



A Book Review Related to Wildland Fires



How many of our members have had actual experiences with a significant fire in a forest environment? ... probably very few of us here at LACC. The numbers of different issues that can develop during a wildland fire are only known by the firefighters that are increasingly asked to protect us from the larger and larger fires that have been occurring recently in our national forests. Well, what better way to better understand what issues can develop in a major fire than to read about a past significant fire in a similar setting as LACC.

*Book Name: Under A Flaming Sky: The Great Hinckley, Minnesota Firestorm of 1894. Author: Daniel James Brown, Author of a #1 New York Times Bestseller The Boys in the Boat.
Barbara MacArthur, Firewise Chairperson (v. FireNews17_2_3)*

In the 1800's, the industrial revolution in the U.S. was off and running. Like today's technology advances, their industrial advances were fast and furious. Growth of homesteads, towns, and cities often involved wooden structures in or at the boundaries of forest and grassland areas. Fire was a constant threat to these developments. Fire protection was in its infancy and relied heavily on volunteers with limited equipment. The demand for wood products was enormous and wood mills were located in forest areas as close to development as possible.

This book is about a wildfire in the wood products town of Hinckley, a rural community in a dense forest area of Minnesota. The town was organized to fight fires by company and community volunteers with then "modern" equipment and practices. Included in the town's firefighting equipment was a gas-powered water pump. But on occasion, conditions develop in rural forests that all the volunteers, "modern" practices and equipment can't begin to handle.

The story unfolds slowly at first but steadily and expansively tells of the growth of a basic fire into a monster. The initial fire uses a densely-treed forest, heavy undergrowth, moderate winds and questionable development practices to grow into firestorm. The story tells about the actions and reactions of the residents of Hinckley and several nearby towns. This fire moves so fast and furiously that the majority of residents can't react rationally since they have never experienced such a situation...hardly anyone, even during present times, ever has. In times of great distress, however, a few exemplary individuals take charge and motivate brave citizens to go beyond all limits to

help their fellow man. This theme was a key back story of the book.

Recent fires in the wildland areas of the western U.S. have been described as larger and more ferocious than those in the prior 50 years. Certainly the Hinckley fire is in this category. The story involves over 1200 people, 4-5 villages, 1600 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures, zero visibility, high fire-caused winds, disappearing oxygen, limited escape routes, and danger denying residents.

Obviously, all the conditions mentioned above have a remote chance of occurring simultaneously in our community, but even if a few of the many issues that occurred in the great Hinckley fire occur at LACC, the story gives valuable insights on what not to do in the case of a fast moving wildland fire.

Source: N/A

NEXT ISSUES: Future Firewise articles in the LACC newsletter will present "lessons learned" from more recent fires in wildland areas to emphasize the benefits of recommended Firewise practices.