



# BIGHORN BASIN FIRESMART

## BIGHORN BASIN FIREWISE COMMUNITIES

### ISSUE #5—FALL 2011

#### THE WALLOW FIRE—ARIZONA & NEW MEXICO—2011

The recent Wallow Fire was an exception to the headlines from other 2011 wildfires where the media have reported more than 2000 homes burned. There were three primary reasons for the fact that the Wallow Fire “threatened” numerous homes, but only burned one structure.

- 1) **Prior fuel treatments done by the landowners; both public agencies, and private landowners working with cost-share Firewise funds.**
- 2) **Aggressive fire suppression actions that were allowed only because firefighters could work safely within areas where fuels had been treated.**
- 3) **Firewise and defensible space prefire actions taken by homeowners.**

The 300 square mile Wallow Fire included high winds, ember storms, crown fires, long-range spot-fire ignitions, and a high rate of spread that put at least two forested communities in danger. But these were **Firewise communities**, with Firewise construction and landscaping, and they survived despite active fire reaching within 20 feet of some homes.

While some might cite good karma or divine intervention for this success story, neither could have been this effective without active fuels reduction by landowners, and Firewise preparations by homeowners *prior to the fire start*.

So what can you do to give your home a fighting chance to survive a wildfire?

- **Become familiar with the principles of Firewise.**
- **If you haven’t already done so, Contact your County Firewise Coordinator to obtain a no-cost Firewise evaluation for your rural home or mountain cabin. Bighorn Basin Firewise coordinators are listed on the next page.**
- **Take active steps to make your property Firewise.**
- **Pay constant attention to “It’s the Little Things That Matter” on pages three and four of this newsletter.**

Two final thoughts from folks involved in the Wallow Fire:

***Without fuel treatments, firefighters would not have been in those communities. It is not a matter of “if” but “when” fire is going to threaten your wildland home.***

*Page 8 has an aerial photo that illustrates the “why” of the Arizona success.*

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#### Special points of interest:

- \* Why homes survived wildfire.
- \* Little actions to prevent big problems
- \* When and how to do it best
- \* Fuel treatments need not be clearcuts
- \* Another picture of this concept

**THE BIG HORN BASIN FIREWISE COORDINATORS ARE:**

**Big Horn County:** The County Fire Warden is Brent Godfrey (307) 568-2324. The Firewise Coordinator is Chris Weydeveld, [cweydeveld@wytfs.com](mailto:cweydeveld@wytfs.com), Technical Forestry Services, LLC, 6628 W. Riverside Dr. Casper, Wyoming 82604, or (307) 333-1098 (office), (307) 272-9533 (mobile).

**Washakie County:** Chris Kocher, Fire Warden, [ckocher@worlandfire.org](mailto:ckocher@worlandfire.org), P.O. Box 504, Worland, Wyoming 82401, or (307) 347-6379. **Chris wants everybody to know that it's still dry, and care should be taken.**

**Hot Springs County:** No Firewise Coordinator has yet been selected. Contact Jay Duvall, County Fire Warden, at (307) 921-1485, or [hscdwarden@gmail.com](mailto:hscdwarden@gmail.com)

**Park County :** Russ Wenke, Fire Warden, [rwenke@parkcounty.us](mailto:rwenke@parkcounty.us) 1131 11th Street, Cody, Wyoming 82414, or (307) 527-8551.

**If you have general or specific questions about Firewise, two good online sources of answers are:** [www.firewisewyoming.com](http://www.firewisewyoming.com) and [www.livingwithfire.com](http://www.livingwithfire.com).

Do you have topics you would like included in future newsletters? Please submit your suggestions and comments to [gwynn@wytfs.com](mailto:gwynn@wytfs.com), [cweydeveld@wytfs.com](mailto:cweydeveld@wytfs.com), to Chris at any of the above phone numbers, or by mail to G. Wynn, 824 Country Club Road, Casper, Wyoming 82609.

Thanks for providing this newsletter go to the Wyoming State Forestry Division, the Big Horn County Fire Warden, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. They provide the funding.

**This newsletter is provided as a service of your county's Firewise Coordinator. If you choose not to receive future issues, please respond to the E-mail address that delivered it, or to G. Wynn by mail.**

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***A Big Horn County Firewise Report: Coordinators had a busy season in the Bighorn Mountains, and at the Globe Canal fuels reduction program in Lovell. Activities included:***

- *A well-attended mountain cabin owners picnic and cabin protection field trip near Deerhaven.*
- *Attendance at the Big Horn County Fair with information on the county's Firewise program.*
- *Completion of more than two dozen wildfire mitigation plans for homes and mountain cabins.*
- *Work on Manderson's fuelbreak, and finalizing a contract for river side fuels treatment in Greybull.*

**Regretably, the planned and announced cabinowners' picnic in the north end of the Big-horns was first postponed by deep snow, and then cancelled for 2011. Plans are already being made to hold that event in 2012. Details will be in future newsletters.**

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A brief introduction to George Wynn, Deputy Big Horn County Firewise Coordinator, and [Bighorn Basin Firesmart](#) newsletter editor: George recently retired as a government forester, with more than thirty years of experience in all phases of wildfire suppression, fuels management, prescribed burning, reforestation, and thinning to reduce tree density, decrease fuel loading, and increase tree growth rates. His Forest Management degree from the Oregon State University's School of Forestry took him to the pine forests managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Montana, and by the US Forest Service in Oregon. George resides in Casper, Wyoming, and is employed by **Technical Forestry Services, LLC.**

## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER

There are an uncountable number of seemingly unimportant things around your home or cabin that can each burn your buildings down if ignored. Here are a few of them that you should look for and correct. All of the pictured items could be easily ignited by flying embers.



Bird or paper wasp nests under the eaves



Uncovered or uncleaned window wells



Conifer needles in the roof valleys or rain gutters, or buildup on building attachments



What all of these little things on these two pages have in common is that they could be ignited by flying embers, or even careless smoking. You need to remember what you do when building a campfire, or making a fire in the fireplace - You always start with fine fuels (tinder) that can be lighted with a match. Anything you could ignite with a match should never be left in contact with any part of your home, cabin, or other structures. Flying embers have the same fire starting ability as a match.

## MORE IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER



Conifer needle and litter buildup around the base of buildings.



Weathered unsealed siding



Careless storage of flammable materials on decks



Unattended vehicles near structures



Buildup of forest litter under decks and wooden steps

## TREE PRUNING

To be Firewise, home and cabin owners should remove all limbs within 8-10 feet of all structures—both horizontally and vertically. Within 100 feet of structures, there should be no limbs left within 8-10 feet of the ground. Here's how to do it to get the best results, without harming the trees.

### How to Prune a Tree

Pruning is the practice of removing branches from the bottom of the crown of a tree. Pruning can help prevent a ground fire from climbing into the tree canopy. Pruning cuts should be made so that only the branch is removed and main stem is not damaged. If only the branch is cut when pruning, the stem tissue of the tree is less likely to become decayed, and the wound will seal more effectively.

To find the proper place to cut a branch, look for the branch collar that grows from the stem tissue at the underside of the base of the branch (Fig. 1A). On the upper surface, there is usually a branch bark ridge that runs (more or less) parallel to the branch angle, along the stem of the tree. A proper pruning cut does not damage either the branch bark ridge or the branch collar.

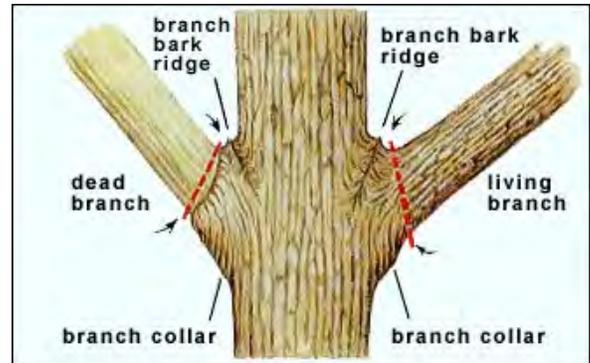


Figure 1A. Targeting the cut

A proper cut begins just outside the branch bark ridge and angles down away from the stem of the tree, avoiding injury to the branch collar (Fig. 2A). Make the cut as close as possible to the intersection of the stem and branch, but outside the branch bark ridge, so that stem tissue is not injured and the wound can seal in the shortest time possible. If the cut is too far from the stem, leaving a branch stub, the branch tissue usually dies and wound-wood forms from the stem tissue. Wound closure is delayed because the wound-wood must seal over the stub that was left.

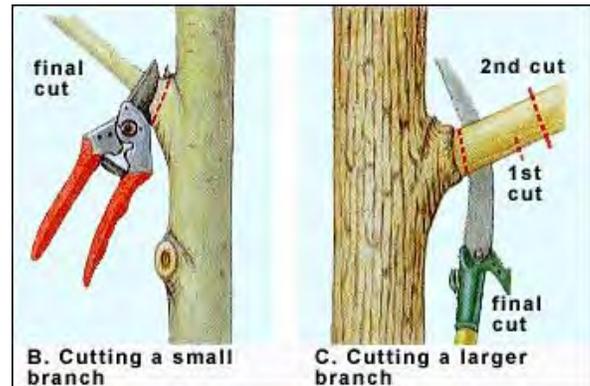
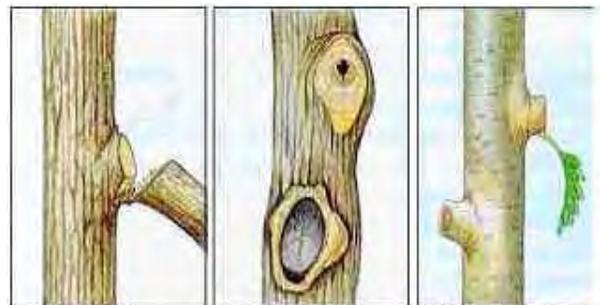


Figure 2A.

Figure 2B.

Improper pruning cuts cause unnecessary injury and bark ripping (Fig. 3A). Flush cuts injure stem tissues and can result in decay (Fig. 3B). Stub cuts delay wound closure and can provide entry to canker fungi that kill the cambium, delaying or preventing wound-wood formation (Fig. 3C).



3A. Bark Ripping 3B. Flush Cut 3C. Stub Cut

**When to prune:** Conifers may be pruned any time of year, but pruning during the dormant season may minimize sap and resin flow from cut branches. Hardwood trees and shrubs should be pruned in the dormant season to easily visualize the structure of the tree and to maximize wound closure in the growing season after pruning. This helps reduce the chance of transmitting disease, and discourages excessive sap flow from wounds. Recent wounds and the chemical scents they emit can actually attract insects that spread tree disease.

**THESE EXAMPLES SHOW THAT EFFECTIVE FIREWISE FUEL TREATMENTS DO NOT NECESSARILY CREATE A CLEARCUT IN A FORESTED AREA.**



**AFTER A FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT NEAR MANDERSON**

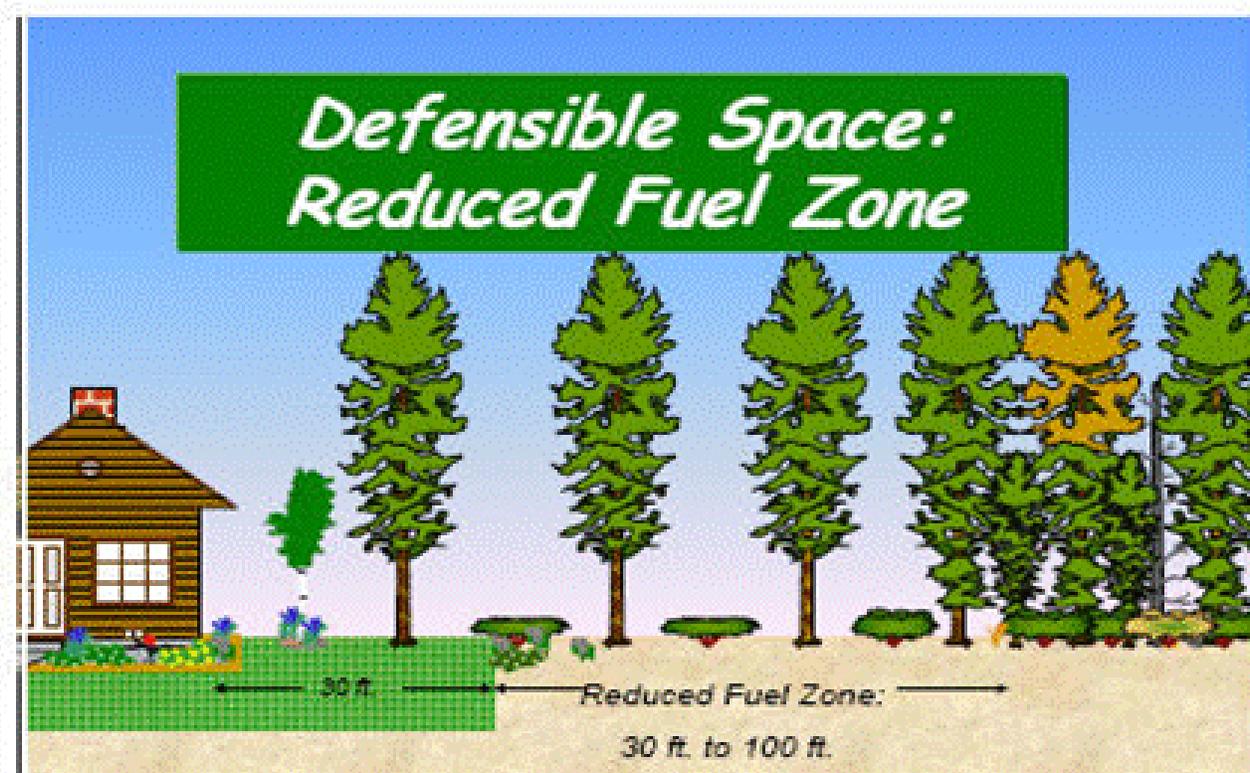


### **A CABIN IN THE BIGHORN MOUNTAINS**

*Developing defensible space does not mean cutting everything down and scraping a wide area down to dirt. These before and after pictures show development of an effective defensible space with moderate reduction in the number of trees within 100 feet of all structures, removal of highly flammable ground juniper, and removing low hanging limbs. Ground fuels (needles, twigs, etc.) near the cabin were cleaned up to provide a barrier to groundfire that would threaten the decks and siding.*

**REMINDER:** BIG HORN COUNTY HAS OBTAINED ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO DO FIREWISE EVALUATIONS ON RURAL HOMES AND MOUNTAIN CABINS. THERE IS ALSO COST-SHARE FUNDING FOR FUELS TREATMENTS ON PRIVATE LANDS WITHIN THE COUNTY. IF YOU OR YOUR NEIGHBORS HAVE AN OVERGROWN WOODLOT, OR "JUNGLE" CREEK BOTTOM, CHRIS WEYDEVELD **(307) 272-9533** WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

**DEFENSIBLE SPACE**—This is such a critical part of being Firewise, that refreshing your memory with this version of a diagram and explanation should not offend.



### **Defensible Space in a Nutshell:**

- 1. Remove or reduce the tinder** - Those fine materials like leaves, dried grass, pine needles, jute doormats, seat cushions, brooms, etc. can easily ignite with a match or a spark from nearby fires and transfer fire to kindling.
- 2. Remove the kindling** - The small and medium sized woody material such as stacked firewood, construction materials, dead trees & juniper bushes, etc. are easily ignited by burning tinder or hot flaming fronts, and will transfer fire to heavy fuels.
- 3. Isolate or reduce the heavy fuel**— These materials are less likely to ignite in the absence of tinder and kindling— things like your home, barn, or even large trees. Thin concentrations of trees & isolate the heavy fuels from the tinder and kindling!

## **WHATS COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES OF BIGHORN BASIN FIRESMART**

**Firewise and propane tanks**

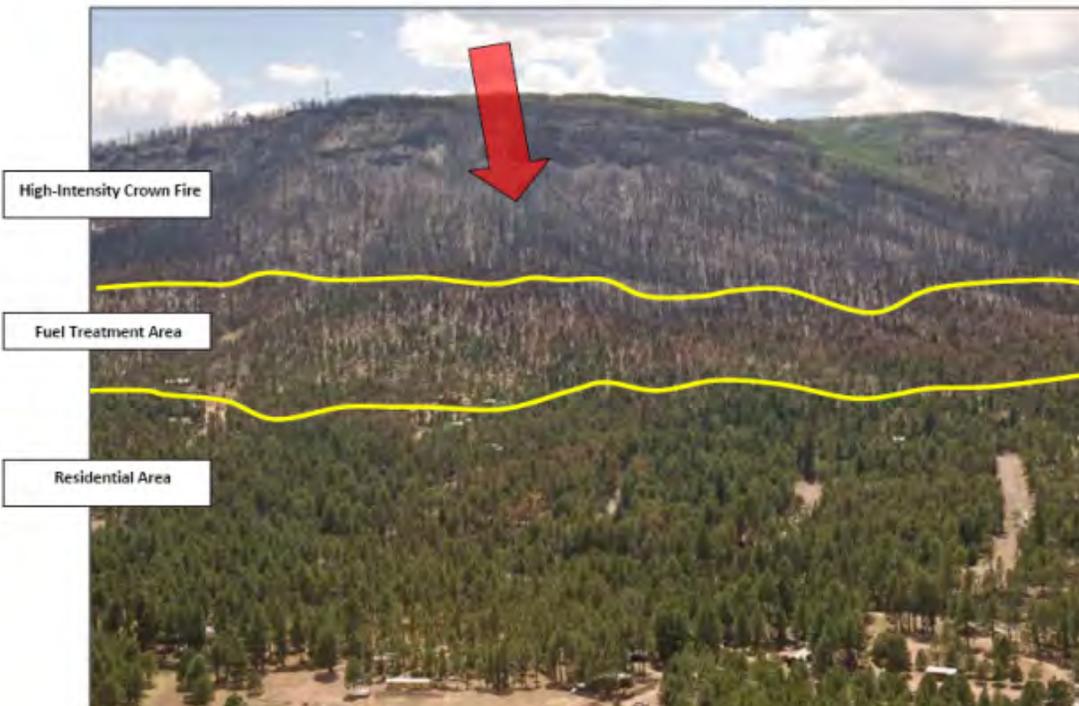
**Firewise and chimneys**

**Firewise and building siding**

*IF YOU HAVE OTHER SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE SHARE THEM WITH GEORGE OR CHRIS. THEIR CONTACT INFORMATION IS ON PAGE TWO.*



## How Fuel Treatments Saved Homes from the Wallow Fire



*The red arrow indicates the direction of the crown fire’s spread toward the Alpine community’s homes. Yellow lines delineate the approximate location of the Wildland-Urban Interface Fuel Treatment Area. As the fire raced downslope, numerous houses were at risk from the crown fire. While only a few of the house roofs can be seen in this photo, approximately 40 homes are located in this area—and a total of 100 homes were threatened in the Alpine community. This photo shows how the fuel treatment slowed and diminished the Wallow Fire’s intensity, helping to save the homes in this Firewise Community.*

***Big Horn County Firewise  
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