

## Wildfire Events

### Stephen Bridge Road Grayling, Michigan, 1990

Fire is a central part of the natural cycle in the Great Lakes region. Each year, Michigan experiences approximately 8,500 wildfires that burn between 10,000 and 12,000 acres. The average Michigan wildfire burns 8–10 acres. In the past, wildfires burned only natural resources. Now, however, homes, property, and lives are at risk as a result of the increasing number of people moving into rural areas.

For example, in 1990, the Stephen Bridge Road wildfire burned about 6,000 acres in 5 hours. The fire destroyed approximately 76 homes, more than 100 other buildings, and about 35 vehicles. More than 300 people had to be evacuated. The property losses were estimated at more than \$5.5 million.

Asphalt roofs saved many homes, but roofs that accumulated dead pine needles and twigs were not protected. In addition, many residents either were unaware of or ignored fire hazards.

Source:

Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "Wildfire: Are You and Your Home Prepared?" <[http://michigan.gov/dnr/1,1607,7-153-10367\\_11851-24040--00.html](http://michigan.gov/dnr/1,1607,7-153-10367_11851-24040--00.html)>, accessed May 3, 2005.

### Oakland Hills Oakland, California, 1991

In 1991, California experienced its worst wildland fire in the Oakland-Berkeley area. The area is characterized by the "complete intermingling of ... natural and man-made fuels," combined with steep terrain. This landscape created a combination that was more hazardous than either urban or wildland fuels alone. The reported damages from the fire indicated that 25 people were killed, 150 people were injured, and about 2,500 single-family dwellings and 437 apartments were destroyed. More than 1,600 acres were burned, and the losses were estimated at approximately \$1.5 billion.

The causes of the fire and subsequent severe damages were attributed to the following factors:

- ▶ There had been a 5-year drought.
- ▶ In some areas, the leaves of eucalyptus and Monterey pines were touching each other, making the spread of fire easier, and in other areas these trees overhung homes.
- ▶ Many wood decks were unprotected.
- ▶ There were high temperatures, strong winds, and low relative humidity.
- ▶ Steep slopes of the area encouraged the spread of fire.
- ▶ There was unregulated use of wood shingles as roof and siding material.
- ▶ Narrow roads provided limited access for fire trucks.
- ▶ There was limited access to water.

In addition, risk reduction measures that had been studied and recommended had not been implemented. "The lesson from this fire ... is that the risks were recognized and the consequences were actually predicted long before the fire, but nothing was done to mitigate the risks before the fire occurred."

Source:

Federal Emergency Management Agency. *The East Bay Hills Fire: Oakland-Berkeley, California*. U.S. Fire Administration, National Fire Data Center, 1991.