

# WILDFIRE

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## MITIGATION

BEGINNING ON JUNE 2, 1996, AND LASTING FOR TWO WEEKS, A LARGE WILDLAND FIRE SPREAD ACROSS A 37,000-ACRE AREA AROUND BIG LAKE AND THE CITY OF HOUSTON, ABOUT 60 MILES NORTH OF ANCHORAGE.

# Case Studies

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH, ALASKA

The Miller's Reach Wildland Fire, named after the region most heavily impacted by the disaster, destroyed or damaged nearly 450 structures, and caused extensive damage to public infrastructure.



*Wildfire causes extensive damage.*

# Case Studies



### Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska

**In response to the Miller's Reach Wildland Fire**, several local, state, and federal entities, in cooperation with several area businesses, mapped out a plan to mitigate future fire damages in the area. These partners determined that preventing wildland fire disasters could no longer be limited to response activities such as fire fighting and suppression. Instead, wildland fires must be mitigated by aggressive programs such as preventive land treatments that reduce fuels and break up large contiguous urbanizing fire prone areas; the creation of defensible spaces around buildings; and the improvement of building standards.



*Wildfire spreads quickly.*

The planning effort emphasized the following fire mitigation goals:

- Protecting critical public facilities by ensuring a defensible space and incorporating structural modifications to reduce flammability;
- Developing incentive programs that assist homeowners in protecting residential properties; and,
- Developing fuel management programs that reduce highly combustible materials in borders between wilderness and urban areas.

In support of these fire damage reduction goals, the following projects were implemented:



*Like many of the 450 other structures, a foundation is all that remains of a two-story home that was nestled tight among the fire-fueling trees.*

- Creation of firebreaks and evacuation routes;
- Structural retrofits of public buildings;
- Defensible space demonstration projects and exhibits;
- Development of alternative water supplies and installation of dry hydrants; and,
- Installation of an automated weather data collection system for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Equally important, the plan emphasized the need to change people's perception of the wildland fire threat and how they see their place in a border between wilderness and urban areas.

# Case Studies

### Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska

The Borough's Fire Mitigation Officer developed a wildfire prevention program that incorporated significant involvement from local area businesses. For instance, the Pepsi Corporation distributed cups, banners, and place mats with fire prevention messages. Pepsi also sponsored promotional slides shown at theatres before each movie. State Farm Insurance Company provided volunteers and extensive fire prevention education materials for several area home shows.

Several local greenhouses and nurseries participated in a program to promote the concept of "defensible space" by encouraging the purchase of fire-resistant landscaping plants.



*Wildfire spreads quickly.*



*"Defensible space" around this home and a metal roof saved one of the few homes in Miller's Reach Wildfire in Alaska.*

These national and local companies were able to bring substantial resources to the mitigation effort that otherwise would not have been available.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's wildland fire mitigation effort underlines both the need for and the enormous benefits of forging partnerships. Due to the successful cooperation of numerous public and private partners, future wildland fires in Miller's Reach and surrounding areas will result in significantly less damage.