



A Program Aimed at Combating Wildfires



One of the homes that survived the onslaught of the destructive Creek Fire within the Pine Ridge neighborhood outside of Shaver Lake. Photo courtesy of Steve Haze

FRESNO COUNTY, CA – Recorded as the largest single fire in California’s wildfire history, the Creek Fire caused 30,000 residents of Fresno County and 15,000 residents of Madera County to evacuate, burned 352,339 acres, destroyed 856 and damaged at least 71 structures.

Thanks to the Eastern Fresno County Fire Safe and Stewardship Fuels Reduction Program, a small cluster of homes is proof that being proactive in implementing fire safety measures is beneficial.

“Initiated in February 2019, the Eastern Fresno County Firesafe and Stewardship Fuels Reduction Program was established through a grant from the California Fire

Safe Council,” said Steve Haze, District Manager of the Sierra Resource Conservation District (SRCD). “The program is executed in two phases – Phase I involves property assessment and Phase II involves preventative actions. It enlists private landowners within and adjoining the Sierra National Forest in developing defensible areas on their properties and within the Wildlands Urban Interface.”

According to Haze, landowners participating in the program can have their property assessed at no cost. “The objective is for landowners to better understand their forested landscape and its resources, identify forest improvement opportunities, and implement forest management practices,” Haze said.

The program is integrated into existing and planned fuel breaks and other fuel reduction efforts underway in California. It is made up of a Task Force known as the Technical and Regulatory Advisory Committee (TRAC) which includes the US Forest Service (USFS), CALFIRE, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Southern California Edison (SCE), Caltrans, and Fresno

County among others. TRAC provides the determination on what are the key targeted areas in which to outreach to landowners.

“The program has two components – a firesafe component and a stewardship component,” Haze said. “The firesafe component includes dead and hazardous tree removal and wildfire hazard mitigation (defensible space and home hardening). The stewardship component includes thinning and general forest improvement work, reforestation, soil erosion control and other forest stewardship activities.”

Forest stewardship is an approach to forest management that meets the needs of the landowners. It is based on conservation principles that ensure protection of all forest resources including wildlife, timber, soil, water recreational opportunities and natural beauty. Forest stewards actively manage their land on a long-term basis by following management objectives that are based on multiple resources, are economically viable and conserve natural resources.

Spring 2019, the SRCD in partnership with the Highway 168 Fire Safe Council sent flyers to homeowners seeking permission to execute a firesafe assessment of their property. The assessment involved the inspection of the roof, vents, eaves and soffits, windows, siding, decks, chimney, rain gutters, fence, water supply, garage, outbuildings, driveway and access roads. Defensible space was also noted.

Homeowners in the Pine Ridge neighborhood were among the program participants. Of particular concern, in this neighborhood, was the amount of log decks that were located on properties.

“These had been there from three to five years,” Haze said. “We hired a logging company to remove them.”

September 2020, the Creek Fire began its reign in the counties of Fresno and Madera.

Located in Fresno County, a small cluster of six homes in the Pine

Ridge neighborhood was unscathed as a result of their proactive wildfire mitigation activities. The mitigation measures included home hardening, creating defensible space and other fuel reduction activities that had been executed on the properties. These homes have an average current market value of \$400,000; an estimated \$2,400,000 in losses was avoided due to the mitigation measures.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), research around home destruction versus home survival in wildfires point to embers and small flames as the main way



In a race against time, thousands of decayed logs (due to drought and bark beetle infestation) located on landowners' properties were removed as quickly as possible. The logs were relocated 25 miles away from the fire zone. They will be used for other purposes. Photo courtesy of Steve Haze

that the majority of homes ignite in wildfires. Embers are burning pieces of airborne wood and/or vegetation that can be carried more than a mile through the wind can cause spot fires and ignite homes, debris and other objects. Note, there are methods, such as the fire mitigation activities listed above, for homeowners to prepare their homes to withstand ember attacks and minimize the likelihood of flames or surface fire touching the home or any attachments.

For additional information, visit: <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Preparing-homes-for-wildfire> and <https://sierrarc.com/>