

THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

FIREWISE BULLETIN

MARCH 2012

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A Community Wildfire Protection Plan: Berryessa Highlands Takes Action

by Peter Kilkus, Lake Berryessa News. (This story was originally posted on July 6, 2011 in the Lake Berryessa News. It has been edited for length.)

Neighbors protecting neighbors – what a concept! But if you are a Berryessa Highlands resident, you have seen it in action all spring – cutting, chipping, and burning off dangerous fuel loads. This has been accomplished because of the work of the Berryessa Highlands Fire Safe Council.

The Berryessa Highlands consists of 649 parcels with 349 residences, and a population of 920. It is located on rolling to steep terrain on about 700 acres located near and above Lake Berryessa. The site is isolated from other residential areas and is more than five miles from the nearest fire station.

The Berryessa Highlands



Example of a well-planned defensible space zone at Berryessa Highlands

community has been involved in fire safety initiatives starting in 2009, primarily utilizing the Napa Firewise chipping program. In 2010, a group of Berryessa Highlands homeowners took the initiative to form a committee with the support of the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCF), CAL FIRE, and Napa County Fire.

For the past four years, the

resident homeowners of Berryessa Highlands have benefited from the curbside chipping program provided by the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation. With funding donated by the NCF, a Vegetation Management Plan was developed in 2010 by a professional defensible space consultant, who is a certified forester. The assessment and its

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AB XI 29: A Hot Topic For Rural Residents

If you live in a rural part of Napa County that is protected by CAL FIRE, you probably have heard of Assembly Bill XI 29. The state legislature passed this bill in June of 2011. It imposes a fee on residents living in what is called a "State Responsibility Area," or SRA.

AB XI 29 is designed to generate much-needed revenues to fund defensible space planning, fire mitigation, and fire prevention in

rural communities throughout California. As you might expect given these hard economic times, opposition to the bill is significant.

We encourage members of the Napa Firewise community to follow the development of AB XI 29. Additional information about this Bill will be made available in the coming weeks and months on the NCF website (www.napafirewise.org).

HELP NAPA FIREWISE CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation has been helping the residents of Napa County since 2003. We are a non-profit foundation focused on preparing the citizens of Napa County for the type of wildfires that have become commonplace throughout California and the West.

We are guided by an overarching commitment to save lives and protect property. We do this through public education, hands-on community involvement, and fuel reduction projects.

Non-profits have seen a huge change in funding during the past several years. Creating a sustainable funding model for the future, without eroding our ability to deliver in the present, is quite a challenge. If it were not for the generosity and encouragement of our grant sponsors and contributions from private individuals, we would have had to throw in the towel years ago.

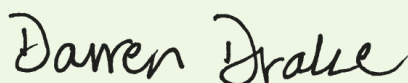
We are proud of our success in helping build and sustain a network of Fire Safe Councils that have become our "family," with familiar names such as Mt. Veeder/Dry Creek, Circle Oaks, Berryessa Estates, Berryessa Highlands, Tucker Acres, Montecito Heights, Atlas Peak, Soda Canyon, Pope Valley, and Deer Park.

A common thread that connects us is our free vegetation management chipping program for county residents. Based on past results, by the end of this chipping season, we will have collected and chipped nearly half a million cubic yards of potentially dangerous fire fuels. This effort has provided real help in creating all-important defensible space for thousands of Firewise supporters throughout Napa County.

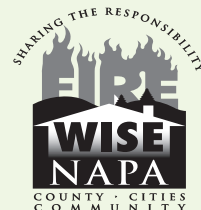
Sadly to say, our current funding will be exhausted in less than a year. We can no longer rely on government grants to support our entire efforts. For Napa Firewise to be sustainable tomorrow, we need your financial help today!

Please consider joining our extended family by making a gift to Napa Firewise. Your donation is tax-deductible and it can be directed to fund fire prevention work in your own community. You can send us a check in the enclosed envelope or use a debit/credit card on our website: www.napafirewise.org.

Sincerely,



Darren Drake, President
Napa Communities Firewise Foundation



A Community Wildfire Protection Plan

(cont. from page 1)

recommendations have been embraced in the new CWPP (Community Wildfire Protection Plan). After reviewing the Vegetation Management Plan, the council created and prioritized a list of projects that will help make the community more defensible in a wildfire.

Utilizing \$12,000 in grant "seed" money provided by NCF, the council worked with CAL FIRE in early 2011 to start and/or complete four of the higher priority projects (See the before/after photo with this story).

The Berryessa Highlands community is unique because the lake around it does provide some protections from large-scale wildfires to the east, north, and west of the community. The lake acts as defensible space. At the same time, the shoreline, and the public who use the lake, create a predictable fire ignition area that is within 1/4 to 1 mile from homes.

For this reason, creating defensible space, and eliminating fire fuels in strategic areas, can have a significant impact on the ability of fire crews to do their job and save homes and lives in the event of a small or large wildfire. The goal of this work is to make our community safe under any fire situation.



Asst. Chief Dave Shew points to origin of fire.



All that is left of a once stately home.

SODA CANYON FIRE – A COMMUNITY RESPONDS

by Roger Archey, NCCF Bulletin Editor

November 1 started out with ominous overtones. Gusty north winds, typical for that time of the year, caused the National Weather Service to declare a “Red Flag” warning throughout Napa County and much of Northern California. Red Flag days are days where humidity and fuel moisture levels are low and high winds are predicted. CAL FIRE and Napa County Emergency Services were poised for a worst-case scenario.

It happened just before 9:00 PM. The first call came in from a terrified resident in the 1300 block of Loma Vista Drive. She reported a 20-foot tall wall of flames a few hundred yards from her home. This quickly set in motion an emergency response from CAL FIRE/Napa County Fire Department, and eventually fire agencies from throughout the County.

One of the first on the scene was Assistant Chief Dave Shew. As initial incident commander, Chief Shew immediately called for reinforcements and requested sheriff’s deputies to assist with a voluntary evacuation of the approximately 100 homes in the area.

Fortunately for the fire crews and residents alike, the fire was slowed and ultimately controlled as the result of aggressive fire suppression and natural defensive space barriers such as vineyards, creek beds, roadways and homeowner landscaping. Thankfully, there were no injuries and only one home and a garage were lost. Investigation is still underway as to the cause of the 90-acre blaze.

In early January, Chief Shew and I toured the burned area as he recounted the event. I was struck by how complex and confusing road access is, and how difficult it was to identify specific home addresses. This type of confusion is heightened at night, especially to emergency responders coming into an area they are not familiar with. I was also struck by how vulnerable was the house that burned. It was situated directly at the top of a natural fire “chute.” And because of the wind-driven ferocity of the flames that day, and the home’s proximity to fire fuels, it was clear to me the outcome was inevitable.

I asked Chief Shew if there was a positive message we could take away from this unfortunate event. “Absolutely,” said the Chief. “It’s taken a couple of months for the community to assess the physical and emotional losses relating to this type of event. A fire always gets people’s attention!”

On January 7, a group of community members met with CAL FIRE and a representative of Napa Firewise to discuss fire service response time and community preparedness.



SOCIAL MEDIA: Napa Firewise now has a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Join our online family and add to the conversation about wildfire prevention and the steps you can take to protect your home and family. Visit us at www.facebook.com/napafirewise and like our page or Follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/napafirewise. Welcome! Napa Communities Firewise Foundation





CHIPPING – AN IMPORTANT PART OF ANY VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

by Pete Munoa, Napa County Fire Marshal

Right now is the best time to be following through with your defensible space vegetation management plan. For some this means starting from scratch, and for others it means revisiting old brush fields and undergrowth to remove vegetation that has grown back. Keeping ahead of the curve is the true definition of vegetation management.

To help county residents maintain the state-mandated 100 feet of defensible space around their homes and outbuildings, Napa Firewise and Napa County Fire are once again offering free chipping from March 15 to early October. All you have to do is prepare your vegetation piles according to guidelines provided online at www.napafirewise.org.

There is no limit to the amount of vegetation you can have chipped. All we ask is that you adhere to our simple guidelines. This service is not designed for general landscape maintenance outside of the 100-foot defensible space zone. The 2012 chipping season is just around the corner – and there is no excuse for inaction when the service is 100% FREE!

Examples of a Shaded Fuel Break



CAL FIRE crews removing ladder fuels



CAL FIRE crews build chipping and burn piles



Shaded fuel break brush piles ready for burning

WHAT IS A SHADED FUEL BREAK?

A shaded fuel break is a carefully planned thinning of dense vegetation, so fire does not easily move from the ground into the overhead tree canopy. A shaded fuel break is not the removal of all vegetation in a given area. Fire suppression resources can utilize this location to suppress wildland fires, however any fuel break by itself will not stop a wildland fire.

NAPA FIREWISE PHOTO ALBUM



CAPTIONS ID'S

A- "CALFIRE inmate crew preparing a shaded fuel break."

B- "Tucker Acres community volunteer crew."

C- "Example of shaded fuel break in oak forest."

D- "Dangerous 'ladder' fuels. A perfect application for chipping."

E- Wildfire is a serious threat to us all.

F - " John Hallman points out shaded fuel break around his community at Berryessa Estates"

G- "CAL FIRE crews burning vegetation at Berryessa Estates"

H "Firewise chipping crew in action."

I - "Juniper can be deadly in a wildfire."



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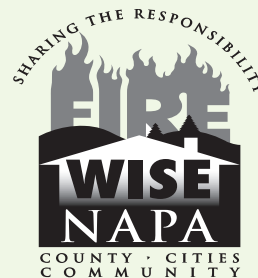
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**Napa Firewise
Free Chipping**

PREPARE FOR FIRE SEASON NOW!

NO LIMIT ON THE AMOUNT WE WILL CHIP!

A PERFECT SOLUTION FOR BUILDING DEFENSIBLE SPACE!

For application information visit www.napafirewise.org
Applications are accepted beginning March 5,
with chipping starting on March 15, 2012

SIGN UP NOW!