

Explanation of project

North Carolina has strong Firewise and Urban Forestry programs. Through these programs, the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources [DFR] will implement two grant programs available to all 100 counties in the state which provide specific incentives and encourage communities to manage their urban-intermix and interface forests, complete risk assessments and initiate hazard mitigation. The funds from this grant will be awarded through a combined effort of the Firewise and Urban & Community Forestry Programs. This initiative will combine the Firewise and Urban Forestry concepts and efforts to provide a more holistic program for landowners and communities.

The Division has found through other programs that providing these incentives to communities (profit, non-profit, private, and public) has played an integral role in the participation and productiveness of communities in both urban forestry and Firewise.

North Carolina now has seven nationally recognized Firewise communities and there are more than a dozen additional communities in the process of developing and implementing mitigation plans. We also have 68 Tree City USA communities. This combined grant will improve urban forest management and reduce the staggering impact of wildfire in the urban interface and urban intermix through sound land-use planning, creative mitigation, supportive community infrastructures and collaborative decision making.

The grant program will be offered to urban interface and intermix communities throughout the state who meet the criteria set forth by DFR and its partners noted in this application. This grant will empower urban interface and intermix communities to utilize available information, skills and resources to take action towards improving their urban forests and reduce the wildfire hazards. Improved forest health will be a positive by-product of this program. It is essential to the program to have a wide variety of participants to develop a cooperative approach.

Taking the Program to the Next Level

North Carolina is mostly urbanized, urban-interface or urban-intermix. The recent SWRA and population growth reports have highlighted areas where the fire hazards and urban forestry demands are high to extreme. Providing communities with financial assistance so that professional foresters and natural resource planners (others) can assess local condition, relate potential problems and develop workable solutions will lead to community action. It will also help NCDFR in completion of community assessments throughout the state for use in urban and fire management plan development.

The objective of this grant is to change the behavior and habits of many of those who live in or near woodland areas and to encourage them to take the steps necessary to keep their urban forests healthy and to make their communities a Firewise place to live. This will be accomplished through:

- cost-share funds earmarked for projects in high hazard areas (\$125,000 annually) for example:
 - community fuels reduction projects
 - water resource improvements
 - community meetings and Firewise awareness days
 - emergency road access
 - safety zones
 - cul-de-sac improvements
- cost-share funds earmarked for projects to integrate Firewise projects with urban community projects (\$100,000 annually) including, but not limited to:
 - open space/comprehensive resource planning integration
 - canopy analysis projects
 - urban management plan development
 - county/community policy meetings
- a more directed media campaign to raise awareness to high risk Urban Communities (\$25,000 annually):
 - local advertisements and articles in local newspapers
 - strategically placed billboards to call attention to the risk caused by poor management
 - metal signs for posting at high visibility properties which have successfully implemented prevention practices
- continued and stepped up support for Foresters and County Rangers working in these areas.

Evaluation Criteria Discussion:**1. National and Regional Relevance (check all that apply)**

- √ Fractured Forests
- √ Wildland Fire and Forest Fuels
- √ Changing Markets
- √ Forest Health
- _ Water Quality and Quantity

2. Prioritization

This project is a high priority for DFR. It is ranked #4 out of the 24 proposals prepared because it integrates programs and provides direct assistance to landowners and communities.

3. Meaningful Scale

While this project will be directed to all geographic areas, it will focus most of its attention to urban interface and intermix communities. This program will also benefit National Forests in North Carolina and adjacent counties in South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee. This project proposal can easily be used in the rest of the south and country.

4. Collaboration

Planning and implementation of this project will be completed in cooperation with the various sections, districts and regions within the Division, along with collaboration with NC State University, League of Municipalities, NC Cooperative Extension Service, fire marshals, fire chiefs, county managers, city managers, and National Forest in North Carolina to coordinate messages and projects that are beneficial to all entities

5. Outcomes

The proposed cost-share funding will directly result in many communities being made aware of the urban forest health and urban interface challenges. Several communities will be directly impacted by the grant programs on an annual basis. The benefit of the directed media campaign should result in at least 5% increase in the use of proper urban forestry and Firewise practices in the targeted area.

6. Technology

Technology support, including geospatial modeling will be attained from the North Carolina Center for Geographic Information and Analysis and potentially the US Forest Service Forest Health Enterprise Team. These will be shared with Division personnel and partners to improve program delivery and to communicate feedback on the ground observations and improvements needed in modeling

7. Integrated Delivery

The NCDFR Fire Control and Urban Forestry staffs will work closely together and use the Firewise Council and Urban Forestry and Community Grant committees to prioritize grant requests and increase cooperation and integration of the two programs. Firewise principals, as well as urban forestry practices, will be coordinated with forest health specialists to provide added benefits in improving forest health, especially in areas of preventing outbreak of pests such as the southern pine beetle. Furthermore, water quality staff will be consulted to integrate Low Impact Development concepts.

8. Leverage

In-kind services will be provided to support delivery of the program by Communities and other Division and university personnel.

9. Influence Positive Change

Direct benefits will be long term reduction of wildfire hazard and an increase in proper urban forest management on those lands where communities were given sound advice and grant/award assistance. Changing the culture of management in the urban and urban interface setting from passive management to taking a more active role to improve the health and productivity is the most important change sought.

10. Timeliness

This project will begin shortly after the funding is awarded. On the ground practices will be documented within the timeframe of this grant project.