

Saddlewood HOA

Saddlewood Wildfire Mitigation Strategies

April 21, 2022

Dear Homeowner:

This letter is being distributed by the Saddlewood HOA as both a reminder and a guide for all Saddlewood owners and residents of necessary actions that should be taken to reduce and alleviate the exposure of the entire community to the devastating effects of a wildfire/ crowning forest fire.

As most owners are aware, our Saddlewood development has undergone a substantial rise in value over the past few years. This semi-urban forest area is becoming more attractive to the discoverers of this country. As protectors of these relatively rare forested flat lands, there are some steps we should all be taking to protect our own properties and safeguard our neighbor's property as well. We must all recognize that this high desert environment, compounded by the low levels of snow and rain in recent years has created an elevated risk of fire.

Living in this natural habitat should make all of us more aware of nature's benefit, vagaries, and dangers. A notable danger is all too natural, fire and the wildfires that can occur. While lightning can be a powerful igniting force, we are also susceptible to the carelessness of individuals, as well as adverse circumstances with power transmission lines such as occurred in the devastating fire in Paradise, California just a few years ago, and the mysterious source of fires recently from The Marshall Fire, in Louisville just months ago.

Take Action to Prepare Your Home & Property for Wildfire

Remember that protecting a home, property and a community from wildfire is not a one-time effort. It is a process and requires ongoing participation, maintenance, and shared responsibility.

The need for defensible space around homes and subdivision

Forest conditions will continue to support large-scale wildland fire into the future and increasing numbers of people will continue moving into wildland settings. Communities also have forests. Trees appear along streets and greenways, and in backyards and parks. Urban forests enhance the quality of human life by purifying air, modifying temperature extremes, reducing noise pollution, improving aesthetic appeal, and raising real estate values. These forest communities also need to be managed and nurtured to maintain these values. In addition, properly managed forests can provide income, reduce wildfire risk, help protect trees against insects and diseases, and even increase property values.

Trees are important to all communities in our state. Whether you live on the Eastern Plains, in a mountain town, in a forested subdivision or in the Denver metropolitan area, trees have an impact on your community and your life.

- Trees improve our air, protect our water
- Trees reduce heating and cooling costs
- Trees enhance economic sustainability by increasing property values
- Trees also have an aesthetic benefit — they add pleasure to our living and working environments.

However, trees can become liabilities if they are not properly cared for and maintained.

Wildfires are a natural part of Colorado's forests. If you live in Colorado, where homes and other structures intermingle with wildland vegetation, you are at risk of being affected by wildfire. Planning and taking action can increase the likelihood your home survives when a wildfire occurs.

Firefighters always do their best to reduce fire damage, but ultimately, it is **your** responsibility to protect your property from wildfire. Taking practical steps to prepare your home does not guarantee it will survive a wildfire, but it does improve the odds. Any work completed may also allow firefighters who might be present to safely engage the fire and attempt to protect your property. If fire and site conditions are unsafe, firefighters will not be there.

As you address fire mitigation on your property, always start with the home or structure and work outwards. Remember, taking action to prepare for wildfire is not a one-time effort — it requires ongoing maintenance to give your home the best chance of surviving a wildfire. The two primary determinants of a home's ability to survive a wildfire are the structure's ignitability and the quality of the surrounding defensible space. Together, these two factors create a concept called the home ignition zone, which includes the structure and the area around it. To reduce wildfire hazards to your home and property, the most effective actions to take are to minimize the ability of the home to ignite during a wildfire and to reduce or eliminate nearby fuel. The likelihood the materials in and on your home will ignite during a wildfire is known as structural ignitability. However, you can take steps to reduce the ignitability of an existing home.

Structural Ignitability

- Ensure the roof has a Class A fire rating
- Remove all leaves, needles and other debris from decks, roofs, and gutters
- Screen attic, roof, eaves, and foundation vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh
- Screen or wall-in stilt foundations and decks with 1/8-inch metal mesh
- Use tempered glass for windows; two or more panes are recommended
- Create 6 inches of vertical clearance between the ground and home siding
- Replace combustible fencing or gates, at least within 5 feet of the home

Defensible space is the area around a home or other structure that has been modified to reduce fire hazards. In this area, natural and manmade fuels are treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire.

Establishing defensible space reduces the likelihood of a home igniting by direct contact with flame or by exposure to the radiant heat of the fire. It also helps limit local production of embers and reduces the chance a structure fire will spread to neighboring homes or surrounding vegetation.

Defensible Space Zones

Creating an effective defensible space involves establishing a series of management zones. Develop these zones around each building on your property, including detached garages, storage buildings, barns, and other structures.

- Zone 1 (0-5 feet from the home) is the area nearest the home and other structures. It requires the most vigilant work to reduce wildfire hazards.
- Zone 2 (5-30 feet from the home) is the area transitioning away from the home where fuels should be reduced.
- Zone 3 (Over 30 feet from the home) is the area farthest from the home. It encompasses the totality of your property, including roadway frontage. Your property abuts your neighbor and or common space, that once it is enflamed, the fire spread is assured to expand.

Defensible Space Zones 1 and 2

- Mow grass and weeds to a height of **4 inches or less**.
- Rake and remove all pine needles and other flammable debris from a 5-foot radius around the foundation of your home and deck.
- Treat or mow shrubs that re-sprout aggressively (such as Gambel oak) every 3-5 years or more depending on growth rates.
- Remove branches that hang over the roof and chimney.
- Dispose of slash from thinning trees and shrubs by chipping or hauling to a disposal site. Any accumulation of slash that's chipped or otherwise should be isolated 30 feet or more from the home. Also, be aware these piles will attract insects that may jeopardize trees in the area, as well as snakes and mice looking for a cozy home.
- Avoid creating continuous areas of wood chips on the ground when chipping logs and/or slash. Break up the layer of wood chips by adding nonflammable material or allow for wide gaps of at least 3 feet between chip accumulations.
- Don't forget that Elizabeth provides a free slash dump location at the intersection of Garland and Washington. Call 303-646-0916 for detail information. A Slash/Mulch program is available in El Paso County at the corner of Shoup Rd and Herring Rd in Black Forest. See bfslash.org for full specifics and availability.

Firewood

- Keep firewood stacked uphill from (or at the same elevation as) any structures and keep the woodpile at least 30 feet away from the home.
- Do not stack firewood between remaining trees, underneath the deck, or on the deck.
- Remove flammable vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles.

Propane Tanks

- Keep aboveground tanks at least 30 feet from the home, preferably on the same elevation as the house.
- Remove flammable vegetation within 10 feet of all propane tanks and gas meters.
- Be aware of the exposure of your grill propane tanks on decks as an explosive accelerant

Driveways

- Maintain at least 10 feet between tree crowns and keep trees a minimum of 30 feet back from each side of the driveway along the entire distance from the house to the main access road.
- Remove any remaining ladder fuels beneath trees after thinning up to 10 to 12 feet above ground.
- Remove any shrubs that are within 10 feet of the outer edge of tree crowns.
- Space shrubs apart at least two-and-a-half times their mature height, as measured from the edge of the shrubs.
- Post signs at the end of the driveway with your house number that are noncombustible, reflective, and easily visible to emergency responders.

Solutions for Managing Slash

Properly thin and prune trees and shrubs as you address the home ignition zone. The sticks and other debris left from cutting trees and shrubs is called slash. Slash is a fuel for wildfire, so ensure this debris is properly managed on your property. It is critical that any slash is located as far from your house as possible:

1. Spread slash and wood chips over a large area of ground to avoid heavy accumulations and large piles. Being close to the ground will help speed decomposition.
2. Material over 2 inches in diameter should be removed from the property.
3. Lop slash by cutting it into small pieces (generally less than 24 inches long) and/or haul it to the Elizabeth collection center located at the intersection of Garland and Washington. Call 303-646-0916 for detail information.
4. A Slash/Mulch program is available in El Paso County at the corner of Shoup Rd and Herring Rd in Black Forest. See bfslash.org for full specifics and availability.

Roadways

It is very important to maintain your property up to the road! A smoldering cigarette butt or something dragging from a car or truck can create sparks and ignite the grass on the side of the road and spread to the trees! Please keep your grass along the roadways 4 inches or less. Properly thin and prune trees and shrubs as you address the home ignition zone 3.

While the Elbert County Road and Bridge can maintain the trees and shrubs located along the roads in the community on their Right-of-Way, they rarely do and if they do, it is likely to not be as aesthetically acceptable as the owner would prefer. The work done will be solely to eliminate any intrusion of the trees or branches into the roadway that might be covering stop/speed limit signs or hinder or damage the road grader used to maintain the unpaved roadways.

1. For the sake of safety, please clear all trees and shrubs that block the sightline to all road signs and stop signs.
2. Thin and limb all tree lines along roads to reduce the chance of a careless spark or flame starting a fire.
3. Trim all grasses adjoining the roadway to eliminate the rapid spread of a fire that reduces the effectiveness of the roads as a semi natural fire break.
4. Remember that should there be an incident, the fire department needs unencumbered access to your property, or they may not undertake any actions.
5. In addition, should our internal roads be overtaken by fire in a serious situation, these roads are our way to evacuate.

The above information is excerpted from material online at [Wildfire Mitigation - Colorado State Forest Service \(colostate.edu\)](http://www.colostate.edu/forestry/extension/wildfire_mitigation/)

The Saddlewood HOA encourages all homeowners to Fire Mitigate their entire property and maintain it regularly! We hope these strategies help and as always, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at saddlewoodbod2019@gmail.com.

Kind regards,

The Saddlewood HOA, Board of Directors