

Creating Defensible Space from Wildfire

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With fireworks and grilling, lightening and dry grass part of the summer pallet maybe a few of you have been thinking about the impact fire would have on your property. Living in the mountain communities around Teller, our homes are located in an area classified as “extreme” when it comes to fire danger. Although we cannot eliminate the danger of fire completely, creating a “defensible space” can help your property become less vulnerable.

Defensible space is an area around a structure where fuels and plant materials are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards the structures and reduce the chance of fire moving from building to building or to adjacent forested areas. Defensible space also provides room for firefighters to do their jobs. The process involves developing a series of three best strategies to accommodate distance from structures, materials used in construction, slope of the ground, sizes and types of vegetation, and surrounding topography. For example, a wooden home with a cedar roof, large wooden deck, situated on steep, uphill slope in the midst of a forest will be considerably more vulnerable than the same size area that is flat with structures comprised of rock and stucco, fire resistant roofing material, and few large trees. However, the following general zone descriptions and management plans can be used regardless of the other variables that might be involved.

Zone 1

Extends 15-30 feet around the edges of structures and is the area where maximum efforts are applied. Remove all flammable vegetation, including under decks, within 15 feet of all structures and mow dry vegetation to six inches or less out to 30 feet. Prune low shrubs and remove ladder fuels (low tree limbs) to 10 feet above ground and no branches within 10 feet of a chimney or that interfere with a roof. Critical to zone 1 management is to store firewood, LPG tanks, or other combustible materials outside this area. Use of decorative rock and gravel will provide a break of inflammable ground cover.

Zone 2

Extends 75 to 100 feet depending upon the slope. Thinning is the management technique as well as removal of stressed, diseased, and dead trees and shrubs. Thin trees and large shrubs so there is at least 10 feet between the crowns and more space on slopes. Thin the closer area of this zone more heavily than the outer as it approaches Zone 3. Removal of ladder fuels extends into the Zone 2 area as well.

Zone 3

The area of traditional forest management extending beyond 100 feet. Specific thinning is dictated by the objectives of land and individual tree use. Thinning in this area sanitizes and

improves the forest by removing trees that are diseased, attacked by insects, low vigor or that generally have poor form.

For more information about defensible space visit www.ext.colostate.edu/sam/index.html the Colorado State University Extension website. For questions regarding produce, landscape, and horticulture questions; please call our growline at 686-7980, visit our website at www.co.teller.co.us/csu or visit our booth at the Woodland Park farmers' market.