



Lehigh Acres, Florida Develops Successful Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is a national collaborative effort to bring a broad cross-section of stakeholders together to address wildland fire management challenges. The Strategy directs wildland fire planning activities and has three primary goals: restore and maintain landscapes, develop Fire-Adapted Communities, and improve wildfire response.

Activity	Impact
% reduction in wildfires caused by humans since 2007	40
Property savings from fuel reduction on 2,200 acres (2010-2012)	\$110 million
Property savings from fuel reduction on 1,700 acres (2010-2012)	\$88 million

The Lehigh Acres community, located in Lee County, SW Florida, encompasses approximately 61,500 acres, 28,500 of which are classified as natural areas. The forests contain a pine overstory with a 6 to 12 foot high palmetto understory and occasional, dense stands of the highly flammable paperbark tea tree (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*).

Following two devastating wildfires in Lehigh Acres, the Florida Forest Service brought together representatives of the Lehigh Fire Department, Lee County Public Safety, Lee County Planning, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and local citizens of Lehigh Acres to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Central problems addressed in the Lehigh Acres CWPP included:

- excessive vegetation that could become wildland fire fuel if not reduced, or mitigated
- lack of strategic fire breaks and defensible space throughout the community
- county codes inconsistent with Firewise principles
- minimal Firewise education and action within the community

- education and training to increase the local fire department's capacity to deal with wildfire

Since adoption of their CWPP in 2007, the Lehigh Acres community has made remarkable strides in wildfire management and prevention, with human-caused wildfires reduced by 40% since that time. Lehigh Acres Fire Department, in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service, now provides community fire risk assessments, Firewise education, and training. In addition, Lehigh Fire Department command personnel upgraded their national Incident Command System (ICS) training. Lee County assisted mitigation efforts by approving \$650,000 to purchase equipment and fund positions for fuel reduction needs. During years 2009-2010, approximately 2,200 acres of vegetation were chopped, leading to protection of \$110 million in property. From 2010-2012, wildfire mitigation work was funded through the Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Grant. During this time, 1,700 acres of vegetation were chopped, which protected over \$88 million in property.

Success stories highlight regional wildland fire accomplishments that support implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy in the Southeast. The stories demonstrate how the Southeast is improving its "fire resiliency" through technology, education and outreach, forest management, collaboration, and more. Success stories also serve as a model for other communities to follow.

Additional Information:

Lehigh Acres Community Wildfire Protection Plan: www.wildfiremitigation.org/download-document/97-lehigh-acres-cwpp

Lehigh Acres Case Study on US Forest Service website: <http://www.wildfireprograms.usda.gov/search.html?displayId=352>

2013 Florida State Hazard Mitigation Plan, Lehigh Acres Mechanical Fuel Reduction Project: <http://www.floridadisaster.org/mitigation/State/documents/2013stateplan/Appendix%20E%20Wildfire%20Mitigation%20Annex%20FINAL.pdf>

Lee County Wildfire Protection Plan-2011: <http://www.lee-county.com/gov/dept/dcd/Planning/Amendments/Documents/RA2012/CPA2011-17/CPA201117A1.pdf>

Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan-2008: http://www.iafc.org/files/wild_CWPPreport.pdf

An article from the website, Lehigh Acres Citizen, "Controlled Burns in Lehigh Planned for this Week": <http://www.lehighacrescitizen.com/page/content.detail/id/522425/Controlled-burns-in-Lehigh-planned-this-week.html?nav=5100>

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Partners: Florida Forest Service, Lehigh Fire Department, Lee County Public Safety, Lee County Planning, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Lee County American Red Cross, Lee County Department of Community Development, and Lehigh Acres Residents



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