



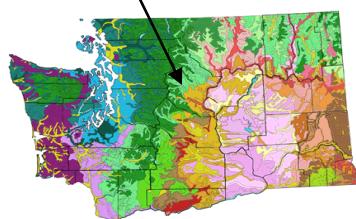
FEMA Best practices

Disaster Mitigation Working in Washington

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Building a Fire Adapted Community

Leavenworth



Leavenworth, WA – For many years members of the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition have worked together to reduce the risk of a devastating wildfire in their area. Annie Schmidt, director of the Coalition, summarized the key question in this way: “How do we want to live with wildfire?” She explained that several big fires in recent years have motivated people to acknowledge, prepare for, and deal with their risk. “We’ve begun to take action and have made progress toward becoming a Fire Adapted Community” or, as she prefers, “fire adapting community,” acknowledging that the work will never be finished.

The Coalition came together to promote and coordinate US Forest Service and State Department of Natural Resources forest fuel reduction projects. These efforts can impact the size and nature of a wildfire in the Chumstick Watershed. “The big projects can reduce damage to property, homes, businesses, infrastructure, and valuable natural resources,” she stated.

Beneficial low-intensity fires have burned through the region for many centuries. They helped reduce excess vegetation, return nutrients to the soil, and kept forests healthy. Decades of fire suppression resulted in a more dense forest, with thick undergrowth that makes severe wildfires much more likely.

Coalition partners have worked for many years on issues of forest fuel reduction. They realized that additional progress to reduce risk would be possible if local citizens, businesses, organizations and government agencies shared ideas and coordinated their programs and activities.

A major step came nearly ten years ago with the development of the Leavenworth Area Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The plan begins with an examination

of the risks to the community, recognizing that every area has unique conditions and challenges. It set goals, strategies, and priorities for action, emphasizing the safety of residents and fire fighters. The plan includes an inventory of fire-fighting assets, as well as detailed communication and evacuation plans. The effort to create the CWPP has greatly strengthened the community, making it better prepared and able to respond effectively in an emergency.

In recent years, the plan’s partners realized their work would be more effective if it could become a component in an even more comprehensive effort. National wildland fire planning initiatives emphasize a “whole community” approach. The idea is to focus on the health

of forests and natural ecosystems while also encouraging property owners and local communities to become active participants. The result is a community that communicates, cooperates, and recognizes that everyone's actions affect everyone else.

People in a fire adapted community know that eliminating all wild-fire risk is not realistic. They choose how they want to live with the reality of fire, and build knowledge, skills, tools and behaviors that improve their community's resilience.

In the Leavenworth area, people are determined to create fire resilient forest landscapes. They work to improve fire response capabilities, establish evacuation routes, and locate neighborhood safety zones. They are becoming a fire adapted community by creating buffers between fuels and neighborhoods. Their public education initiatives encourage Firewise property improvements, business continuity planning, and a willingness to adopt appropriate regulations. Perhaps most important is their commitment to maintain these activities and behaviors over time.

Annie Schmidt and other Coalition partners have learned a lot about how to build community capacity. As she describes it, "All of the issues are interconnected, but if you try to do everything at once, it gets complicated and the efforts can become less effective. We've learned to divide the tasks into manageable components. So instead of calling a meeting for everyone to come together to work on everything at once, we often work with a smaller group on a more targeted, focused topic."

Their experience and accomplishments led to the Leavenworth group being recognized as a hub organization in the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network. "I can't speak highly enough of the concept and practice of the Learning Network," says Schmidt. "We've been able to offer assistance to other communities in the fire prone areas of our state, but have also received a tremendous amount of help from others in our area and from as far away as Travis County, Texas."

One of the lessons the Coalition shares is the importance of developing relationships with people who will become the Incident Command group during a fire emergency. These relationships build trust and pathways for communication that can be critical during a crisis.

Another lesson: Be ready to provide information immediately after the fire! Well before the 2014 fires, the Chumstick Coalition began to produce a series of useful publications that they were able to quickly complete and distribute throughout the area. The brochures and flyers, designed to be easily customized for use in other communities, include: After the Fire—Information for Landowners and Residents; Community Resilience—Preparation is the Key; Sharing the Responsibility; Business Resilience—What Every Business Needs to Know; Fuel Reduction in Action; and Maintaining Your Fuel Treatment.

Annie's final advice: "Early preparation is critical, so we need to be on top of all of this long before fire season!"



FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

The efforts of Hazard Mitigation will advance community resilience and sustainability.

More information:

www.chumstickcoalition.org

www.fireadapted.org

www.fireadapted.org/region/fac-learning-network.aspx

www.firewise.org

Ready, Set, Go:
www.wildlandfirersg.org/

<http://www.dnr.wa.gov/RecreationEducation/FirePreventionAssistance/Pages/Home.aspx>

[www.fema.gov/library/Publication # 468 At Home in the Woods—Lessons Learned in the Wildland / Urban Interface](http://www.fema.gov/library/Publication%20#%20468%20At%20Home%20in%20the%20Woods---Lessons%20Learned%20in%20the%20Wildland%20Urban%20Interface)