

# Oracle Prepares for Wildfire Season

By Fire Chief Larry Southard

Wildfire preparation in Oracle doesn't just occur during the wildfire season, but rather it is a year round process that is usually associated with homeowners creating a "defensible space" or as we often call it, creating a "survivable space" around their homes.

Advance preparation is the key to surviving a catastrophic wildfire, and many Oracle homeowners have been doing a wonderful job of following National Firewise Communities criteria for protecting their homes and families.

Homes having a defensible space statistically have a much better chance of surviving a wildfire than those that don't. Creating a defensible space requires some advance planning including some physical labor on the part of the homeowner; however creating a defensible space doesn't mean having a moon scape around your home either.

An effective defensible space is usually nothing more than having a well maintained and landscaped yard that is free of dry grass, weeds, low tree limbs, dead trees, and flammable yard debris. Ensuring trees are healthy and hydrated along with providing a space between the trees and structures is also important.

Keeping vegetation and other combustibles away from vulnerable areas of your home could mean the difference between your home surviving or not. Areas in and around your home that are especially susceptible to wildfire are combustible exterior siding, wooden patios, porches, walkways & fences, flat roofs, unscreened attic and crawl space vents, patio furniture and vehicles.

One of the weakest points of your home, and often one of the least considered areas, are windows. It doesn't take much of a fire to leap through an open window and ignite the room and contents. Windows are also fragile and they can easily break in a high heat situation. These high risk areas for wildfire intrusion should always have a minimum of at least three feet of spacing from outside combustible material.

The Oracle Fire Department has been very successful in obtaining a number of large fire prevention grants and the results of those grants can be seen all over town and especially in the areas to the south and to the east that pose the greatest risk of wildfire, such as Cody Loop, Coronado Ridge Road, Durant Road, Hobe Road, Paseo Encino, and several others.

Some of these grants have provided funding for 90% of the costs of fuels treatments on private properties, while other grants have provided 100% of the funding for fuels treatments along several of our most hazardous roadways.

Major arterials such as American Avenue, Linda Vista Road, Mount Lemmon Highway, Rockliff and a few others were given a high priority for fuels treatment, as they would likely become areas of heavy traffic and possible traffic jams during a major evacuation.

Many of you have probably seen the Wildland Crew trucks that are frequently in Oracle. These crews from the Arizona Department of Corrections (DOC) are under the authority of the Arizona State Forestry Division.

While the 20 man DOC crew from Florence, works in Oracle almost year round, recently other DOC crews from Tucson and Globe have been working here too, as well as a variety of fire crews from the Arizona State Forestry Division and from Coronado National Forest.

A number of Pinal and Pima County wildland firefighting teams, under the direction of Oracle FD, have been using several areas of Oracle as a training ground for a variety of field exercises.

Whenever these agencies use our town for training purposes, we benefit from it as much as they do; they receive the training and the physical conditioning, while Oracle receives the benefit of having these wildland firefighters getting familiar with our community, including learning where our high risk areas are, along with learning where their safety zones and lookout points are located.

While Oracle Fire Department has well-trained and well-experienced wildland firefighters, and our crews have been very successful in extinguishing countless wildfires while they are still in the early growth stages; at some point we may have to depend on outside resources to assist us.

If or when, we would ever need to push the panic button, it will be comforting to know that these outside agencies have provided literally hundreds of “boots on the ground” during their various training and familiarization exercises in Oracle.

The picture shows the Florence DOC Wildland crew during a physical endurance and area familiarity exercise held on May 29<sup>th</sup>. The 20 man crew is hiking, while in full gear, up the steep Oracle Ridge Trail located just off of Cody Loop.

Information on National Firewise Communities and many other fire prevention and preparedness topics can be found on the OFD web site at [www.oraclefire.org](http://www.oraclefire.org) or feel free to stop by the fire station and ask for Firewise brochures or to have your questions answered by our friendly staff.