



Oracle Firewise Board

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U.S. Forest Service, Coronado National Forest
Santa Catalina Ranger District
SUBJECT: Catalina-Rincon FireScape Project
ATTN: Christina Pearson, Interdisciplinary Team Leader
VIA FAX 520-749-7723

As the Oracle Firewise Board of Directors, we would like to thank the Forest Service staff personnel who conducted the public meeting in Oracle on the Catalina-Rincon FireScape Project. The presentation was informative and has certainly generated a great deal of discussion and concern within our community.

The Oracle Fire District covers 43 square miles in Pinal County and shares a large common boundary with Coronado National Forest and Arizona State Lands. In the Oracle District, there are 4,000 residents, 1,700 homes and 90 businesses.

Because of its mountainous and rolling topography and dense vegetation, Oracle is uniquely susceptible to forest fires as a community. Most residents remember with dread the devastating forest fires that swept up to the edges of Oracle's residential districts—the Oracle Hill and Bullock Fires of 2002 and the Aspen Fire of 2003.

As an official Firewise Community, we are intensely focused on wildfire mitigation through public educational activities, residential property fuel assessments, wildfire fuel reduction and management programs (the Oracle Brush Dump) and the maintenance and constant refinement of Oracle's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Thanks to the extensive help, counsel and assistance from the U.S. Forest Service and the Arizona State Forestry Division, tremendous strides have been made to reduce hazardous fuels and to create defensible space on both sides of our common boundaries. We are pleased to see that the operational aspects of the FireScape Project Plan bring those wildfire management objectives into even sharper focus.

The primary treatment methods that have been used to date in and around Oracle by residents, the U.S. Forest Service and the Arizona State Forestry Division are cutting, chipping, mastication, grubbing and fuelwood sales. Those treatment methods have proved to be precise, effective and without risk to surrounding properties and the community as a whole.

We would urge the U.S. Forest Service to continue to use those specific treatment methods around the periphery of Oracle rather than prescribed burns. We understand the role of fire in an ecological context and the successful use of fire as a management tool, but prescribed burns, regardless of all precautions taken, have and will continue to jump the fire lines as wild fires on occasion.

That's our concern as a community that has survived the Oracle Hill, Bullock and Aspen Fires when we review the prescribed burn proposals of the FireScape Plan. As a community, we continue to look over its shoulder because we know there are still large amounts of fuel yet to be treated within and without the boundaries Oracle. Burn but please don't burn around Oracle.

Sincerely,

Mary Harris, Co-Chair Oracle Firewise Board
Brian Kirkpatrick, Co-Chair Oracle Firewise Board