

Culmination Activity: Firewise Community Meeting

Residents, community groups, and public agencies all play important roles during planning, surviving, and recovering from a wildfire. You were introduced to the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA® Program in Lesson 5 where residents voluntarily form a group with their neighbors to improve their wildfire safety and preparedness. Part of this process is holding one or more community meetings to share ideas and make an Action Plan.

Your class will review concepts from the seven lessons and hold a mock Firewise community meeting. At this meeting, students will represent a stakeholder or professional that has something important to share about wildfire. After hearing everyone's presentations, you can end the Wildfire in the Foothills program with a class discussion.

Setting up your class Firewise community meeting:

- 1) After reading through the steps, explain the activity's purpose and the procedure to your class. Invite students to step into the roles of residents and wildfire stakeholders.
- 2) Cut up character cards and pass one out to each student. Some cards are the same character, but with a different focus and information to share. If you run out of character cards, you could create your own characters to fill in a missing topic or add more residents with challenges or questions for the group. The focus of the Firewise USA® program is on improving fire safety on private property. This community meeting will take a wide overview of wildfire and include a few new topics not mentioned previously in the program. Give students a few days to research the missing information for their characters and prepare to share their card with the group. If the card mentions a specific organization or program, their website is a good place to start looking for this information. The cards do not offer enough room in the blank spaces to write in the full answers so students will need to bring additional paper for notes. Props or costumes to support their character could be an option on the day of the meeting.
- 3) On meeting day, arrange desks facing inward to form a large circle. This gives the feeling of collaboration and students can present from their desks without having to stand in front of the class. Have students fold a piece of paper in half to make a placard where they will write their character.
- 4) You will fill the role of Firewise Community Leader and host the meeting. Call the meeting to order and welcome the guest speakers and residents of the community. State that the focus of the meeting is to learn how to create a more fire-safe community. Expert guests have been invited to share their knowledge and help answer

important questions. Community members will also be able to share their experiences and ask questions. The meeting will be split into three parts: mitigation and planning, wildfire response, and wildfire recovery. Or more simply put, before, during, and after a wildfire.

- 5) To keep the class engaged during peer presentations, have each student bring a blank piece of paper for notes. Students can turn this paper in at the end of the meeting for credit. Have students separate their paper into three columns to fill in during the presentations:

Classmate's Name ----- Character/Role ----- I help my community be fire-safe by----

- 6) Possible post-meeting discussion questions:

What advice does the group have for the two landowners that have challenges?

What support does the community have to offer the high school senior?

What are some of the community's greatest strengths?

Can you think of other community members who should be a part of the next meeting?

Why do you think our class has spent time doing the Wildfire in the Foothills program?

What is the most important thing you have learned during this program?

What do you think your *real* role is in building a fire-resilient community? Or what would you like it to be?

Do you feel like you have the power to help your family, neighbors, or friends be more prepared for wildfire? Why or why not?

Mitigation and Planning Roles

Defensible Space Inspector

(2) Private Landowner - Overgrown property and difficult neighbor

(2) Homeowner - Defensible space and home hardening

Prescribed Burn Association Organizer

Ecologist

Botanist- invasive species removal

(2) Arborist - Oak and conifer specialist

Chipper Machine Operator

Goat Herd Owner

Landscaper

School Administrator

Wildfire Response Roles

Wildland Firefighter

Volunteer Firefighter

Communication Operator

Red Cross Shelter Volunteer

(2) North Valley Animal Disaster Group Volunteer- Pets and Livestock

Law Enforcement Officer- Assisting at a Public Assembly Point

Wildfire Recovery Roles

Air Quality Monitor

Geologist - Soil stabilization

Conservation Projects Coordinator- Reforesting

High School Senior

Climate Scientist

Mitigation and Planning Roles

I am a **Defensible Space Inspector**.

My job is to perform defensible space inspections on people's property. I help increase their awareness and knowledge of things they can do to reduce their risk and damage from wildfires. Some of the actions I recommend are improving defensible space, reducing fuels, and explaining fire-safe building standards. To help explain defensible space I talk about the three Home Ignition Zones and give people ideas to improve each zone. One common suggestion I make for each zone is:

Zone 1 (Immediate): _____

Zone 2 (Intermediate): _____

Zone 3 (Extended): _____

I am a **Private Landowner**.

My property is 4 acres of mixed conifer forest with species like _____, _____, and _____. This area has not had a fire pass through in 100 years and there is a lot of overgrowth. I can't walk through parts of my property because the vegetation is too thick. Tree canopies are touching over my driveway, and I don't have a clear escape route if there was a fire. I want to make my property safer but I'm not sure where to start. What should I do?

I am a **Private Landowner**.

I have worked hard to clear defensible space and maintain my property for fire season. My neighbor who is just 200 feet away from me has not. Some of the hazards on their property are _____, _____, and _____. I worry if there is a fire, embers from their property could blow over to my property. They say they want to keep their property more “natural”. They are friendly people, but I am not sure how to start the conversation. I don’t want to cause an argument. How should I start a conversation or get some help?

I am a **Homeowner**.

I am working to improve my house’s defensible space. I had a free property inspection last month and was given a list of things to improve to be more fire-safe. Three changes I am going to make to improve my defensible space are:

- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
-

I am a **Homeowner**.

I saw a poster in town that said embers are the cause of most home ignitions during a wildfire. It said that defensible space alone is not enough to protect my home from an ember storm. I didn’t know embers from a large fire can blow from over a mile away! To be more prepared, I am now working to harden my house to embers. Three improvements I am going to make are:

- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
-

I am a **Prescriber Burn Association Organizer**.

We are a group of neighbors who help each other get “good fire” on our properties. We share burn equipment, advice, training, and work. This is a great, low-cost way for community members to gather, share resources, and work together. We meet to prepare and help each other with prescribed burns. Since we started this group in Butte County, I have noticed changes in people’s attitudes towards fire. There is more acceptance of using prescribed fire. A fear that some people have about using prescribed fire is _____. The reality is that _____.

I am an **Ecologist**.

I study the health of our forest ecosystems. When I study ecosystems that have had low-intensity fire in the past few years I notice:

- 1)
- 2)

When I study ecosystems that have not had a fire in a very long time I notice:

- 1)
 - 2)
-

I am a **Botanist**.

I work to track and remove invasive plant species. Some invasive plants in our area we should focus on removing is _____ and _____. These plants are harmful and increase our risk of wildfire because _____.

I am an **Arborist**.

I specialize in the health of oak trees. In Butte County, we have multiple species of oaks including valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, black oak, canyon live oak, and scrub oak. Low-intensity fire can benefit oak trees by _____. Oak trees are important to the oak woodland ecosystem because _____. They are also a culturally important tree for the Maidu people because _____.

I am an **Arborist**.

I specialize in conifer trees. An adaptation the _____ tree has to live with fire is _____. This tree could be at risk from a wildfire if _____. In conifer forests that have not had a fire in a long time, the forest structure becomes very dense. Mature trees crowd out the smaller trees so the forest is not diverse. These forests are made up of the same few species until something thins out the forest. Large fires that sweep through these overgrown forests often kill all the trees because the heat is so intense. Keeping regular, controlled fire in these ecosystems can help lessen this problem.

I am a **Chipper Machine Operator**.

Do you have fallen branches, overgrown brush, and other vegetation that needs chipping? At the Butte County Fire Safe Council, we have a Chipper Program that offers free services to residents who are working on their wildfire safety. I will bring out the chipper machine and leave you with some chipped-up scattered mulch. This is an alternative to pile burning or hauling brush yourself. If you want me to chip on your property here is what you need to do to get ready _____.

I am a **Goat Herd Owner**.

I own 200 goats that are used for fuel reduction projects around the county. Goats help reduce wildfire risk because _____. Some of the plants they munch down include _____. One of the benefits of using goats to reduce this vegetation is _____. This idea has been catching on and people are paying more attention to the idea of using grazing for fire mitigation.

I am a **School Administrator**.

I work at _____ (your school's name) school. I am responsible for making sure our school has a fire emergency plan and that all staff know what to do if there is a fire threat. At our school if there is a fire threat we plan to _____. To make sure everyone knows the plan I will _____. If students are told we need to evacuate it is important that they _____.

I am a **Landscaper**.

I help people create more fire-resistant landscaping. It is important to make good choices about what plants to put around your house. Two plant species I advise against keeping are _____ and _____ because _____. I encourage people to plant California native, drought-tolerant plants instead. They save water and their property becomes much more fire-resistant.

Wildfire Response Roles

I am a **Wildland Firefighter**.

I am part of a team that works on prescribed burns, wildfire suppression, and fire preparedness. I have an extremely physically and mentally difficult job. I often work 12 hours a day and can be sent out with my team to a wildfire for days to weeks at a time. I have learned how to use and maintain equipment like fire engines, tractors, mowers, chain saws, and hand tools. I have also learned how to use a topographic map and compass, use weather monitoring tools, and predict a fire's behavior. I must always be alert to a fire's behavior and conditions. Three factors that affect fire behavior are _____, _____, and _____. Some things I watch out for that could lead to a higher severity fire is _____ and _____.

I am a **Volunteer Firefighter**.

I am part of the Butte County Fire Department. I serve my community by responding to a wide variety of situations. I must be prepared to respond to a call, day or night. Sometimes I am responding to an emergency and other times I help people with requests for information and assistance. Part of public education is explaining to people the "Ready, Set, Go" model. These steps mean _____. Something you should do at each step is:

Ready _____

Set _____

Go _____

I am a **Communications Operator**.

I work in Emergency Command Center Operations for Butte County. We process around 48 incidents per day or 17,500 per year. If a 911 call is for fire rescue, medical, or other non-law enforcement emergencies, the caller is transferred to us. We coordinate emergency response within Butte County, as well as communicate with our neighboring counties for assistance during a wildfire. If you are searching for information and updates during a wildfire emergency, you could use the following sources:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

During a wildfire you should call 911 if _____.

I am an American Red Cross Volunteer.

Ninety percent of the American Red Cross workforce are volunteers. I volunteer on the Disaster Action Team. If an emergency shelter is opened due to a wildfire, I help evacuees by offering emotional support, serving meals, providing medical care, and providing what information I can. If people are asked to evacuate, they should listen to local officials for information about the nearest evacuation point or shelter. If people need to evacuate to a shelter, they should try and bring _____ with them. Some things they should not bring are _____.

I am a North Valley Animal Disaster Group Volunteer.

Our mission is to educate Butte County residents on pet evacuation. During an emergency, we help evacuate, rescue, or shelter-in-place animals at risk. We train year-round on fireline safety, emergency equipment, radio operations, animal rescue, and animal handling so our team is ready to respond. There are some important things you can do now to prepare your pet for an evacuation. This can include:

- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
-

I am a North Valley Animal Disaster Group Volunteer.

In addition to household pets, we can help with larger animals and livestock like _____ that people are unable to evacuate with or take to a shelter. An important thing you should do now is make a plan. You should know where you would evacuate the animals. Have several evacuation routes in mind. If you don't have your own truck and trailer, make arrangements with local companies or neighbors before a fire emergency. Other actions you can take to prepare your large animals and livestock are:

- 1)
 - 2)
-

I am a Law Enforcement Officer.

I help people get to their nearest Public Assembly Point and follow evacuation routes. People must be familiar with these places so they can evacuate quickly and safely during a wildfire emergency. The nearest Public Assembly Point is _____. To get there from here you need to go _____.

I am an Air Quality Monitor.

It is important people protect themselves from the dangers of wildfire smoke. You can check online for local air quality reports by typing your zip code into AirNow.gov. Here you will find your area's Air Quality Index (AQI) which is a color-coded scale from 0 to 500. Today's air quality is _____ with the _____ color code. If there is poor air quality from smoke, keep indoors as much as possible and keep windows and doors closed. Do not rely on paper or cloth masks for smoke protection. These masks will not protect your lungs from the small particles of wildfire smoke. A _____ mask is a mask that could protect you from smoke and should be added to your Go Bag.

Recovery Roles

I am a Geologist.

I work for the U.S. Forest Service and focus on fire recovery. After a fire, landscapes are missing roots and vegetation cover that stabilizes soil. This causes faster erosion of soils which can lead to debris flows and flooding. The mass movement of soil and water downhill or downstream from the fire area can be dangerous and destructive. My job is to help prevent erosion and stabilize slopes after a fire. Some of the ways I do this is by:

- 1)
 - 2)
-

I am a Conservation Projects Coordinator.

I oversee large reforestation projects with the Resource Conservation District of Butte County. Putting the forest back the way it was before the fire is not "recovery". We must set the new forest up to be successful with the current and future impacts of climate change. Butte County will experience longer droughts, warmer wetter storms, and have more frequent fires. We will not replace every tree that burned because Butte County's "next forest" needs to be less dense. One of our efforts is in oak restoration. The new forest will be open, patchy, and diverse. This is a healthier ecosystem and safer for people to live in and around because _____.

I am a **High School Senior**.

I have to fulfill 20 hours of community service for school this year. I want to make wildfire recovery the focus of my senior project and I have three school friends who can help me. I want to make a positive impact here before I get a job or go to college next year. My project idea is to _____. This is important because _____. Are there any organizations here that can help me do this? I need someone to supervise and sign off on my hours.

I am a **Climate Scientist**.

I study the impacts that climate change has on ecosystems and predict future climate conditions. Some of the effects of climate change that contributes to more frequent and higher-severity fires in California are _____ and _____. My research is important so that we can develop new strategies to deal with the changes that climate change will bring to our forests and communities.
