

Project Partners:

Itasca County Wildfire Protection Plan Implementation Team:

DNR-Firewise
Itasca County
Itasca County CWPP-
Implementation Team
Itasca County SWCD
Itasca County Chiefs Association
University of Minnesota Extension-
Itasca County
US Forest Service-Chippewa
National Forest
20 Rural Fire Departments serving
Itasca County:
Balsam
Bearville
Bigfork
Bovey
Blackduck
Calumet
Cohasset
Coleraine
Deer River
French
Goodland
Grand Rapids
Hill City
Keewatin
Marble
Nashwauk
Northome
Squaw Lake
Taconite
Warba/Feeley/Sago

Project Coordinator:

Julie Miedtke
University of Minnesota
Extension-Itasca County
123 NE Fourth Street
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
218-327-7365

Itasca County

Firewise Coordinator:

Bill Brink
P. O. Box 607
Deer River, MN
218-360-1114

Itasca County 2008 Firewise Grant Report



Project Description

Background:

Under the auspices of the 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act, the Itasca County Board of Commissioners local, state and federal agencies began the cooperative work in 2004 to identify risks associated with wildfire and developed the Itasca County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). In 2007, the Itasca County

CWPP Implementation Team received an initial Firewise Grant that trained members from local rural fire departments (RFD's) in Firewise. Volunteer RFD's conducted 5,418 homeowner (level 2) assessments throughout Itasca County.

In 2008, the Itasca CWPP Implementation team was awarded a DNR Firewise Grant, with a focus on mitigation activities. This grant had three components; education, vendor training and 'on the ground activities' through the Chipper Days Program. Activities began in February 2008 and were completed by December 2009. This report describes project activities.

1. Education:

During the winter of 2008, the University of Minnesota Extension and Itasca County Firewise Coordinator continued with a strong educational program, educating people on Firewise and encouraging participation in the upcoming Vendor Training and Chipper Days Program. Outreach efforts included a variety of media including; articles in local newspapers, radio promotions, newsletters, websites (<http://itascaswcd.org>) etc. Presentations were made to many lake associations and civic groups. In addition, informational letters were sent out to local township boards with presentation being made to local decision makers. The Itasca County Firewise Coordinator also made many homeowner visits encouraging their participation in the upcoming Chipper Days Program, suggesting mitigation activities and coordinating activities with vendors.

2. Vendors Training:

During the winter of 2008, the University of Minnesota Extension-Itasca County and the Itasca County Firewise Coordinator with the intent of developing a cadre of service providers, or contractors who could assist homeowners with 'on the ground' mitigation activities. Four workshops were offered in Itasca County: Balsam, Bigfork, Grand Rapids and Squaw Lake with 45 Individuals (loggers, tree care providers, excavators, landscapers etc.) attending the training sessions. A list of potential vendors was posted on the Itasca SWCD website (<http://itascaswcd.org>), shared during educational meetings and community events.



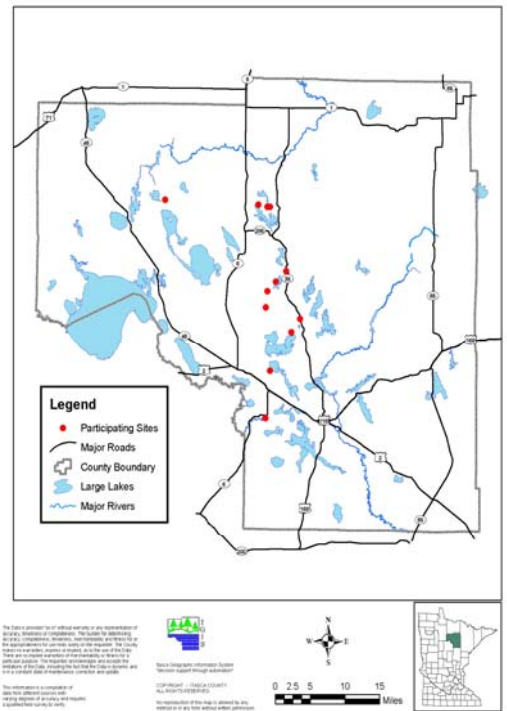
3. Itasca County Chipper Days Program: The first project began in May 2009 in the Suomi Area, located 20 miles north of Grand Rapids, and the first load was hauled on May 27, 2009 to the MN Power Rapids Energy Center in Grand Rapids, MN. Over the course of the 2008 Firewise Grant, **60 property owners** participated in the program, contributing **275 tons** of woody vegetation, that was hauled, chipped by a horizontal tub grinder and turned to woody biomass. There were 11 project areas: Sand Lake, Marcell, Turtle Lake, Suomi Lakes Area, Deer Lake, Red Pine Road, Cohasset and Guile Lake. Each project area had a 'neighborhood liaison' who worked with neighbors on individual mitigation activities and coordinated with the Itasca County Firewise Coordinator.

PROJECT EVALUATION

During October 2008, a survey was sent to participants to garner feedback on the Itasca County Chipper Days Program. 51% of the participants responded.

- 73% of the program participants had a Level 2 Assessment conducted on their property prior to participating in the Chipper Days Program.
- The program participants were generally older (60 years +) and many were absentee landowners which parallels current demographic trends for the area.
- Two property owners hired contractors to help with mitigation projects.
- 50% of the participants removed trees and shrubs along the driveways to improve access and egress for emergency vehicles or removed hazardous fuels (ladder fuels) in the defensible space near their homes.
- 97% were very satisfied with the program and indicated an interest in participating in the program again.
- 50% of the participants indicated that they are not interested or are unable to haul woody vegetation to a designated drop off site.
- Two individuals indicated that they had hired a vendor to complete project activities.

2009 ITASCA COUNTY CHIPPER DAYS PROGRAM



Comments from participants:

- "Much of our firesafe work would not have occurred without this program."
- "We are looking forward to using the program again with our lake group."
- "This was an **excellent program!** After seeing the presentation, I realized I needed to make my home safe from wildfire."

What we learned:

- Key to the success for the Itasca County Chipper Days Program was the overall support from the Itasca County Board of Commissioners and members of the Itasca County CWPP Implementation Team. Most notable was Commissioner Catherine McLynn, who provided enthusiastic support for projects in her district.
- 'Neighborhood liaisons' were important in helping with mitigation activities such as; setting a 'time table' and making sure projects were implemented in a timely fashion.
- Hauling the material was costly and future efforts will focus on chipping material on site and hauling chipped products to designated facilities.
- Support for the program! That families are willing to participate in the program to help keep their homes safe and contribute to renewable energy and the Itasca CWPP Implementation Team is looking to continue the program.