



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AFC Receives 2009 Firewise Leadership Award

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. – The Arkansas Forestry Commission is the recipient of a 2009 National Firewise Leadership Award from the National Fire Protection Association for outstanding efforts to reduce the loss of lives, property, and resources from wildfires. Currently, 115 communities in Arkansas have earned National Firewise Communities/USA recognition. The award recognizes AFC's effort to encourage a collective approach to creating communities resistant to wildfire damage and destruction in areas where homes are built close to or within forested areas.

"The people and programs being honored this year are responsible for saving lives and property all across the country," said Firewise Communities Program Director Michelle Steinberg. "Citizens are better protected, and they and their property are more prepared to survive a wildfire due to our winners' proactive actions and guidance."

"Before Firewise, our communities didn't know there was anything they could do about a wildfire threat," AFC Faulkner County Ranger Orbin Barnes said. "Firewise is good for the public, because residents learn about how to protect individual homes; firefighters are better prepared because they begin to recognize problem areas."

AFC trains local fire departments to conduct Firewise risk assessments and advise homeowners in the community about changes they should make to prepare for wildland fires. AFC also works with fire departments and local leaders to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that includes wildfire prevention projects and emergency preparedness information.

"Firewise has meant many things to Pike County, Arkansas," said Pike County Ranger Billy Williams, who has assisted nine communities in the county through the Firewise Communities/USA recognition process. "Getting volunteer fire departments involved is the beginning of awareness [in a community] that homes can burn from advancing wildfires. Doing home assessments, handing out literature and Firewise Day events then takes that awareness out into the community. Once they see the literature, or someone doing an assessment talks with them, home and property owners often do fuel mitigation activities on their own."

Through Arkansas FireWise, fire departments have an opportunity to earn grant money for needed equipment, such as chainsaws and pole pruners, to conduct hazard fuel reduction projects in their communities.

“I am very pleased that the Arkansas FireWise program has brought around \$30,000 into rural Pike County since the first recognized communities in 2007. That money has been used to purchase tools and safety protective equipment, and to do projects that will help homes and businesses better survive in the face of advancing wildfires,” Williams added.

For more information about the Arkansas Forestry Commission, visit www.arkansasforestry.org or call (501) 296-1940. For more information about the Firewise Communities program, visit www.firewise.org.

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The Arkansas Forestry Commission offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The national Firewise Communities program is an interagency program designed to encourage local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, firefighters, and others in the effort to protect people and property from the risk of wildfire. The Firewise Communities program is managed by the National Fire Protection Association and sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, a consortium of wildland fire agencies. For more information, visit www.firewise.org.