



Transcript  
Firewise Communities Chat Session  
September 12, 2007

**judithleraascook** Welcome to today's chat session. The purpose of the hour is for us to share information about Firewise Communities in action. My name is Judith Leraas Cook. I am the project manager for Firewise Communities/USA and will moderate the chat today. We are going to hear from Patrick Mahoney with the Florida Division of Forestry. Patrick is a Wildfire Mitigation Specialist and the Public Information Officer in the Myakka River District in Bradenton. Over the past year or so, he has worked with many communities in his part of the state. Please hold your questions until the end of Patrick's responses to my questions. When he has finished, the chat will become completely interactive. We encourage you to join in at that time. Patrick, we know that you are responsible for helping several Florida communities earn Firewise Communities/USA recognition status. Would you please tell the audience which ones they are?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** In Sarasota County: Woodland Estates River Walk Mobile Home Park (the 1st mobile home park in Florida the 2nd. in the US), Lazy River Mobile Home Park Harbor Isles Mobile Home Park Harbor Cove Mobile Home Park, Charlotte County: Peace River Shores and Palm Shores Social Club South Gulf Cove Tree Top's @ the Rangers. Work with: Sarasota County: Rivendell Subdivision Manatee County: Winding Creek

**judithleraascook** Whew! About how long did you find the average community takes to go through the recognition process?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** any where between 3 & 6 months depending on the community

**judithleraascook** Great! We are aware that you have been enjoying working with the homeowners as they embark on their recognition projects. Would you give us an example of a typical project in your part of the state?

**mike\_frost** Patrick: Your Florida "Green" and "Gold" teams were a great help to us here in Whitefish MT this summer. They were exceptionally competent and professional. Thanks to ya'all.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** We have done a lot of mitigation work in the different communities, fuel reduction, and some Rx burns. We also have work with the s couple of the communities in developing a land management plan and we have one community, Tree

Top's @ the Rangers that has become a Tree City USA with the help of our forester Salvador Alemany.

**judithleraascook** That's very interesting and I hope we can come back to that during our open discussion. What have been some of your challenges as you begin working with a new community?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** There have been two "big" challenges the 1st. is "How much money is this going to cost", and once you can get them past the \$2.00 per cap. They have been willing to move forward. The next one is "we do not want any government involvement in our community." Then when we explain to them what we want to do, then they are willing to move forward with the mitigation and the recognition.

**judithleraascook** So, once folks are engaged in actually conducting wildfire mitigation, what have been some of the 'fun things'---or those things that really work well for homeowners?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** The celebrations have been great!!!! GREAT FOOD, GREAT FELLOWSHIP, and just a GREAT TIME TO CELEBRATE WHAT THE COMMUNITY HAS DONE!!!!

**judithleraascook** Yes, universally we like to laugh and to eat! So, do you have advice for fire staff that may be just beginning to work with a homeowners' association or a community?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Be patience!!!!!! One thing that has worked for me is working with the local fire dept. they can be a great resource to work with. I have work with Sarasota County Fire Dept., North Port Fire Dept., Charlotte County Fire Dept. and the county EOC. This has been a great partnership!!!!

**judithleraascook** Partnerships are really the name of the game. So, finally, before we open up the discussion, do you have some words of wisdom for homeowners who would like something to happen in their communities?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Be patience, work hard, move slow, move FORWARD!!!!!!!

**judithleraascook** Yes, the results of all our hard work are soon evidenced...and everything looks so great!

**judithleraascook** Thank you, Patrick! We will post the transcript of this session in the chat archives in just a few days. The chat is now open to everyone. We encourage you to ask questions of Patrick about the work he is doing. Or Michele Steinberg (who has just joined us) or myself. Remember if you need to reach us after the chat, you can contact me at [firewiseusa@aol.com](mailto:firewiseusa@aol.com).

**mike\_frost** Patrick: Are the insurance companies taking a position in your community on insuring homes in communities that are or are not "firewise"? It seems like this may be a deciding factor for many communities.

**christina.fowler** I would like to find out more how you were able to incorporate Tree City USA with the Firewise process.

**judithleraascook** Patrick - Great questions! Why don't you take them one at a time?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** first to mike no they are not working with us, we are trying to talk to them and show them it would benefit them if they would

**mike\_frost** It just seems inevitable that this will be an area of interest to insurance companies. I read that AIG was actually applying Phos Check to some of their insured homes in Idaho free of cost. It would sure be nice to get them behind our efforts.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** to christina I worked with our forester and he has been a big part in the tree city usa and he is also coming up with a land management plan for them. it would be great if they would get with the program

**mike\_frost** Do you know of any organized efforts to involve them?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** I have oonly heard rumors!!!!

**christina.fowler** I don't know how well a response we would get from homeowners if they found out we were trying to get insurance companies involved. We've already run into problems with homeowners unwilling to participate in projects, because of concern their insurance would drop them.

**Michele\_Steinberg** Hi Mike, I am wondering what state you are from. Insurance companies are regulated by the state insurance commission. It might be worth while to contact your state's insurance commission with your specific interests or concerns.

**mike\_frost** Communities might be very happy if their insurance company gave a price break to "firewise" communities.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** In the areas that I work in that is a big issue and they would welcome the "discouont"

**Michele\_Steinberg** A couple notes on insurnace, if I might. Firewise Communities/USA participation will not cause insurers to drop policy holders. It also will not likely trigger a premium discount. The price of homeowners insurance is based on a lot of different things, and fire loss (from ANY kind of fire) is only o

**mike\_frost** I'm in the State of Montana, where the Governor is very supportive of "firewise" efforts. I'll contact his office.

**Michele\_Steinberg** Oops - lost some of my message. Premiums are based on potential losses from a number of hazards, fire (of any kind) being just one. Liability is a much bigger slice of the coverage.

**judithleraascook** While insurance discounts are really great, (I would certainly like one!), the Firewise process is more concerned with giving communities an increased understanding of wildfire.

**mike\_frost** I understand. In the "Fun Department", our community has an "End of Fire Season" party where we all eat and drink too much and pat ourselves on the back. We also have live music with a country western band playing songs like "Ring of Fire" and "Fire on the Mounain". It's a lot of fun.

**judithleraascook** This knowledge, in increasing numbers of communities, is sufficient to make a change in wildfire preparedness. While insurance advantages, hopefully, will come one day, our communities seem to be eager to take positive mitigation steps.  
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**Michele\_Steinberg** Patrick, do you have suggestions for how advocates from large states like yours can effectively reach many communities?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** What I have done!!!! I will drive around and look for communities that are in a "High" danger area and find out if there is a HOA and talk with the Pres. or someone on the board and tell them what dangers that i see and the benefits there are for them to move toward becoming firewise

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** The Firewise Committees - did you create them from scratch? or did you utilize a pre-existing group (Homeowners Assoc., Neighborhood Watch, etc) ?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** I started working with the HOA, because they are the ones that will help push it through

**judithleraascook** You are certainly doing a great job. I was interested in the fact that you created a land management plan for one of yours. Am I correct that it encompasses more than the wildfire issue?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** yes. Sarasota county requires that those sub-divison that have wet lands to come up with a land management plan

**judithleraascook** So, was this the community that eventually decided to become a Tree City/USA site as well?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Tree Tops wanted to become Tree City USA first but them or forester told them about firewise and they JUMP!!!!

**judithleraascook** Most interesting!

**Patrick\_Mahoney** I have also found that if a community has a CERT team they are more willing to go firewise, for what reason they seem to go hand to hand?

**judithleraascook** Often, we think, it is that a spirit of community has been built---either by CERT or by FWC/USA, so one can cause the birth of the other.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** half of our FWC also have a very active CERT team

**judithleraascook** What a wonderful combination.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** it's worked out great

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** obvioulsly, they understand that an "emergency" is more than a remote possibility

**judithleraascook** Yes, indeed. I was interested in the work you have done with mobile home parks. Do you find that certain activities are more appealing to them others?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Correct!!! Not really. They have been more of the "HOLD" outs, because they do not understand "good fire bad fire" so we have to work with them in a different way, but they have been great to work with at time they act like teenagers, but when it comes down to it they have time on their hands and once we explain it to them they like the idea of become FWC "grants" go a long way

**judithleraascook** 'Good fire/bad fire' is not an easy concept for LOTS of people. You're absolutely correct that sometimes a different door is better. Are your 'grants' fairly large, or small?

**mike\_frost** I'm sorry to show my ignorance. What is "good fire/bad fire" about?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** both!!! but they also apply for other grants that are out there.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Rx fire GOOD wildfire BAD

**mike\_frost** Thanks. That makes sense.

**judithleraascook** Patrick - Are you currently working with yet more newbie communities?

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Yes. I have started to work with one in Manatee county and one that shares boarder with a state park.

**judithleraascook** Great! One of the things we are working with right now (in the autumn) is being sure our renewing communities get their paperwork submitted in time.....

**Patrick\_Mahoney** I have one due in Dec. and they are ready to renew

**judithleraascook** I am curious about whether you, or others, have challenges with some of our more established communities---that is, with fatigue. Great!

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Most of ours will be due in the spring and summer so we have a little time.

**judithleraascook** The online form works really well for this. We have had a steady stream of renewals coming in.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Michele How many do we have now? ::unsure

**judithleraascook** What we want to help with on that front is to keep up the interest in areas that have been performing mitigation tasks for years and are becoming a little tired. As of September 5, Florida had 22.

**Michele\_Steinberg** There are 22 communities in Florida right now, second in number only to Arkansas. But Virginia is catching you up with 21 as of last week!

**Patrick\_Mahoney** we are concerned that our fire season will be long and hard so we are working "over time" with communities in high fire areas with mitigation

**judithleraascook** I, of course, am rooting for Washington! We are at 19, but will bump up very soon!

**Patrick\_Mahoney** be ready for some action from FLORIDA!!!!!!!!!!!!!! ::laugh

**judithleraascook** OK!

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** I am a little concerned about the "fatigue" factor as well - one of my communities had been run by the same people for 4+ years. We have increased our "recruitment" efforts but only 2 new people so far.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Michele how many nation wide

**judithleraascook** I believe we hit 250 just a few days ago!!!!

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** Bravo !

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Timber, Is this a community with a HOA

**judithleraascook** Thus, of course, our concern with the 'fatigue factor'. We are thinking of new things for communities to do, etc. and are continually looking for thoughts/suggestions.

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** yes, Patrick

**Michele\_Steinberg** Numbers for the program nationwide have doubled in the past 18 months. We are up to 253 as of yesterday, in 36 states.

**judithleraascook** Hooray! To stick with our time schedule, we will terminate our session now. Of course, if folks would like to stay longer the chat room is always open.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Thanks for the time

**Mr\_FL\_Mit** Thanks everyone ::rolleyes

**mike\_frost** Thanks all. Talk with ya all again soon. Best Regards.

**bill** anybody doing county wide firewise

**judithleraascook** Thank you all for joining us today. It was certainly a delightful, spirited discussion. We invite you to come in for another chat on October 10 when Michele will be talking about the new NFPA codes and standards.

**christina.fowler** We tried that here in Arkansas, however it doesn't seem to work out as well as having boards for each individual community.

**bill** why do you feel it doesn't work

**Jeff\_Madden** Bill, the state is working with 2 counties in Washington to promote local FWC, they have funded a program to do initial assessments in 12 communities and help with plans. Its ongoing so I don't know how well it will work.

**christina.fowler** It really depends on the individuals involved. What seemed to happen in our cases, was that most of the work fell to one or two people who quickly burned out. Now we do things slightly differently than other states, because the Firewise boards

themselves are responsible for conducting the community assessment and completing a CWPP, as well as organizing the Firewise Days and mitigation projects.

**bill** I am in MN and we are trying it county wide, but it seems we have a big job getting the public interest

**Patrick\_Mahoney** it would be easier to do one community at a time

**judithleraascook** Since the ultimate unit that is affected by this program is the homeowner, we depend on volunteers. That is why the community focus seem to work well.

**Patrick\_Mahoney** that a big job

**bill** I am educating the fire department and each of them will be responsible for there areas

**judithleraascook** Jeff - Which counties is Washington supporting right now?

**Jeff\_Madden** King and Pierce (its the south puget sound region of the state DNR).

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Sarasota county has a mitigation team and part of the job is promoting firewise that makes things a little easier for me in that county

**judithleraascook** Thanks!

**Jeff\_Madden** I think with the North Puget Sound region getting so organized, the folks down here were getting a little jealous! :-)

**judithleraascook** Probably!! :-) Thank all of you again for sticking with us for more than an hour! As I mentioned, we will be posting the transcript in the Chat Transcripts area of the Forum in just a couple of days. You were all stars!

**Patrick\_Mahoney** Judith ,thanks for having me, I'm gone ::biggrin

**judithleraascook** Thank you for being so gracious!

**bill** What time is the next chat

**Michele\_Steinberg** Thanks, Patrick. I know you are doing a great job with the communities in your area of Florida and that your colleagues are as well. Keep up the good work!

**bill** I was told the wrong time sorry

**judithleraascook** Our next chat will be at 1:00 EDT on Wednesday, October 10. Sorry you missed this one, Bill, as it was great.

**bill** ok great I will read the transcripts

**judithleraascook** I think you will find them most interesting.

**bill** Yes We are just getting started with the level 2 so any info is great

**judithleraascook** Feel free to contact either myself (firewiseusa@aol.com) or Michele Steinberg (msteinberg@nfpa.org) if you have questions. We are really pleased to assist.

**bill** great news thanks

**judithleraascook** No problem.

**Michele\_Steinberg** Thanks, Bill, for joining us today. Hope you can join us on future chats as well.

**bill** thanks will chat then

**judithleraascook** OK. Bye!