



**Big Mountain Fire District  
Fire Wise and Fire Safe**

November 2024

## **2024 BMFD Firewise Annual Report to our Community**

Fall has arrived and the leaves are beginning to show their color. With an unusual amount of rain in August and September our risk for wildfire is moderate. As the risk for wildfire decreases, your community Firewise Board can begin to reflect on accomplishment over the past year and begin planning for next year. The Firewise Board would like to say “Thank you” to those of you who have taken action to protect your property and therefore our community. It takes all of us working together to decrease the chance of wildfire on Big Mountain.

We began our year in March with a **Winter Wildfire Education session and Pizza Party** at the Base Lodge. This program was designed to try and reach the part-time residents that are only here during the winter season. **Local, County, and US Forest Service fire personnel** were present to answer questions on creating survivable/defensible space around homes. **Scott Countryman from Goosehead Insurance** presented information on the importance of personal property reviews. The turnout was good with a mixture of new faces and the dedicated from our community. **The Bierstube** provided delicious pizza, and **WMR** graciously allowed us the use of the Jackson room. A winter educational program will be offered again in February 2025.

In April, Firewise hosted a Big Mountain Road Egress meeting with County, State, and US Forest Service fire personnel along with Flathead Electric personnel, and representatives from the Montana Department of Transportation. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and prioritize improvements needed for Big Mountain Road which is our only ingress and egress from our community. A follow up meeting was held to discuss the identified priorities from the initial meeting and to set up an action plan to address improvement priorities for Big Mountain Road. This work will continue in 2025.

Educational topics ranging from “**Home Hardening**” to “**Evacuation Procedures**” were emailed to the community monthly from April through July. The monthly community updates are posted and available for review on our community website [www.bigmountaincommunity.com](http://www.bigmountaincommunity.com) You can also find important wildfire safety and prevention checklists and brochures on the website.

The Big Mountain Community website is a valuable resource for wildfire education and wildfire evacuation notices. If you are registered as a member and have provided your cell phone number, you will receive a text message as outlined in the **BMFD Wildfire Evacuation Plan** should the need arise. If you have not registered for notifications, you can do so by going to the website noted above; click on “**Register**” in the top right corner and enter your contact information. If you have any questions, contact [jenannsato@gmail.com](mailto:jenannsato@gmail.com) Jen Sato and Jeffra Clough are credited with keeping the website up to date. **Thank you Jen & Jeffra!**

In June our Big Mountain Fire Department and Whitefish Mountain Resort held a Wildfire drill. Key employees were assigned roles in the event of an actual wildfire evacuation on Big Mountain.

A follow up meeting was held in July to address and improve the process for emergency notification to Big Mountain property owners. Our Fire Chief, Ben Devall, has worked closely with County Emergency personnel to investigate possible grants to fund our Firewise activities and community improvements. Chief Devall maintains a close relationship with local, county, state, and federal departments. He attended eight **FireSafe Flathead** meetings and shared information from those meetings with the Firewise Board and the BMFD Board of Trustees. [www.firesafeflathead.com](http://www.firesafeflathead.com) is another excellent resource.

Also, in June we had our **Annual Brush Collection Day**. A big **"Thank you"** to the thirty property owners that cleared brush and yard debris from their property. Sixteen community volunteers collected the brush piles that totaled 15 pickup truck loads and 4 dump trailer loads. They were able to dump these loads at one of the WMR burn piles. Our volunteers included coordinator Paul Silverman, Doug and Julie Brinkman, Brett and Sue Oemichen, Al and Jeffra Clough, Justin and Treyson Steinbach, Ron Benton and Kim Jensen, Tom Sato, Carol Moody, Angel Dominquez, Lloyd Hartsfield, and Suzanne Burrow. **Clearing debris and brush from your property is a significant contribution towards protecting your property and our community from wildfire.**

The Fire Danger Risk signs were posted at the bottom of Big Mountain Road and at the top of the road near the entrance to the Base Lodge by the BMFD Firefighters. These signs are a great way to inform property owners and guests of the current wildfire danger. Updates to the wildfire risk were also posted on the Big Mountain Community website and were emailed to property owners.

Whitefish Mountain Resort plays an important role in keeping our community safe from wildfires. They posted "No Smoking" signs at trailheads and lift lines. Firewise pamphlets were placed throughout the Resort for the public to pick up and review. "No Fireworks" signs were posted throughout the Village and HOA's. Grizzly Security was on call for reports of fireworks in the area.

In a continuing effort to share information on wildfire prevention and evacuation the Property Owner Packet which was developed for new property owners in our community was revised and posted to the Big Mountain Community website. The **Wildfire Information for Construction Workers** sheet was reviewed and revised, posted to the community website and was sent by email to all active contractors in the area. The **Wildfire Information Sheet for Renters** was also reviewed and revised. It is posted on the community website and was sent to all property managers/owners. They were encouraged to post a copy on the refrigerator or in a visible spot in all rental properties. If you rent your property through VRBO, etc. during wildfire season please post this information. It could be life- saving information for someone unfamiliar with the area.

**The Third Annual Big Mountain Firewise Community Picnic** was held on Thursday, July 18<sup>th</sup> at the BMFD Fire Hall. Thank you to the planning committee and volunteers who spent many hours coordinating this fun event. Thank you also to our **picnic sponsors: WMR; Anapurna HOA; Big Mountain HOA; Big Mountain Sub 2 HOA; Edelweiss HOA; Elk Highlands HOA; Lotus HOA; Moose Run HOA; Northern Lights/NLW/NL3/Glades HOA.**

The picnic is a great way to visit with neighbors and meet new community members; tour our Fire Engines and Ambulance; discuss our BMFD Evacuation procedures for a wildfire at the Firewise Display; learn about the BMFD Firefighters Association; pick up wildfire prevention and preparation literature; spray a fire hose; discuss property insurance coverage for wildfires; discuss creating a property inventory list or video; visit with Search and Rescue and Fire Extinguisher personnel; learn about the

History of Wildfire in our area; and take a picture with Smokey Bear. A very special thanks to Lee Pinski who always seems to know where to locate Smokey Bear and get him to the picnic. Ben Devall, BMFD Fire Chief, led a discussion with fire personnel from Flathead County OES, Montana DNRC, US Forest Service; FireSafe Flathead; and Search and Rescue. They shared valuable wildfire information with attendees and answered many questions. Thank you to everyone who attended and all who worked to make this such successful community event.

On July 23 at 6:30pm a text message was sent to all property owners who are registered on the Big Mountain Community website. The message was to evacuate and gather at the Birch parking lot. Subsequent emails followed as the drill progressed. The BMFD Fire Department held a full-blown Shelter in Place Evacuation Drill for property owners. This was a complete run through of what an actual shelter in place evacuation would be like. It was well attended by homeowners and lasted about 2.5 hours. Many excellent questions were addressed. Attendees left feeling more at ease with the idea of sheltering in place should the need arise. If you did not receive the text message and subsequent emails, please go to [www.bigmountaincommunity.com](http://www.bigmountaincommunity.com) and “REGISTER”. This is truly your best source for information in the event of a wildfire on Big Mountain. If you need assistance registering you can email [admin@bigmountaincommunity.com](mailto:admin@bigmountaincommunity.com). Our community is so fortunate to have Chief Devall and the BMFD firefighters working in tandem with WMR employees to create a safe plan for our community. As a side note, the BMFD is one of a handful of fire districts that have actually tested their evacuation plan and conducted a drill. **We appreciate you all!**

As we start our planning for next year, please send us your ideas and thoughts; and if you are interested in becoming a part of BMFD Firewise or helping with Firewise initiatives, send us a note through [www.bigmountainfiredistrict.com](http://www.bigmountainfiredistrict.com) click on “Contact Us” and type “Attn: Firewise” in your note.

**According to FireSafe Montana, “Based on recent history and experience, Montana possesses all of the characteristics necessary to support large, intense, and uncontrollable wildfires. The solution to Montana’s wildfire situation is to create communities that can survive wildfires.”**

**Your home ignition prevention preparations not only help to protect your property, but also your neighbor’s property and the Big Mountain community. Thank You!!!**

**Your BMFD Firewise Board:**

Ben Devall, Fire Chief  
Avvy Smith, BMFD Firefighter  
Sue Oemichen, Resident Leader Sun Rise Ridge  
Paul Silverman, Community Rep Sun Rise Ridge  
Steve Cosby, BMFD Board Rep

Diana Tague, Community Rep Northern Lights  
Julie Brinkman, Community Rep Northern Lights West  
Suzanne Burrow, Community Rep Wood Run  
Woody Hust, Community Rep Sub 1  
Josh Witt, WMR Rep