



Building a Proud Tradition—While Creating the Future

Firewise in the Classroom Project

In this document you will find references to the following abbreviations:

EPCF – Eagle Promise Charitable Fund
EPGO – Eagle Promise Golf Outing
WHOA – Woods Home Owners Association
WVDOE – West Virginia Department of Education
WVDOF – West Virginia Division of Forestry
WVAGE – West Virginia Alliance for Geographic Education
MNDNR – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
MAGE – Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education
HHS – Hedgesville High School
BCBOE – Berkeley County Board of Education
BC – CC – Berkeley County – County Commission

National Firewise Communities programs

What is Firewise and a Firewise Community?

In the U.S., we average 140,000 wildfires per year, burning approximately 14.5 million acres. Each year since 1990, more than 9000 homes have been destroyed by wildfire. When people build their “dream homes” in the woods or on wild lands on the edges of urban areas, these properties may be vulnerable.

The national Firewise Communities program is a multi-agency effort designed to reach beyond the fire service by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others in the effort to protect people, property, and natural resources from the risk of wildland fire - before a fire starts. The Firewise Communities approach emphasizes community responsibility for planning in the design of a safe community as well as effective emergency response, and individual responsibility for safer home construction and design, landscaping, and maintenance.

WV Firewise in the Classroom Project at HHS

What is Firewise in the Classroom? – Minnesota and West Virginia Programs

Firewise is a National Program which is called: “Firewise Communities.” Minnesota and West Virginia adopted and developed the program and called it Firewise in the Classroom.

- 10 years ago the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received special grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service – Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry to develop a curriculum to teach Firewise in the Classroom in schools in Minnesota. Minnesota has been teaching Firewise in the Classroom since 1999.
- The WV Classroom Project initiative includes a working alliance among with Woods Home Owners Association (WHOA), the West Virginia Division of Forestry (WVDOF), and Hedgesville High School. Through this group’s working relationship, the WVDOF and the EPCF were able to secure only the second grant of its kind to support a Firewise Classroom Project in the United States. This grant was awarded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service – Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry.



Building a Proud Tradition—While Creating the Future

- The WVDOF, in cooperation with the Eagle Promise Charitable Fund (EPCF), submitted and received a Firewise Grant from U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service – Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry in the spring of 2007. Through the efforts of EPCF and Ken Pekarek of GIS4Schools, serving as a consultant, the curriculum was both designed and implemented for implementation for WV Firewise Classroom Project at Hedgesville H.S. in the fall of 2007.

BACKGROUND ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIREWISE IN THE CLASSROOM IN WEST VIRGINIA

Establishing and adapting the Minnesota DNR Firewise in the Classroom model to West Virginia

The EPCF has worked closely with the Roger Ozburn and the West Virginia Division of Forestry (WVDOF) along with the Woods Homeowners Association (WHOA), Hedgesville, WV in helping WHOA to become the first Firewise Community in Berkeley County and the second in the state of West Virginia. Because of the limited number of staff in the WVDOF, the WVDOF and the Eagle Promise Charitable Fund worked together to establish and replicate for the state of West Virginia a model that has been successfully established in Minnesota by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) and their Firewise in the Classroom initiative. Tom Eiber, retired from the MNDNR, worked closely with the WVDOF and the EPCF to establish this same program for the State of West Virginia.

The MNDNR Firewise Communities program helps communities assess and reduce the risk of wildfire to homes. The Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education (MAGE) has developed a standards-based, hands-on Firewise Communities project that integrates GIS and GPS technologies into the classrooms of local schools. This program utilizes a combination of students in local schools coupled with the technologies of GIS and GPS, which aids homeowners and communities as they become National Firewise Communities.

HHS establishing the model for the WVDOF for future use in other school districts

The EPCF worked with members of the administration of HHS to bring the MNDNR and its MAGE model to HHS. The MNDNR program has been adapted to meet all WVDOE curriculum standards. This program fits nicely with the recently announced “21st Century Schools that Work” program by the WVDOE, with HHS being one of the sixteen schools selected to be a participant in this program. HHS will be first school in the state of WV to help establish the model of the West Virginia Alliance for Geographic Education (WVAGE) program. The program model being put forward by the EPCF and the WVDOF and developed at HHS will be the model utilized by others when it is moved to other school districts in the state of West Virginia sometime in the future. The EPCF has been working closely with HHS Principal Don Dellinger, Assistant Principal Ron Lyons and science teacher Sun Schroyer from the planning to implementation of the Firewise in the Classroom Project. The WVAGE program initiative at HHS will not only familiarize the students to GIS and GPS technologies but give them hands on experience with the technologies. The Firewise in the Classroom program will also give the students the opportunity to interact with the varied constituencies within the community at large while working to help those communities become Firewise Communities. Those other constituencies include: local volunteer fire departments, the local home owners associations, and leaders in Berkeley County. This program will bring visibility both to HHS and its participating students.



Building a Proud Tradition—While Creating the Future

Funding for the Firewise in the Classroom at HHS

The EPCF will not be utilizing any funds it has received for the Track and Soccer Complex or from the EPGO for the Firewise in the Classroom educational initiative. All gifts the EPCF has or will receive for the Firewise in the Classroom program will come from grants developed by the WVDOF and the EPCF.

Through the EPCF and members of its Board of Directors HHS has secured gifts of hardware and technical software donated or paid for by grants for this project. The value of monitors, docking stations, use of laptops loaned to HHS from the EPCF as well as use of the technical software licenses for the GIS/GPS, and the GIS/GPS hardware has a value of over \$40,000. This does not take into consideration other monies gained from the Firewise in the Classroom grant to support all equipment and technical expertise needed to support this program for two years. The technical training sessions for both a WVDOF specialist and a HHS teacher took place in Minnesota in August 2007. All expenses for teacher education and training were supported as part of the Firewise Classroom grant from the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

GIS4Schools and Ken Pekarek, as a consultant, were keys to modifying the curriculum built for teaching Firewise in the Classroom in Minnesota to meet all of the standards for the state of West Virginia.