Columbia Gorge Wildfire Project

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The four counties in the heart of the Columbia River Gorge, Skamania, Klickitat, Hood River and Wasco Counties lie in high wildfire risk areas due to high fuel loads, increasing numbers of rural-urban interface dwellers and warm, dry windy weather. This project was designed to accomplish three tasks; survey wildland urban interface dwellings as to wildfire risk, assist rural fire districts in building their capacity to fight wildfire and educate rural dwellers in how to protect their homes.

The project was initiated under the leadership of Peter Mackwell as Wildfire Coordinator and is now under the leadership of Andrew Lembrick. Funded by the USDA Fish and Wildlife Service it is coordinated by representatives from Washington Department of Natural Resources, Oregon Department of Forestry, the USDA Forest Service and local volunteer fire districts and counties.

The survey data is being recorded in a GIS format that will allow emergency planners and responders to better identify hazardous areas. Surveys have been initiated in all four counties with county crews augmenting the WSU crews in Hood River and Wasco Counties.

A web page listing grant funding sources and close communication with volunteer fire districts is helping rural fire fighters remedy equipment and training needs.

Under interface dweller education, seven education programs have been delivered and evaluations demonstrate that participants increased knowledge and demonstrated intent to clean up their properties making them less susceptible to wildfire. About 1000 "Living with Fire" brochures have been distributed to area residents.

For more information on this project or on how to make your rural dwelling more resistant to wildfire or for a copy of the "Living with Fire" brochure, contact Andrew Lembrick, 509-427-4130