

Extension response to 2015 fire season: public outreach and information

AT A GLANCE

Extension responds to the devastating 2015 wildfire season with programming for rural landowners on reducing fire risk on their property, and land recovery from wildfire impacts.

The Situation

The 2015 fire season was predicted to be a bad one, and was. Over 80,000 acres of non-industrial private land burned in the Clearwater Valley and the Salmon River area near Riggins, with over 50 homes lost. Land owners can improve their odds of surviving wildfire by learning how to reduce fuels on their property, and those affected by the 2015 fires needed information on agency assistance programs for fire recovery as well as instruction on salvage logging and preventing erosion.

Our Response

Given the forecast for the 2015 fire season the workshop, *Reducing Fire Risk in the Wildland-Urban Interface*, that was developed in 2013 (which was also predicted to be a bad fire year) was offered again in the communities of Fraser and Grangeville in June.

In addition to the topics of defensible space around homes, the workshop presents information on the ecological/landscape context to increased wildfire incidence in the west, as well as instruction of wildland fire behavior, wildland firefighting in the WUI, and county emergency management response and evacuation.

After the fires hit in August Extension began distributing fire recovery information packets to affected communities in north central Idaho with over 400 packets distributed so far. In addition, a special



Fire Recovery Assistance Programs for Rural Landowners event, Kamiah. Julie Fowler, Photo by FSA.

edition of the fall Extension Newsletter was issued devoted to fire recovery information for landowners and was mailed to 2,600 rural landowners in the valley's fire-affected areas, with over 200 distributed to local businesses and agencies for public distribution.

Extension also organized five public information events on *Fire Recovery Assistance Programs for Rural Landowners* that provided "one stop shopping" for landowners affected by the fires to learn about agency financial and technical assistance for fire recovery. These events were held in the communities of Kamiah, Orofino, Craigmont, Fraser and Riggins, and were attended by a total of 161 landowners and 67 agency representatives. Agencies participating included the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, US Forest Service, Fire Assessment and Recovery Volunteer Group, Idaho Department of Lands, Extension, local mills, NW Management,

county Emergency Management and county Weed Management departments.

Finally, Extension conducted two fire recovery workshops focused on salvage logging and erosion control during the last week of October in the communities of Kamiah and Orofino. *After the Fire: Salvage Logging and Erosion Control* included presentations and handouts on conducting salvage logging, local mill representatives and the purchasing of fire damaged timber, as well as erosion control and flood risk.

Program Outcomes

Reducing Fire Risk in the Wildland-Urban Interface (2015 edition) had 20 participants, representing over 2,000 acres, who reported a 79% increase in knowledge on reducing wildland fire risk, with 100% indicating they would likely take action to reduce that risk on their properties (a follow-up survey of attendees of the 2013 edition of this workshop indicated that 100% subsequently took action to reduce wildfire risk on their property).

According to agency representatives, landowners found the Fire Recovery Information packets to be extremely useful, with many offices running out of packets and requesting more. The special "fire" edition of the fall newsletter was also well received with one recipient emailing "thank you for your efforts to share information with the many people in this county."

Attendees of the *Fire Recovery Assistance Programs for Rural Landowners* events reported an 87% increase in knowledge of agency fire assistance programs with 95% indicating that they would consider using the assistance available. Quotes from attendees: "Very helpful and needed meeting," "Best event of all – knowledge was excellent," "I am amazed at how many agencies and people are involved."

After the Fire: Salvage Logging and Erosion Control had a total of 63 attendees, representing over 15,000 acres who reported a 68% increase in knowledge gained. Eighty-nine percent said they would, or probably would, implement practices learned, with 100% stating they would be able to use what they learned.

The Future

An additional program on fire recovery is planned for December which will focus on weeds, forest insects, and pasture and range land recovery. Additional fire recovery and prevention programming will be made available in 2016 as we learn more about landowner needs for fire recovery through the ongoing assessment of the 2015 fires.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

William Warren, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Clearwater County
2200 Michigan Ave.
Orofino, ID 83544
Phone: 208.476.4434
Fax: 208.476.4111
E-mail: williamw@uidaho.edu

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