



BIGHORN BASIN FIRESMART



BIGHORN BASIN FIREWISE COMMUNITIES

ISSUE #40 — FALL 2021

NOTES FROM THE 2021 FIRE SEASON

Hundreds of homes and forest community cabins have been destroyed by this year's western wildfires. Reports are incomplete, but it is known that some survived by being Firesmart, and others were saved by firefighters and efforts of homeowners in locations where they were allowed to stay and protect their structures. Available information doesn't tell us how many of these homeowners were injured or killed by fire.

A discouraging factor on several 2021 fires (and those from last year) was that some of the wildfires got large because the limited fire forces spent their days and nights protecting subdivisions and individual houses, instead of working to stop the fire's spread.

There were tales from folks who had relocated to rural locations to avoid the pandemic, and lost their homes/cabins to wildfire.

This year, up to 20,000 wildland firefighters were busy in the western U.S. starting in June, and this was all of the trained and available troops in the country. One California fire had more than 6,000 committed for the month of August! This impacted the ability of Wyoming fire agencies to aggressively control fires within our state.

THE 1871 PESHTIGO FIRE

150 years ago this October the **Peshtigo fire** burned **1,875 square miles** of forest and farmland in Northeastern Wisconsin and a corner of Michigan. It, and another 1,000± square miles on fire nearby that same date, didn't make the news everywhere as the "Great Chicago Fire" was burning on the same days.

The Peshtigo fire is, according to some sources, the deadliest wildfire in recorded history, with the number of deaths *estimated* between 1,500 and 2,500. Twelve communities were burned to the ground.

The legacy of this fire was that it destroyed the local timber industry, and loggers became dairy farmers on the land cleared by the fire. That helped make Wisconsin "America's Dairyland."

Firesmart information and all newsletter issues are available at:
www.bighornbasinfiresmart.com

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BECOMING A VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Volunteer firefighters are a major factor in protecting property in the Bighorn Basin from structure fires and wildfire. All of the several volunteer fire departments in the Basin welcome new recruits who would like to participate, and no experience is necessary to apply if you would like to **"Make a difference and enrich your own life."** Volunteering for your local fire department can:

- Help you learn new skills.
- Fulfill a family tradition.
- Give you a sense of camaraderie as part of a team.
- Help you gain experience.
- Prepare you to pursue an exciting career as a firefighter.
- Increase your sense of community identity and pride.
- And much more!

As an example, the Worland Fire Department requires applicants to be 18 years old and live with-in the WFPD boundary for at least 90 day prior to applying. Applicants must pass a background check and serve a probation period while obtaining certification. Youth can apply at age 16 for the Cadet Program, they begin working on some of the same areas as firefighters, but are not able to enter "Immediately Dangerous To Life or Health" (IDLH) areas. Once turning 18 they then follow all the same rules as a firefighter.



To find more information on the Worland Fire Department, start with the website at <http://www.worlandfire.com/worland-fire-department-home.html>, or contact any volunteer firefighter, or Chris Kocher, Worland Fire Chief, Washakie County Fire Warden at the Worland Fire Station at 200 South 5th Street in Worland, or by phone **307-347-6379**.

Applications for the Worland Fire Department can be found at:
<http://www.worlandfire.com/membership.html>

Other Basin fire departments may have slightly different requirements, but they all welcome and train new volunteers. To find out about the fire department in your corner of the Basin, contact your County Fire Warden/Marshal listed on Page 2 of this newsletter.



Around the country many volunteer fire departments are losing members as they age, and younger trained firefighters are needed. And it is not just males that are being recruited and trained.

OCTOBER IS FIRE SAFETY MONTH

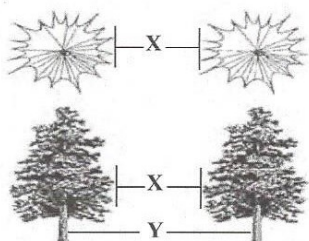
ACE Hardware shares these "Five Simple Steps To Ensure Your Home is Fire Safe"

1. "Have at least one Smoke Detector in each room and on Carbon Monoxide Detector on each floor."
2. "Test alarms monthly and change batteries as needed."
3. "Keep fire extinguishers throughout your house."
4. "Replace old space heaters, and always keep area around them clear."
5. "Have a Home Fire Escape Plan and practice it."

PRUNING AND LADDER FUELS

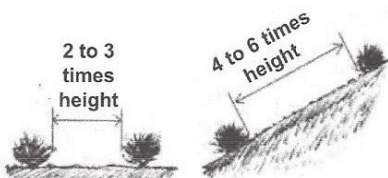
Firewise thinning and pruning can help your home survive a wildfire.

Managing the *crown spacing* between trees, *pruning* up limbs, and eliminating *ladder fuels* will keep a wildland fire on the ground. A fire on the ground is easier to control than one in the tree crowns, and will cause less damage to your trees.



X = Crown Spacing
Y = Stem Spacing

Do not measure between stems for crown spacing. Measure between the edges of the tree crowns.



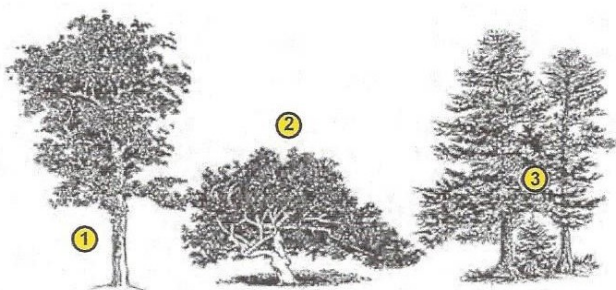
Maintain adequate cleared space between ornamental or wild shrubs.



Ladder fuels are created when vegetation of different heights is close enough to allow a ground fire to climb up into tree tops.

PRUNING

- In Zone 1, prune lower limbs up to 10' above ground level, with crown spacing of 10'.
- In Zone 2, prune lower limbs of trees up to 10' above ground level, with crown spacing of 8'.
- In Zone 3, prune lower limbs of trees up to at least 6'-10' above ground level, with crown spacing of 6-8'.
- Never prune up more than 1/2 the total height of the tree.
- Never cut into the collar around the branch at the trunk of the tree.
- Do not cover wounds on branches.
- If you are unsure about pruning on your property, ask your local Forester or Master Gardener.
- If your property is in a Homeowner Association, be sure to check any covenants which might apply before modifying existing vegetation.



1. This tree has been trimmed so that no branches are close to the ground.
2. This small tree is close to the ground and can be more easily ignited from burning grasses.
3. Small trees growing underneath larger trees provide "ladder fuels" which allow grass fires to jump to the branches of the larger trees and spread even more rapidly.

LADDER FUELS

- Thin trees to prevent interlocking crowns.
- Remove or modify ground fuels so they cannot produce flame lengths more than six feet.
- Remove "ladder fuels" - shrubs, brush, tall grass, dead vegetation, trash, and small trees underneath or close to large trees.
- Shrubs and brush (fine) fuels have similar characteristics - all burn rapidly with high intensity.
- Stack firewood and scrap woodpiles at least 10 feet from any structure.

This page is copied from the **FIREWISE WYOMING** publication "**PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM WILDFIRE.**"

A WASHAKIE FIRESMART PROJECT FIELD REPORT by C.J. Grimes

In the foothills east of Ten Sleep, sagebrush, juniper and cheatgrass can become a hazard in fire season. Some homeowners in Canyon Creek Village subdivision were able to mitigate the risk to their homes by working to reduce fuel loads in the Home Ignition and Defensible Space Zones. When planning and performing this kind of work, it is important to remember that the area right around peoples' homes needs to be viewed from more than just a "fuels and vegetation management" perspective. This area also provides aesthetic value to the homeowner, and habitat for wildlife that people like to observe out of their windows. Additionally, the right arrangement of trees and shrubs can also provide a windbreak and serve as a living snow fence in the winter months near roads and driveways.

On the Diane Orme property, tall and dense sagebrush in the defensible space zone posed a hazard to the home as well as the propane tank and ponderosa pines that she planted twenty years ago. It was important to her to reduce the risk of damage to her property from wildfire, while preserving the habitat and aesthetic value that the native vegetation provides. After receiving her Wildfire Mitigation Plan and completing a cost share application, Ms. Orme hired a local contractor to perform the work. She was out working along side the crew throughout the project and provided valuable feedback as the work progressed.

It became apparent early on that hauling the cut brush away was time consuming and would drive up the cost of the project, so Ms. Orme decided to have the crew pile the brush on the property to be burned later. Fortunately, the crew was experienced in this regard and was able to make several small but dense piles that will burn easily in winter when heavy snow will prevent fire from spreading to adjacent vegetation.

Below are some photos from before and after the project was completed – notice the increased space between trees and shrubs, reduction of ladder fuels and overall reduction in fuel load. The overall result is a home that will be defensible in the case that it is threatened by wildfire!



Diane dragging brush



Firesmart pruning of one of Ms. Orme's aspen trees.



Is your home a fire hazard? Part One From the American Red Cross

It can happen within two minutes — first a lick of flame, then it spreads as it searches for fuel. The next thing you know, you could have a life-threatening fire on your hands. But fires can be prevented with a few very simple precautions.

Smoke alarms double the chance of your family surviving a fire, so it goes without saying that you should have several.

Don't neglect to test them and change the batteries regularly.

You should test them once a month and change the batteries every 6 months (if your smoke alarms use replaceable batteries) regardless of whether they seem to need it, just to be on the safe side (some alarms are 10-year tamper resistant and don't have replaceable batteries).

You know the drill — make it a habit to change batteries twice a year when you turn your clocks.

Purchase smoke alarms and other fire safety products at the American Red Cross store.

Kitchen Fires Are Most Common - Most home fires start in the kitchen during cooking — usually on stovetops — not in the oven. Be sure to stay in the kitchen when cooking, frying, or grilling on your stove top.

Check for curtains, towel racks or even paper towel dispensers sitting too close to the burners.

If your microwave isn't built in, make sure it's clear of surrounding clutter and its vents aren't obstructed.

If you don't already have one, buy a fire extinguisher to keep within easy reach should something ignite while you're cooking.

Remember, don't toss water on a grease fire if you're caught without an extinguisher. If a fire starts in a pan — and many do — put a lid on it to suffocate the flames.

Keep Your Home Safe While Keeping It Warm - Heating equipment, like space heaters, are involved in 1 of every 6 home fires. Furthermore, 1 in every 5 home fire deaths and half of all fires caused by home heating occur between December and February.

Make sure to always keep anything that gives off heat at least 3 feet away from flammable materials or items.

Never plug more than one heating appliance into an outlet.

Keep portable gas generators outside and away from windows to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

If you have a fireplace, make sure your chimney is checked and cleaned by a professional once a year. Use a metal or glass screen that is large enough to prevent escaping embers.

Never leave fires (or candles) burning, or heating appliances plugged in, while asleep, in another room, or when you leave your home.

Check Your Appliances - Dryers are responsible for about 9 out of 10 appliance fires.

Check yours — in fact, check all your appliances — for testing labels that indicate you purchased them in safe working order. You may not find them on some older appliances, so consider whether it's time to replace them or have them checked by a professional.

Make it a habit to clean out the lint screen every time you use your dryer. It may be an annoyance, but this simple action can save you a lot more pain and aggravation later.

 **[Part Two will be in the next issue of Bighorn Basin Firesmart]** 

ABOUT YOUR FIRESMART PROGRAM

Firesmart in the Bighorn Basin provides a wide range of wildfire management and prevention services to landowners in counties with funding for Firesmart work. Services include:

- Consultation with landowners on developing defensible space areas around their homes and cabins, and developing Forest Stewardship and Fuel Management plans for their land.
- Educational workshops, and Training on Defensible Space and Forest Management.
- Cost-share programs to help defray the expense of implementing some wildfire mitigation activities.
- Work with local fire departments, private landowners, Wyoming State Forestry Division, and federal land management agencies to create shaded fuel breaks that act as “lines” to stop the spread of an uncontrolled wildfire.
- Periodic newsletters provide Information and literature on Defensible Space, Fire-wise Construction, and keeping a forest healthy.

A SPECIAL SERVICE PROVIDED BY WASHAKIE FIRESMART

Pile Burning: If your Washakie County home or cabin has slash and debris piles resulting from your Firesmart activities with an approved Wildfire Mitigation Plan, your county Firesmart coordinator is available to burn them at no cost to you, weather permitting.

Home and cabin owners with piles to burn need to be reminded that:

- Flame lengths may be 10 to 15 times the height and length of the pile size. Example: If a pile is five feet tall and five feet wide, the flames could extend in all directions 50 feet or more, depending on wind. With this in mind, piles should be far enough away to avoid scorching standing trees, structures or other improvements. Look at the photo below page for flame lengths.
- After ignition, piles will need to be closely monitored periodically for the next few days, to ensure that fire does not spread away from the pile location.
- Debris piles should be, compacted with as little air space as possible.

If you are burning your own piles, contact the County Fire Warden to inform them of the time and day you will be burning. The Washakie County Fire Warden phone number is: **(307) 347-6379**. Other county fire warden numbers are on Page 2.

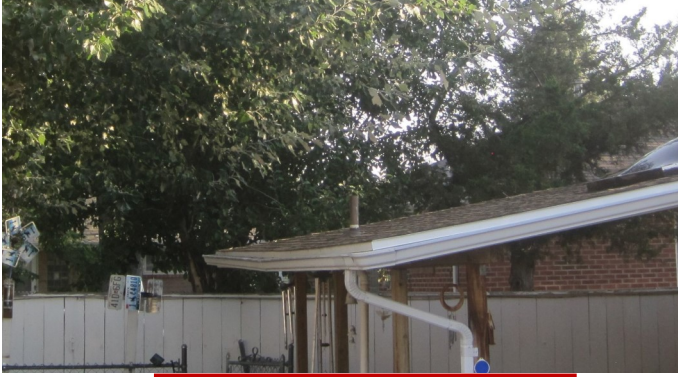
Home and cabin owners should consider spreading a seed mixture on burn pile locations the following spring with native grasses and forbs to help prevent introduction of noxious weeds



A Canyon Creek Country resident burning his cabin's slash pile

To obtain burning services, all you need to do is submit a request to Washakie County Firesmart at firesmart@wytfs.com, 6628 W. Riverside Dr. Casper, Wyoming 82604, or (307) 333-1098 (office), (307) 272-9533 (mobile). Your request should include your name and the location/physical address of your home or cabin.

LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER



Tree limbs laying on a roof.



Tree limbs trimmed to 8 feet away from roof.



← An access road/driveway crowded by highly flammable dense vegetation. It would make a dangerous escape route, and firefighting apparatus would likely refuse to use this highly hazardous route to access a home or cabin during a fire.

The correction would be to clear **all** of the shrubbery for 30 feet on both sides of this road, and prune all trees to clear room for a 12-foot tall and 12-foot wide fire truck.



Tree limbs wrapped around a powerline.



Powerline cleared of limbs for four feet around. This incidentally reduces chances of snow damage to the powerline.