

Saturday, May 4, 2019 is Wildfire Community Preparedness Day. This is an annual event sponsored nationwide by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and State Farm Insurance to promote wildfire community safety and encourage wildfire risk reduction. This day presents Tree Farmers with a special opportunity to strengthen community bonds and share information on forest health and the benefits to all forest land owners of creating defensible space.

In 2017, we hosted a Wildfire Mitigation Fair on Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, for residents of La Plata County at our family tree farm property in Southwest Colorado. Our day long activities were chosen to empower individuals to take action on their land. We had demonstration stations for safe chainsaw and wood chipper use, pruning techniques with pole saws, pruners and loppers; and “hands on” how to build/burn/ extinguish a slash pile. We had a station on forest health so people could learn to identify healthy/diseased/damaged trees to determine which trees to save, and what to limb up or consider thinning out. There were short field trips to neighboring properties to discuss home ignition zones 1, 2 & 3 as well. We had a special station for kid’s activities. During our taco bar lunch, we had a presentation on evacuation planning. We recruited help to assist us with the various stations from the Upper Pine Fire Department, FireWise of Southwest Colorado, Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control, Colorado State Forest Service, San Juan Mountain Association, Tree Farmers, Master Gardeners, and Fire Smart of Durango. If you think it might be too hard to find people to help put on an event like this, think again...the skilled experts we recruited were happy to come and share their knowledge with our neighbors, and glad to have a platform to do so. It was a very successful day with residents from all over La Plata County attending to learn about wildfire preparedness.

Our event was a pretty ambitious undertaking, especially for a first time endeavor. I recommend trying a smaller project, unless you have lots of folks excited to be involved. Holding a simple gathering of your immediate neighbors for a couple of hours with a single demonstration, presentation, or community work activity can get everyone more mindful of wildfire issues close to home. It’s also a fun way to connect with neighbors and share information. When emergencies happen, it’s good to know your neighbors and how to reach them!

This year we plan to have a community clean up of ground litter, pruning branches and raking up pine needle debris near homes and along the road right of way; followed by a potluck with information about an evacuation drill we are planning with our local fire department. Neighboring subdivisions are planning similar workdays of clean up and building community bulletin boards to help share important information.

The NFPA website has lots of useful information and ideas for planning a wildfire preparedness activity in your area. [www.NFPA.org](http://www.NFPA.org) Click the section on public education - wildfire or FireWise USA for lots of tips and resources. Although it's too late to apply this year (deadline was Feb 28), NFPA has a grant program to help offset the cost of a Wildfire Preparedness Day activity...so put it on your reminder list for next January to apply, but DO plan something in your community this spring.

We have been part of the Tree Farm family for 25 years now, and in my experience, this collective has so much to offer to their communities in terms of knowledge and skills. I encourage you to take that first step to get your neighbors on board thinking and preparing for a wildfire before it happens. Protecting our private forest land from wildfire does not stop at the property boundary line.

This quote which is posted on my refrigerator (along with my emergency evacuation checklist), pretty much sums up my call to action.

“Let every gust of wind be a reminder that you have the power to be prepared and modify fire behavior before a wildfire threatens your home or community. Don't just worry: Take Action Today!”-Rebecca Simulski

Respectfully submitted by:  
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