



Firewise and Firescape: Protect Your Property

The Wildland Urban Interface in Kittitas County, with its wide range of topographic and geographic landscapes, hot summer weather and recreational features, is a destination area for outdoor enthusiasts, tourists, and county citizens who enjoy the panoramic views, wildlife and recreational activities that are abundant throughout this area. Many residents and tourists who appreciate and enjoy the beauty of these areas eventually purchase property and build residences in the wildland urban interface.

Most of Kittitas County, however, is considered an extreme or high hazard fire area, based on weather, fuel moisture content, topography, vegetation, slope, aspect and access to properties. Most of Kittitas County is outside of

a fire district, which means that those homes are without fire protection. The Department of Natural Resources and the US Forest Service do provide wildland fire protection in these areas, however their function is to prevent and extinguish wildland fires, not protect residential structures from fire damage. Additionally, the majority of fire districts that provide services to the wildland urban interface areas are primarily volunteer departments. As such, property owners in these areas should realize that response times are not what you would expect if you lived in an urban area. It is up to you as the homeowner to ensure that you are prepared to protect your property and lives in the event of a wildfire. Your ability to live more safely in these potential fire environments depends on pre-fire planning and activities.



This Morgan Creek property owner utilized the natural rocky ground as part of their firescaping. They cleared the southern slope of trees, allowing approximately 200' clear zone as defensible space. Other mitigations were non-combustible exterior siding, Class A roof system and a large parking area on the northeast side of the property.

PRE-FIRE PLANNING SHOULD START AS SOON AS YOU FIRST VIEW YOUR NEW PROPERTY.

What is the aspect of the property? While a northwest aspect provides stunning views, it may not be a great location to build a residence in Kittitas County, as the wind blows from the northwest during the hot, dry summer months, and could put your new home in the path of a wildfire.

What percentage of slope is on the property and on adjacent properties? Remember, fire runs uphill and backs downhill; the greater the slope, the faster the potential of the fire travel, and the greater the chance that emergency responders will be delayed. A property at or near the top of a hill is at greater risk than one at the base of the hill.

What type of vegetation surrounds your property? The types of fuels present can greatly affect wildfire movement. Properties with heavy fuel loads will need significant work to increase your home's ability to survive a wildfire.

How to determine your defensible space:

1. Find the percent slope that best describes your property at the top of the chart.
2. Identify the type of vegetation that best describes the plants growing on or adjacent to your property.
3. Locate the number of feet shown in the appropriate box for your slope and vegetation type.

The distance shown is the recommended defensible space for your property.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE			
SLOPE	0-20	21-40	40+
GRASS Wildland grasses, weeds, desert scrub and widely scattered shrubs with grass understory. Typically found between 1200 and 4500 feet elevation.	30 ft	100 ft	100 ft
SHRUBS Ladder fuels such as reforested areas with juvenile tree growth, or dense shrubbery. Typically found between 3000 and 5000 feet elevation.	100 ft	200 ft	200 ft
TREES Forested areas such as mixed conifer and ponderosa pine. Typically found between 5000 and 8000 feet elevation. If vegetation type is widely spaced and substantial grass or shrub understory is present, use appropriate vegetation type above.	50 ft	100 ft	200 ft

Defensible space is an area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards the structure. It also reduces the chance of a structure fire moving from the building to the surrounding forest.

Your house is more likely to withstand a wildfire if grasses, brush, trees and other common forest fuels are managed to reduce a fire's intensity. Defensible space provides room for firefighters to do their jobs.

Creating and maintaining defensible space around your home is one of the most important and effective steps you can take to protect you, your family and your home from wildfire. All vegetation is potential fuel for fire. Plant choice, spacing and maintenance are critical; where and how you plant can be more important than what species you use, although fire resistant plants are a smart choice for those living in the Wildland Urban Interface areas within Kittitas County.



Colockum area outbuilding provides a 50' defensible space around the structure. Trees are limbed up 8'-10' and are spaced a minimum of 10' apart. Ground fuels have been eliminated or reduced.

Fuels Reduction—Quality of Defensible Space

The quality of your defensible space is directly related to the types and amounts of fuels on and surrounding your property. Reducing the fuels around your property is a key component of fire-scaping, and in conjunction with providing adequate defensible space, may allow your property to survive in the event of a wildfire. To reduce fire intensity, adequate spacing needs to be provided in the vegetation.

The recommended practice is to thin vegetation to provide adequate spacing between the plants. Removal of ladder fuels is key when thinning vegetation. By removing potential fuels sources you are reducing the intensity of the fire.

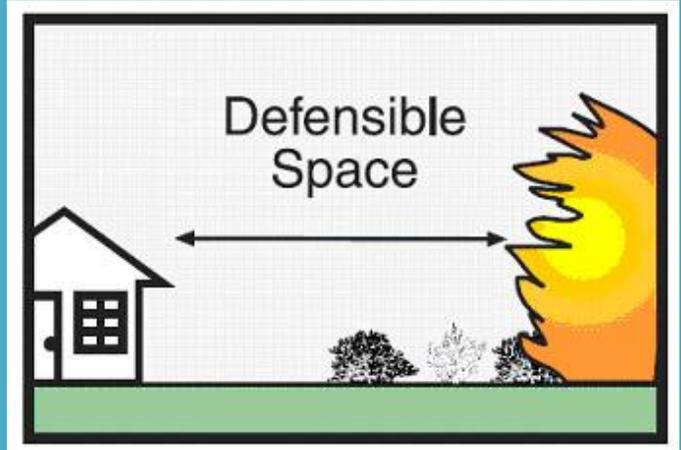
Inadequate Defensible Space



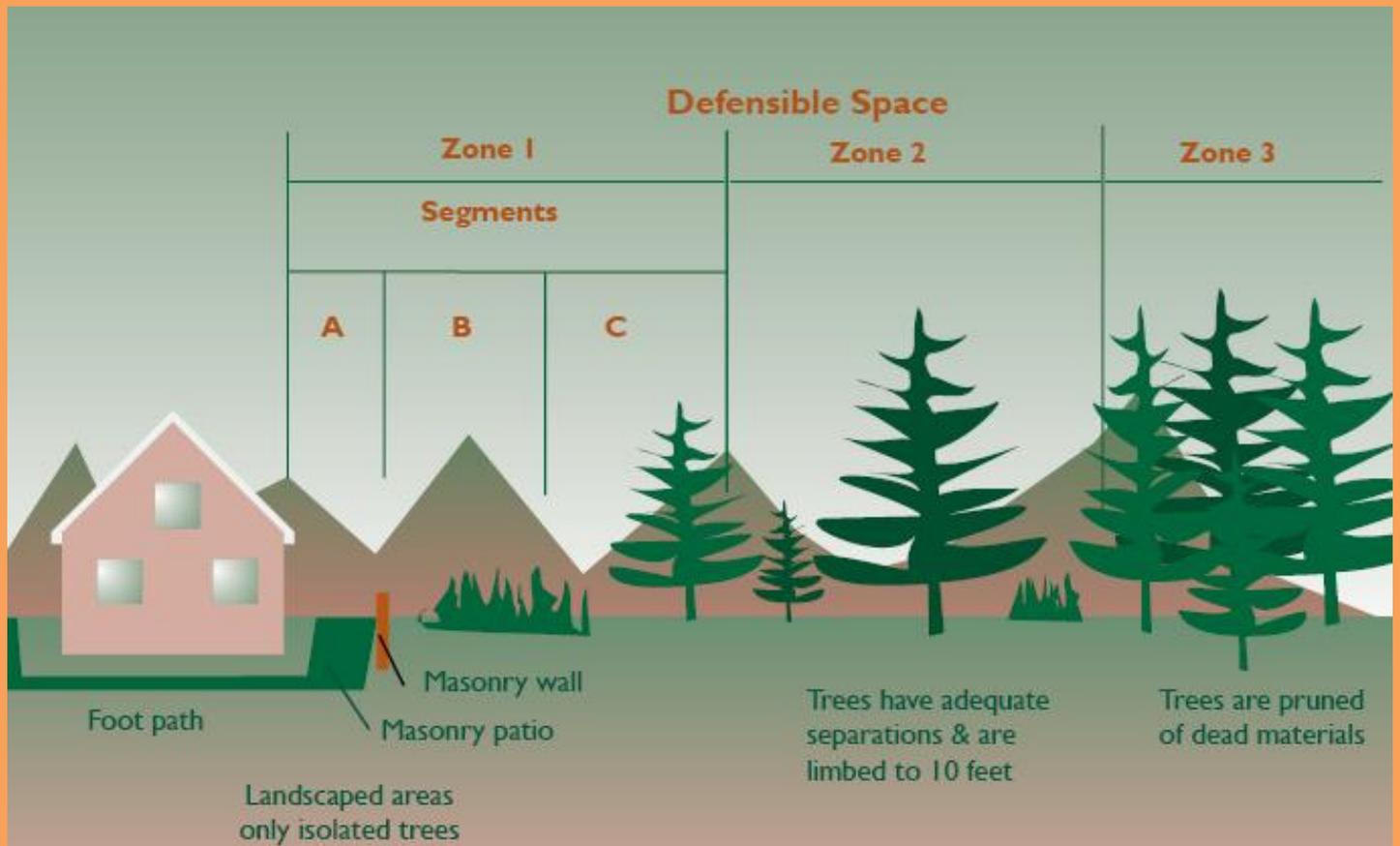
Note the combustible siding, brush ladder fuels, trees and ground fuels surrounding these homes. Removal of these fuels is critical for wildfire survival!

Two factors have emerged as the primary determinants of a homes' ability to survive a wildfire:

- 1. The home's roofing/building materials, and*
- 2. The quality of the defensible space surrounding it.*



Defensible Space Zone Designations



Zone 1-A—This area is directly adjacent to the building(s) and extends out 10'-15' from the outer edge of the building eaves. The landscaping should contain mostly noncombustible surfaces. Any vegetation in this area should consist of flowers, low growing deciduous shrubs and should be well trimmed and irrigated. Ground cover should be of flower beds and cut grass.

Zone 1-B—This area can have more landscaping and less man-made surfaces. Vegetation should be deciduous, and the native grasses should be trimmed to a maximum height of 6 inches tall.

Zone 1-C—This area should change from introduced deciduous trees to the natural vegetation found in the area, including evergreens.

These trees should still be maintained 10' apart (limb to limb) and trimmed to 10' above the ground.

Zone 2—All limbs must be pruned to 10' of the ground, and trim the trees to maintain a minimum of 10' between limbs. No groves or stands of trees should be located in this area. Thin the inner portions of Zone 2 more heavily than the outer portions. Gradually increase tree density as you approach Zone 3. Isolated shrubs may remain, provided they are not under tree crowns. Prune and maintain these plants periodically to maintain vigorous growth. Trim and remove dead material from natural vegetation and the ground.

Zone 3—Vegetation management is much less intense. Trees only need to be pruned to 4'-5' above the ground. Dead material should be removed from natural vegetation and the ground.

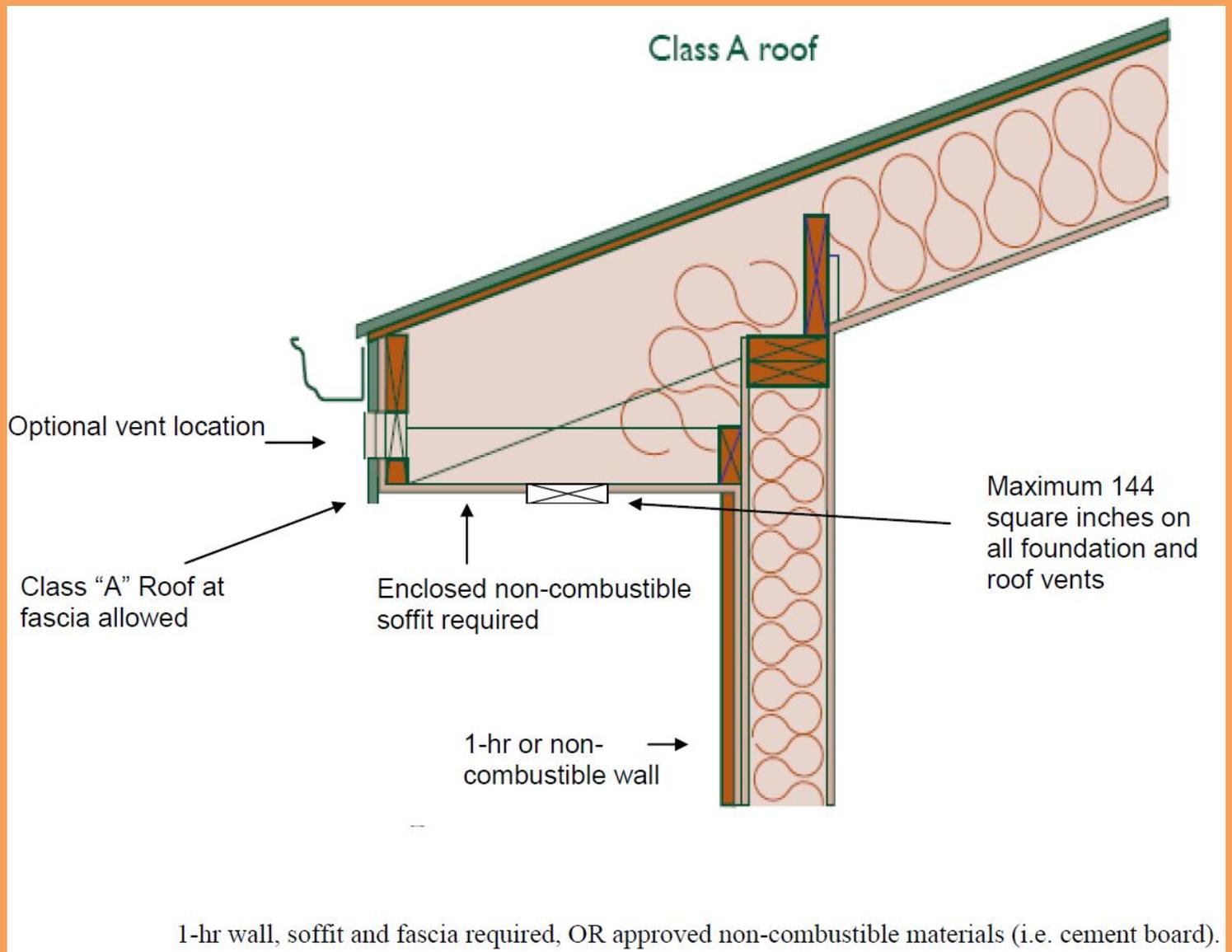
Personal Responsibility when Building in the Wildland Urban Interface

It is up to **you**, the property owner, to ensure that any structure you build within the Wildland Urban Interface will not propagate fire into the wildland, nor will it provide additional fuel in the event of a wildland fire. Building materials, in conjunction with appropriate defensible space and firescape landscaping can ensure that your property is not impacted in the event of a fire.

According to the International Code Council, Wildland Urban Interface Code, the best building practices for homes in these areas are to provide non-combustible exterior siding and Class A roof systems. Non-combustible siding includes fiber-cement board (Hardi-siding), stucco, brick, UL approved aluminum siding over 5/8" fire-rated gypsum board, concrete block and heavy timber/log home construction.

A spark arrestor should be installed on any new or replaced chimney.

The diagram below further explains additional actions homeowners can take to provide fewer ignition points on their homes in wildland areas.



Firescaping and Firewise-Planting with Fire in Mind

The concept of firescaping revolves around landscaping your property with appropriate fire resistant plants, natural borders such as rock outcroppings, and maintaining your property to reduce the threat of a wildfire. Firescaping and Firewise concepts go hand-in-hand when preparing your property and/or building your home.

While you are planning your defensible space, consider the plants and natural or man-made barriers you would like to use to provide additional safety measures for your property. Creating and maintaining defensible space around your home is critical in protecting you, your family and your residence from wildfire. All vegetation is a potential fuel for fire, which is why it is so important to consider fire resistant plants as a component of your firescape. Plant choice, spacing and maintenance are critical; where and how you plant can be just as important as the

species you use. Some important things to remember about plants are:

- Moisture content is the most important factor influencing flammability of vegetation.
- Deciduous plants tend to be more fire resistant, because the leaves have higher moisture content.
- Plants with high resin content tend to be most readily flammable. Many native plants in arid environments, such as juniper, fir, douglas and pine, are resinous, and as such should not be planted in Zones 1 or 2.
- Salt tolerant plants show natural fire resistance, with the exception of saltcedar.
- Isolated or small groupings of trees or shrubs are best. Treat groups as individual vegetation units.

The following list of plants are native to or endemic in Kittitas County, are mostly drought resistant as well as fire resistant, and will likely flourish once they are established (with low maintenance required.) No plant is “fireproof” however by landscaping with fire resistant plants you are decreasing the likelihood of a fire propagating onto or from your property.

Creeping Thyme is often used as a border plant and/or ground cover around gardens and stone paths. It may also be used to replace a bluegrass lawn to xeriscape low to moderate foot traffic areas due to its tolerance for low water and poor soils.

Creeping Thyme



This species is a low maintenance, spreading plant, comprised of dark evergreen leaves, and bears blue flowers in mid-spring to early summer. This is an excellent groundcover and is drought tolerant.

Carpet Bugleweed



This species forms a low mat of succulent, evergreen leaves, bearing loads of small starry yellow flowers in late spring. This is a great choice for hot, dry areas, and is an excellent groundcover or lawn substitute. The Ice Plant comes in a variety of colors.

Yellow Ice Plant



Snow-in-summer plants prefer sun and thrive in well-drained, poor soil. These perennial flowers are drought-tolerant and bloom profusely in the early summer. They are a creeping plant that spreads through runners and may spread fairly quickly.

Snow-In-Summer



This species is a rapidly spreading perennial. Creeping Phlox grows to no more than 6 inches in height. The foliage is soft, needle-like, and remains lush spring through fall. The flowers emerge in April and May and are quite brilliant. This plant looks great growing over rocks and is drought tolerant. Creeping Phlox comes in a variety of colors to suit many different landscaping needs.

Creeping Phlox



Wild strawberries are a creeping plant that spread through runners (stems that spread outward through the soil). The fruit, while smaller than store-bought produce, is edible and quite tasty to humans as well as wildlife. If you want to encourage wildlife onto your property, this is one way to do so. This plant can be planted in your yard for color, but is not very drought tolerant, so watering should be considered.

Wild Strawberry



Yarrow is a drought tolerant plant that does best in dry, sunny areas. It is a medicinal herb and enhances the essential oil content of nearby plants. Yarrow is an excellent plant for xeriscaped properties and grows between 10" and 20" high. Be sure to plant in well-drained soil, as it may suffer from mildew or rot if the soil is too wet.

Yarrow



Sun rose plants like hot, sunny areas, and they prefer dry rock gardens or rocky soil. The leaves on many varieties are silvery-gray, with a frosty appearance.

Sun roses are excellent additions to xeriscape gardens due to their drought tolerance.



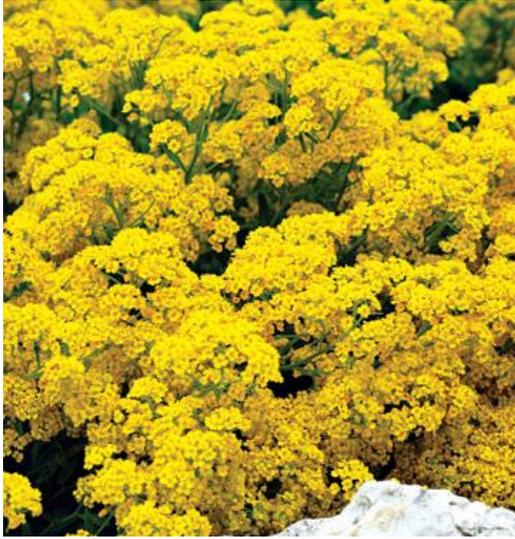
Prized for its dependable nature and colorful, daisy-like flowers, coreopsis has a long bloom period and is generally trouble-free and easy to grow. Coreopsis is an easy care and low maintenance plant which tolerates dry soil and full sun exposure.



Red Hot Poker plants lend attention-getting color and shape to any garden. Drought- and heat-tolerant, they are easy to grow and maintain, even in environments where other plants wilt. These plants can grow between 2' and 5' in height and produce long, thin leaves and tubular spikes.



Basket-of-gold is one of those plants that love to grow in the least likely of place -- cracks between paving stones, the edge of gravel paths and patios, rocky outcroppings, between the stacked stones of a retaining wall, and more. It loves a baked spot with excellent drainage, is drought tolerant and deer resistant. It grows between 6"-15" in height.



Native to Washington, the Sunflower is a tall, sun-loving plant that once established will thrive without supplemental irrigation in all but the hottest, driest climates of inland Washington. Harvest the sunflower seeds for snacking or leave the seeds on the plant for hungry birds. Sunflowers do require slightly higher maintenance, as the dry stalks need to be removed after blooming.



Serviceberry blooms in the spring and produces white flowers in small clusters that are quite showy, especially in ecotypes native in eastern Washington. Foliage is dull green during the growing season and browsed upon by deer, elk, and moose. Fall colors including red, orange, bronze, and yellow are often seen with this shrub. Once established, low maintenance is necessary.



Plant California poppies and you'll have colorful blooms from early summer until the first frost. A perfect choice for a low water garden, California poppies can survive with only an occasional watering during extended dry periods in Eastern Washington. Although California poppies are annuals, the flowers will often reseed themselves.



Purple coneflower requires well-drained soil and full sunlight, although the plant will benefit from afternoon shade in the hotter climates of Eastern Washington. This perennial will benefit from an inch of water every week during the dry season, and is part of the Echinacea family, with medicinal value found in the root system.



Native to the Pacific Northwest, Columbine is a perennial early summer bloomer available in colors ranging from pastels pink or lavender to bold purple or red. Columbine does well in well-drained soils, on rocky ledges and is drought tolerant. Plant in full sun to partial shade for best results.



**INVASIVE AND/OR HIGH FIRE HAZARD PLANTS
--NOT RECOMMENDED FOR FIRESCAPING**

Acacia; pampas grass; gorse; juniper; eucalyptus;
all conifers, including pines, cypress, Douglas fir, spruce,
cedar, hemlock; pepper tree; bamboo; palms; periwinkle (*Vinca*);
Algerian, English, or German ivy; French, Spanish, or Scotch broom.

Read more: [The Best Plants for a Low Water Garden in Washington | Garden Guides](http://www.gardenguides.com/122178-plants-low-water-garden-washington.html#ixzz1rZSSwm00)
<http://www.gardenguides.com/122178-plants-low-water-garden-washington.html#ixzz1rZSSwm00>

REMEMBER!!

- **Wildfire will find the weakest links in any defensive measures you have taken on your property.**
- **Even small steps to protect your home and property will make them more able to withstand fire.**
- **Consider all these measures for the entirety of your property, not just the immediate vicinity of the house.**