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## Study Reveals Homeowner Perceptions in Fire-Prone Areas

*RIVERSIDE, Calif. September 24, 2008*—Most residents in fire-prone communities surrounded by the San Bernardino National Forest have taken steps to protect their homes from wildland fires, according to a U.S. Forest Service study completed this summer.

“The Experience of Community Residents in a Fire-Prone Ecosystem: A Case Study on the San Bernardino National Forest,” showed about 94 percent of homeowners who participated in surveys and focus group discussions in 2007 had taken defensible-space steps. About 75 percent reduced the flammable vegetation because it was required.

Inadequate financial resources, physical limitations and a desire to leave the landscape unchanged were commonly reported as barriers for undertaking action to protect homes from wildland fires.

“Overall, we found participants were concerned about fires and thought they were knowledgeable about ways to reduce the threat,” said Pat Winter, a U.S. Forest Service research social scientist at the Pacific Southwest Research Station.

Winter completed the study with George Cvetkovich, a psychology professor at the Western Washington University Center for Cross-Cultural Research. She and Cvetkovich conducted the research on the San Bernardino National Forest because it is one of the most fire-prone forests in the country.

The study can be found on the Pacific Southwest Research Station website at:  
[http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/documents/psw\\_rp257/](http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/documents/psw_rp257/)

The scientists examined participants’ stress related to living in fire-prone areas, perceived level of responsibility for fire prevention and preferred way to receive fire information. Almost 70 percent had experienced an evacuation because of fires.

Results showed most residents were very concerned about fires and that psychological impacts linger even a few years after the last major fire in an area. Many of these respondents also rated their knowledge of what should be done for effective fire management as high.

More than 80 percent of respondents thought the Forest Service had some level of responsibility for reducing fire risks and on average assigned it the most responsibility. The agency received a median grade of B for its fire-reduction efforts during the last year, along with the California Department of Forestry and individual homeowners.

Participants who were most trusting of the Forest Service gave higher grades for its fire-reduction efforts. Trust was influenced by the belief the agency shared their fire management values and acted in ways consistent with those values.

Most study participants said they preferred to receive fire information through public meetings so questions could be quickly answered. However, strong support for this type of communication was expressed by respondents who themselves participated in a survey that required attending a meeting.

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