

An Interview with Faith Berry

By Devin Wanner, U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Faith started her career at age 15 working in both state and national parks for the Youth Conservation Corps in her home State of Ohio. She got a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies from Bemidji State University in Minnesota and completed graduate work in Natural Resources Management from Central Washington University in Washington State. She also received a Firefighter 1 certification from Idaho State College as a firefighter with the Spokane, WA, Fire Department and the Idaho State Parks Department.



Educating children and parents about fire prevention is one of the goals of the NFPA. Faith Berry poses with fire prevention mascot Sparky. (Courtesy photo provided by Faith Berry)

Faith and her husband moved to San Diego, CA, after graduating from college. There she worked at Chula Vista Nature Center in California with birds of prey and outdoor learning school science enrichment programs. Her love for animals drew her to become an assistant for Joan Embery, the Goodwill Ambassador for the San Diego Zoo.

She started working as a park ranger in southern California where she assisted with wildfire response. She also served as an assistant park manager in northern Idaho in a variety of park settings and as a firefighter for both wildland and structural fire response. She has worked for the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA®) since 2014 as a Program Manager for Wildfire Education.

She loves helping people and has a great love and passion for the outdoors. She has a diverse working and educational background. Because of this, she likes to help people from a variety of work and cultural backgrounds find common ground to recognize their wildfire risk and develop and implement actions that ultimately reduce their risk of loss or injury from wildfires.

In your organization, what are the key issues related to improving wildfire outcomes?

NFPA is a global nonprofit organization that works to help make people safer from fire, electrical, and related hazards. The Wildfire Division team of the Public Education Department works on programs, training, and campaigns to help residents throughout the United States and internationally have the science-based information and knowledge they need to understand what their risks are, as well as what steps they can take to reduce their risk of loss. NFPA wants residents to understand what causes homes to burn during wildfires and that there are steps they can take to prevent them from suffering loss during a wildfire.

What are you and your organization doing to help communities live with wildfire?

NFPA provides resources that homeowners and agency partners can use to create communities that are much better prepared for wildfire. [NFPA's Firewise USA® program](#), which is co-sponsored by the [U.S. Forest Service](#), [U.S. Department of the Interior](#), and the [National Association of State Foresters](#), teaches people how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to work together and take action

now to prevent losses. [Currently there is a growing network of more than 1,500 recognized Firewise USA®](#) sites from across the Nation taking action and ownership in preparing their homes against the threat of wildfire.

NFPA also provides research-based training and resources for residents, firefighters, insurance industry leaders, and others to understand how homes burn during wildfires. NFPA's [Assessing Structure Ignition Potential from Wildfire training](#) is delivered by experienced wildland fire specialists and focuses on both the physical and behavioral sciences behind successful wildfire mitigation focusing on the [home ignition zone](#).

Additionally, NFPA® partners with State Farm® to host a national campaign called [Wildfire Community Preparedness Day](#). Held on the first Saturday in May each year, 2018 marks its fifth anniversary. The campaign helps raise wildfire awareness, promotes collaboration, and brings neighbors together to work on projects that can help protect homes, neighborhoods, and entire communities from future wildfire risk.

[NFPA® also offers information and resources to help residents take effective actions to improve their safety](#). Materials for youth, including virtual field trips, no-cost lesson plans, pet evacuation information, and more, are available through NFPA®'s [TakeAction program](#).

What are you most excited about working on in 2018?

I am excited about helping people be safer from wildfire loss through Wildfire Community Preparedness Day and about gaining valuable insight about how teens want to learn about wildfire by implementing a survey with middle and high school students.

Wildfire Community Preparedness Day is a day set aside to raise wildfire safety awareness and encourage residents from areas throughout the United States to take action on wildfire preparedness projects. State Farm has provided NFPA with grant funding to provide \$500 awards to 150 of these projects. It is so exciting to hear about the successes of these communities. I look forward to hearing about and sharing what they have accomplished. The sense of community that these projects build is also an important component of reducing the community's wildfire risk. Commenting on the program, Darron Williams from the Bureau of Indian Affairs stated, "I appreciate your giving us the opportunity to participate in the Wildfire Community Preparedness Day. It has been a wonderful chance to work with organizations we don't typically think of when smoke is in the air."

Administering the survey about how middle and high school students want to learn about wildfires has been an eye-opening experience for me. Young people want to not only be a part of helping reduce the risk of loss during wildfires, but really want to gain good information and knowledge to take effective actions. One student shared with me that it meant a lot to them that an organization wanted to hear from them about how they would like to be able to learn more about wildfire and wildfire preparedness. We will be putting together a paper soon to share what we have learned.

What advice do you have for people or communities that are interested in engaging in the Northeast as part of their wildfire risk planning or fire adaption work?

I think it is so important for people and communities to first understand what their risk really is and then take action (often through simple, low-cost steps) to reduce their risk of loss. Residents working with agency partners can together create safer communities.

Some people are scared off by the seemingly onerous task of writing a risk assessment document. NFPA and others provide good guidance to develop outlines to put together a risk assessment. The best and most complete documents enlist all residents, organizations, and agencies in the community to look at features that are unique to their community and sometimes similar to others to craft a good plan of action.

Working from a plan helps residents work on projects that will make a difference in the survivability of a community. Many of these activities do not have to cost a lot of money. Simple maintenance measures such as removing all dead vegetation, including pine needles and leaves from around the home, and paying special attention to the first 5 feet around a home can really make a difference!

What's been the most exciting wildland fire development during your career?

Seeing a growing bipartisan acknowledgment of the value of wildfire prevention and forest health issues has been very exciting. It has been a wonderful experience to see elected officials recognize the value of communities and agencies taking steps to improve wildfire safety and forest and watershed health. It is such an honor to work with the Northeast Regional Strategy Committee, State Foresters, The Nature Conservancy, Fire Adapted Community members, and others who have contributed so much to raising the awareness of the value of wildfire preparedness.

Can you tell us about someone who has influenced your thinking regarding wildfire management?

There have been many wonderful people who have influenced the way I think about wildfire management. The communities that I have had the privilege of working with and for have greatly influenced my thinking about wildfire management. The most successful communities that I have worked with, and learned from, are willing to sit at the table and learn from others, recognize the value of everyone's contribution to reducing wildfire risk, help those who need help, and most importantly have fun getting it done. I think the sense of community that they build in the process of growing a wildfire preparedness program pays big dividends in reducing other loss in their communities as well. This observation was actually proven by an insurance industry actuarial examination of Firewise USA® sites in California and other Western States.