

# Defensible Space Contracts Initiative

## to Protect Homes from Wildfire

*By Stanley Anderson, Protection Division, Alabama Forestry Commission*

**M**yrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Santa Barbara, California, are just two cities recently in the news where wildfires have destroyed dozens of homes and businesses. Although it seems far away, in reality Alabama also has dozens of communities and cities that are classified “at risk” for damage or destruction from wildfire.

The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment has identified areas in Alabama with a high susceptibility for wildfire. Current research indicates that 803 communities in the state are at high or very high risk from wildfire while 6,683 communities are at moderate risk.

From 2004 through 2008, Alabama experienced over 17,700 wildfires burning more than 247,000 acres. Unfortunately trees were not the only victims. During the past five years, 212 homes have been damaged or destroyed from wildfire in the state. Another 736 other structures, as well as 806 vehicles burned as a result of wildfire during this time frame. State Forester Linda Casey recently commented, “We believe homes damaged or destroyed by wildfire are simply unacceptable, especially if such tragedy can be prevented.”

The Alabama Forestry Commission has embarked on an initiative to encourage homeowners living in the wildland urban interface (WUI) to increase their home’s defensible space. The initial release of 300 defensible space contracts to the field WUI Specialists took place on March 31, 2009. These cost-share con-

tracts will provide up to \$1,000 to individual homeowners to help cover their costs in mitigating vegetative hazards around their homes.

With more and more people moving and living in the rural areas of our state, the AFC and local fire departments are facing new and difficult issues in providing adequate fire protection. The threat from wildfire is very real and there are no guarantees that there is the capability to protect all homes, particularly during periods of high fire occurrence and extreme weather conditions. However, by taking the personal responsibility for reducing hazards around their property, homeowners may substantially reduce the risks from damages to their homes caused by wildfire.

Where possible, the AFC will provide cost-share programs to help with the expenses related to hazardous fuel reduction in wildfire prone communities and other priority areas covered under community wildfire protection plans.

Professionals with the Alabama Forestry Commission have the training and experience to guide homeowners through the process of hazard reduction on their property. Additional information can be found by going to the Commission’s website, [www.forestry.alabama.gov](http://www.forestry.alabama.gov) and clicking on the link, “Homes, Communities in the Forest,” or contacting your county AFC office. ☝

