

Southeastern Massachusetts Hazardous Fuels Mitigation

The Challenge

The coastal area of Massachusetts includes over 100,000 acres of pine barrens, heathlands, and grasslands that are prone to wildfire. The area is also fragmented by extensive development with primary residences and vacation homes. Over the years conflagrations have resulted in significant property damage. Decades of fire suppression have resulted in mature, closed canopy forests, putting new development at risk from catastrophic wildfires.

Two challenges to the success of this project were most significant:

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant required that the project maintain jobs, reinstate jobs, or stimulate the creation of jobs through the State Forester or equivalent State official, by reducing the threat of wildfire to communities and resources on State and private lands.
- Since prescribed burns were a major part of the project, project leaders had to overcome concerns of longtime residents relating to wildfires that had caused severe property damage and forced evacuations.

The Solution

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has partnered with The Nature Conservancy to train municipal fire service personnel, increase fire planning in high-risk areas, and assist with developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Plans call for 12 training courses (150 students including municipal firefighters) by June 30, 2011. Plans are also to continue educational programs, including 20 prevention programs for kindergarten through fourth grade students (500 children). The DCR and The Nature Conservancy will also carry out prescribed burns on 1,700 acres of DCR land and 65 acres of private lands in southeastern Massachusetts, assisting 33 towns at risk.

The activities delivered through this partnership are fulfilling the ARRA expectations by—

- Retaining nine critical seasonal fire management positions
- Creating five new seasonal jobs to support fuels management and ecosystem restoration



Prescribed fire is ignited by a fire manager and allowed to burn within a predetermined set of guidelines and conditions, to eliminate flammable vegetation while protecting people and property.

- Creating 20 contractor jobs for two mechanical fuel removal projects.
- Retaining one part-time and three full-time private sector jobs.

Resulting Benefits

The ARRA grant will enable Massachusetts DCR and The Nature Conservancy to retain and create a total of 43 jobs in southeastern Massachusetts. Over the course of the grant, these employees will work together to assist 48 communities at risk.

Sharing Success

The collaboration between Massachusetts DCR, The Nature Conservancy, and numerous fire departments has lowered the risk of wildfires in southeastern Massachusetts and taught communities about mitigating fire risk and keeping their homes and businesses safe. Recently, one community member wrote to the *Martha's Vineyard Times* to express his change of heart about prescribed burns. In the past, he had feared prescribed burns in the State forest. After meeting the people in the burn group, whom he described as “top-notch,” he changed his mind. He now completely supports prescribed burns.

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