

# Fire Adapted Communities & Firewise Communities

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# FIRE THREAT: Not “if” but “when”





What can we do about it?

# 2002 National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

- The **National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy** is a strategic push to work collaboratively among all stakeholders and across all landscapes, using best science, to make meaningful progress towards the three goals:

# 3 goals of the National Cohesive Strategy



# What is a resilient landscape?

**Resilience** is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

**Landscape resilience** is the **ability of a landscape to sustain** desired ecological functions, robust native biodiversity, and critical landscape processes **over time, under changing conditions, and despite multiple stressors and uncertainties.**





# Firebreak vs Fuelbreak



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A ***firebreak*** is an area where all vegetation and organic matter is removed down to mineral soil, thereby removing the fuel leg of the fire triangle. The purpose of a firebreak is to deny a fire any combustible material.

A ***shaded fuelbreak*** is a strip of land where fuel (for example, living trees and brush, and dead branches, needles, or downed logs) has been modified or reduced to limit the fire's ability to spread rapidly.



## **The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)**

The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetation fuels

In our County, most homes are surrounded by continuous tree cover, fine fuels, abundant flammable shrubs and ladder fuels. Not only are these homes at risk, but they're also our greatest opportunities for mitigation.



**Homes are Fuel !**



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# What is a Fire Adapted Community?

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 Film: What is a Fire Adapted Community?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yHBUMt7Nbk> (5 ½ min)



**Fire Adapted Communities (FAC)** is a broad, holistic framework for living with wildfire, focusing on collaborative, community-wide planning.

**Firewise USA®** is a specific, actionable program focusing on individual homeowner actions and home hardening. FAC is the comprehensive strategy, while Firewise is a key tool under that umbrella.

# What is a Firewise Community?

A Firewise community is a neighborhood or area formally recognized by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for actively taking steps to reduce its wildfire risk, often known as Firewise USA®.



**FIREWISE USA®**  
Residents reducing wildfire risks



**FIREWISE USA®**

**Residents reducing wildfire risks**

- **The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is the sponsor for the program.** NFPA is an international nonprofit devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards. Founded in 1896.
- The Firewise USA® program is **co-sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters.**



2024 Tanager Firewise Community

# LIVING WITH FIRE

Teaches people how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to **work together and take action** now to prevent losses.



Wildwood/Shadybrook 2023

**Voluntary program** that provides a **framework** to help neighbors get organized, find direction, and take action to **increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community.**

Key component of the fire adapted approach

Washington Fire 2022





CartoonStock.com

The Firewise USA Program is **free**.

You can do as little or as much as you can/want. You are already required to do your home defensible space (State Public Resource Code 4291), why not take credit for it?

*A scofflaw is a person who disregards the law, especially by ignoring laws that are hard to enforce. The term originated during Prohibition to describe someone who drank illegally.*

## What are the primary threats to homes during a wildfire?

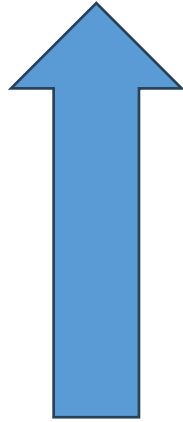
Research around home destruction vs. home survival in wildfires point to embers and small flames as the main way that the majority of homes ignite in wildfires.

Experiments, models and post-fire studies have shown homes ignite due to the condition of the home and everything around it, up to 200' from the foundation. This is called the **Home Ignition Zone (HIZ)**.

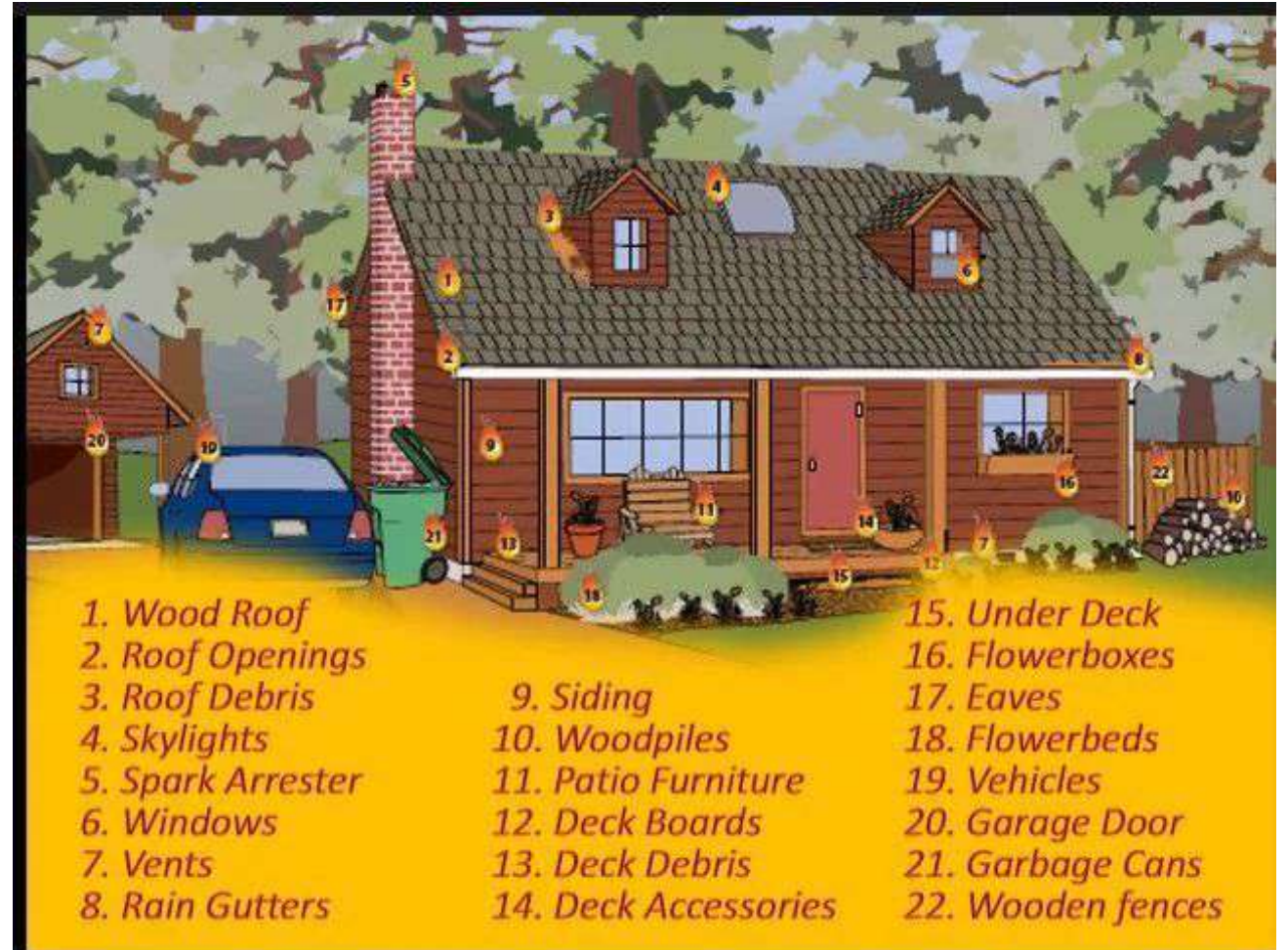
**Zone 0** - Ember Resistant Zone extends 5 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc. Science has proven it to be the most important of all the defensible space zones.

Film: IBHS Research Center Ember Storm Test  
Highlights (4:1/2 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjA9yLP1icg>



**Can your home  
survive an ember  
storm?**

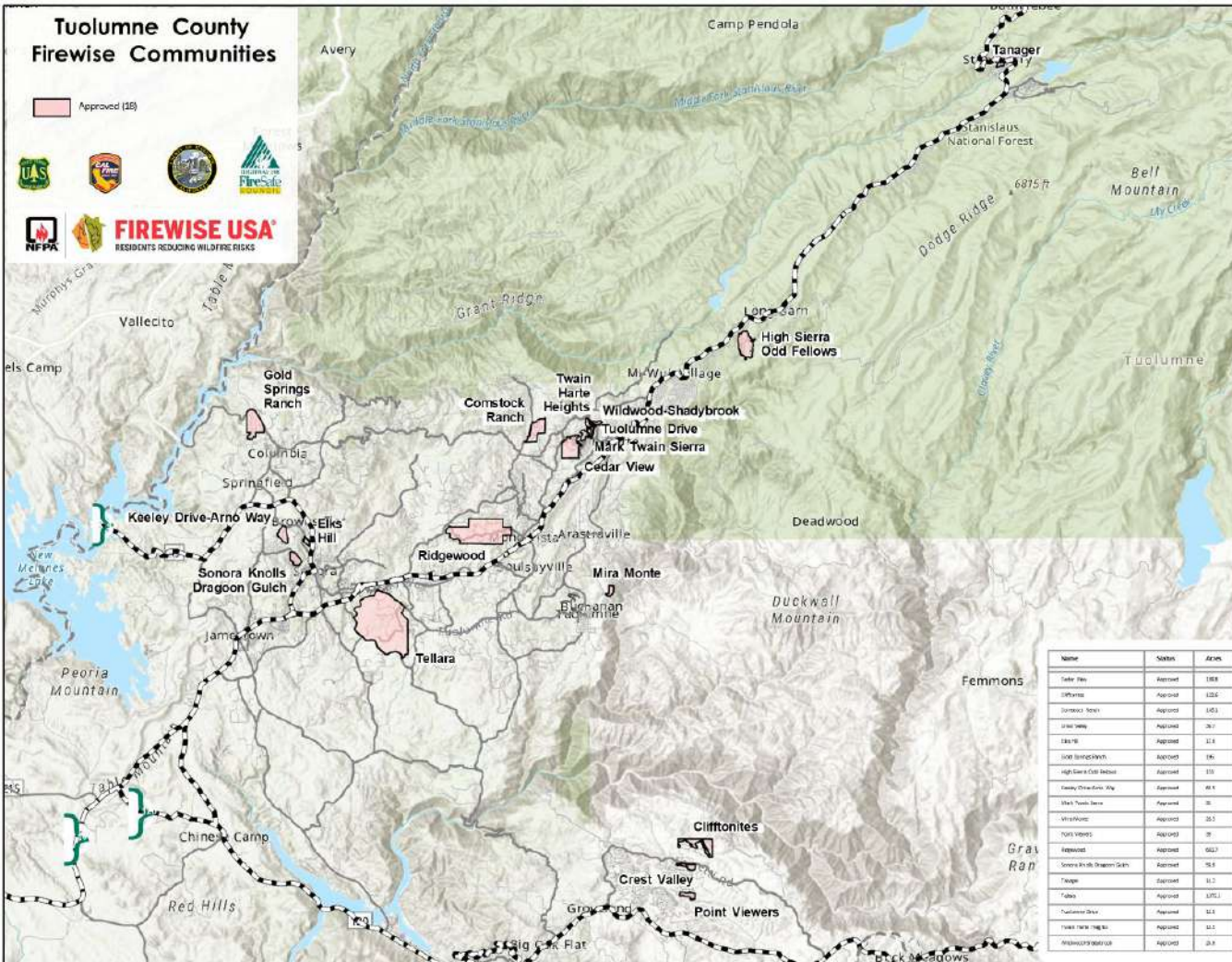


- |                   |                      |                   |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Wood Roof      |                      | 15. Under Deck    |
| 2. Roof Openings  |                      | 16. Flowerboxes   |
| 3. Roof Debris    |                      | 17. Eaves         |
| 4. Skylights      |                      | 18. Flowerbeds    |
| 5. Spark Arrester |                      | 19. Vehicles      |
| 6. Windows        |                      | 20. Garage Door   |
| 7. Vents          |                      | 21. Garbage Cans  |
| 8. Rain Gutters   |                      | 22. Wooden fences |
|                   | 9. Siding            |                   |
|                   | 10. Woodpiles        |                   |
|                   | 11. Patio Furniture  |                   |
|                   | 12. Deck Boards      |                   |
|                   | 13. Deck Debris      |                   |
|                   | 14. Deck Accessories |                   |

# Structure ignition in wildfires

- **Myth** – giant wall of flames from nearby vegetation
- **Reality** – wind-blown embers are responsible for the majority of structure ignitions





## Key points about Firewise Communities:

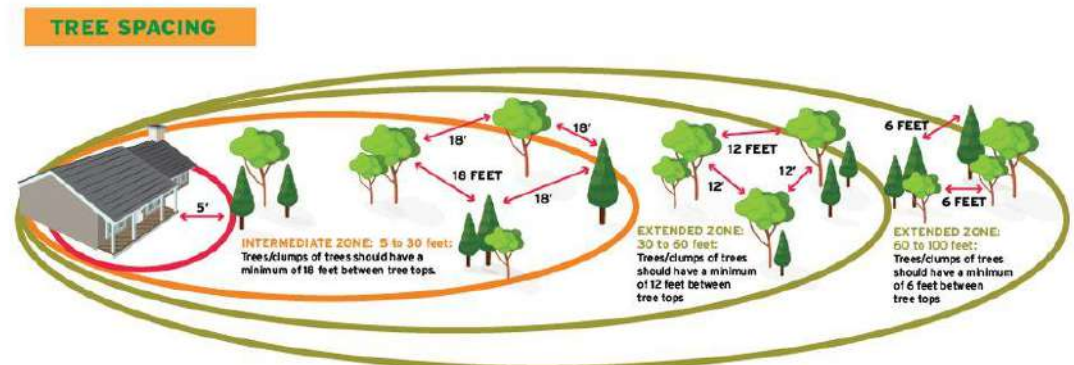
- Collaborative effort: Neighbors working together
- Focus on home ignition prevention:
- Community education:
- NFPA recognition:



**FIREWISE USA®**  
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

# What does a Firewise Community do?

- Develop a wildfire risk assessment for their area
- Create a community action plan to address identified risks
- Implement defensible space around homes by thinning vegetation and removing flammable debris
- Encourage residents to choose fire-resistant plants and building materials
- Organize community clean-up events and volunteer parties
- Conduct regular fire safety education and awareness campaigns





## **BENEFITS OF A FIREWISE COMMUNITY**

- ✓ **Reduced Risk to Life and Property**
- ✓ **Get a Framework for Action**
- ✓ **Community Building & Organizing**
- ✓ **Financial Benefits**
- ✓ **Support**
- ✓ **Peace of Mind**

# Becoming a Firewise Community USA Site

Before beginning the process, consider holding a neighborhood meeting,

- to learn about the Firewise Community Program,
- to promote interest and support,
- to recruit volunteers.

Information from this meeting can help you determine boundaries for your Firewise Community map.



# 1

## ORGANIZE IT

Form a board/group/committee that is comprised of residents and other applicable wildfire stakeholders.



# 2

## PLAN IT

Create a written wildfire risk assessment with your Cal Fire representative or the City Fire Chief for Sonora. The assessment should be a community-wide view that identifies areas of successful wildfire risk reduction and areas where improvements can be made.

# 3

## DO IT

Develop an action plan - a priority list of risk reduction projects/investments, along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years.

# 4

## SUBMIT IT

Submit application to Firewise USA. State liaisons will approve applications, with final processing completed by the NFPA.

# 5

## IMPLEMENT IT

Put your plan to work. At a minimum, each site is required to contribute one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in wildfire risk reductions.



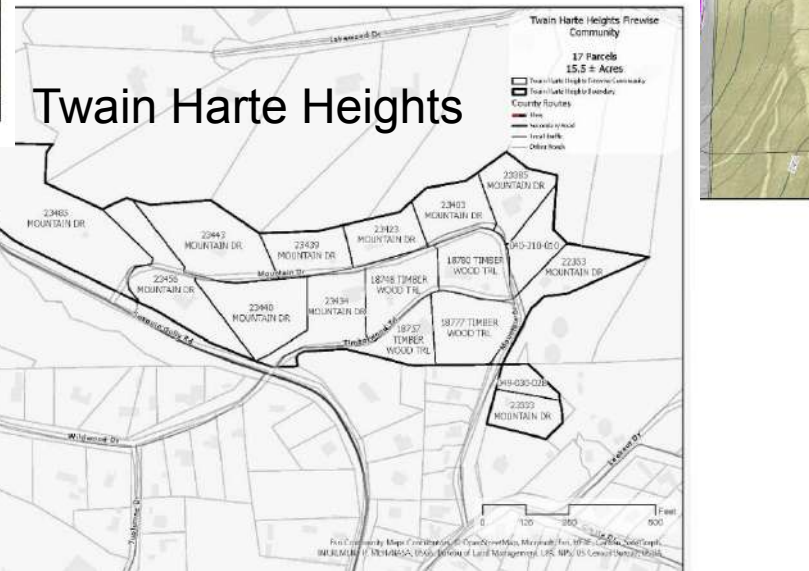
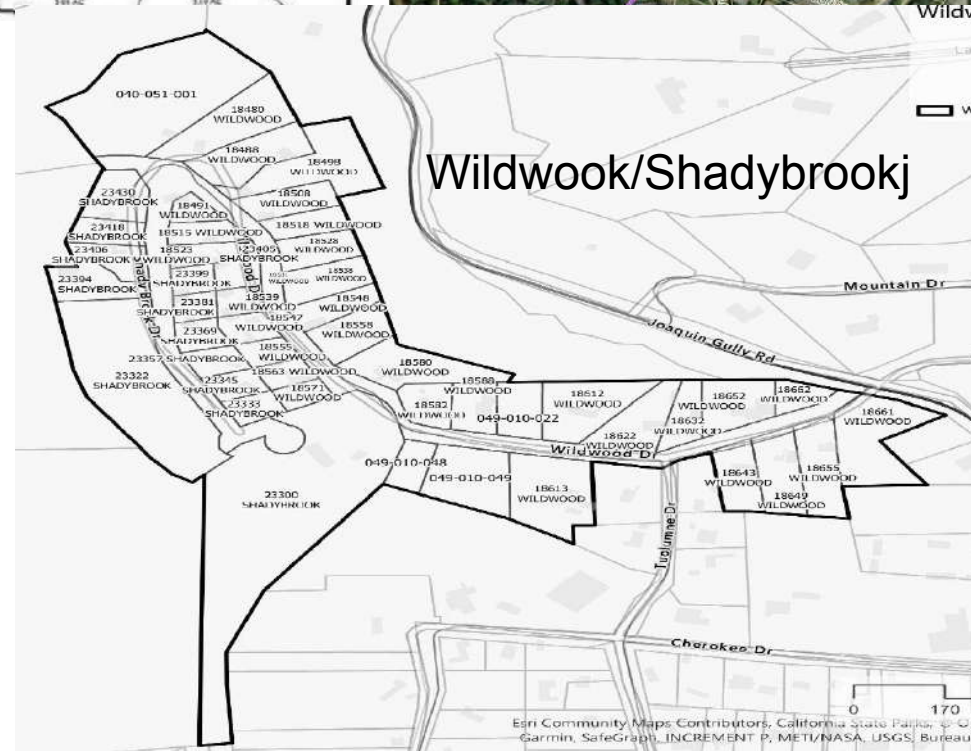
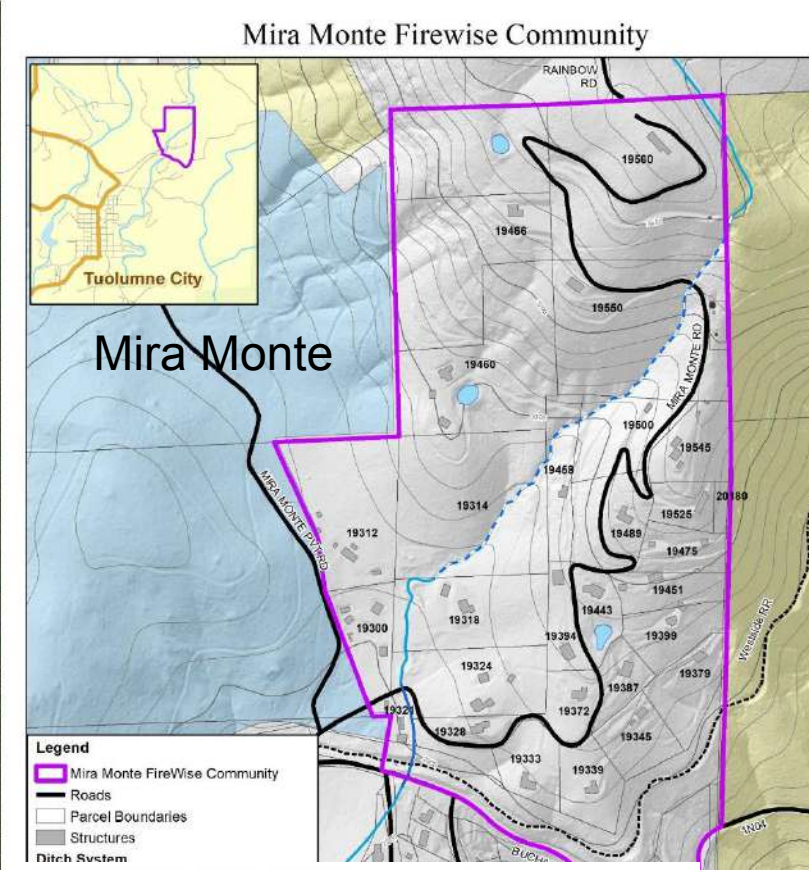
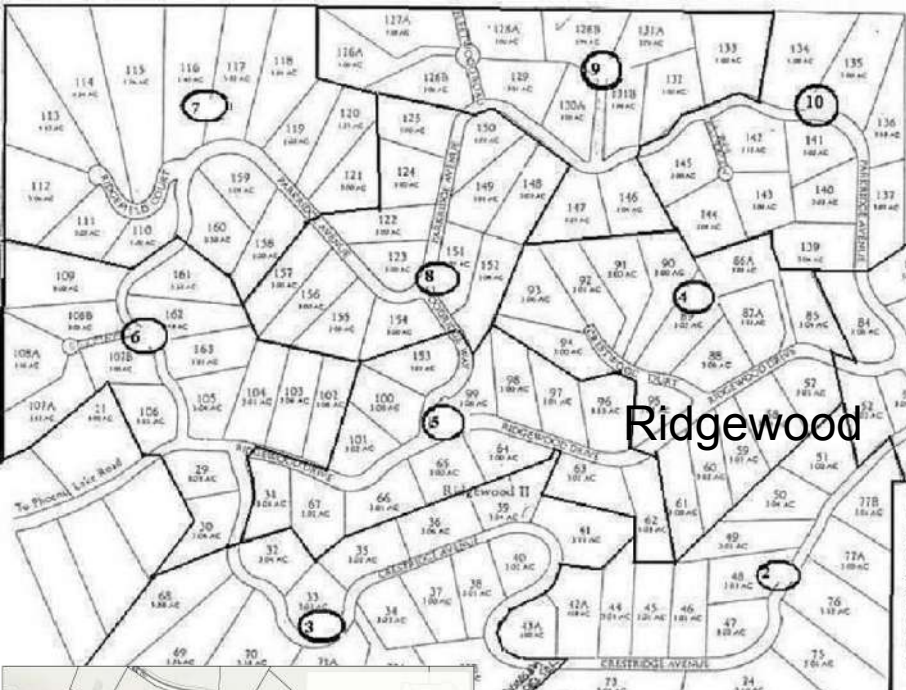
# 6

## RENEW IT

Participating sites must submit an annual renewal to maintain their "Good Standing" status. Part of being a Firewise USA site is reporting the ongoing work residents complete each year to reduce wildfire risks.



**Big is not  
always  
better.....**



# Risk Assessment vs CA PRC 4291 enforcement

**PRC 4291 is the law requiring annual defensible space** be provided around all structures in, upon, or adjoining any mountainous area, forest-covered lands, brush-covered lands, grass-covered lands, or any land that is covered with flammable material.

**The Risk Assessment is a community-wide view** that identifies areas of successful wildfire risk reduction and areas where improvements could be made. Emphasis should be on the general conditions of homes and related home ignition zones.

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- Possible insurance discounts may be available if you live in a recognized Firewise USA site. Check with your provider to see if they participate.

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# Become a part of the solution!

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There are 24 recognized FIREWISE USA community sites in Tuolumne County and more are in progress.

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As of Aug 2025, there were 3,401 communities, across the country, in the Firewise USA program that were considered "In Good Standing".

There are over 1000 Firewise Communities in California that are in good standing. (Jan 2025)

# 2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Chipper Costs \$12,777
- Other Equipment Costs \$398,534
- Contractor Costs \$347,172
- Home Improvements \$948,698
- Grants none
- Vehicle Mileage \$1,855
- Landscaping \$145,986
- Miscellaneous \$18,688
- **Hrs. Worked Calculation \$1,145,760**

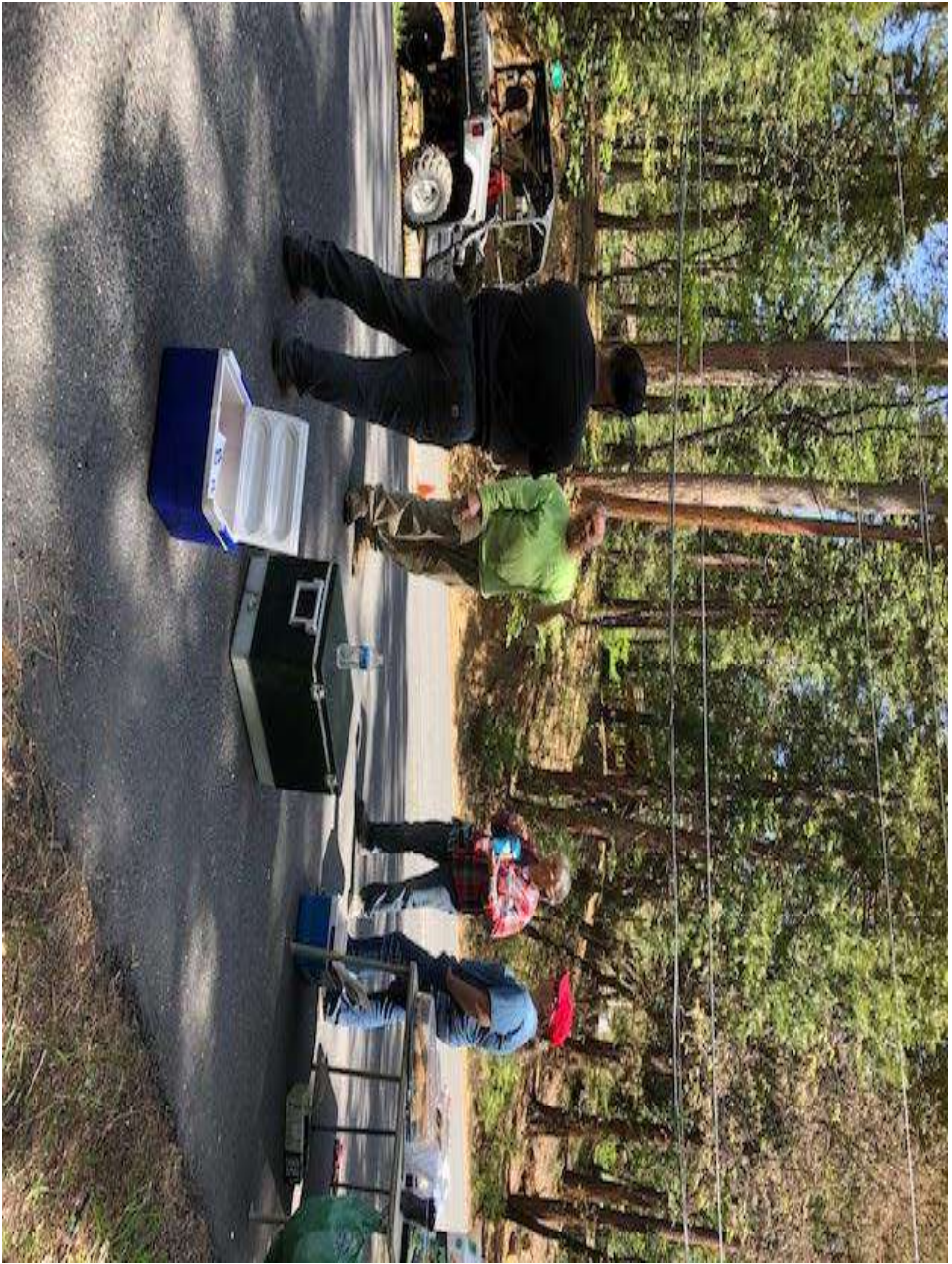
**Total Risk Reduction Investment  
for 2025 = \$2,662,869**

**Total Cubic Yards of Vegetation  
Removed: 11,660.01 cu. Yds.**

**4 New Firewise Communities added in 2025**









**GET  
FIRESAFE**

**Communities  
coming together to  
meet the challenge  
of wildfire.**

**Get Started!**

**Be a part of the  
solution!**



**Together we can  
make a  
Difference**

**STRENGTH IN  
NUMBERS**

**Become  
a Firewise  
Community**

**MAKING YOUR  
NEIGHBORHOOD SAFE FROM  
WILDFIRE**