to homeowners, schools, communities and other government agencies.

Partnering Agencies and Groups: The Tennessee Division of Forestry partners continuously with the following agencies/groups and anticipates their full support: U.S.D.A. Forest Service, D.O.I. National Park Service, Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Tennessee Valley Authority, U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service, County Wildland Urban Interface Task Forces, Tennessee Firewise Communities, Tennessee Inter-Agency Fire Cooperative, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, County Forest Landowners Associations, University of Tennessee.

Additionally, letters of support are provided from the following partnering agencies/groups: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Tennessee Forestry Association, Tennessee Fireman's Association, Tennessee Urban Forestry Council, Appalachian RC&D Council, Buffalo/Duck River Resource Conservation and Development Council (Attached)

Project Location: Eastern Tennessee Forestry Divisions 1, 2, and 3 (List Attached) These counties account for 44% of the total number of fires and 57% of the total acres burned in the state.

Expected Completion Quarter: 4th, 2009

Total Proposed Budget:

Income Sources	Grant	State	Total
	\$350,000.00	\$350,000.00	\$700,000.00
Expenditures			
Materials and Supplies	\$10,000.00		
Training and Travel	\$10,500.00		
Personnel Services	\$309,500.00		
Contract Services	\$20,000.00		
In-Kind Services		\$350,000.00	
Total	\$350,000.00		\$700,000.00

2. Project Description:

This project involves instituting a high priority fire prevention model in the three eastern-most districts of the Tennessee Division of Forestry. This prevention model will require an active approach towards fire prevention and will carry a strong fire prevention message to adult outdoor burners. The approach will

3. Evaluation Criteria Discussion

National and Regional Relevance

This project will protect the forest from harm through a very pro-active and effective fire prevention approach which involves the Division of Forestry, partnering agencies, groups and homeowner and community action, as well as provide information and education to the people of the State of Tennessee on the importance of fire prevention. Much of the work will impact an area of Tennessee which is wedged between the states of Kentucky and Virginia with some ripple effect in the project. Continuing the current prevention project is vital to the success of the program. This is a long term venture because it involves a change in human behavior which takes many years. Also, increasing our continued Firewise Community program will make landowners living in the Wildland Urban Interface more aware of the dangers of wildfires and steps they can take to reduce losses to their property. These programs can be shared with other states both regionally and nationally.

Prioritization

The prevention program will be concentrated in the eastern portion of the state. The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment tool will be used to identify areas of greatest concern. However, the program could be applied to the entire state. This program is a priority for the DOF and will be implemented through the use of the following 4 methods:

1. Enhance and improve BurnSafeTn.org website. The website will be made more interactive and provide up-to-date information about fire danger and ongoing wildfires.
2. Use the Firewise Program to educate the public in high risk communities by providing assessments and guidance in hazard mitigation projects. This will be accomplished by training DOF personnel and through the help of our cooperators.
3. Develop and distribute prevention messages for audio and print media. Continue current contract with the TN Radio Network and develop/continue communications with the print and other mass media contacts.
4. Prepare county comprehensive fire prevention plans and involve the communities in this planning process by making personal contacts. All DOF personnel will be trained and encouraged to become involved with local planning commissions in the development of plans.

Meaningful Scale

This project will affect all communities in a 38-county area in eastern Tennessee. This area is approximately 40% of the State and contains a population of approximately 2.5 million people. In addition, thousands of other individuals from adjoining counties and states will receive the prevention message that shall be applicable in their community.

Collaboration

The recent formation of the Tennessee Wildfire Prevention Working Group (sub-committee of the Tennessee Wildland Fire Co-op gives us a forum to collaborate with other agencies. These partnerships provide a stronger and unified voice with which we will disseminate the prevention message. Division of Forestry personnel will work with local fire authorities in promoting fire prevention. Several agencies and organizations have responded very positively in assisting in this approach. The Tennessee Forestry Association has agreed to assist with combating woods arson by soliciting its membership for funds to provide "reward" money for informants. County Forestry Associations are an example of grassroots organizations that will be the target of our efforts. Members are forestland owners and other interested community leaders who have associated themselves with the Tennessee Forestry Association. Buffalo/Duck Rivers & Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Councils have pledged to continue cooperating with DOF in this expanded prevention and Firewise programs.

Outcomes

This program will be evaluated through participant feedback, community input and involvement. Fire occurrence and cause will be a long-term method of measurement. One measure of success will be the number of written citations for burning without a permit compared to the total number of debris caused fires will be a measure of the accountability of the adult burner in using the permit system and taking the necessary steps in conducting a safe burn. A second measure of success will be fire occurrence indicating the percent change in debris burning caused fires in the counties within the project area in eastern Tennessee.

Technology

Utilizing the latest technology such as the SGSF WFRA to identify "Communities at Risk" will allow us to target the areas in greatest need of prevention and fuel mitigation projects. DOF personnel will continue to make personal contacts with homeowners located within those "Communities at Risk". New automated weather stations and collaboration with the National Weather Service will be helpful.

Continually improve the www.BurnSafeTn.org web page to make it more user-friendly and interactive in disseminating prevention information and updating current fire activity.

Integrated Delivery

Working with forest industry, Urban Forestry Councils, local forest management groups, and inter-agency fire prevention working groups will present a unified wildland fire prevention message. This will increase the chances of continuing this successful prevention program.

Leverage

Tennessee Forestry Association has committed to reestablish the Arson Reward Program. This is a reward system offered in addition to the current Arson Reward Program offered by the Tennessee Advisory Council on Arson in cooperation of the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance.

Influence Positive Change

- To raise public awareness about wildfire risks in east Tennessee, while also providing basic fire prevention and protection information to the public.
- To communicate the urgency for residents to respond appropriately to wildfire conditions. To instill in the public the necessity to know and understand how weather impacts fire conditions and to take the current conditions into account before burning. The public needs to know how to access this information easily and quickly.

Continue community education projects to increase public awareness about the risks of living in the wildland/urban interface. Knowledgeable and informed residents will be empowered to protect their own property and are more likely to form partnerships with their fire protection agencies.

Projects involving the reduction of flammable vegetation around rural communities will help protect interface homes from wildfires and encourage homeowners to maintain defensible space around their homes and property. Other activities include:

- Providing communities with information about FIREWISE principals; defensible space, fuel mitigation and use of fire.
- Create self-determination and improved local support and commitment for mitigation activities.

Timeliness

Due to the record drought conditions that Tennessee is experiencing this year, it is imperative that this prevention effort continue through the end of this extended drought and otherwise indefinitely. Also, the topography and the increase of the Wildland Urban Interface will warrant increased personal contact with the general public. A total of 6 cabins were destroyed this past spring in the project area. This project deals with a change in cultural behavior that takes many years to correct. These grant funds will provide the necessary assets to successfully carry out and continue the prevention program in Tennessee.