

Thanks to all the neighbors who joined us last week for the “firewise chat” at Solems. For those of you who couldn’t make it, here is a summary of what we learned from DNRC representative Holly McKenzie about what we can do to prevent fires in Lion Mountain and protect our homes and property.

Historically, all land in northwest Montana burned every 5-25 years, which kept our forests healthy and productive. Because we currently suppress fires to protect life, property and natural resources, we are experiencing the downside of fire exclusion:

- **Increased conifer density:** our forests now have fewer meadows and aspen groves, which are replaced by continuous, dense, unhealthy conifer stands.
- **A buildup of fuel:** small trees and dead debris (pine needles, sticks, branches and logs) are no longer removed by frequent, low severity wildfires.
- **Increased spread of insects and disease:** our dense forests compete for resources such as water, nutrients and sunlight. Combined with hotter, drier summers and mild winters, this competition places stress on trees and makes them less able to fight off forest pests.

These three factors increase the potential for high-severity wildfire. So what can we do? We can help keep our forests healthy and minimize fire damage by:

- Actively managing our forests by thinning and clearing debris
- Maintaining our properties to reduce flammable materials
- Building our homes with ignition-resistant materials
- Increasing awareness and preparedness during times of high fire danger.

Here are the steps DNRC recommends we take to prepare ourselves:

1. **Determine your wildfire risk.** You can request a free home assessment, where a local wildfire professional will come and assess your property and provide recommendations on how to reduce your wildfire risk. To schedule a free visit, go to: www.dnrc.mt.gov/fire. You can also visit the wildfire risk portal, which provides a free interactive tool for homeowners to learn more about how to reduce their wildfire risk and create a customized risk report. Learn more at www.dnrc.mt.gov/firerisk.
2. **Prepare your property.** Studies show that as many as 80% of homes lost to wildfires could have been saved if homeowners had taken precautions such as cleaning up the 200 foot “ignition zone” around the home. You can find a simple checklist of tasks at www.nfpa.org.

- **Immediate zone: 0-5 feet around your home:** Windblown embers are your home's biggest threat. Remove all combustible materials, protect vents and openings where embers can enter, and clear your roof and gutters of all debris.
- **Intermediate zone: 5-30 feet around your home:** Rake the area around your home to remove needles and leaves, remove tree limbs up to 10 feet from the ground, and remove branches that overhang or touch the roof to create a 10 foot free space around all buildings.
- **Extended zone: 30-100 feet around your home:** Reduce fuel for fire and create spacing between trees and shrubs. Thin trees to a minimum of 12 feet between tops of trees.
- **Outer zone: 100-200 feet around your home:** Proper thinning and pruning in this zone will make a significant difference in protecting your home and other structures. Create and maintain spacing between treetops, and remove small seedlings and shrubs to guard against the creation of fuel ladders that can spread a ground fire to the treetops.

3. **Use ignition-resistant materials when building or retrofitting.** Your roof, eaves, siding, windows and doors can serve as an effective fire barrier when non-combustible materials are used.

4. **Prepare your family and pets for wildfire evacuation.** Build an emergency "go kit" that includes food, water, medications, first aid and other necessities, and learn about and practice neighborhood egress routes.

The DNRC website has much more information to help prepare your home, property and family in the event of a wildfire. Learn more here: www.dnrc.mt.gov/fire.