



# **FIREWISE USA<sup>®</sup>**

## **RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS**

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Jodie Barram, outgoing Director of **Project WildFire** & **FireFree**, spoke at our annual meeting and provided a powerful presentation that included video clips on how to improve and expand your home's **DEFENSIBLE SPACE**. If you missed it, take a look at this presentation by going to the following link: [https://prezi.com/nsuazuu3wpcs/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy](https://prezi.com/nsuazuu3wpcs/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy)

**Project WildFire**, **FireFree** & **FIREWISE USA** are three important names that need more clarification. Let's look at the history of fires here in Central Oregon and how these three programs have come together to help our neighborhoods defend themselves from wildfires.

We are living in an era of **megafires**. Why is that? For years the national policy governing wild fires was suppression. And for decades this worked. But during those years of fire suppression, forests that normally experienced small fires burning off the underbrush every 15 to 30 years were getting thicker and thicker with smaller trees and shrubs. Now when the fires hit, they are no longer small ground fires but huge roaring fires that clear the understory, kill the large trees, and spread rapidly. This era of **megafires** began in the 1990's and it began here in Bend with two notorious fires.

In 1990, the AWBREY HALL FIRE destroyed 22 homes due partly to shake roofs and a high amount of combustibles surrounding the homes. The fire started near SHEVLIN PARK then headed south toward Deschutes River Woods traveling a full 6 miles before it came to a stop. The fire jumped three major roadways and the Deschutes River while burning 3,500 acres in addition to the homes in 10 hours. It cost \$2 million to suppress and caused \$9 million in damage.

Then, in 1996, the SKELETON FIRE burned nearly 18,000 acres on the eastern flank of Bend, and damaged or destroyed 30 structures. This lightning-caused, wind-driven fire completed most of its damage in just a few hours, starting on the eastern edge of town and burning west.

The Bend fire marshal recognized large fires as the new norm and that Bend residents needed to become actively involved to reduce their risks of personal home loss. Through a partnership with Safeco Insurance and dozens of local businesses, the program **FireFree** was launched in 1997. Its goal is to educate Central Oregon residents on defensible space actions and to provide free yard debris drop-off days in the spring and ½ price drop-off days in the fall.

A second fire mitigation program available to us is **FIREWISE USA**, a program of the National Fire Protection Association that began in the late 1990s. Its goal is to help neighbors work together to reduce the fire risks in their community and around their homes. A **FIREWISE USA** "site" is a group of homes –

minimum of 10 - that wants to be recognized for working on fire mitigation together. Tillicum Village is one of those “sites”. Each “site” forms a committee to draw up an action plan and track volunteer hours and/or money spent to do the work. Each site commits to 1 volunteer hour per dwelling over each year. Tillicum Village held two cleanup days in the Commons last year which gave our “site” all our volunteer hours. This year’s dates will be decided and announced very soon.

The third program, **Project WildFire** began in 2004. **Project WildFire** is the Deschutes County’s program that oversees and coordinates the **FireFree** and **FIREWISE USA** activities via reading materials, presentations and participation in community events.

These three programs focus on **DEFENSIBLE SPACE**. Next month’s newsletter will look in depth at what is meant by **DEFENSIBLE SPACE** and the steps we need to take as homeowners to maintain that space.

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Last month’s **FIREWISE** newsletter focused on **ORNAMENTAL JUNIPER BUSHES AND ARBORVITAE**. According to our FIREWISE Community Assessment, the number one fire hazard that can be seen throughout Tillicum Village homes is *“an abundance of ornamental juniper bushes, arborvitae and other type bushes.”* The picture below shows a cut away section of a living bush to show the “hidden” fuel and therefore why keeping bushes like it right next to your house is so very dangerous!

