

Project Wildfire Toolkit

Alison Green—Project Wildfire Program Director



PARTNERSHIPS IN MITIGATION

MITIGATION

This toolkit was made possible through an agreement with the CDC Foundation with financial support provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

A big thank you to all partners in our community and Deschutes County. Our toolkit would not have been possible without their support.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
The Need for Project Wildfire	3
Awbrey Hall.....	3
The Skeleton Fire	4
Fire Free was Born.....	5
Early Project Wildfire.....	6
Project Wildfire	7
The Framework	7
Measuring Success	9
Project Wildfire Checklist.....	11
Appendix A - County Ordinance.....	13
Appendix B - Examples of Marketing Materials.....	16
Appendix C - Sample Press Release.....	17
Figure 1 - Graph of Yards Collected.....	20
Figure 2 - Large Fire History Map.....	21
Figure 3 - CWPP Districts in Deschutes County.....	22

Executive Summary

Project Wildfire is a preparedness outreach program that addresses the threat of wildland fire. When creating a program whose aim is to change the culture of wildfire preparedness in a community, there are several factors that must be in place.

The first and most important is that the community must recognize the need for change. Unfortunately, that need is often recognized only after a catastrophe has occurred. Prime examples were two large catastrophic wildfires in Central Oregon, the Awbrey Hall (1990) and Skeleton (1996) fires. Those fires were the impetus to create an educational program, such as Project Wildfire, that could be used to teach the community about wildfire preparedness and prevention.

Another key factor for a successful program is to engage the community grass roots stakeholders to ensure that those individuals and groups most likely to be directly affected by wildfire believe in the program. Without their support, lasting change is unlikely. Project Wildfire successfully engages and empowers the grass roots stakeholders, which results in a lasting cultural change. This was done through extensive outreach at any relevant function, media exposure and the formation of a steering committee.

Engaging and sustaining the support of elected officials is another critical piece in creating a preparedness program in the community. Project Wildfire has lasting support from both local and regional elected officials. The support from the elected officials led to the creation of a county ordinance that defines the collaborative group, the steering committee, that is unique to Project Wildfire. Securing the funding for the program can be aided by these relationships.

Project Wildfire has fostered and maintained collaboration between the private and public sectors. Without collaboration, the program would have ultimately failed. The stakeholders involved in Project Wildfire are able to set aside their personal agendas to work towards a better plan for community preparedness. By working together, the stakeholders identified the threat of wildfire as a common ground issue that needed their attention and action. Because the possibility of disaster became real to all involved, the program became stronger and more effective.

This toolkit outlines Project Wildfire's framework, history and successes. The main points of the program that make it successful are included. Project Wildfire is a preparedness outreach program that addresses the threat of wildland fire. However, the concepts that make Project Wildfire successful can be applied to any preparedness outreach program.



The Need for Project Wildfire

Wildfire is the predominant natural disaster Central Oregonians face. Many residents have chosen the area for its beautiful landscapes and outstanding recreational opportunities. Many residents have decided to live in forested areas, known as the wildland urban interface (WUI), where the threat of a large wildfire is always present. The residents live in a fire adaptive environment that historically experienced a wildland fire every three to ten years, which served to maintain landscape resilience and forest health (See Figure 2). However, wildfire exclusion efforts in the past and changes in active management of vegetation on public lands have created uncharacteristically large amounts of wildland fuel rather than maintaining the fire resilient landscape that is necessary for our environment. This large wildland fuel loading has created a significant hazard for the citizens and their property from large wildfires.

This means for those homeowners who have chosen to live in the WUI, the threat of catastrophic fire is very real. The need for education and prevention of large wildfires along with community preparedness is constant in Central Oregon. Before Project Wildfire, there were two such fires that brought this threat into the backyard of residents.

Awbrey Hall

Awbrey Hall was the first large catastrophic wildfire Central Oregon faced. An arsonist on the heavily populated west side on Bend ignited this fire on August 4, 1990. In just 10 short hours this fire grew to 3,500 acres. It jumped three major roads and the Deschutes River in that time. 3,000 people were evacuated even though many knew their home might not be there when they returned. Many homeowners tried to stay until the last



moment to defend their homes as they watched the flame front get closer to their backyards. Once officials evacuated the majority of the residents, the concern grew that the fire would reach people who were waiting to escape in their cars. Then firefighters caught a break; the wind shifted and turned this destructive fire away from its path. All the fire crews knew they had gotten lucky.

Awbrey Hall caused \$9 million in total damages, including suppression costs and insurance claims. All 22 of the homes lost were in the WUI and the homeowners that lived there were completely caught off guard. A wildland

fire was the last thing they considered moving into the forests of beautiful Central Oregon and most had not planned for it. After assessing the damage of Awbrey Hall, officials found that the majority of the homes that had fallen victim were severely lacking in their defensible space. Awbrey Hall marked the beginning of true collaboration between agencies to address wildfire preparedness. Even though Awbrey Hall rang in the back of homeowners' minds, most thought it couldn't happen again, fires like that only happen once in a lifetime. However, six years later, homeowners were about to face that threat again.

The Skeleton Fire

In August 1996 dry lightning ignited the Skeleton Fire on the east side of Bend. And, almost immediately Bend Fire Department sounded the call for the evacuation of homeowners that were in the fire's path. Flames were quickly moving west towards an even more populated area. Soon the fire grew to 17,000 acres and consumed 30 homes and outbuildings. In matter of hours it caused the evacuation of 450 homes and caused \$2 million worth of damage. Firefighters reported that they did not even have time to assess some homes. They just had to let them go and move on.



Many homeowners on the east side of Bend wanted to stay and defend their homes. Some even tried to sneak back in after they had been evacuated to protect their



homes from the advancing flame front. Most of them knew that if the fire reached their backyard, their home would not survive. The Skeleton Fire was driven solely by wind and many feared that the damage would be worse than Awbrey Hall. The Skeleton Fire was even more dynamic. Luckily, officials on the ground caught a break in the winds, once again that allowed for them to suppress the fire before any more damage could be done.

Both of these large fires had unimaginable losses and devastated the Central Oregon community. After looking at the destruction we know now that most of the homes that were lost did not have defensible space. Many of these homeowners appreciated the natural landscape and did not think it needed any improvement. A wildfire in their backyard was something that was never addressed as it is now. Mostly, the proactive steps that could be taken against large wildfires were not addressed. Fire suppression was largely a reactive culture that needed an

educational boost. These large wildfires in the WUI created the motivation for an outreach program unlike any other in Central Oregon.

Fire Free was Born

Once the losses had been tallied for the Skeleton Fire, a local insurance company saw the need Central Oregon had for funding. They offered to buy a new fire engine for Bend Fire Department. However, Gary Marshall, who was the Fire Marshal at Bend Fire, had a different idea. He suggested to the company that the money they would spend on a fire engine would be better served if used to launch a comprehensive education program and purchase educational materials instead. Gary believed that instead of purchasing a new engine that could only protect one home at a time during a large wildfire, why not develop a program that could protect thousands of homes. This program was intended to inform homeowners how to defend their homes by creating “defensible space,” a fire resistant space around a home that greatly reduces the spread of fire and allows firefighters a safer place to work. The premise of FireFree was first to change the behavior and over time, the attitudes and culture about wildfire preparedness. His proactive idea was the beginning of the FireFree program in Central Oregon and eventually the springboard for the development of Project Wildfire.



At FireFree’s core is a ten-step checklist that any homeowner can use to define defensible space around their home. Defensible space is defined as at least a 30-foot buffer zone of reduced vegetation around a home to mitigate the effects of advancing fire. This is something that a homeowner can accomplish in a weekend.

The ten steps are:

1. Define your defensible space.
2. Reduce flammable brush around your home and under nearby trees.
3. Prune or remove trees.
4. Keep grass and weeds cut low.
5. Clear woodpiles and building materials away from your home.
6. Keep your yard and roof clean.
7. Keep address signs visible.
8. Choose fire-resistant building materials and lawn furniture.
9. Recycle yard debris – avoid burning.
10. Be prepared to respond to wildfire.



Chief Marshall's innovative idea created a prevention program that was easy for every homeowner to follow. This new program had the ability to hold each individual responsible for his or her own space while still empowering the homeowner to defend their property by defining their defensible space. These steps are still at the core of both the FireFree program and Project Wildfire as a simple checklist for anyone who wants to take the necessary steps to protect their home against a large wildfire. The goal of FireFree was to empower the "spark plugs" (a dedicated community member) in each community and inspire the grass roots to move the program forward.

Early Project Wildfire

Project Wildfire was originally founded under the name of Project Impact. Initially, a grant from an insurance company and a federal Project Impact Grant funded the program. A county ordinance outlined the purpose and membership of a steering committee to include a balance between public and private entity representation. The initial funding allowed the program to purchase educational materials for FireFree. One of the early accomplishments of Project Impact was an evacuation route out of Deschutes River Woods, a large neighborhood which only had one way in and out. This neighborhood was no stranger to the threat of a large wildfire; they had been evacuated during Awbrey Hall. This was the first step the Central Oregon community took toward planning for a large wildfire before it was on their doorstep. It allowed for quick access to the main highway in the event of a wildfire in the heavily wooded and populated subdivision. This evacuation route is the first project that showed the power of true collaboration and what Project Impact (Wildfire) could accomplish. Program funding eventually ran out but the steering committee continued to meet to discuss the issues that the Wildland Urban Interface posed.

In 2004, Deschutes County developed a position for a county forester. Once hired, one of the most important conversations was the future of Project Impact and its relevance to the community. The steering committee agreed that this program was still necessary. The committee rebranded the program "Project Wildfire" and defined the single mission of the organization moving forward: to prevent catastrophic losses from wildfire.



The county forester became the chair of the Project Wildfire steering committee. The second order of business was the hiring of a director for the program. The steering committee agreed that the new director needed energy, grant writing skills, program management and facilitation experience. The new director became the main point of contact for Project Wildfire. With the county forester support and leadership, and a program director to handle the day-to-day business, Project Wildfire had a framework for moving forward with community preparedness.

Project Wildfire

The Framework

- ❖ The mission of Project Wildfire is to prevent deaths, injuries, property loss and environmental damage resulting from wildfires.
- ❖ Project Wildfire is able to achieve this mission by:
 - Developing long term wildfire prevention and education strategies designed to reach an ever-changing community.
- ❖ A county ordinance that defines the collaborative steering committee for Project Wildfire (Appendix A).
- ❖ The ordinance defined the committee as a balanced mix between private and public members.
 - The steering committee is designed to bridge the gap between the two spheres and foster collaboration.
- ❖ Sustaining political support for the program is vital.
- ❖ The strength lies in the diversity of the stakeholders.
 - Using Project Wildfire as the umbrella entity, each stakeholder feels connected to each of the successes.
- ❖ The Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)
 - Assessing and prioritizing the needs of each community is paramount to understanding and resolving community wildfire issues. Community Wildfire Protection Plans give each of the seven communities in Deschutes County an opportunity to collaboratively address the hazardous vegetation issues in each area and prioritize for mitigation treatments. Education and wildfire preparedness are top priorities in each CWPP. Project Wildfire updates and maintains seven out of the ten CWPP districts in Central Oregon. (See figure 3)
- ❖ Project Wildfire requires a consistent two-pronged leadership for success.
 - The 27-member steering committee is a 50-50 mix of public and agency members. This type of collaborative group, provided by county ordinance is unique to Project Wildfire. It provides a successful, visible example to the community to stimulate collaborative activities in wildfire preparedness. This collaboration is crucial in developing one overarching ideal that empowers individuals and communities to take proactive action toward protecting themselves and their property against catastrophic wildfires.

- The program director is also critical to achieving the mission. The steering committee members are volunteers, each with their own day jobs. A program director is the main point of contact, communication and facilitation for each of the program's activities and projects. With day-to-day business for the organization a priority now, the director is a necessary position.
- ❖ Project Wildfire has essential partnerships that must be maintained to keep the program relevant and educational messages alive in the community.
 - A good standing relationship with elected officials.
 - A close working relationship with the Deschutes County Forester.
 - Partnerships within homeowner associations in the community and with the individual homeowners must be cultivated and maintained.
- ❖ Marketing has made Project Wildfire a household name in Central Oregon and is an irreplaceable asset to the program (See Appendix B).
 - One of the main successes of Project Wildfire's media is capitalizing on any relevant success stories and teachable moments (See Appendix C).
 - Keeping Project Wildfire in the media is an assured way to keep the program relevant and messages alive in the community.
 - Social media has become another important piece for Project Wildfire communications. With populations accessing information regularly online, an updated web and social media presence keeps the public connected in an easy, cost effective way.
- ❖ Project Wildfire's strength lies in its ability to empower the grass roots efforts in the community. This is a critical piece to create lasting cultural change.
 - Provide outreach at as many homeowner and community meetings and conferences as possible.
 - Be sure to involve interested stakeholders and foster collaboration within communities to reach goals.
 - Have a common, consistent definition for defensible space. This has been achieved with Senate Bill 360 (Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act of 1997) in Oregon.
- ❖ Project Wildfire's sustainability is based on a few simple items.
 - The largest threat to Project Wildfire is the ability to maintain sustainable funding. It is absolutely necessary to seek out any grant opportunity and community assistance available to the program.
 - Promoting programs that empower homeowners to treat hazardous fuels on their property that are cost effective to Project Wildfire.
 - Utilizing fund matching programs for communities that have larger projects that they are unable to fund or complete on their own.

Measuring Success

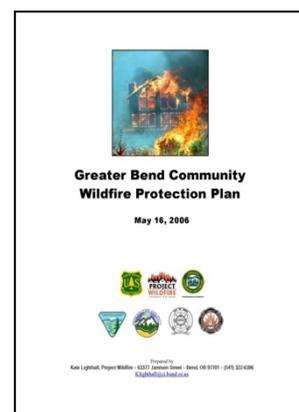
Project Wildfire is designed to change the community's approach to disaster preparedness and wildfire prevention. The program advocates a proactive approach by the homeowner to defend their property. Its goal is to change the culture by empowering the grass roots to defend themselves against large wildfires in their community. Trying to measure whether or not the culture can be changed is done by studying the behaviors of the public that Project Wildfire serves.



When Project Wildfire first began, Deschutes County did not have any neighborhoods recognized by the Firewise program. Firewise is a national recognition program that highlights neighborhoods that have taken steps toward disaster preparedness regarding wildfire. These are communities who have acknowledged the threat of large wildfires and have taken the necessary steps to mitigate that threat. Most have evacuation routes in place; their defensible space defined and plans to mitigate any hazards that are still present in their community. In fifteen years, Firewise has recognized 25 communities in Deschutes County.

The continuing support of local and regional elected officials has been fundamental in Project Wildfire's success. A prime example of this support is shown in a piece of legislation, Senate Bill 360. This bill lends a common definition of defensible space in the state of Oregon. The backing from elected officials not only supports Project Wildfire but it also empowers the individual homeowner. With legislation similar to Senate Bill 360 it allows for an individual to define their defensible space and encourage their neighbors do the same. Another example of support provided by the elected officials is the creation of a county ordinance (see Appendix A) that defines the Project Wildfire's steering committee. This ordinance outlines the membership for emergency officials, private citizens, fire district members and private industry members. This mix provides a steadfast collaborative group that creates a strong backbone for Project Wildfire.

The Community Wildfire Protection Plans developed in Deschutes County speaks to a culture that is focused on preparedness. These plans help communities identify the hazards unique to their neighborhoods and plan for the future. None of the seven CWPP's in Deschutes County is older than five years. This fact highlights that these communities are not only recognizing the threat but they are continuing to maintain their preparedness and reassess their hazards frequently. Another statistic that emphasizes the preventative culture in Deschutes County, there has not been a home lost to wildfire since 2003.





Project Wildfire's success can also be measured in cost. One success story focuses on this point more than most. The Burgess Road Fire was ignited by a downed power line during a wind event in early May 2013. Normally the fire season in Central Oregon does not begin until at least mid-June. Resources were spread thin since the seasonal firefighters had not yet begun their season. This fire grew to 168 acres in an afternoon. A few years ago, Deschutes

County and Project Wildfire had previously treated the area that the fire burned into with funding from a federal grant. This treated area slowed the fire enough that firefighters were able to successfully suppress the fire before it caused damage to property or life. If the land had not been treated, the fire would have been much larger and more costly with the winds that were present that day. The Burgess Road Fire burned near a small town in South Deschutes County and the cost of damages to structures could have been high. By treating the landscape to develop a more fire resilient environment, the suppression costs were reduced.

Project Wildfire plans and implements two community clean up events. The FireFree days occur every year in the spring and the fall. The spring days are completely free for residents to drop off yard debris at landfills throughout Deschutes County. The fall days are half-priced days at the main landfill for Deschutes County. On a ten-year average the FireFree days have collected 28,830 cubic yards of debris. The total amount of yard debris collected during FireFree events since 1999 is 475,493 cubic yards (See Figure 1). The public has come to expect these FireFree events. The events are an easy and cost effective way for homeowners to create and maintain their defensible space.



Project Wildfire Checklist

There are a few key elements that make Project Wildfire successful. The program is designed to be a proactive outreach program that inspires the grass roots in the community to take responsibility for their own preparedness and prevention.

Bring the right people to the table

- Engaging the correct people in the community who want to see the change and have the ability to implement change.
- Maintaining and fostering new relationships are crucial to creating a lasting program.
- Invite a variety of stakeholders to participate in the program. Engage everyone from the elected officials, government officials and the private citizens.
- Capitalize on events that highlight the need in the community for the program and use the event as a catalyst for bringing the right people to the table.

Sustaining support from local and regional elected officials

- With the support from elected officials the program will have the backing it will need to reach the grass roots
- These will be the people who can implement change in the community
- The program will have to be adaptable to changes in the political leadership locally and regionally.
- Make sure the mission of the program is conveyed as a relevant point to the political partners in the community. Once they understand the need, they can help implement policy that creates lasting change in the community.

Foster Collaboration

- Create a collaborative panel where preparedness issues can be addressed by both public and agency representatives. Project Wildfire uses a steering committee.
- Invite members who are able to set aside their personal agendas to address the issues the program faces. Create an environment where the stakeholders feel able to collaborate and discuss any preparedness issues.

Hire a program director

- This needs to be someone who handles the communication and facilitation of the program
- They handle the day-to-day business and act as the main point of contact for the program.
- They must share the passion for the mission.

Engage the grass roots

- These are the boots on the ground that gets the work done.
- With the support from dedicated community spark plugs the program will have the footing it needs to create a lasting cultural change.

- Make sure the resources that are handed to the grass roots empower them. Teach them how to prepare themselves for a disaster, don't do it for them.
- When engaging the grass roots, meet on their terms. Know the audience and context of each community.

Get the media involved

- For the program to create a lasting cultural change, it must first become a household name. Make sure each success story or event is in the media. It keeps the program relevant to the community.
- Media for the program also keeps the stakeholders involved. With each success they feel connected to the program they have helped create.

Funding

- Aggressively seek out any funding option for the program.
- Make sure there is a plan for the funding previous to receiving it. This will make the program marketable and organized for potential funding.
- Use cost effective projects that are effective in mitigating hazards for communities, i.e. matching programs, sweat equity programs.

Create a written strategy

- Create a road map of the behaviors the program aims to change.
- Project Wildfire uses a program of work. This outline is revisited annually to provide guidance for the program director.
- Identify the needs of the program and prioritize them to steer the program in an effective and successful direction.
- Focus on concrete projects that can be measured and celebrated.

Celebrate success

- Highlight successes in the media. This will keep the message relevant and in the forefront of everyone's mind.
- Project Wildfire hosts an annual celebration for all the stakeholders that make the program possible.
- Celebrating and recognizing the grass roots and partners that make the program a success is significant to the program's survival.

Plan for the Future

- Preparedness is a continuous process. Maintaining the programs goals and preventative actions throughout the community are a must.
- Reevaluate the program's goals bi-annually to sustain the relevance of the mission.
- A program director can help with the sustainability of the program. Make sure to keep the program relevant to the community. Use a variety of tactics to maintain a relevant message.



Appendix A:

Chapter 8.24. PROJECT WILDFIRE STEERING COMMITTEE

- 8.24.010. Formation.**
- 8.24.020. Membership and expenses.**
- 8.24.030. Election of chair and vice chair.**
- 8.24.040. Quorum.**
- 8.24.050. Meeting schedule.**
- 8.24.050. Powers and duties.**
- 8.24.070. Advisory role.**

8.24.010. Formation.

A steering committee is hereby formed to coordinate, develop and implement strategies to mitigate the effects of losses due to wildfires that strike Deschutes County. The committee shall be called the Project Wildfire Steering Committee and shall serve as a local coordination group for Deschutes County.

(Ord. 2003-032 § 1, 2003; Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.020. Membership and expenses.

The committee shall be composed of 15 to 27 members who reside or represent agencies within Deschutes County. All members shall be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. The terms of the members shall be four years, commencing on January 1, of an even numbered year. Appointments shall be on a calendar basis. Not more than one-half of all appointments shall expire in any odd numbered calendar year.

- A. Committee members shall be representative of the entire County and shall ensure that a single agency or entity only has one representative. As closely as possible, members shall be made up of the following persons, groups or entities:
 - 1. A member from the insurance industry.
 - 2. A member from the business community.
 - 3. A member from the marketing/ communications industry.
 - 4. The County Forester.
 - 5. At least two representatives of Homeowners Associations.
 - 6. At least four representatives chosen from Fire Departments and/or Rural Fire Protection Districts in Deschutes County.
 - 7. A County Commissioner.
 - 8. A representative from the 9-1-1 County Service District.
 - 9. A representative from the County Community Development Department
 - 10. A representative of the private forestry community.
 - 11. A representative from the Sheriff's Office emergency management program.
 - 12. Up to an additional three at-large members.
- B. In addition to the members allowed under A. above, the Board may appoint additional representatives from:
 - 1. A representative of the Oregon Department of Forestry.
 - 2. A representative of the U.S. Forest Service.
 - 3. A representative of the Bureau of Land Management.
 - 4. A representative of the Oregon State University Extension District.

- 5. A representative from Central Oregon Community College.
 - 6. A representative from the environmental community.
- C. Committee members shall receive no compensation, but shall be reimbursed for authorized expenses.
- D. A member of the committee may be removed by the Board of County Commissioners for misconduct, nonperformance of duty, or three successive unexcused absences from a regularly scheduled meeting.
- E. Vacancies in the committee shall be filled by an appointment by the Board of County Commissioners for the unexpired term of the predecessor in the office.
- F. The membership of the committee shall, as much as possible be representative of the various geographical parts of Deschutes County.
(Ord. 2003-032 § 1, 2003; Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.030. Election of chair and vice chair.

At its first meeting in January of each year, the committee shall elect from among its membership a chair and a vice chair. No person shall be chair for more than two years in succession.
(Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.040. Quorum.

A majority of the members of the committee shall constitute a quorum. The committee may establish rules, regulations, and procedures for its operation consistent with the laws of the state and Deschutes County.
(Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.050. Meeting schedule.

The committee shall have regularly scheduled meetings at least once every 3 months.
(Ord. 2003-032 § 1, 2003; Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.060. Powers and duties.

The committee shall have the following duties:

- A. To reduce potential loss of life and property through natural and man-caused disasters by enhancing public awareness, expanding community partnerships and prioritizing potential hazard mitigation projects, using stakeholder and citizen input. This shall be accomplished by working to coordinate activities with and between other public and private groups, entities and persons to plan for and implement both wildfire and other natural hazard mitigation plans and actions as efficiently as possible.
- B. Advise the Board of County Commissioners, Project Wildfire staff and the Deschutes County Office of Emergency Management and other agencies and programs on adoption and implementation of wildfire mitigation and other natural hazard projects, including but not limited to Hazard Mitigation programs approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
(Ord. 2003-032 § 1, 2003; Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

8.24.070. Advisory role.

The committee may:

- A. Recommend and make suggestions to persons, groups, and entities concerning disaster response plans, needed changes in state or local laws and regulations, and provide assistance to such persons, groups, and entities to implement such suggestions.
- B. Recommend to public authorities standards for regulating the future growth and development within Deschutes County and its incorporated cities to address disaster-planning issues in each jurisdiction.
- C. Perform such other review and make whatever other recommendations on disaster planning matters as may be appropriate or may be requested by the Board of County Commissioners or any city council, person, group or entity.
(Ord. 2000-005 § 1, 2000)

Appendix B:

These photos below are example of marketing products that are available to the community.



www.projectwildfire.org

www.firefree.org

Appendix C:

July 25th, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: **Alison Green, Program Director**
Project Wildfire
541-419-1116

Success Out of the Ashes of the Stagecoach Fire

Monday's wildfire south of La Pine has provided a frightening, yet positive example of why creating and maintaining your home's defensible space is so imperative to protecting your home and property.

With especially dry and hot conditions in the recent weeks across Central Oregon, the potential for large wildfires is increasing daily. With the incredibly dry fine fuels, which are normally the fuels that aide in the spread of wildfire, the possibility of a small campfire growing to large wildfire is entirely possible. The Stagecoach Fire is living proof of the current fire danger in Central Oregon.

The Stagecoach Fire was ignited Monday when a campfire was left unattended by a couple living illegally on BLM land. The fire moved so quickly that shortly after it ignited at 3:30 pm, it prompted the evacuation of two neighborhoods in its path. While firefighters are still working towards 100% containment of this 330 acre fire, success stories of defensible space are already emerging.



Defensible Space around the cabin

Deschutes County Commissioner, Tony DeBone, has family members that live in one of the communities that was evacuated. For the last decade, they have implemented and maintained defensible space around their home and all outbuildings on their property. Their commitment to defensible space around the family cabin saved their favorite family retreat.

They watched the Stagecoach Fire come right up to their back doorstep and had accepted that their favorite family cabin had probably been sacrificed to the fire. After the evacuation order had been lifted, they returned to their home and assessed the damage. Much to their surprise and appreciation they found their cabin fully intact, along with about a 30-foot perimeter that had not burned. Commissioner DeBone chalks this up to their defensible space.



Where the fire stopped near the cabin

In the spring months prior to this fire season, the family had taken the time to thin fuels on their property, make sure all their firewood was stacked away from the cabin and that it was clear of any fuel on the roof. These efforts ensured that their cabin survived the fast moving Stagecoach Fire. By eliminating the ladder fuels, creating space between trees and clearing away fine fuels off of the cabin, they starved the fire of fuel, which stopped the fire from consuming their family cabin.

“The little bit of work that our family puts in every spring and fall, to maintain our defensible space, is the best investment we have made, and will continue to make, to safeguard ourselves from wildland fire,” states Commissioner Tony DeBone. “We have directly experienced the benefits of fuel reduction twice this year in the La Pine area. The first was the Burgess Road Fire, near the Crescent Creek neighborhood in La Pine, and now here on our family’s property in Antelope Meadows. We know that by thinning and reducing fuels that allow wildfire to spread and gain intensity, we lessen the damage wildfire can cause to our homes and our communities. We encourage more communities to work together to become a "Fire Wise" community.”

The greatest risk of homes catching fire during a wildland fire event is from the advancing embers that reach your property long before an actual flame front. “Our environment here in Central Oregon is very receptive to fire,” explains Alison Green, Program Director for Project Wildfire. “One of the best ways to protect your home and property from a large, catastrophic wildfire is to create defensible space around your home.”

Where are your most vulnerable places for glowing embers to ignite your home?

- **Are your gutters and roof valleys free from debris like pine needles and leaves?** Clean them out. Despite a metal or asphalt shingle roof, the buildup of gutter debris provides necessary fuel for the glowing embers to ignite adjacent fascia boards or siding – most often made of wood.
- **Do your shrubs and weeds provide a path of fuel for fire to reach your trees or home?** Reduce shrubs and other “ladder fuels” around your home to reduce the threat of ground fires igniting nearby trees, or your home.
- **What can catch fire on your deck or patio or near your fence?** Remove weeds, shrubs or any combustible materials from around, under or on top of your deck, patio or wood fence. This includes toys, planters, construction materials, furniture and cushions along with even small piles of pine needles or leaves.

- **Is your wood pile near your home or other combustible vegetation?**
Move wood piles at least 20 feet away from your home or other combustibles.

Visit www.firefree.org or www.firewise.org for more information about how you can prepare your property for wildfire season and Plan, Prep, Go guide. For more information and photos visit projectwildfire.org.

For a video of the Stagecoach Fire approaching the home go to <http://vimeo.com/70887731>

Or call the Project Wildfire office at 541-322-7129.

###

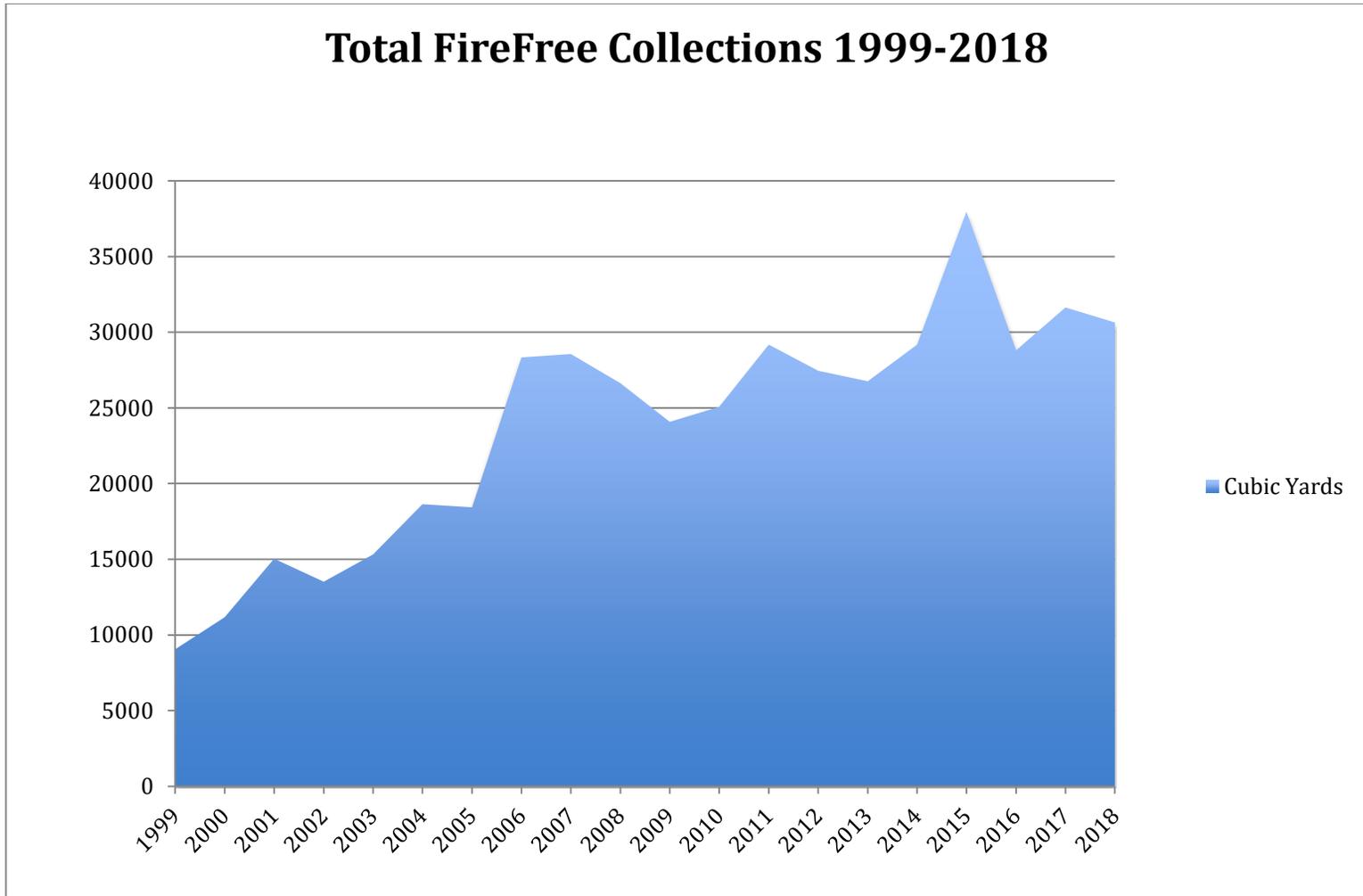


Figure 1

DESCHUTES COUNTY COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN BOUNDARIES

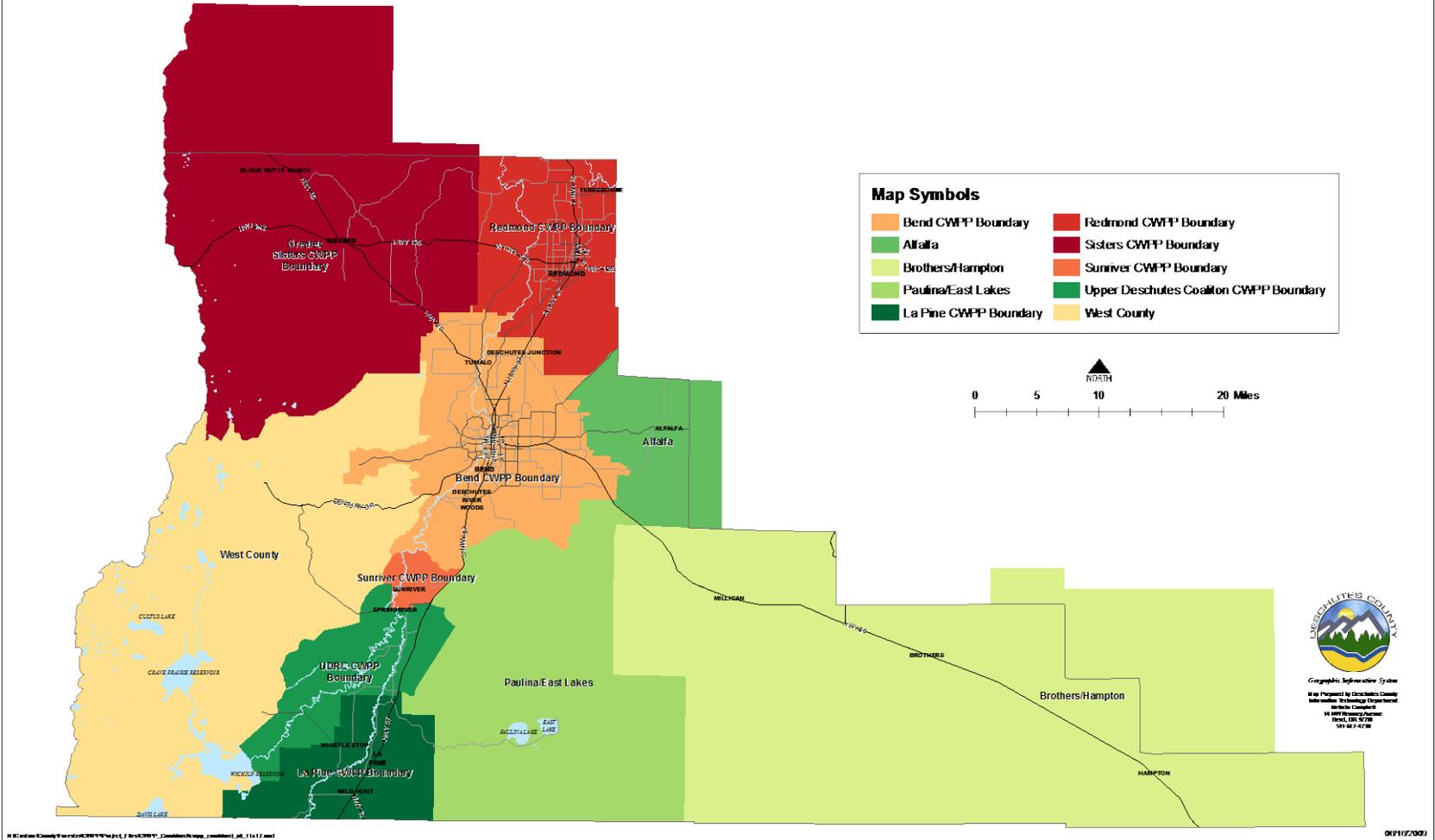


Figure 3