



Transcript
Firewise Communities Chat Session
May 21, 2008

Judith_Leraas_Cook Welcome to our Firewise liaison chat session. And thank you for joining us today. We have lots to talk about. Michele Steinberg and I will be today's 'speakers'. Please hold questions until the end of our presentation. At that point, the chat will become completely interactive. Would you like to greet everyone, Michele?

Michele_Steinberg Thanks, Gerry and Steve, for joining us today.

Judith_Leraas_Cook The first thing we want to do is to remind you that submitting applications for the 2008 Firewise Leadership Awards must be completed within the next 5 weeks. These awards are really a wonderful way to let program advocates know they are valued. Both Michele and I have attended awards ceremonies around the country and have witnessed how pleased the recipients are. We really encourage you to nominate someone or to pass application materials on to folks who might.

Michele_Steinberg I've gotten questions recently from some state forestry staff asking how they can motivate groups such as private preserve managers to do more fire mitigation activity. A Firewise Leadership Award nomination for an outstanding program or project on a private preserve, a state park, or another such area would be a great way to encourage those folks to continue good work, and make others curious about how they can get good results, too. Other great nominees are local community leaders who have gone "above and beyond" with Firewise work or advocacy.

Judith_Leraas_Cook You may have communities within your jurisdictions that have received 5-year banners. These are one we have of acknowledging the hard mitigation work people are doing---right where they live. We are working on 5-year decals for the signs as well. Michele Would you describe the banners and talk a little about the decals?

Michele_Steinberg Sure! The banners are eight feet long and suitable for use outdoors or indoors. The graphics show a silhouette of a house among trees, with the phrase, "Where We Live. How We Live," on the left and the Firewise Communities/USA logo in the center. To the right, it says "A recognized community since 2002," or whatever year the community entered the program. All of the communities active since 2002 and 2003 have received banners. As the communities that entered the program in 2004 begin to renew this year, they are receiving the banner along with their renewal confirmation letter and their current year decals. We've decided to also create a decal that says "5 years" that will be a triangular shape and fit into the top left corner of the sign. When those are

produced, we'll send them to all the communities that have been active in the program for 5 or more years. And pretty soon, we will need to start making 10-year decals!

Judith_Leraas_Cook As you know, we are two-thirds of the way through the Firewise 'refresher' course. We have been able to broaden the attendance a little in the host states to accommodate a few more students. We are looking for input on what should be included in future courses. Michele - Do you want to share some of our ideas about configuring them?

Michele_Steinberg The liaison refresher course has been fun to pull together, and I'm so glad that we've had good participation from so many of the states. We are thinking that this kind of course would be useful to offer yearly or every other year (in the odd-number years when we don't have a conference, for example). What we might do is a classroom day for liaisons who are new to the role, and then invite in "veterans" of the Firewise process for Day 2. That second day would include a tour in the morning, and an hour or so of facilitated networking so that the more experienced liaisons can share their experiences. However we structure it, we would still aim to underwrite the cost of travel and lodging for the state liaisons so that it makes it possible for many of the state forestry staff to attend.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And it is time to start thinking about Backyards & Beyond. We had overwhelming response to the call for papers, and the course schedule is excellent. And there is more good news. Firewise Communities wants to provide scholarships to a significant number of community representatives from FWC/USA sites. Letters are going out very soon. We encourage you to talk this up so that your state will have good representation. The conference is truly energizing for volunteer homeowners. The scholarship is one way we can let them know how much we value their work. Michele - Do you want to add something here?

Michele_Steinberg Yes – I think the thing that makes Backyards and Beyond stand out from most other fire conferences is the fact that we do have community representation at the event. We hope to be able to get as many as 100 of our Firewise Communities/USA sites represented at the conference this fall (November 6-8). It's not only exciting for the community folks – most of whom are not involved professionally in fire or forestry but also for those of us "in the business," because these residents bring a very different perspective to our work.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Another project that is within a hair's breadth of completion is a community assessment course that we will be adding to the Firewise Learning Center. Based on the work of Jack Cohen and other members of the Firewise Communities staff, it will be of great benefit for those of you who are trying to train more folks to be able to conduct assessments within your jurisdictions. Michele - I know you have an update about this.

Michele_Steinberg Oh, I will be SO happy when we can announce that this project is ready for you to use! We have a great producer/technician working out the fine points of how the course will flow on the website. Our aim is to have it for you by the end of June. It's going to provide the primer information (what is the WUI, why is it a problem, etc) and then get into wildfire behavior and the home ignition zone. The main thrust of the course, however, is how to conduct community assessment that residents can use to help them become Firewise and apply for Firewise Communities/USA recognition. You'll see some overlap with the live course, Assessing Wildfire Hazards in the Home Ignition

Zone but a lot more emphasis on how to work with residents and how to create a final product that they can read and understand. I think you will find this a great tool for your own use as well as helping to train your staff and others.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Finally, we know you are interested in code/covenant guidelines. Michele wants to tell you about our work with them.

Michele_Steinberg I'm finalizing a draft now of a document I'm calling "A Guide to Firewise-Friendly Development." We've known for some time that there are concerns in many states that community associations (homeowners associations, property owners associations) have rules in their subdivisions that make it difficult to be Firewise. These include requirements such as a mandate to have wood shake roofs only on homes and prohibitions against removing live or dead vegetation. Few such associations have rules that take wildfire into account. Yet we are also hearing from more and more developers who want to build in a Firewise manner and are looking for guidance. The guide will provide the basics about wildfire behavior as it relates to homes and neighborhoods, so the reader will understand why home siting, design, construction and maintenance are so important. It will also provide suggested language for community master deeds (also known as Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions or CC&Rs) as well as models from other communities that have included Firewise components in their Architectural Review rules. This document will be available by the time of the Backyards and Beyond conference.

Judith_Leraas_Cook The chat is now open. We are interested in your thoughts on any of these topics!

Gerry_LaCavera Thanks for putting these projects into operation so many of our people want to do good but need the basic framework to operate and talk with those "higher up" types

Judith_Leraas_Cook We are hoping that many of these tools will help them.

Gerry_LaCavera I think they will but we need the liasons to make sure the word gets out that they are or will be available

Judith_Leraas_Cook Exactly. And that is what we are communicating in the refresher course. I think you will both have a great time in Richmond.

Michele_Steinberg Steve, we were so happy this week to see the Firewise Communities/USA application from the community of Allen, and I know the application from the community of Grant is on the way.

Judith_Leraas_Cook One of the things that will be helpful, Michele.....Do you have an approximate date that the scholarship letters will be mailed? I believe that both of our liaisons here will be interested in pushing those. A call from the liaisons will be a real boost for the community representatives.

Michele_Steinberg The letters are on their way to the mail this week. I will have Linda Coyle send you a sample so you see what they say.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Great!

Steve_Mattax I hope to add to the Firewise Community count in the near future.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Hooray, Steve! Once the program gets rolling, it kind of keeps on going.

Steve_Mattax I think City of Allen would be able to have a representative attend "Backyards and Beyond"

Judith_Leraas_Cook What a great idea. We would like to see a number of 'new' communities in Tampa.

Gerry_LaCavera any thoughts on connecting the Firewise Comm. programs more closely with the CWPP push?

Judith_Leraas_Cook Actually, you'll hear more about that in Richmond. We are, indeed, looking at creative ways to blend these two, seemingly-separate, things effectively.

Steve_Mattax In Oklahoma for a Community to receive a Grant the Firewise Plan has to be equivalent to a CWPP.

Michele_Steinberg Gerry, the good news is there is some updated guidance coming out on CWPPs. It will include discussion of Firewise Communities/USA in the section on structural ignitability.

Gerry_LaCavera they really aren't...The CWPP is only a short step away from a FW Community plan

Judith_Leraas_Cook Agreed.

Gerry_LaCavera yup I know..I am reviewing the doc as we type

Michele_Steinberg Also on CWPPs - I've seen really good examples of the large-scale plan (county level) using FWC/USA for small neighborhoods in the jurisdiction to address structural ignitability. I think our strategy is to keep making folks aware that the voluntary FWC/USA process integrates beautifully with the mandated CWPP process and can really help jurisdictions address the home ignition issue.

Steve_Mattax Oklahoma is not doing County CWPP.

Gerry_LaCavera you're doing community ones locally?

Judith_Leraas_Cook Steve - A number of states are not, so we have to keep being creative---as you are.

Gerry_LaCavera flexibility is the key whether we do local or county wide...my fear is that it will take forever to get all our at risk communities done and the CWPP is becoming a higher priority for WUI funding as well as other fed. funds.

Steve_Mattax CWPP and/or Firewise at the local level. I have yet to address the large cities in Oklahoma. The Large Cities (Oklahoma City and Tulsa) will require that a CWPP for the City not be the same as a Firewise Plan that will have to apply to housing groups in the city. I feel the same pressure. But a philosophical question, do County level CWPPs really address the Communities at Risk issue?

Gerry_LaCavera depends on the area. I could see having local cwpps in addition to the county ones that reflect local community needs better - they could be off shoots of a county plan

Michele_Steinberg My take is that the HFRA legislation is broad (vague) enough that there is a lot of flexibility on how to apply it. With Firewise, we are really focused on the residential neighborhoods taking action, so the plans we look for need to address home ignition potential as job one.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And each state has the opportunity to do this is the way most appropriate to that jurisdiction.

Gerry_LaCavera don't forget the personell issue

Judith_Leraas_Cook I just received a news flash from Virginia! Our site visit for the Richmond training session has been finalized.

Michele_Steinberg Excellent! Is it going to be at Woodhaven Shores?

Judith_Leraas_Cook No. A preferable site has been located---New Kent Courthouse Estates. This is a community that has been through the FWC/USA process. Only the

paperwork remains to be turned in. It is about a 15-minute drive from the hotel and a community representative will be there to tell their story.

Michele_Steinberg That is very cool. Steve, Gerry -- we had great experiences in the previous two sessions with our neighborhood tours. I think you will really enjoy this part of the course.

Gerry_LaCavera the one I was on with Jack and then the one with Fred Turk were pretty good. always refreshing to get other viewpoints and perspectives - especially from the "experts" who live in a community

Steve_Mattax I have learned everytime I have attended an on the ground session or conducted an on the ground training.

Judith_Leraas_Cook We have made an especial effort to involve residents in these tours, as they play such an important role in maintaining their mitigation plans. It's good for them, and good for us. Michele - How many states did you say will be at the Richmond session?

Michele_Steinberg Let me check...

Judith_Leraas_Cook We have representation from most of the country, and so will have some good discussion.

Michele_Steinberg We should have representation from 16 states - the best diversity of all 3 sessions.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thanks! Before we go, I want to remind you again to consider nominating someone for a Firewise Leadership Award. I talked to someone from CA yesterday who is working on an application.

Gerry_LaCavera already working on 2 here

Judith_Leraas_Cook Good news! So you can mark your calendars, we will be holding our third (and final) liaisons-only chat on September 10. We plan to discuss Backyards & Beyond, of course, and also community renewal status, progress made on the various things we talked about today, and so forth. One other thing: A number of our liaisons who miss the session have told me that they really like the fact that they can visit the Chat Transcripts area and read the transcripts. So if you are unable to attend a chat, be aware that we will be posting the proceedings for later review.

Gerry_LaCavera thanks

Judith_Leraas_Cook No problem! Our next chat will be a general session on Wednesday, June 11. We are still negotiating with our speaker, so can't announce it yet. So, in keeping with our commitment to keep these sessions to one hour, we will wind this one down today. Thank you both so much for joining us. It was a GOOD discussion.

Gerry_LaCavera thanks Judith and Michele

Judith_Leraas_Cook Anytime!

Steve_Mattax Thanks for your assistance. See you in Richmond.

Michele_Steinberg Thank you for the good discussion! See you soon.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Sure enough. Looking forward to a really good session. Bye