

ISSUE #1—FALL 2010



Welcome to **Bighorn Basin Firesmart**. This quarterly newsletter will connect you to the Firewise concept for your home and recreational-use residence in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Topics covered will be a mixture of:

- What you can do to make your home and cabin Firewise.
- How to keep it that way.

Specific topics that will be covered:

- Your structures Surrounding vegetation
- Access roads Your activities

Photos of good and bad examples will be featured, including before and after.

Property owners and wildland cabin owners with hazardous fuels conditions can benefit from National Fire Plan funds available through the USDA Forest Service Region 2, Cooperative Forestry Act of 1978. As summarized in this first issue, the first step is to contact your county **Firewise Coordinator or Fire Warden** for an assessment and a mitigation plan. Both are provided by the Firewise Coordinator at no charge, regardless of land ownership. A WMP is required prior to cost/share funding.

The Big Horn County Fire Warden is Brent Godfrey. Assisting Brent as the **Big Horn County Firewise Coordinator** is Chris Weydeveld, cweydeveld@wytfs.com, Technical Forestry Services, LLC, 6628 W. Riverside Dr. Casper, Wyoming 82604, or (307) 333-1098 (office), (307) 272-9533 (mobile)

The **Washakie County Fire Warden** is Chris Kocher, ckocher@worlandfire.org, P.O. Box 504, Worland, Wyoming 82401, or (307) 347-6379

The **Park County Fire Warden** is Russ Wenke, rwenke@parkcounty.us, 1131 11th Street, Cody, Wyoming 82414, or (307) 527-8551

The **Hot Springs County Fire Warden** is A.J. Helm, tfdwarden@yahoo.com, 400 S. 14th St., Thermopolis, WY 82443, (307) 921 - 1955, or

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Special points of interest:

- * Introduces Firewise and this newsletter.
- * Firewise defined and briefly explained
- * Large fires in the vicinity since 1898
- * To make your own base Firewise evaluation.

Your county Firewise Coordinator offers these services:

1. Consultation with landowners on developing defensible space areas around their homes and cabins, and on developing Forest Management and Fuel Reduction Management plans for their land.
2. Educational workshops.
3. Training on Defensible Space and Forest Management.
4. Cost/share programs to help defray the expense of implementing wildfire mitigation activities.
5. Work with local fire departments, private landowners, Wyoming State Forestry Division, Bighorn Basin Counties, the U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management, to create shaded fuel breaks that act as “lines” to stop or slow the spread of an uncontrolled wildfire.
6. Information and literature on Defensible Space, Firewise Construction, Mountain Pine Beetle, and quarterly newsletters. Publications are also available on websites as downloadable PDF’s. The best sources of information are www.firewisewyoming.com and www.livingwithfire.com. Other sources will be listed in future newsletters.

If you have topics you would like included in future newsletters, please submit your suggestions and comments to gwynn@wytfs.com or cweydeveld@wytfs.com, or to Chris at any of the above phone numbers, or by mail to G. Wynn, 824 Country Club Road, Casper, Wyoming 82609.

Thanks for providing this newsletter go to the Wyoming State Forestry Division, the Big Horn County Fire Warden, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. They provide the funding.

Special thanks for this initial issue of Big Horn Basin Firesmart, goes to **Jim Shell, Johnson County Firewise Coordinator**. He provided several examples of his *JOHNSON COUNTY LIVING WITH FIRE* newsletter, and permission to use portions of those that are appropriate to the Big Horn Basin.

This newsletter is provided as a service of your county’s Firewise Coordinator. If you choose not to receive future issues, please respond to the E-mail address that delivered it, or to G. Wynn by mail.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ **ALERT:** The county Firewise Coordinators are planning to hold “Mountain Community Workshops” in the basin during the late spring of 2011 to provide details on the Firewise program and cost/sharing. Locations and dates will be provided in the Spring 2011 newsletter.

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A brief introduction to Chris Weydeveld, the Big Horn County Firewise Coordinator: Chris has worked with Big Horn, Natrona, Park and Hot Springs Counties since 2002 developing forest management and wildfire mitigation plans. Chris has a Forest Resource Management degree from the University of Montana and worked for the Wyoming State Forestry Division as a Forester for eight years in the 1990’s. Chris has been involved in firefighting as an engine operator and hand-line Pulaski engineer. Chris is the owner of **Technical Forestry Services, LLC**, a private consulting firm with headquarters in Casper Wyoming.



National Firewise Communities Program: A Resource for State and Local Agencies

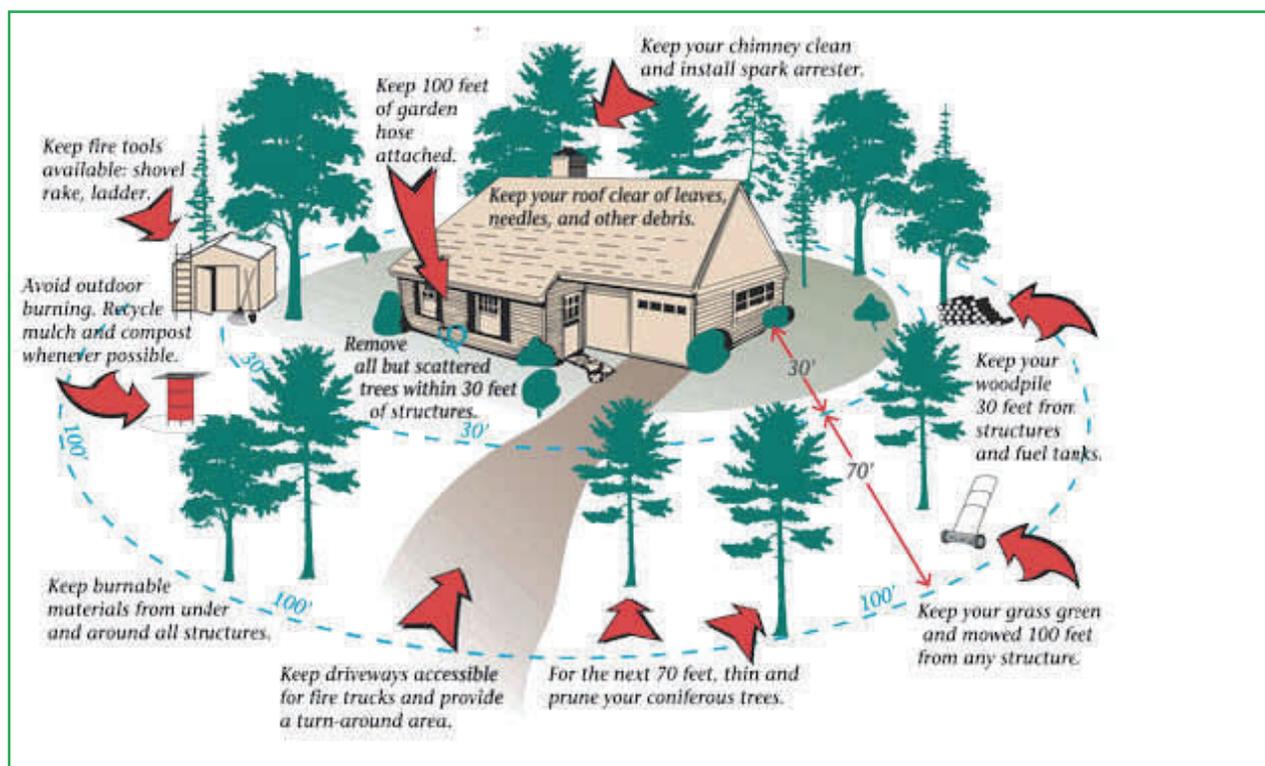
Firewise Defined - Originally coined in 1992 by a botanist working with the National Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Program, the term “firewise” describes the state of being knowledgeable and prepared for wildfire in residential or urban settings. While the national program carries the title “Firewise Communities,” there are thousands of local and regional efforts that are committed to this concept – such as Fire Safe Councils. The national Firewise Communities program is designed to support and complement these efforts – it does not conflict or compete with them.

The national Firewise Communities program is a multi-agency effort designed to reach beyond the fire service by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others in the effort to protect people, property, and natural resources from the risk of wildland fire – *before a fire starts*. The Firewise Communities approach emphasizes community responsibility for the design and maintenance of a safe community, including sound land use planning, creative mitigation measures, supportive infrastructure, collaborative decision making, and effective emergency response.

The national Firewise Communities program serves as a resource for agencies, tribes, organizations, fire departments, and communities across the U.S. who are working toward a common goal: reduce loss of lives, property, and resources to wildland fire by building and maintaining communities in a way that is compatible with our natural surroundings.

The raw part of Firewise that applies to homes and wildland cabins is summarized in the illustration below. Each aspect of this will all be expanded on in future issues of **Bighorn Basin Firesmart**. To get a headstart, you can do two things:

1. Use the page 5-6 rating sheet to evaluate the Firewise state of your home and/or cabin.
2. Browse the two Firewise websites mentioned on the previous page.



SOME LOCAL FIRE HISTORY

Thankfully wildfires do not occur regularly in most communities. But most communities in the west have a history of fire and depending on conditions, can expect wildfire threats at some time in the future. Residents may say something like “I haven’t seen a fire in these parts for 30 years.” Recent fire history, however, is not necessarily a reliable indicator of fire hazard. For example lack of recent wildfires may lead to a buildup of dry vegetation, and therefore could become a contributor to intense fire conditions. On the other hand a recent fire may remove vegetation and perhaps reduce the chances for high intensity fire for decades to come. A better measure of fire risk is to compare fire conditions in your area to areas or communities that experience damaging wildfires. The following list is a partial summary of wildfires that threatened or destroyed homes or other properties in northern Wyoming in the past few years:

Kate’s Basin Fire, 2000. Hot Springs County. Started on the Wind River Indian Reservation, southwest of Thermopolis and spread rapidly. A fatality occurred as a result of a burn over incident. (137,600 acres).

Fort Washakie, 2005. Fremont County. Similar to river bottom fire in 2004 near Riverton. Both fires caused a loss of structures. Human caused.

Outlaw II, 2006 Johnson County. Burned 12,000 acres pine/sagebrush Middle Fork of the Powder River and into cottonwood bottoms ; two ranch buildings lost.

Jackson Canyon, 2006 Natrona County. Started on Casper Mountain; burned 10 structures; 12000 acres; cost \$4 million to fight; caused \$1 million in property loss; threatened dozens of other recreation residences and high valued facilities.

Little Goose, 2007. Sheridan County. Burned from National Forest in Little Goose Canyon onto private lands; destroyed 7 structures including 5 recreation residences and seriously threatened permanent and recreation homes along the base of the mountain.

Line Creek Fire, 2007. Park County. 52 acre wind-driven fire through mostly sagebrush and cottonwood fuels. Burned a structure and threatened others. Fire occurred in November—not normally fire season in northern Wyoming.

Bobcat Fire, July 2008. Park County. Burned in cottonwood river bottom with green grass understory. It began as a cabin fire, involved 53 acres of river bottom and destroyed two additional cabins.

Other historical fires of significance:

The Great Fire of 1910 burned about three million acres in northern Idaho and western Montana. The firestorm burned over two days (August 20–21, 1910), and killed 87 people, including 78 firefighters. One-third of the town of Wallace, ID, was burned to the ground.

The Hayman Fire, June 2002. Southwest of Denver, Colorado was the largest fire in the state's recorded history. The fire caused nearly \$40 million in damages, burned 133 homes and forced the evacuation of 5,340 people. (138,114 acres).

The Fires of 1898 -Documentation found in a U.S. Geological Survey report of a survey conducted in the summer of 1898 describes numerous large fires throughout the Bighorn Forest Reserve that year. “*It will be within bounds to estimate the destruction of timber in the reserve by fire, this summer only , at 70,000 acres....*” Other observations described in the report provide further evidence of the role fire has played. “*There are extensive areas...which have been devastated by fires ... mountainsides are strewn with the debris of these fires. ... A great many of the fires which caused this wreck appear to have occurred about twenty five years ago.*”

The Greybull Dike Fire, 2007

“It pretty well cleaned out all the brush and trees.” Assist. Fire Chief, Carl Meyer regarding the Greybull Dike Fire (October, 2007).

The “Dike” Fire started around 1 pm on a Monday, October 4, 2007. **“Within minutes, plumes of black smoke filled the skies as the fire ripped through the estimated 10-acre area, starting at the (Bighorn) river and the dike and eventually crossing the river to the vegetation beneath the bluffs.** The Greybull Standard, October 4, 2007.



HOMESITE & STRUCTURE FIRE HAZARD RATING – Page 1**Hazard Factors** **Rating**

Slope %: 0-20 = 1 point 21-40 = 2 41-60 = 3

Vegetation within 100 feet:

Open water, bare rock, watered lawn = 0

Continuous grass <2 feet tall, few trees = 2

Conifer and hardwood forest with many tops touching, with only leaf and needle litter, but no vegetation that allows fire to spread into the treetops. = 2

Grasses, shrubs, young evergreen trees, dead branch wood 2-4 feet deep; open Forest, very few treetops touching. = 4

Dense young green shrubs with no dead branch wood. = 4

Medium dense conifer forest with some treetops touching, lower vegetation comprised of live and dead herbaceous material with patches of young conifer. = 6

Dense conifer forest having many treetops touching with lower vegetation that will carry fire into the crowns. = 8

Thick tall grass over 3 feet tall. = 8

Roof Type: Fiberglass, Metal or Tile = 0

 Composition = 1

 Wood = 6

Defensible Space:

70% or more of the site = 1

30% or more, but less than 70% = 3

Less than 30% of site = 5

Add 1 point for each Item:

Wood Deck

Stilted House

Wood Siding

Roof Debris

No Screens on Vents

No Spark Arrestor on Chimney

Total page 1 points:

HOMESITE & STRUCTURE FIRE HAZARD RATING – Page 2

Add 2 points for each item:

- Fuel on or Under Deck
- Branches Within 10 feet of Roof
- Non-Maintained Wooden Siding
- Scarce Water Supply
- Propane Tank < 30 feet of structures
- Poor Access

Total	
Total points from this page	
Total page 1 points	
Total Points	

FIRE RISK SCALE

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	EXTREME
< 3	3 - 8	8 - 12	> 12

Homeowner Action Items:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Improve Defensible Space | Pruning trees |
| Clean up Dead & Down Material | Mow after Grasses Cure |
| Clean Roof & or Change Roofing | Improve Access |
| Address Signs | Improve Water Supply |
| Move Propane Tank | |

ARE YOU GOING TO BE THIS?



OR THIS?

