

# Fire Prevention

**A**s more of us move into rural areas, we need to increase our fire awareness. Longer response times, limited water hydrants, difficult terrain and unpaved roads all increase the risk of fire damage to your home. Building your home in a wooded area is appealing, but you need to be aware of the potential dangers of wildfire and learn how to protect your family and home.

## Prevention

Keep a defensible space of 30 to 200 feet around your home. If your home and landscape are properly maintained, they may survive a fire even without fire department intervention. The size of your defensible space depends on the slope of the land and the type of vegetation around your home.

## Burning on Your Property

Under state laws, a person must have a valid burning permit obtained from ODF or the local fire district to burn any material in Hood River County. On the day you plan to burn, call your local fire department or ODF before lighting the fire.

### Simple Fire Prevention Measures

- Maintain 30' of green lawn or fire-resistant plants around your home.
- Prune the branches of trees below 12' to remove "ladder fuels" that help ground fires become crown fires.
- Trim branches away from your roof and house. Keep gutters and vents clean.
- Replace wood shake roofs. Screen vents and areas under decks with metal mesh.
- Store firewood away from your house.
- Trim branches along driveway at least 14' tall and wide.
- Water and firefighting tools should be available and ready.
- Maintain good access to your home and ensure that your address is visible and easy to read.

During fire season we are all required to follow Oregon fire prevention laws. Fire season typically begins in May or June and ends with the coming of the fall rains. During fire season, burning restrictions apply and open burning may be prohibited. Also, public use restrictions may limit times that the public can perform various activities on forest land. These activities



include off-road vehicle use, campfires, smoking, mowing, welding, using chain saws and fireworks.

## Fire Ecology

Fire is a fundamental component of a healthy forest ecosystem. It is an integral part of forest regeneration, cleansing and renewal and maintaining plant and animal diversity. Fire removes undergrowth that chokes trees and facilitates disease. Burned trees return nutrients to the soil. Burned snags and downed trees in streams create habitat for fish and wildlife. Many plants require fire as part of their life cycle.

## Fire Prevention Agencies

The Hood River County Rural Fire Protection Districts provide fire protection within rural fire district boundaries. These highly-trained volunteer firefighters respond to wildland and structural fires. Their primary responsibility is the protection of lives and property. ODF is responsible for wildland fire protection and suppression on all non-federal and private forest lands both inside and outside of the Rural Fire Protection Districts. These responsibilities include regulating outdoor burning and industrial operations on forest lands and providing landowner assistance by inspecting and offering advice on fire-prone rural properties. It is a good idea to know which fire department or district is responsible for your protection.

*Article written in cooperation with: Pete Peterson, Westside Fire District, Henry Buckalew, Hood River County Forestry Department, Leo Segovia, USDA Forest Service and David Jacobs, Oregon Department of Forestry*