

INTRODUCTION

Whenever residential, industrial, or agricultural developments are located within or near wildland settings with natural vegetation, they are at risk from wildfire. We call such areas the wildland/urban interface, or interface for short. Fires that have the potential to involve buildings and wildland fuels or vegetation simultaneously are known as interface fires. An interface fire can ignite within a building and spread to nearby forests or, more commonly, spread from burning vegetation to engulf homes, farms, or industrial installations.

Forested and wildland areas are highly desirable places to live. What makes them so attractive, however, also makes them hazardous. While vegetation is an amenity for residents, it is nothing more than a source of fuel for a fire.

The economic and social impact of interface fires is immense. Every year, tens of thousands of Canadians are placed on evacuation notice or evacuated from their homes and places of work because of the risk of wildfire. Wildland/urban interface fires can occur at almost any time of year.

Prevention and control of interface fires presents many unique challenges. These challenges demand that communities take collective responsibility for the problem, and that we develop new attitudes towards fire. All members of the community need to cooperate to implement novel approaches that resolve fire problems in the wildland/urban interface.

The lives of people who live in the wildland/urban interface are often deeply intertwined with nature. People live in the interface for recreation or escape from the urban setting, or because their livelihood depends on agriculture, tourism or resource-based industry. Others carry on their traditional aboriginal lifestyles and culture.

The forest, parkland, and agricultural landscapes of Canada are now scattered with subdivisions, settlements, campgrounds, ranches, lodges, industrial sites, and homes that are vulnerable to wildfire. The number of wildland/urban interface areas is growing rapidly in Canada.

The danger of interface fire has been known for many years. Despite many determined efforts to resolve the problem, incidents continue to become more common and increase in terms of economic, societal, and personal impacts.

The Risk of Wildfire in the Wildland / Urban Interface

The interface fire problem continues to grow for a number of reasons:

- Residents and others in the interface may not be aware of, or do not fully appreciate the interface fire danger and the possible consequences.
- They may also have a false sense of security about protection from interface fire, or feel that it is the responsibility of their local fire department or provincial/territorial agency.
- Others may be concerned about interface fire but do not know how to reduce the risk without sacrificing the natural setting or visual attractiveness of the area.
- Within many interface areas, the net effect of many years of successful fire suppression has been to increase the amount and continuity of fuels available to future fires.

To reduce the risk of wildfire losses, we must all be more aware of the potential consequences of interface fire and share responsibility to find practical solutions.



PHOTO: BRIAN MOTTUS

The threat of wildfire must also be seen at a broader landscape level. Fire has been a major factor in shaping the vegetative cover and creating a mosaic across the forest landscape. In many cases, large-scale fire events have repeatedly occurred across the landscape. To reduce the threat of a large intense wildfire to a community, the forest fuels must be

assessed well back from the community. Efforts to make communities FireSmart may be compromised if the landscape surrounding the community is not also FireSmart.

Be FireSmart – Protect Your Community from Wildfire

Partners in Protection is an Alberta-based non-profit organization that formed in 1990 to address common issues in the wildland/urban interface.

We originally developed this manual, *FireSmart: Protecting Your Community from Wildfire*, to give communities and individuals across Canada the information and tools they need to confront interface fire protection issues. The second edition updates the original and presents more recent examples of FireSmart initiatives. It also reflects current perspectives on fire prevention and intervention in the wildland/urban interface.

Communities benefit when they adopt programs of interface fire awareness and work together on effective preventive solutions. As well as providing greater safety for people, homes and businesses, communities can expect decreased fire-fighting costs and better protection for adjacent natural resources like forests and rangeland.

How to Use the FireSmart Manual

Partners in Protection encourages community-based initiatives to reduce the risk of fire losses and enhance safety in the wildland/urban interface. Partners in Protection is recommending a three-phase program for use by interface fire community members in resolving their fire problems. This is the focus of the remainder of this manual.

Theme 1: Assess the situation

- **Chapter 1:** The Issues
- **Chapter 2:** Wildfire Hazard Assessment System

Theme 2: Resolve existing problems

- **Chapter 3:** Solutions and Mitigation

WHO IS THE FIRESMART MANUAL FOR?

The FireSmart manual is written for:

- Property owners and residents
- Fire chiefs and fire department personnel
- Municipal and wildland fire protection personnel
- Other emergency services personnel
- Municipal planners
- Developers, building contractors, and building material manufacturers
- Elected officials and councillors
- Insurance industry representatives
- Utility company representatives

Theme 3: Avoid future problems

- **Chapter 4:** Emergency Measures
- **Chapter 5:** Wildland/Urban Interface Training
- **Chapter 6:** Communications and Public Education
- **Chapter 7:** Land Use Planning
- **Chapter 8:** Communities Taking Action — *Templates for Success*

We hope that residents and others interested in the wildland/urban interface will find *FireSmart: Protecting Your Community from Wildfire* helpful. For more information about wildland/urban interface fire prevention, contact your nearest fire authority.