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# FIRE

## IN THE GORGE

**EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS**

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F C O L U M B I A G O R G E N E W S



# Are you wildfire ready?

Knowing what to do before, during and after a wildfire can make a big difference in your safety. Taking simple steps to prepare today for fire or other emergencies with a step by step guide for you and your family.

**Be prepared for an emergency.**

For additional copies of this publication contact Gorge News 541-386-1234 ext. 100 or email: [info@gorgenews.com](mailto:info@gorgenews.com)



According to federal data, only 48% of people have a plan if an emergency strikes.

But there are plenty of resources and step-by-step guides available to help you get started. A comprehensive guide can be found at [www.ready.gov/plan](http://www.ready.gov/plan).  
“Your family may not be together if a disaster strikes, so it is important to know which types of disasters could affect your area,” the website states. “Know how you’ll contact one another and reconnect if separated. Establish a family meeting place that’s familiar and easy to find.”  
Key steps are planning for emergencies and building an emergency kit.

Planning includes things like:

- 1. How will I receive emergency alerts and warnings?
- 2. What is my shelter plan?
- 3. What is my evacuation route?
- 4. What is my family/household communication plan?

5. Do I need to update my emergency preparedness kit?

While planning, keep in mind:

- Different ages of members within your household
- Responsibilities for assisting others
- Locations frequented
- Dietary needs
- Medical needs including prescriptions and equipment
- Disabilities or access and functional needs including devices and equipment
- Languages spoken
- Cultural and religious considerations
- Pets or service animals
- Households with school-aged children

The second step is creating an emergency kit. Basic supplies should include:

- Water (one gallon per person per day for several days, for drinking and sanitation)
- Food (at least a several-day supply of non-perishable food)
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries

- Whistle (to signal for help)
- Dust mask (to help filter contaminated air)
- Plastic sheeting, scissors and duct tape (to shelter in place)
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties (for personal sanitation)
- Wrench or pliers (to turn off utilities)
- Manual can opener (for food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery

Additional considerations: Medications, hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes, baby or pet supplies, cash, important documents, extra clothes, sleeping bags.  
Planning can seem overwhelming, so the “Do1Thing” nonprofit organization has dedicated itself to making emergency preparedness more doable. It breaks it down to taking one small, easy step per month toward improving your emergency preparedness. For more information, visit [www.do1thing.com](http://www.do1thing.com).



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Columbia Gorge Wildland & Fire Information Page

Public group · 36.0K members

# POPULAR FB PAGE HAS FIRE INFO

By NEITA CECIL  
*Columbia Gorge News*

Social media is often the first place people go to looking for information on local events or emergencies.

Perhaps the best known is local Facebook page, Columbia Gorge Wildland and Fire Information, which has sought to provide timely and accurate information on fires since its formation in 2015.

The volunteers who run the page take their work seriously, and have even pulled all-nighters to keep the public up to date, said Dawn Rasmussen, one of the 11 page administrators, or admins.

It has nearly 36,000 followers now and mainly covers fires on both sides of the Columbia River from Corbett and Washougal on the west to Alderdale and Arlington to the east. It also frequently covers south central Washington and north central Oregon, Rasmussen said.

“We use information gathered from scanner radio traffic, Wildcad [wildland fire dispatch] fire reports, weather, wind, GPS, and air traffic, as well as contributions from followers out in the field to get fire notification posts up quickly and efficiently,”

Rasmussen said.

“We also make sure that we verify everything,” she said. “Where this page really shines is in the immediate moments after fire is reported until task forces are put into place to manage the fire.”

“It used to be that different fire agencies would start a specific fire page for that incident, but people didn’t know what the fire was called. So, this page came about to become sort of a clearinghouse, go-to site so when a fire gets started, people know to come to our page to get the right information before the agencies take over” and start a page for the fire.

The page makes one thread per fire, “so it’s clear and uncluttered on our page, and all updates occur on that same thread so it’s just constantly updated versus having multiple posts about the same thing,” she said.

“The other part is that we can only update it when officials information comes out, which can be excruciatingly slow. We get frustrated many times when there’s a big incident happening and yet there’s no updates anywhere from first responders or the police or even crews when they go to [tactical] channels. So we have to glean as much information as we can.”

Rasmussen said being an admin for the page “is a lot of work and sometimes it takes a lot of hours. It sounds kind of corny, but it feels like one of the most patriotic things you can do, because we can’t go fight the fire.”

Indeed, the page was recognized two years ago by The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce when the page founders, Mark Lamb and Darlisa Black, were awarded first responders of the year.

As for those all-nighters, Rasmussen said, “It’s what needs to be done.” Fires do usually settle down at night, but not always, and sometimes evacuation levels can change in the middle of the night.

“The nice thing is that we tag team and when one person has to go, someone takes over the monitoring,” she said. “Most folks don’t know what goes into this page.”

“Plus, all of us have day jobs so that is a little difficult, but we make it happen,” she said. Another popular wildfire monitoring app is called Watch Duty. Rasmussen said, “We are different than Watch Duty because we are based locally and have local connections that can inform us. Watch Duty is helpful, but it also only pulls from a lot of online reporting sources so it’s not quite as informed as we are.”

She added, “We are also always looking for people who are good on computers and want to volunteer to help us. We do have a vetting process and training, and a scanner radio is provided. We really need ears near Cascade Locks.”

Page admins closely monitor the page, and do not allow speculation on what caused a fire. “That’s not the place for this comment. We are here to inform about transpiring events to help inform the community,” she said.

“One of the best parts of this group is that everybody has their specialties,” Rasmussen said. “I am really fast at getting posts assembled and then other people are really good at pulling information from other sites and feeding it into me so I can include it in the post.”

Others are good at gathering photos. And they all take turns monitoring who asks to join the group so they can keep out trolls or spammers, she said.

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# WHY WILDFIRE RISK IS UP

By NEITA CECIL  
*Columbia Gorge News*

**Wasco County has a higher wildfire risk than 95% of other counties in the country. So how did this region in particular get to such a high fire risk?**

Kayla Bordelon, the Oregon State University extension service regional fire specialist for the Willamette Valley and Columbia Gorge, explained.

It's complex. The Gorge has a dryer east and wetter west, each with different ecosystems. But all of the Columbia Gorge ecosystems are "fire adapted," meaning they have historically seen significant wildfire.

In fact, historically, fire used to happen a lot more often than it does now. But historical fires, often started intentionally by indigenous land stewards for land management, had fewer negative outcomes, she said. Indigenous land managers used fire to grow their foods, to manage for insects and disease, and to promote biodiversity, Bordelon said. Lightning also started fires.

These fires were like a "spring cleaning" for oak and pine savannas. They kept underbrush down, maintained spacing between trees, and

prevented some species of trees like Douglas Fir from encroaching too much, she said.

And while it seems like there's more fire than there's ever been, "we would say there's a fire deficit right now in the drier forest ecosystems of the eastern Columbia Gorge," she said. That is due in part to a century of active fire suppression.

In that absence of fire, conifer trees like Douglas Fir moved in, squeezing out oak and pine. It made the forest dense and changed the forest to species less tolerant of wildfire, such as Grand Firs, she said. Underbrush was allowed to grow without periodic natural thinning through fire.

In addition to active fire suppression, cooler temperatures during the mid-20th century made it less likely fires would start and spread readily.

But climate change has brought warmer temperatures, a century of fire suppression has caused a buildup of fuel, and the fire season is now 84 days longer in the western United States than it was in the 1980s, she said.

Now when fires occur, they may burn hotter because there's a lot more fuel and a lot less fire-tolerant species, she said.

More people living here also means more

fires are set on accident. In the last 20 years, 81% of fires in Hood River County were human-caused.

Invasive species also increase fire risk. In the dryer east of the Gorge, sagebrush and grasslands have seen the arrival of invasive grasses, such as cheatgrass. Unlike the native bunchgrass, which, as the name implies, grows in spread out bunches, cheatgrass evenly coats the ground, Bordelon said, allowing fire to spread far and wide.

Bunch grass is a perennial, returning every year. Cheatgrass is an annual, meaning it needs reseeding each year. But each cheatgrass plant throws out thousands of seeds, so it is excellent at reseeding.

Cheatgrass dries out earlier in the year and becomes easier to ignite. Cheatgrass is also more likely to take over after a fire, since it grows earlier than bunchgrass does.

This vicious cycle leads to ever bigger fires that are started in cheatgrass, and then the area is effectively replanted as cheatgrass the next year.

"Climate change is obviously a driver," of worsening wildfire seasons, Bordelon said. "Warmer temperatures mean dryer fuels." Warmer winters mean more precipitation occurs as rain instead of snow, so the annual

snowmelt that would keep vegetation moist through summer is decreasing, Bordelon said. That means fuels dry out sooner and become more ignitable.

Use of the land has changed substantially, with more housing encroaching into natural areas. Things like powerlines, railroads and highways are all sources of ignition, she said. The structure of area forests is also different than it was historically, since we logged much of the mature fire-resistant trees, and in their place are younger, more dense forest stands, making the fuel load higher and resistance to wildfire lower, she said.

Disease that affects trees is also a factor. Bark beetles are native to the area, but they are typically limited by resilient forest ecosystems. Healthy trees are less susceptible to disease and infestation.

Trees stressed by drought, overgrowth or resource scarcity are more susceptible, she said.

All these issues are interconnected, and all must be addressed jointly to move the dial. "We can't resolve our fire issues if we're not tackling forest health and climate change challenges as well," she said.

## SIGNING UP FOR EMERGENCY ALERTS.

Signing up for emergency alerts is a strong first step to take in being prepared for emergencies. Visit these websites in Oregon and Washington to sign up.

You can tailor what kind of alerts you get, and how you get them – such as by email, text or phone call to your landline or cellphone.

**IN OREGON:**  
For Wasco County: <https://member.ever-bridge.net/453003085612392/login>  
Individuals who need assistance can register by calling the Wasco County Communications Manager at (541) 506-2760.

**For Hood River County:** <https://hoodriver.sheriff.com/events/emergency-alerts>  
Or call the Hood River County Sheriff's Office at (541) 386-2098.

**IN WASHINGTON:**  
For Klickitat County: <https://www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/login.action?pa=klickitatco>

**For Skamania County:** [https://signup.hyper-reach.com/hyper\\_reach/sign\\_up\\_page\\_2/?id=45528](https://signup.hyper-reach.com/hyper_reach/sign_up_page_2/?id=45528)

## BE READY BE SET GO NOW

### Wildfire Evacuations Can Happen Quickly

Know evacuation levels and follow advice of emergency officials. Make the best decision for your safety. Don't wait if you feel unsafe!

For more information visit: <https://wildfire.oregon.gov/>



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# EVACUATION LEVELS AND THEIR MEANING

When wildfires occur, officials provide varying evacuation instructions to affected areas, depending on the severity of risk. The three levels are: Be Ready; Be Set; and Go Now!

The following is a description of what each level means, as provided by wildfire.oregon.gov.

**(Green on a map) LEVEL 1 - BE READY** to evacuate.

Be aware of danger in the area. Stay informed: Sign up for emergency alerts with your county. Check the county emergency management website and follow local emergency services on social media for updates (county, sheriff's office, fire agencies). Tune in to local news for more information. This is the time to pack and prepare to leave. Have your emergency plan and go-kit ready. Plan possible evacuation routes and transportation needs. Check with loved ones and emergency contacts. If you can do so safely, check with your neighbors, share information and ask for help if needed. Consider leaving early if you or your loved ones can't move quickly and need more time to evacuate, including older adults, families with children, people with disabilities and those with limited access to transportation. Consider moving pets and livestock early.

**(Yellow on a map) Level 2 - BE SET** to evacuate.

There is significant danger in the area. Be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Time to act — there may not be enough time to pack your belongings and doing so is at your own risk. Leave if you or your loved ones can't move quickly and need extra time to evacuate. Inform loved ones of your evacuation plans. Be prepared to relocate to a shelter or with family or friends outside of the affected area. Stay informed and be alert. Continue to check the county emergency management website, local emergency services on social media, and local news for updates. Conditions can change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe. You don't need to wait for another evacuation notice.

**(Red on a map) Level 3 - GO NOW!**

Leave immediately! There is extreme danger in the area. It is unsafe to stay and threatens the safety of you, your loved ones and emergency responders. Do not stop to gather belongings or make efforts to protect your home. Emergency responders may not be available to provide help if you choose to stay. Do not return to the area until officials announce the area is safe.

**As the saying goes, knowledge is power. In an emergency, it can be lifesaving.**

The key areas to learn before an emergency are:

**Know your risks.** What's most likely to happen here? Tornadoes? No. Tsunamis? No. Wildfires and winter snowstorms? Yes.

**Know when and where to go.** Beforehand, decide on several possible destinations in various directions, and share them with your family and friends. When you choose one, share that.

**Know what to bring.** Build a go bag ahead of time so you're not scrambling (see page 8). Make sure everyone in the house knows where it's stored and who is responsible for it in an emergency.

**Know where to get good information.** Sign up for alerts from your local emergency management agencies and the National Weather Service, which will provide updates on threat conditions, shelter locations, and other important safety information.

**Download the FEMA App** where you can receive real-time weather alerts, locate emergency shelters in your area, prepare for common hazards, and more.

**Keep your car full of gas,** especially if you know evacuation is likely. Keep your tank half full at all times.

**If you don't have a car,** plan with family and friends how you will leave.

**Once you evacuate,** close and lock your doors. Leave a note saying where you're going. Unplug small appliances.

LEVEL 1

BE READY

PREPARE TO EVACUATE

BE AWARE OF DANGER IN THE AREA

✓ Stay informed.

✓ Have your plan & go-kit ready.

✓ Act early if you or your loved ones can't move quickly.

LEVEL 2

BE SET

BE SET TO EVACUATE AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE

SIGNIFICANT DANGER IN THE AREA

⚠ Follow your evacuation plan & grab your go-kit.

⚠ Check news & radio for updates.

⚠ Conditions change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe.

LEVEL 3

GO NOW!

LEAVE IMMEDIATELY!

EXTREME DANGER IN THE AREA

🚫 Leave without delay. It is unsafe to stay.

🚫 Do not stop to gather belongings or protect your home.

🚫 Do not return until officials announce the area is safe.

Graphic from wildfire.oregon.gov

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*The Dalles, OR*

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Lucas King from Mt. Adams Resource Stewards gives a talk on firing resources for burns. Sarah Allaben photo

# What is a prescribed burn?

Prescribed fires are a common tool used by land managers and conservation groups to reduce the amount of fuel available for wildfires, improve the health of older trees, support new and current wildlife habitats, and recycle soil nutrients back into the ground. Successful completion of a prescribed fire operation enhances public safety by providing wildland firefighters a safer landscape on which to fight a wildfire. It can also lessen the amount of smoke caused by wildfires due to the reduction of fuels.

A recent study completed by Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) scientists found that forest health treatments that included prescribed fire in addition to mechanical thinning of tree stands were more likely to be effective when impacted by a wildfire.

The smoke impacts from prescribed fire are minimal and short-lived compared to those caused by wildfire. Burn crews carefully monitor conditions to limit the effects of smoke on nearby residents.

Smoke impacts may reduce visibility on roads adjacent to a prescribed burn.

Persons and businesses with increased sensitivity to smoke should be prepared to follow the same precautions they would for wildfire smoke. These include limiting physical activity outdoors, closing the fresh-air intake on air circulation systems, and creating a box fan filter.

**For a video on making a box fan filter, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qr1Aj-6Di7w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qr1Aj-6Di7w).**

Additional information is available on the Washington Department of Natural Resources website, [www.dnr.wa.gov/Wildfires](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Wildfires).

Outdoor recreationists and hunters are encouraged to check closure information frequently to ensure the areas they plan to visit are open. All burn areas will have signs posted in advance.

# DO'S AND DONT'S OF DEBRIS BURNING

DEBRIS BURNING IS A LEADING CAUSE OF HUMAN-CAUSED WILDFIRES.

- **CHIP, COMPOST, OR HAUL** DEBRIS TO A RECYCLING CENTER
- **CHECK** WITH YOUR LOCAL FIRE AGENCY OR AIR QUALITY AUTHORITY BEFORE YOU BURN
- **KNOW** THE WEATHER FORECAST
- BURN **ONLY** YARD DEBRIS
- **KEEP** YOUR BURN PILE SMALL OR USE A BURN BARREL WITH A SCREEN
- **CLEAR** A 15-FOOT RADIUS AROUND YOUR BURN PILE DOWN TO BARE SOIL AND AWAY FROM OVERHEAD VEGETATION
- ALWAYS **HAVE WATER** AND A SHOVEL ON SITE, AND STAY WITH THE FIRE
- MAKE SURE YOUR BURN PILE IS **COMPLETELY OUT**
- **DON'T** USE GASOLINE OR DIESEL TO START YOUR FIRE



OREGON STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Courtesy of Oregon State Fire Marshall

## HOUSE FIRES: A COSTLY CATASTROPHE

Each year, approximately 360,000 house fires devastate homes across the United States, resulting in more than \$10,000,000,000 in insured losses. This isn't just a statistic—it's a wake-up call. The destruction and financial burden on families and insurers demand our immediate attention and action. Please prioritize fire prevention and safety measures to protect our homes and futures.



### IMMEDIATE ZONE 0-5 ft

Keep your yard and surrounding property clear of debris.

Use flame-resistant yard material like rock or flame-resistant plants.

### INTERMEDIATE ZONE 5-30 ft

Create breaks in vegetation with patios, flowerbeds, and walkways.

Cut back overgrown areas, especially beneath trees, and remove ladder fuels.

Prune trees so lowest branches are 6-10 ft above the ground and keep tree canopies at least 10 ft away from the house.

### EXTENDED ZONE 30+ ft

Trim any overgrown grass or shrubs.

Clear the property of dying trees and plants.

Store flammable materials appropriately.



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Emily Richardson from the Washington Department of Natural Resources monitors the creation of a fire line.



Instructors demonstrate a firing pattern with a drip torch on a mini plot of land. Sarah Allaben photos

# Learning and burning:

## Mt. Adams Prescribed Burn Association hosts prescribed fire workshop

By EMMA RENLY  
*For Columbia Gorge News*

KLICKITAT — On May 9-11, the grassroots organization Mt. Adams Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) hosted its second annual Lean & Burn Prescribed Fire Workshop in Klickitat, Washington. The free event aimed to educate and teach small private landowners and community members on a wide range of fire-related topics with classroom sessions and hands-on practice.

“We want people to better understand why this landscape needs fire. And we need them to understand that it can be safe and cost-efficient,” said Sarah Allaben, Fire Adapted Communities coordinator at Mt. Adams Resource Stewards (MARS).

She noted that the environment east of the Cascades and in the Columbia Gorge historically received low-intensity fires in the landscape every 5-20 years, creating a healthy forest ecosystem. Fire suppression led to negative ecological impacts and increased risk of catastrophic fires.

Prescribed fire, under the umbrella of beneficial fire, intentionally puts fire across a landscape to mitigate wildfire risk by burning

excessive fuel. This includes overgrown vegetation, downed trees, shrubs and grasses.

“There have been efforts to work on collaborative prescribed fire and to teach community members about prescribed fire for years in the Gorge,” Allaben said, noting that there has been a huge uptick of interest on the topic in recent years from private landowners.

It wasn’t until last May that Mt. Adams PBA formally became an organization with the assistance of nonprofits MARS, Columbia Land Trust and Sustainable Northwest. Together, their mission is to provide small private landowners in Washington and Oregon with the tools and knowledge necessary to conduct prescribed fires through collaboration and education.

On the first day of the Learn & Burn Workshop, instructors included Adam Lieberg from Columbia Land Trust, Emily Richardson from the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Kara Karboski from Washington Resource Conservation & Development Council. The tools for implementing a prescribed burn, from a pulaski to hoses, were also demonstrated.

The day two instructors included Sami Schinnell from The Nature Conservancy, Lu-

cas King from MARS, and Adam Lieberg from Columbia Land Trust.

For the in-field teaching, participants dug fire lines around a 10-by-10 foot plot to practice using hand tools to remove vegetation and build a line in the group, which ideally, fire cannot pass. Drip torches, a handheld device that drips fuel, were used to light fires on the plot’s perimeter in different firing patterns.

“It’s a tiny small-scale way to see how fire works and how you can manipulate it depending on the weather and where you choose to put it using the drip torch,” Allaben said, adding that it was exciting to see participants watch and understand how controllable the fire was.

On the last day, the prescribed burn was canceled due to conditions, as there wasn’t enough personnel to continue patrolling the unit over the following days as the forecast predicted high winds and warm temperatures.

“It was a lesson how we, as prescribed fire practitioners, take these decisions really seriously,” Allaben said, adding that there’s a lot of thought and planning that goes into a burn. “We’re looking very closely at forecasts,

we’re thinking about the number of resources we have available, and thinking about the what-if scenarios.”

Along with the Learn & Burn Prescribed Fire Workshop, Mt. Adams PBA provides a coalition-style membership to share equipment, training and skills for small private landowners to implement prescribed fire on their land successfully.

While landowners are the key people the workshop PBA intends to reach, Allaben said the organization wants the training to be open and available for as many people as possible, regardless of whether they are landowners or not.

“It’s a whole community effort to understand and use prescribed fire,” she said, pointing to neighbors helping neighbors with prescribed fires.

The best way to stay up-to-date on trainings, workshops, and burns is to sign up for the mailing list at [PBA@mtadamsstewardrds.com](mailto:PBA@mtadamsstewardrds.com) or visit [mtadamspba.org](http://mtadamspba.org).

*This story was originally published in the June 5, 2024, edition of Columbia Gorge News.*

# KLICKITAT PUD'S RESPONSE TO FIRE RISKS:

Before

After

**1. Extensive efforts continually made to maintain ROW.** To the right, see an example of ROW maintenance, which reduces fire risk.

**2. Moving overhead lines to underground.** By installing underground lines whenever possible, KPUD reduces the risk of line contacts which can lead to fires.

**3. Modified distribution breaker and recloser settings.** KPUD places most distribution breakers and reclosers on "One-Shot" or "Non-Reclose" mode. This reduces the possibility of sparks each time a fault occurs on a line, but it increases line patrols & outage duration.

**4. Installation of smoke detection cameras.** KPUD uses advanced camera technology to identify smoke plumes within our service territory. Alerts are reviewed and confirmed prior to alerting Klickitat County EMS and fire district with exact coordinates.

# WHAT'S YOUR WILDFIRE READY PLAN?

¿CUÁL ES TU PLAN DE LISTOS PARA LOS INCENDIOS?

## Prepare your property. Prepara tu propiedad.

EXTENDED ZONE

30-200 FEET AWAY FROM BUILDINGS, DECKS, AND YOUR HOME'S EDGES.

INTERMEDIATE ZONE

5-30 FEET AWAY FROM BUILDINGS, DECKS, AND YOUR HOME'S EDGES.

IMMEDIATE ZONE

0-5 FEET AWAY FROM DECKS AND YOUR HOME'S EDGES.

THE MAJORITY OF HOMES LOST TO WILDFIRE ARE LOST DUE TO EMBERS

WILDFIRE READY

NEIGHBORS

LISTOS PARA LOS INCENDIOS

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Únete hoy en [ListosParaIncendios.com](http://ListosParaIncendios.com)





Above, this evacuation checklist is attached to the inside of Dawn Rasmussen's electrical panel by her door. Also handy is a sign she can post on the front door telling emergency responders they have evacuated, and it lists her phone number.

Right, this outbuilding at Rasmussen's house shows the defensible space she's created around it.

Contributed photos



# Creating defensible space

By NEITA CECIL  
*Columbia Gorge News*

**In 2020, Dawn Rasmussen had to evacuate her Browns Creek area home twice in two days. Once with an hour's notice, once with no notice.**

She and her husband Brad had already done a significant amount of work to make their rural acreage as defensible as possible from fire. Those evacuations led them to take even more steps.

Their property is in what's called a wildland interface area. It's a zone where rural homes are surrounded by lots of natural habitat.

Not long after they moved there in 2016, they began taking steps to reduce fire danger. The previous owners had beautifully landscaped their property, Rasmussen said, but they had to remove a lot of it because shrubbery was too close to the house.

She asked Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue to come out and she got lots of suggestions that they implemented.

"One of the most important things that I've learned is the 10-30-100 rule as far as fire preparedness," she said.

First, keep any vegetation within 10 feet of your house very low to the ground, very well watered, and not touching the house, she said.

Then 30 feet away from the house, you can have some trees, but limbs should be at least six feet off the ground. And finally, out to a 100-foot distance from her house, "We weed-whack everything to the ground."

Pick up branches, fell dead trees, "and clear out stuff so there's no fuel on the ground. You want to eliminate ladder fuels," she said. Fire can spread from grass to bushes to trees, like going up rungs of a ladder.

"It's a lot of work, and at some point, Brad and I are going

to be too old to do this stuff so we're going to have to figure something else out there."

More recently, she built a sprinkler system for her roof. "That's probably the biggest thing. People should be thinking about putting that in. It's one less surface to ignite."

When it comes to homes, the risk isn't a wall of fire reaching the home, she said, but embers blowing onto roofs. They can catch debris in gutters on fire, and then burn the roof and the home.

Then she realized that fire could knock out the power, which runs the well that waters her roof in the event of wild-fire. So they switched to solar power. "That's great because that's part of my green goals anyway, so we will have water. It runs our refrigerator and our freezer, so we don't lose any stuff."

She recalls seeing photos after the Mosier Creek fire in 2020, showing fire burning right up to houses, and those houses having things like wood stacked right by the home.

She said she and her neighbors are "all very concerned and I think each property owner has gone through the paces of making changes." They're doing things like creating and burning small burn piles in cold months to eliminate debris, and others are moving burnable things like wood piles away from the side of their home.

She learned that she has "a high risk of getting burned out in the next 30 years," but she's also been told that "we have a pretty high chance of surviving that with what we've done with our property."

Rasmussen has also taken neighborhood emergency response training. "One of the biggest misconceptions everybody has is if you have an emergency, someone is going to drive up and say, 'What do you need?' And oftentimes, you're it. The farmers know that. They're out there discing, they're taking care of their own."

She added, "Even city dwellers, you cannot just assume someone is going to be there, you have to be protective, and

an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

She's spearheading an effort to form a local Firewise group with her neighbors. "We're kind of mutually protecting each other a little bit more."

Firewise is a national program run through the Oregon State Fire Marshal. It offers grant funding to make homes better able to survive wildfire.

She's also upped her evacuation game, having had several rounds of practice. "We made some changes here how we stage stuff. Our photo albums are near the door so we can grab them."

She knows exactly where her important documents are: In a fire safe. She's included things like car titles, house title, her will, home insurance documents, marriage certificates, birth certificates, passports, college transcripts, diplomas, Social Security cards, and heirlooms and valuable jewelry. "It saves a bunch of time if they're all in one spot," she said.

She has treasures all around her house from her travels that are precious to her, but she also knows "at the end of the day, you save what you can, but if you don't, you can't sweat it."

She said if a fire destroys her home, there would be losses and it would be traumatic, but saving family and pets is the most important thing.

She has an evacuation checklist by her door. She also has a paper she can put on her door that says she's evacuated, and it lists her phone number.

"We have a whole procedure and we're very thorough here and probably taking it further than we need to," she said.

She also encouraged people to sign up for emergency alerts. "Google your county or town name and emergency alert, then sign up for text/phone messages about evacuations."



## Evacuation Checklist

### 15 Minutes to Pack:

- Load with car facing out, and write names and emergency contact phone numbers on everyone's forearm
- Critical Medical Items: Hearing aids, prescriptions, canes, oxygen, etc.
- Pets, leash, carriers
- Cash, wallet, purse
- Birth certificates, passport
- Keys: cars, house, shop, work, safety deposit box
- Phones, charger, power bank
- Laptop, computer, drives
- Flashlight, headlamps
- Coat, hat, leather shoes and gloves, N95 masks
- Home Insurance info
- Titles, deeds
- Kid's special comfort item
- Infant supplies

### 30 Minutes to Pack ADD:

- Tell non-local emergency contact you are evacuating
- Valuable or family jewelry
- Photos including framed, Home Videos
- Address book/phone List
- First aid kit
- Clothing for 3-7 days
- Pillow, sleeping bag, blanket
- Battery radio
- Gas can
- Drinking water
- Irreplaceable heirlooms
- Cremains

### 1 Hour to Pack ADD:

- Take photos of contents of each room, and take or safeguard guns, ammo
- Special artwork
- Financial and medical files
- Wills, powers of attorney, legal documents
- Genealogy records
- Appraisals/receipts
- Fire extinguisher
- Chain saw (if rural)
- School items
- Military decorations awards and records
- Special diet items
- Extra eyeglasses
- Personal hygiene items
- Feminine sanitary items
- Kid activities
- Pet food, meds, license, litter, toys, crates

### 2 Hours to Pack ADD:

- Relocate or pack secondary vehicles and move them to safe place; pack items in luggage
- Collectibles
- Journals, diaries, letters
- Valuable cameras, electronics, tools
- Camping equipment
- Awards
- Christmas ornaments
- Ice cooler with food, drink
- Non-perishable snacks
- Heirlooms/mementos
- Work files
- Sanitizing wipes

### General Notes:

- Evacuate livestock and vulnerable family members at level 1 or 2.
- Constrain pets to be easily caught.
- Keep neighbors informed, check on vulnerable ones.
- Make sure you know which direction to drive.
- Do NOT assume you will have a chance to go back or that it's just a precaution.
- Imagine what you will need for a week staying on a cot in a school gym.
- Dress to protect yourself from fire and smoke.

### Tips to prepare your home for firefighters as time allows:

- Turn on all lights.
- Turn off HVAC and gas, unplug appliances.
- Close all windows, interior and exterior doors.
- Open all gates.
- Place fire proof tarps over wood piles.
- Ladders in front yard.
- Hoses hooked up with squeeze nozzle sprayers.
- Move propane tanks, flammable or explosive items, outdoor furniture 30 feet away from the house.





Clockwise: Montana native Kait Crossguns seeks refuge from the heat inside the “Ice Truck,” where cold drinks and ice are kept. Colorado resident Josiah Gould said his truck drove out from Canyon City, Colorado. This year marks Gould’s first season as a wildland firefighter, but he said the Microwave Tower Fire was his fourth fire. Camp cook Chris Costello stocks chocolate milk. Costello says it is a favorite by most firefighters. Tod Johnson analyzes data and weather trends to create a smoke forecast for the Whiskey Creek and Microwave Tower fires.

Noah Noteboom photos

# 'City that crops up overnight'

By NOAH NOOTEBOOM  
*Columbia Gorge News*

HOOD RIVER — Every year in July and August, wildland firefighters, medic teams and forestry technicians are dispersed across the country to battle wildfires. These men and women are continuously on the job building fire lines, cutting through brush, mapping the fire line and organizing information to keep the public informed, but, what do they do and where do they go when their “work day” is done?

If you are working the Microwave Tower Fire or Whiskey Creek Fires you are most likely stationed at the Hood River County Fairgrounds, if you are lucky. Forestry Technician and Lead Public Information Officer Carissa Silvis said some firefighters may sleep in a “spike camp.”

These small camps are set up in the wooded areas and provide the necessities for firefighters close to the fire. A spike camp is set up near Kingsley Reservoir and Silvis said at times it is safer and more convenient for travel.

“Even though it closed down, we do have folks camped around there and that just helps so they don’t have to drive so far every day,” she said. “Not only is it great for timing to get folks on the fire line, it also reduces exposure to driving, which is the most dangerous thing we do.”

Further away from the fire line, there is far more access to water, food and shelter at the county fairgrounds — and the people who provide these services are firefighters, too. Chris Green, Austin Candela and Tyrone Stone help with logistics at Fire Camp — known by the firefighters. Green makes supply runs back and forth from the fairgrounds to the spike camps while Green and Candela create signage and do the little things to turn the fairgrounds into a mini city.

On-site paramedic Jared Grissom said when you have so many people in one area doing one job there are a lot of moving parts. “It’s a city that crops up overnight. I’ve been on some fires in California where they have 8,000 people split up in two camps.” Grissom said, who is from San Antonio, Texas. He and Makenzie Tiegs are paramedics that treat minor injuries for firefighters who show up to fire camp. Tiegs is from Boise, Idaho and earned her stripes as a rookie EMT on a fire engine and has now been in the fire service for 10 years. Tiegs said she is grateful to sleep in the living space of the medical trailer, because she has seen the weight firefighting has on a person.

“I think one of the misconceptions that the public just doesn’t quite see is the emotional toll that this career takes on our firefighters... These are your brothers and sisters out on the line, these are your family members out on the line,” she said.

There are medical teams on the group ready to respond in the case a firefighter gets hurt or needs medical assistance.

Type 3 Incident Commander in training, Jon Blackburn, has been wildland firefighting for 29 years and says there are three to four different medical resource teams available depending on the request.

“There are line EMTs and line medics who are actually out there with the firefighters. We also have something that’s called a [Rapid Extraction Module Support] REMS team,” Blackburn said. “They’re mobile. They’re able to do some low angle rescue. They’re able to hoist and move patients around and load them on a UTV in order to get them out to a road system.”

Away from the fire at camp a typical day starts at 7 a.m. with breakfast and a briefing meeting. Silvis says important information such as weather patterns, fire behavior, terrain and more. The meeting will break and

each group of firefighters will have specific assignments from their division supervisor. “Those assignments vary from moving fire hose to and from the fire line, doing structure assessment and triage, working with the community and providing community awareness, depending on what the need is,” Blackburn said.

Firefighters are divided into night and day shifts, but Josiah Gould says he’s just happy to be here helping out. Gould and his companions drove out from Canyon City, Colorado to assist with the fire season in the Gorge.

“I love the landscape. I love that there’s fruit growing everywhere. We can just go out and pick chokecherries up the line for a snack,” says Gould, a first year wildland firefighter. “What we’re doing is every time they do a burn, we’ll provide backup. Keep the trees from catching and then we’ll do a mop up. And we basically make sure that there’s no hanging around heat sources and checking stump holes.”

Gould will start his 14-hour shift around 6 p.m. with dinner before heading out to the front lines. As Gould hits the road, other firefighters are preparing to settle in for the night. Some will eat dinner prepared by Chris Costello and the rest of his team. Costello says chocolate milk is the popular drink of choice by firefighters.

Showers and laundry services are also available. Some will seek shelter in the shade or the “ice truck” which houses the cold water and ice. You may find Kait Crossguns sitting on top of a dozen pallets of packaged bottled water and Gatorade. “I just wanted to chill out,” she said while scrolling through social media and chatting with friends or family over the phone. Crossguns is from Brown, Montana.

When it’s time to get some rest, firefighters will return to their tents. At the fairgrounds upwards of 30-40 makeshift beds are located

in the “Tent City.” Most said it is not difficult falling asleep but the summer heat can make it less comfortable. A few firefighters were able to book hotel rooms in The Dalles like Missouri residents, Miles Huff and Hailey Sterkis.

“It would suck being in these tents during the day, but I can’t complain. I’ve done worse,” Huff said. He and Sterkis are also on the night shift and said they aren’t scared of firefighting but have had a couple close calls.

“We had a big log fall about 20 feet away that would’ve killed us if it hit us,” he said. When asked if he’s worried about anything he provided a blunt outlook: “I ain’t worried about nothin’. When you worry about something it happens to you.”

Wildland firefighters make many sacrifices to protect residents and the environment from wildfires. They travel far away from home to work grueling hours and treacherous conditions. Wildland firefighters have their own reasons for becoming a firefighter, but most of them want to protect.

The Wildland Firefighter Foundation is an organization that provides assistance — emotional and financial — to families of fallen and injured wildland firefighters. If you are interested in volunteering or donating money please visit [wffoundation.org](http://wffoundation.org). The American Red Cross is also a crucial organization that helps the communities affected by wildfires. They are in need of volunteers to help staff shelters.

To find a Red Cross chapter near you visit [redcross.org/find-your-local-chapter.html](http://redcross.org/find-your-local-chapter.html).

*This story was originally published in the Aug. 14, 2024, edition of Columbia Gorge News.*

## \$5.9m grant to help South Wasco County

By NEITA CECIL  
*Columbia Gorge News*

**Wasco County’s high wildfire risk — higher than 95% of other U.S. counties — was a main driver behind the county getting a \$5.9 million federal grant to address the risk.**

The grant covers a five-year period and focuses on South Wasco County, in the Maupin, Wamic, Pine Grove, Pine Hollow and Tygh Valley area, said Kayla Bordelon, Oregon State University extension service regional fire specialist for Willamette Valley and the Columbia Gorge.

The funding is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and is funneled through the

U.S. Forest Service’s Community Wildfire Defense Program.

There are three goals for the funding, which was awarded in May. First is hiring a wildfire coordinator to work with all the involved local fire districts and other land management agencies on the wildfire resilience projects that are included in the county’s Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Second is supporting residential risk reduction for south county. Across numerous agencies there will be a project to create defensible space around houses and cut the expense of removing hazard trees around houses, Bordelon said.

She noted the Wasco County Planning Department was the main applicant for the grant, which has multiple other agencies on board also, including Oregon Department of Forestry and many of the local fire

districts.

There’s also funding for education on community risk reduction and funding for projects to expand fuel breaks along priority roads by removing and treating vegetation. The third goal is to improve fire resilience in the forest. The grant includes funds for fuel treatment to reduce wildfire hazard on the White River Wildlife Refuge, which is positioned between the Mt. Hood National Forest and the communities around the Wamic area, she said.

Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) will also offer voluntary forest health and wildfire resilience assessments for private, nonindustrial small woodland owners in south county.

It would allow landowners the option to have the technicians from ODF to “assess forest conditions and provide landowners

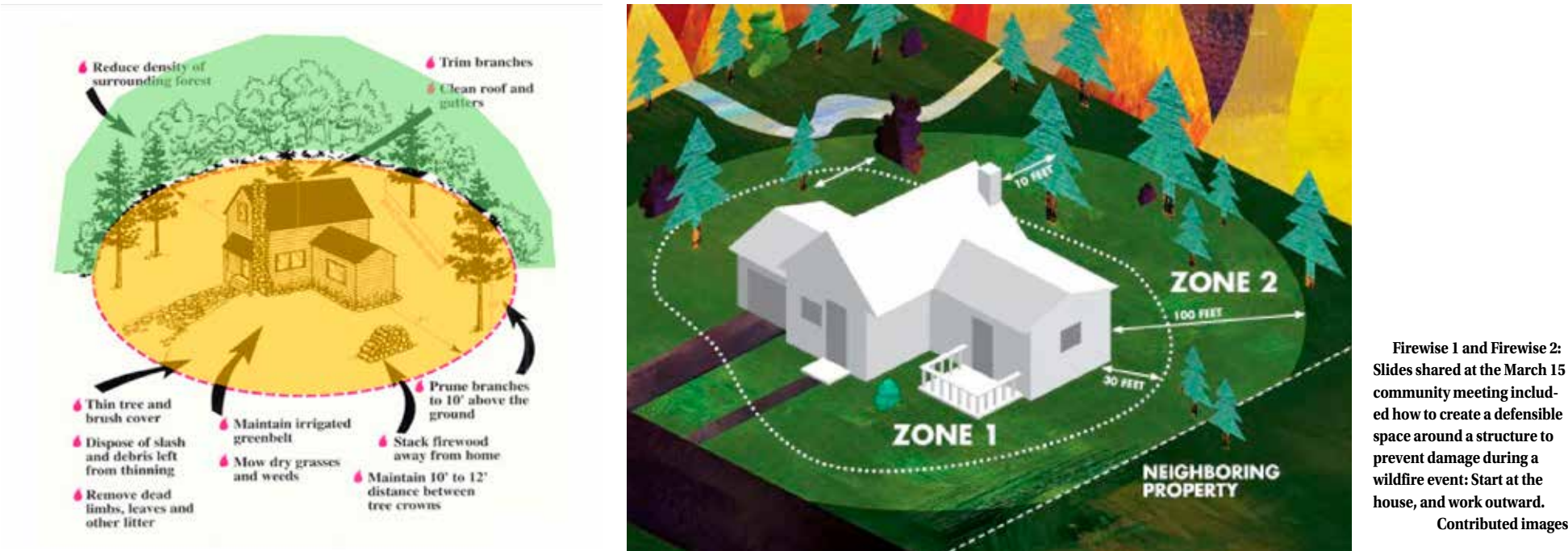
with maps of their specific property and considerations for prioritizing areas for fuels treatments,” Bordelon said.

Fuels treatments include thinning, developing fuel breaks, removing brush, or other activities to modify the vegetation available to burn in a fire.

Having that information mapped would offer landowners a decision-making tool, and better position the county to apply for further grants to reduce landowners’ costs for doing those fuels treatment.

Wasco County updated its Community Wildfire Protection Plan as a precursor to applying for the grant. Hood River County is in the process of updating its plan, which will make the county eligible for this same grant in the future, Bordelon said.





Firewise 1 and Firewise 2: Slides shared at the March 15 community meeting included how to create a defensible space around a structure to prevent damage during a wildfire event: Start at the house, and work outward. Contributed images

# Building wildfire resiliency a community effort

By CHELESA MARR  
*Columbia Gorge News*

UNDERWOOD — How does a community prepare for wildfire and build resilience? That was the topic of a presentation by Michael Norvell, wildfire resilience technician for Underwood Conservation District, and Charlie Landsman, community resilience coordinator with Washington State Department of Natural Resources, March 15 at the Underwood Community Center.

Norvell began by saying Underwood has had increased growth in its wildland urban interface — “the line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetive fuels,” according to the U.S. Fire Administration ([usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui.html](https://usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui.html)) — with more houses being built in these areas. The purpose of the meeting, he said, “is to gain some community assembly around the question of wildfire — what we can all do to protect ourselves, but also our neighbors in our bigger community.”

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) can help homeowners make assessments and provide a list of priorities,

Landsman said, or homeowners can sign up at [wildfirerisk.org](http://wildfirerisk.org) to create a plan.

Underwood is a “really unique area” in the transition zone between the east and west, Norvell said — it gets less moisture than Vancouver, but temperatures don’t get as hot as they do in Lyle. The Tunnel Five fire, which started July 3, 2023, burned 529 acres. Though “relatively small” when compared to the 2017 Eagle Creek fire — which came in around 50,000 acres burned — 10 structures were lost during the Tunnel Five fire, involving 40 engines and 256 firefighters. “It was still a massive, massive operation to put out this fire,” he said. “... Even a small fire like this has a really big impact on our lives ... The best way to avoid your home or property being adversely affected by fire is to prepare the property as best you can by creating a fence.”

It’s embers from a fire that can cause a home to go up in flames. “Embers, not trees, are going to be the biggest danger in the event of a wildfire,” he said. “At least 80% of structures lost during the wildfire event are from spot fires that are ignited by embers.”

Norvell suggested homeowners start by increasing resilience within the first five feet around the house — focus on landscaping to prevent the spread of a fire with native plants like maple, Oregon grape and dogwood; use

fire-resistant materials for siding, decks and the roof; use gravel or stones around the home; clean out gutters; prune trees and shrubs; and store firewood or other wooden materials away from the home, for example.

“And that’s not only to cut out some vegetation that’s potential fuel, but it’s also to make sure you can get in and out of your property,” he said. “And to make sure that if firefighters need to come in, they can get in and out of your property. So if you can prep your driveway in advance of a fire event, that’s great.”

Landsman added that outside vents should be covered with metal screenings to keep embers from entering and igniting the inside of a home, and things like door-mats and patio furniture can be extremely flammable (he suggests metal, not wooden furniture). Tall grasses, dead trees and shrubs are easily ignited, and even the spacing between plants can increase the likelihood of fire spread. “The more gaps that you create in your landscape, the less likely fire is to spread throughout that landscape,” he said.

Norvell said that firefighters prioritize protecting property and recreational areas when fighting wildfires, and “anything residents can do to protect their property and help firefighters to do their jobs with the least chance of getting hurt is critically important.”

Landsman said the same strategies for protecting a house from wildfire should be applied to all structures — not only on your property, but in your neighborhood. “When you start to work with your neighbors or as a community, it’s going to compound [resilience],” he said. “... With this entire community, we can make sure that everything is protected. And the more that you do, not only to your property, but encourage your neighbors to do ... on that community scale, the more effective all of this work is going to be.”

But, he said, “it’s your property. It’s not our job to tell you what level of risk to live with. It’s our job to make sure that you have clearly understand your risk and what steps there are that you can do to reduce that risk.”

...


Fire risk assessment is available for your home and if you have groups of neighbors that want to work together, this is a good way help protect the entire neighborhood.

If you have any questions contact Michael McNorvell, Underwood Conservation District, [michael@ucdwa.org](mailto:michael@ucdwa.org), or Charles Landsman, Washington Department of Natural Resources, [Charles.landsman@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:Charles.landsman@dnr.wa.gov).


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## We’re planning forest restoration work near your community.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources uses prescribed fire as a critical tool to reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health throughout the Columbia Gorge.



### WHAT IS A PRESCRIBED BURN?

 Prescribed fire reduces wildfire danger and brings health back to our eastern Washington forests by removing overcrowded vegetation. Skilled professionals will use low-intensity fire to reduce vegetation on the forest floor, including dense shrubs and saplings, which could otherwise fuel a catastrophic wildfire.

### WHY IS THIS NEEDED?

This work, along with mechanical forest thinning, is part of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan for central and eastern Washington. This effort involves numerous public and private partners from the state, federal, tribal and local levels all working together to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfires while bringing these forests back to a more natural state. In these forests, low-intensity fires help cycle nutrients back into the soil and activate the seeds of fire-adapted plants. Read more at: [dnr.wa.gov/foresthealthplan](https://dnr.wa.gov/foresthealthplan)

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT THE WEEK OF A PRESCRIBED BURN?



The Washington DNR sends information about upcoming prescribed burns out each spring and fall to local media, on social media, and to a free email subscription service. Staff may also post information about planned burns at local stores and community centers. DNR follows a burn-specific plan guided by state and federal regulations to prioritize safety and minimize effects to nearby residents and infrastructure, but you may still see or smell smoke.

### QUESTIONS?

Please call Jeff Dimke (DNR) 564-669-0946

### MORE INFORMATION

[dnr.wa.gov/prescribedfire](https://dnr.wa.gov/prescribedfire)



#### SIGN UP FOR ALERTS

Scan the QR code to sign up for our prescribed burn alerts ([bit.ly/DNRburnalerts](https://bit.ly/DNRburnalerts)). We will send you an email the day before each burn, so you can plan accordingly.

Smoke from a prescribed burn is often less than smoke from wildfires. However, if you or a loved one are sensitive to smoke, please sign up, or follow us on Twitter: [@wadnr\\_forests](https://twitter.com/wadnr_forests)