

# National Fire Plan

USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior

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## Community Assistance

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### Overview

As the nation's demographics change, developed areas and individual home sites increasingly extend into wildland areas. These wildland-urban interface areas exist wherever homes and businesses are built among trees, brush, and other flammable vegetation. Wildland-urban interface communities exist throughout the United States, in both rural locations and urban areas. Fires move from brush or grasslands into communities or from communities into adjacent wildlands. Either way, community involvement is a critical element in reducing fire hazards near homes and communities and restoring damaged landscapes. Communities need many types of assistance and Agencies provide support to meet these needs in educating citizens, community protection planning, and training and equipping firefighters; purchasing equipment; and treating vegetation and landscapes around communities. Community assistance programs focus on building state and community capacity to develop and implement citizen-driven solutions that will lessen local vulnerability to risks associated with wildland fires.

**Community Assistance Budget Summary (\$ in thousands)**

| <b>National Fire Plan</b>           | <b>FY 2001<br/>Final<br/>USDA &amp; DOI</b> | <b>FY2002<br/>Final<br/>USDA &amp;<br/>DOI</b> | <b>FY 2003<br/>Final<br/>USDA &amp;<br/>DOI*</b> |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Rural Fire Assistance               | \$9,978                                     | \$10,000                                       | \$10,249   |
| State Fire Assistance               | \$75,328                                    | \$81,693                                       | \$96,456   |
| Volunteer Fire Assistance           | \$13,251                                    | \$13,315                                       | \$15,544   |
| Economic Action Programs            | \$12,472                                    | \$12,472                                       | \$4,967  |
| Community & Private Land Assistance | \$34,923                                    | 0  | 0  |

\*State by State funding distribution tables available upon request for each program.

### Rural Fire Assistance (Department of the Interior)

In FY2003, Department of the Interior funding provided technical assistance, training, supplies, equipment, and public education support to 1,592 rural fire departments, thus enhancing firefighter safety and strengthening wildland fire protection capabilities.

### State Fire Assistance (USDA Forest Service)

USDA Forest Service funding in 2003 provided in excess of \$96 million for technical and financial assistance to the states to enhance firefighting capacity at the state and local levels. This funding also supports fire hazard mitigation projects in the wildland urban interface and facilitated an expanded series of FIREWISE workshops to help communities reduce the risks in fire-prone areas (described in detail below). It will also support an expanded national public service fire prevention program.

### Volunteer Fire Assistance (USDA Forest Service)

In FY2003, USDA Forest Service provided funding, through the states, to 6,139 volunteer fire departments. This funding helped improve communication capabilities, increase wildland fire management training, and purchase protective fire clothing and firefighting equipment to fire departments that serve over 10,000 small communities.

## **Economic Action Programs (USDA Forest Service)**

As a result of National Fire Plan funding in FY2003, rural communities and organizations were involved with 258 projects. National Fire Plan – Economic Action assistance has enabled wildfire and hazardous fuels management issues to be included as components in more than 295 local strategic plans over the last 3 fiscal years. Seventy five such plans were done in FY 2003 despite the reduced NFP-EAP funding levels. Funds allocated across the Nation addressed a full range of financial and technical assistance programs, including fuel reduction and utilization projects; bio-energy feasibility studies; wood utilization and product/market feasibility studies; modification or development of long-term fuels hazard reduction projects; and community economic development planning to expand or diversify the use of forest products.

### **The Firewise Communities Program**

The Firewise Communities Program funded by the National Fire Protection Association, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and many State, Federal, and nonprofit partners is a highly successful part of community hazard mitigation efforts. The program encourages communities and homeowners to take responsibility for hazard mitigation through land use planning, building codes, landscaping codes, zoning, and fire protection.

2003 marked the third year of national-level workshops since the National Fire Plan was initiated. In these three years, thirty national workshops have been offered. In 2003, 14 national workshops were conducted for 1,300 participants. Workshop attendees represented a spectrum of community leaders, including land developers, builders, the Insurance Services Office, the Institute for Business & Home Safety, and the American Red Cross. As a spin-off from the national workshops, about 500 State and local one-day workshops were conducted around the country reaching 5,000 community leaders in more than 1,000 communities.