

Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership

In 2005, the Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership continued its important work of reducing the risk that wildland fire poses to private property and improving forest health conditions in communities. About 150 acres of private property were thinned in Parks, Sherwood Forest Estates and Williams. That is the most acres ever treated in a year since the partnership was formed in mid-2001. Last year, about 85 acres were treated.

The partnership's goal has been to increase the number of acres treated each year, and it more than accomplished that in 2005. The partnership's efforts were even recognized at the national level. The partnership received a national USDA Forest Service award for strengthening relationships, improving communities and engaging in natural resource stewardship.

The Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership was a recipient of the 2004-2005 national Rural Community Assistance Award in the Leadership Category. Specifically, the partnership was recognized for demonstrating exceptional leadership that enabled on-the-ground planning and actions to take place.

Besides working to thin private property, the partnership has also focused its efforts on educating landowners about the importance of working to make their property more defensible against wildland fire. Through the project, property owners are educated about their roles and responsibilities in fuels management and forest health. That educational focus was acknowledged in the RCA award citation:

“In the spirit of working together for rural America, the Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership is recognized for outstanding leadership in education and community involvement through on-the-ground demonstrations to help local communities in northern Arizona improve forest health and reduce the risk of wildland fire.”

For partnership members, the most important part about receiving national recognition like the RCA award is that it will better position the RCFMP to receive grant funding. The partnership's goal is to treat as many properties as possible, and that will only happen through continued grant funding.

Since the partnership's inception in 2001, more than 400 acres of private land have been thinned. In 2005, the Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership donated the treatment of 11 acres to the Pinal County Pine Combs 4-H Camp. The Arizona State Land Department created a fire management plan for the camp and marked the trees for removal. Coconino Rural Environmental Corps and local Youth Conservation Corps crews did the thinning work. The thinning was done as a donation since the camp's funding resources are limited.

Participants in the Rural Communities Fuels Management Partnership are the Kaibab National Forest; Arizona State Land Department; University of Arizona – College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Northern Arizona University’s Ecological Restoration Institute; Coconino County; Arizona Department of Corrections; Coconino Rural Environmental Corps; City of Williams; and Parks-Bellemont, Sherwood Forest Estates, and Williams volunteer fire departments.