



Wild Lands Advocate 13(3): 25, June 2005

## Nordegg Community Fire Plan Ignores FireSmart Model

Dear Editor:

The Nordegg community fire plan that SRD has allowed to expand into a calamitous harvest plan that could add to the area's fire susceptibility rather than decrease it, really raised my hackles (see *WLA*, April 2005). How can this agency be so contemptuous of the science that is right there under their noses in the form of the well-researched FireSmart program? Now apparently, SRD wants to apply their Nordegg model to the Crowsnest Pass! I say NO! Let them apply the real FireSmart model, not its SRD distortion.

One of Alberta's biggest single budget items is forest fire suppression. Decades of suppression, mainly for the benefit of commercial timber operations, has made our forests fire bombs due to fuel buildup. The ferocity of recent forest fires has raised alarm amongst communities that are fast expanding along the forest fringe, and they are now demanding greater taxpayer-supported protection.

SRD has responded with fire protection plans for such communities under the guise of the FireSmart program. But, instead of applying the program as it was developed by Partners in Protection for making buildings more fire resistant and lessening susceptibility in the critical 30m area close to buildings, SRD has stretched the bounds of the program well into the hinterlands, for the obvious benefit of industry operators.

U.S. Forest Service fire researcher, Jack Cohen, who is one of the technical advisers to FireSmart, has conducted extensive research into the ignition and spread of forest fires into communities, in what is called the wildland/urban interface or WUI. His work is reflected in FireSmart. Cohen has found that ".....vast fuel-reduction projects have very little to do with fires in the WUI."

In fact, he claims that the WUI is too broad; it is really the area within approximately 100 feet (30 metres) of a home that matters in home protection. "That means the ultimate responsibility for home wildfire protection lies with homeowners rather than public land-management agencies," according to Cohen.

Cohen further points out, if the fear of fire to communities can be greatly lessened through better preparedness of the home itself and its immediate grounds, many of the fear-based objections to the use of prescribed burns to reduce fuel load, maintain wildlife habitat and restore ecosystems, could be removed. This could save taxpayers a bundle and bring about broad public good.

How about becoming truly FireSmart, SRD, beginning in the Crowsnest Pass?

- Vivian Pharis

*Read more about Jack Cohen's research at*

<http://www.saveamericasforests.org/congress/Fire/Cohen.htm>

*You can find the FireSmart manual at* <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/wildfires/fpd/firesmart.cfm>

