Changing Roles: Wildland-Urban Interface Professional Development Program

A training program produced by

Southern Group of State Foresters
USDA Forest Service, Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information
University of Florida, IFAS Extension, School of Forest Resources and Conservation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Conservation Training Center

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The South is changing from a predominantly rural landscape to an urban one. Rapid population growth and land-use changes are increasing development, often with tremendous effects on forests, other natural areas, and communities. When forest remnants are left between these developed areas, the fragmented landscape presents challenges to natural resource professionals working to reduce risks and maintain healthy forest ecosystems. Further complications result from the demographic changes that are bringing new cultural and social values to the rural South. As a result, the wildland-urban interface requires a new approach to forest management to protect these natural areas and the ecological benefits they provide. Strategies are also needed to encourage and educate the growing number of new and diverse residents about the importance of conserving resources in the interface.

Conserving and managing natural resources, while protecting the public from risks in the interface, is part of the mission of state forestry and other natural resource agencies. Urbanization complicates this mission with new challenges, but also provides new opportunities.

As communities grow, citizens become more involved in protecting what they cherish: natural vistas, cultural heritage, water quality, wildlife habitat, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and a healthy economy. It is imperative for natural resource professionals to be active participants in these local land-use decision-making processes. They can communicate the role of the environment in quality of life issues and improve understanding of how local decisions affect forests and other natural areas. This is no easy task. Employees of state forestry and other natural resource management agencies must gain new skills and learn to convey information to new audiences.

Changing Roles: Wildland-Urban Interface Professional Development Program was designed to assist agencies at the forefront of this transition in the southern landscape. Our region has the greatest private land ownership and the fastest population growth of any other region of the nation. These training materials will help agency staff better understand the wildland-urban interface issues within a local policy framework and communicate about the management of forests and other natural areas with the best available science.

We hope you find these materials to be useful catalysts for meeting the challenges of changing resources and changing roles.

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