

# Forest Lakes Firewise Program

Forest Lakes is starting a community-wide Firewise Program. The program is a collaboration between Forest Lakes Fire District (FLFD), Forest Lakes Owner Association (FLOA), Black Mesa Ranger Station & AZ Department of Forestry and Fire Maintenance (DFFM). The main objective of the program is to greatly enhance the probability that Forest Lakes will survive a large, uncontrolled wildfire. Having a resident in Forest Lakes is very enjoyable, but we live in a forest, and it needs care to stay vibrant and healthy.

The program will include a 3-Year Action Plan that will have community goals in the following four areas:

- Education and Outreach Goals
- Home Hardening Goals
- Defensible Space / Fuel Reduction Goals
- Evacuation Planning and Wildfire Preparedness

There are just over 900 dwellings in the community of Forest Lakes. Therefore, we will have a community goal of just over 900 hours or \$36,000 associated with the goals (1 hour or \$40 per residence).

While the goals look large for a single person, we are a community and should have no problem meeting these values. To illustrate this point, the owners' cost towards the tree thinning grant was over \$50,000 last year alone, which would have counted towards the goal if we had a Firewise program last year. Once we add in the green waste site related hours and cost for lot clearing of needles and other wood debris, we will easily meet our goal, possibly multiple times over.

Once we meet our goals, Forest Lakes will be Firewise Recognized. The significance of this is not only that the community should be safer from devastating wildfires, but Forest Lakes will move towards the top of the list when applying for future grants like the tree thinning program. There are even some insurance companies that now offer reduced homeowners' insurance for folks that live in Firewise Recognized communities. It's a major milestone to get and keep in the years to come.

## **What can everyone in the community do to help?**

The education and preparedness goals will be scheduled meetings this summer that you can attend at either the Fire Station or the Community Center. Your time at these meetings

will even count towards the required hours. Hopefully, we will all learn that there are some small things that can have a huge impact on making our homes wildfire survivable.

Home hardening will be those items that you may change on your home to make it more fire resistant. Examples of this are: a metal roof, dual pane windows, smaller screens in attic vents to keep embers out, skirts around open foundations, and more. These improvement costs count towards our goal, so track them and turn them in.

### **Will there be any incentives to help meet our goals?**

#### **Tree Thinning Grant**

The FLFD has a grant to cost share thinning trees from lots in Forest Lakes. It's a 20/80 split, where the home owner pays 20% of the cost and the grant picks up 80%. Tree density within the community is our largest wildfire concern, so having this grant and keeping it going into the future is very important.

#### **Green Waste Site Loads**

Last year FLOA gave away 10 \$100 gift cards to the 260 Roadhouse at every FLOA monthly meeting between May and September. This was very successful as documented with the increase in the number of loads taken to the Green Waste site. FLOA will be doing this again this year, so turn in your green waste site receipts to enter the drawings. Keep track of your hours raking and loads taken to the site. We'll have a form soon on the FLFD website to fill out and turn in.

#### **0-5ft Immediate Zone**

The immediate zone around your house is critical to its safety in a wildfire. Firewise sets guidelines on this zone. If you meet these guidelines, then you can submit your property for inspection. If it passes, then you will be entered into a drawing for 5 \$100 gift cards to the 260 Roadhouse at every FLOA monthly meeting.

#### **Eliminate Small Trees**

Ponderosas that are less than 5 inches in diameter should be removed from your property. These are the scraggly "dog-haired" trees that will be the dangerous fire ladder for ground fires to get into the crowns of the larger ponderosa trees. This small size can be removed easily with a hand saw or hand-held chain saw. If you meet this guideline, then you can submit your property for inspection. If it passes, then you will be entered into a drawing at every FLOA monthly meeting for either a hand-held chainsaw with a pole attachment, or a manual pruning saw with a pole attachment. Thinning lower branches on mature trees and

removing small trees is a continuous process if you live in the forest. Therefore, these gifts will come in handy for future clean-up.

### **Needle Removal Days**

Many folks rake their needles into piles, but getting them to the Green Waste site can be difficult unless you have a truck or trailer. Therefore, FLOA will have several days this summer where you can sign up to have your needle piles picked up and taken to the Green Waste site free of charge. There will be a defined number of slots for pick-up based on the number of neighborhood volunteers we get to help, and being a FLOA member will be a requirement to have a slot.

### **Mark Your Calendar**

There will be a Firewise Kickoff meeting at the Forest Lakes Fire Station on Saturday, 11 April @ 1:00pm. It will be an overview of the new Firewise Program and a chance to meet the newly formed Firewise Advisory Board members.

The meeting will also cover the draft release of the Forest Lakes Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) due out at the end of March. Comments from the community on the draft are due back by 17 April. Part of the meeting is to cover the draft and get comments from the community.

The Firewise program will use the information in the CWPP to help advise how to make the community safer. The CWPP will also define what additional items the community may need to get through grants that the Firewise Recognized status will help make possible.

We are a community in the forest.