

Judith_Leraas_Cook Welcome to today's chat session. We are here to share information about organizing and energizing communities with respect to wildfire mitigation activities. My name is Judith Leraas Cook, and I am the project manager for Firewise Communities/USA as well as co-moderator today. Also moderating is Michele Steinberg, Special Projects Manager for the Firewise Communities Program. Welcome, Michele!

Michele_Steinberg Hello all! I'm looking forward to our chat today.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Our chat speaker today is Chief Larry Osborn. Larry is the fire marshal for Colfax County, New Mexico. He will be replacing our scheduled chat speaker, Claudia Standish, who is unable to join us because she has been called out on a fire. She sends her regrets and will very likely join us for a session in the near future. We are extremely fortunate that Larry is available today, as he is going to tell us about the coalition of Firewise Communities/USA recognition sites that he has developed in Colfax County. It started in 2005 with Taos Pines Ranch near Angel Fire, NM. In 2006, he added Ute Park, Hidden Lake (near Ocate) and Elk Ridge (near Angel Fire). He is working with several more candidates that he hopes to have recognized by the end of the year. Please hold your questions until the end of Larry's presentation. When he has finished, the chat will become completely interactive. We encourage you to join in at that time. Larry, we are all very interested in hearing about how you came up with the idea of forming a coalition. Could you tell us what made you think of organizing in that way and how it is working?

Larry_Osborn We found that each community had a diverse group of individual talents and experience. Forming a coalition allowed us to tap into these resources and utilize them to benefit the larger group. Using the strengths in one to offset weaknesses another might have. It just seemed to be a natural progression and an obvious way to go, particularly when dealing with several small communities. It seems to be working very well.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Did interest in wildfire mitigation in Colfax County coincide with wildfire activity in the area?

Larry_Osborn Yes, in some ways, we had had some communities get organized before we had serious fires. It has kept it in the fore front.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Just so I understand the coalition concept, each of the communities maintains its autonomy while the coalition provides a wildfire mitigation network to the participating sites. Is that correct? How do they use it?

Larry_Osborn As we said earlier, it provides a more diverse group and it allows communities that are starting out to benefit from the experience of communities that have already been through the process. Not reinventing the wheel each time. They also become more effective in seeking funding, because the projects now impact a larger group. It gives the a greater voice.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Would you please tell us about some of the Firewise projects the new communities have been involved with? Also, do the communities work with a variety of agencies like the Forest Service and state forestry?

Larry_Osborn Taos Pines is working in conjunction with USDA Forestry on forest restoration. This will provide a fire break between their community and the Carson national Forest. They have also worked with the water shed Alliance in the area to do a defensible space pilot project in their community which was very valuable in getting buy-in from some of their home owners. The other communities are sponsoring several

"Chipping Days" where residents band together and chip the material that has been removed from defensible spacing. Ute Park is currently seeking funding to assist them in creating a fire break between their community and the Colin Neblitt state park. New Mexico State Forestry and USDA Forestry have both been valuable partners in the projects that we have been working on. We have found them to be very supportive with both projects, and finding funding sources.

Judith_Leraas_Cook I know that you are also working with the communities as they develop their Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). Do the CWPPs and the Firewise Communities recognition process make a good fit? Do you have suggestions that other communities might follow regarding the creation of CWPPs?

Larry_Osborn We make the CWPP a part of the Firewise documents, and the Homeowner/Property Owners Association are requiring that the CWPP be included with the warranty deed when the property changes ownership. The County also adopts it as part of their CWPP.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Finally, you have been doing some very creative outreach in Colfax County, working with the local newspaper and radio stations with messages from the Fire "Wiseguys". Would you share what you are doing with the audience?

Larry_Osborn We decided with this fire season, we needed to take an active "In your face" stance with fire education. In a round table discussion, the idea came up that Fire Prevention Ads were "Death-dying-burning-etc" that we needed to take a light hearted approach to a serious problem. We toyed with firewise name and came up with the Fire "Wise Guys" using a 3 stooges theme to start and finish with the message in between. It is based on an old theater adage "Make them Laugh, Make them Cry, Make them Laugh". We run a new "Tip of the Week" every week. It has been very successful county wide. People keep listening to see what we will come up with next.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thank you so much, Larry. That was extremely interesting and useful! We will post the transcript in the 'Chat Transcripts' area in the next few days. The chat is now open to everyone. We encourage questions of Larry, Michele and myself. If anything is not answered during the chat, you can contact me at firewiseusa@aol.com. I will either respond directly or put you into contact with someone who can provide the information you need. Larry - You mentioned that your coalition is morphing a little ways out of New Mexico, into Colorado. How many new communities are you working with now?

Larry_Osborn We are currently working with Santa Fe Trail estates just over the border in Colorado, and Vermejo Park, Philmont Scout Ranch and the NRA Whittington Center.

Judith_Leraas_Cook That will potentially increase your numbers from four to eight, correct?

Larry_Osborn That's Correct. We are also talking with the Village of Cimarron, and they would like to begin the process in the fall.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Fabulous!

Judith_Leraas_Cook When I saw you last, you were broadcasting a 'tip of the week' through the newspapers and over the radio. Do you vary those by season?

Larry_Osborn Right now we are trying all the different media sources, but we are finding out that the radio seems to work the best because you can project more "personality" into the message.

Judith_Leraas_Cook That's for sure! Christina - Good morning. Pleased you could join us today!

Christina_Fowler Thank you. I'm sorry I was so late, but I got sidetracked. This may already have been explained, but I was wondering what type of individuals are included in the coalition.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Larry can explain better, but members are recognized Firewise Communities. Larry - Do you want to tell Christina about it?

Larry_Osborn We include any community that wants to commit to the FireWise ideals, and we have also involved both State and federal forestry also we have involved our Watershed Alliance, really anyone who has expertise that they can contribute.

Judith_Leraas_Cook I visited Colfax County about a week and a half ago. The participation and enthusiasm was really impressive....from the County Commissioners right on down to the homeowners. This model is really worth considering. I am thinking of you, Christina, because Arkansas has many communities that are located within single counties. Larry - Arkansas has a large number of recognized sites in the northwestern corner of the state.

Christina_Fowler One county I am working with right now is having some problems finding a "sparkplug" to keep the individual communities going.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Christina - Larry is the County Fire Marshal for Colfax County. You might contact the fire marshal in that location.

Christina_Fowler But we have had a really positive response from the County Ranger and from the U.S. Forest Service.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Aha! I am sure he would be helpful in getting the process rolling. Are there suggestions you might make, Larry? Larry pointed out that the power of the coalition was that each community had strengths and weaknesses, and the coalition was able to draw on the strengths of them all in order to make progress.

Larry_Osborn Finding the "spark plug" is always a problem. The local jurisdictions may be able to help, but the real key is finding that member of the community that will help and supporting them.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And you are right on there!! You have an amazing sparkplug in Colfax County.

Larry_Osborn Absolutely!! Linda Ford has been amazing.

Christina_Fowler I know what a key role our sparkplug has played in the Fayetteville (NW corner) area. Much of our progress wouldn't have been possible without him.

Judith_Leraas_Cook I wonder of the sparkplugs really know how much we appreciate them all. They are really the keys to success in community wildfire mitigation. And they are treasures.

Christina_Fowler I also had a question about the psa's. How does your organization come up with the funding to run the radio ads. Do these stations donate the air time?

Michele_Steinberg Judith, is this a plug for the sparkplugs?

Christina_Fowler I think it's a great way to reach communities that may not have heard the message yet.

Larry_Osborn They donate some of it, but I am funding through State Fire Protection funds that I receive.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And it appears to be a good hit. The residents of Colfax County really enjoy the Fire "Wiseguys"!

Judith_Leraas_Cook We have spent another great hour talking about Firewise. The transcript of the session will be posted within about a week so everyone who is out on fires can see it. You gave us some wonderful information today, Larry!

Michele_Steinberg Any possibility of obtaining recordings of any of the radio spots?

Larry_Osborn Thank you, it was my pleasure. I can check with the radio station. You can contact me at firemarshal@colfaxfire.com for more info.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thanks, Larry!

Michele_Steinberg Thanks, everyone!

Judith_Leraas_Cook Our next chat session will be on Wednesday, July 12. We hope you will all be able to join us then.

Christina_Fowler See you there. Thanks. Bye

Judith_Leraas_Cook Bye, Christina!