

Defensible Space Could Save Your Home from Wildfire

By, Cortney Crosby– BLM, Color Country District Fire Prevention Technician

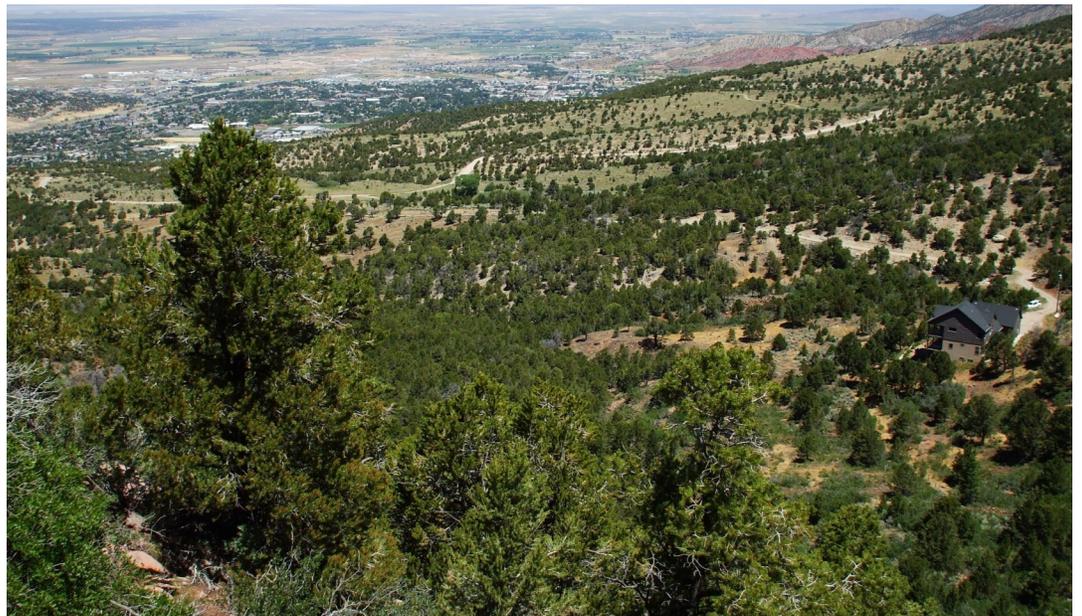
Cedar Highlands, a community near Cedar City, Utah has been working with the Color Country District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands (FFSL) to better prepare in the event of a wildfire. Homeowners and fire personnel are working together to thin and remove hazardous fuels around homes and property at risk. Crews will continue to work this summer and next year to complete the project. Vegetation that has been cut and piled will be burned during winter months. Cedar Highlands is only one of 113 designated Communities at Risk (CAR) within the Color Country District (Iron, Washington, Kane, Garfield and Beaver counties).

Reducing hazardous fuels is one step communities can take to protect their homes from wildfire. Cedar Highlands Homeowner Bill Capone, with the help of FFSL, has already cleared a good defensible space around his home. Defensible Space is defined as the area between a home and the wildland area where vegetation has been modified to slow or stop the spread of wildfire. Fire officials recommend at least 30 feet (or more depending on terrain) of fire resistant or cleared space to serve as a fuel break or defensible space.



Forestry, Fire, and State Lands and BLM firefighters creating defensible space at the Capone Residence in Cedar Highlands.

Other landowners in Cedar Highlands have worked to create a Community Fire Plan. A fire plan helps communities assess their risk of wildfire and identifies what needs to be done to reduce their risk. It also serves as a “blue print” to help identify community resources, to locate safety zones, and to develop fire fighter strategies, if and when there is a fire. “A community fire plan is extremely valuable in helping firefighters determine the best use of resources,” says Paul Briggs, Fuels Program Manager for Color Country BLM. “When firefighters enter a community, fire-fighting resources are usually limited. Areas identified in a community fire plan as having defensible space and/or fuel breaks are the areas prioritized because risks to fire fighter safety have been minimized and the opportunity for a successful outcome is high.” Perhaps as important as the actual creation of defensible space is the communication and pre-planning that takes place between fire personnel and residents. Having worked through the planning process gives everyone involved a good idea of what to expect when a fire occurs. It also opens a dialogue that often results in planning for the future of the community and the adjacent landscape.”



Cedar Highlands has been a focus area for community fire protection since 2001.

Interagency work efforts can be seen throughout the landscape and include numerous pile burns.

In conjunction with work completed by private landowners and FFSL, Color Country BLM fire fighters are working on a 30 acre fuel break extension just south of the Cedar Highlands Community that will tie to 400 acres of existing fuel breaks constructed from 2001-2005. These fuel breaks give firefighters the opportunity to stop or slow the spread of fire before it reaches homes. “Everyone working together to do their part, provides the best possible defense for protecting communities from wildfire,” says Nick Howell, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist for the BLM.

Human caused fires continue to increase each year, especially in and around wildland urban interface areas, further increasing the need for defensible space. For example, in the Color Country District, there were 90 human caused fires during the 2010 fire season. Already this year, there have been 109 human caused fires, which have burned over 4,322 acres. Over 900 homes are destroyed each year by wildfires.



This project creates a buffer and fuel break for various high dollar homes in the subdivision and is well received by residents that are active in the community fire council.

It doesn't take a fire crew coming into a community to create a fuel break and to protect homes. Here are some steps landowners can take to provide defensible space and reduce the risk of impacts from wildfire:

- **Clean roof surfaces and gutters of pine needles, leaves, branches, etc., regularly to avoid accumulation of flammable materials.**
- **Remove portions of any tree extending within 10 feet of the flue opening of any stove or chimney.**
- **Maintain a screen constructed of non-flammable material over the flue opening of every chimney or stove pipe. Mesh openings of the screen should not exceed 1/2 inch.**
- **Remove branches from trees to height of 15 feet.**
- **Dispose of stove or fireplace ashes and charcoal briquettes only after soaking them in a metal pail of water.**
- **Store gasoline in an approved safety can away from occupied buildings.**
- **Ensure propane tanks are far enough away from buildings for valves to be shut off in case of fire.**
- **Keep area clear of flammable vegetation.**
- **Keep all combustibles such as firewood, picnic tables, boats, etc. away from structures.**
- **Connect garden hoses to outlet.**
- **Display street/home addresses at all intersections and on structures.**
- **Ensure all roads and driveways are at least 16 feet in width.**
- **Have fire tools handy such as a ladder long enough to reach the roof, shovel, rake and bucket for water.**
- **Provide at least two different entrance and exit routes to homes.**