The Town of Plymouth Has Active Interagency Community Protection and Prescribed Fire Program

Contributed by Ed Bradley, Town of Plymouth Fire Chief

The Town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, the oldest and largest town in the Commonwealth, hosts many unique features that pose significant public safety and all-hazard concerns. Vast ocean fronts, a nuclear power plant, numerous large and small bodies of fresh water, and a 100-square-mile area are among some of the features that comprise the Town of Plymouth.

Noteworthy is the natural vegetation type—pitch pine and scrub oak. This vegetation nearly dominates the landscape in an area dubbed the “Pinehills” and has been identified by numerous experts as the third most combustible, volatile fuel type in the United States, next to the chaparral of southern California and the pine barrens of New Jersey.

Over the last 100 plus years, this fuel type has been the catalyst for significant wildland fire history. It continues to pose serious concerns for public and firefighter safety today. As much as 15,000 acres have burned in one fire, not to mention a number of other sizeable wildland fire events that have occurred over the years.

The Town of Plymouth Fire Department and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Bureau of Forest Fire Control, specifically District #2 headquartered at Myles Standish State Forest, have fostered a strong working relationship that epitomizes the meaning of interagency cooperation. DCR Forest Fire Control has enacted a strong program to address wildfire concerns, and its staff should be commended in their success in treating these hazardous fuels, as well as the suppression, all-hazard response, prevention, and detection assistance given to the Plymouth Fire Department and surrounding communities that make up Plymouth County. Much great work has been done on this third most combustible pine barren fuel type in the United States. The Plymouth Fire Department regularly participates in most prescribed fire events as both a training tool and to educate new young firefighters.

Since its inception, the program has treated (and continues to treat) hundreds of acres with prescribed fire by either pretreating fuels mechanically or through regular fire break maintenance. Program personnel are also engaged in routine patrols, educating visiting recreational users, detection, utilizing fire observation towers, and taking an overall proactive approach to lessen the risks that come with this fuel type that is native to the area.