

# Walker Community Assessment

## 1) Introduction

The Firewise Communities/USA program is designed to provide an effective management approach for preserving wildland living aesthetics. The program can be tailored for adoption by any community and/or neighborhood association that is committed to ensuring its citizens maximum protection from wildland fire. The following community assessment is intended as a resource to be used by the Walker residents for creating a wildfire safety action plan. The plan developed from the information in this assessment should be implemented in a collaborative manner, and updated and modified as needed.

On October 22, 2010, residents of Walker met with Gary Roysdon. Mr. Roysdon is a qualified assessor and Chairman of Prescott Area Wildland Urban Interface Commission (PAWUIC). Residents in attendance were:

Loren Bykerk  
Mona Feige  
Richard Feige  
Mark Keegan  
Greg Kozlowski  
Bud Mellor

## 2) Definition of the Home Ignition Zone

Walker is located in a forested area, wildfire environment. Wildfires will happen—exclusion is not a choice. The variables in a fire scenario are when the fire will occur, and where. This assessment addresses the wildfire-related characteristics of Walker. It examines the area's exposure to wildfire as it relates to ignition potential. The assessment does not focus on specific homes, but examines the community as a whole.

A house burns because of its interrelationship with everything in its surrounding home ignition zone—the house and its immediate surroundings. To avoid a home ignition, a homeowner must eliminate the wildfire's potential relationship with his/her house. This can be accomplished by interrupting the natural path a fire takes. Changing a fire's path by clearing a home ignition zone is an easy-to-accomplish task that can result in avoiding home loss. To accomplish this, flammable items such as dead vegetation must be removed from the area immediately around the structure to prevent flames from contacting it. Also, reducing the volume of live vegetation will affect the intensity of the wildfire as it enters the home ignition zone.

Included in this assessment are observations made while visiting Walker. The assessment addresses the ease with which home ignitions can occur under severe wildfire conditions and how these ignitions might be avoided within the home ignition zones of affected residents. Walker residents can reduce their risk of destruction during a wildfire by taking actions within their

home ignition zones. This zone principally determines the potential for home ignitions during a wildland fire; it includes a house and its immediate surroundings within 100 to 150 feet.

The result of the assessment is that wildfire behavior will be dominated by the residential characteristics of this area. The good news is that by addressing community vulnerabilities, residents will be able to substantially reduce their exposure to loss. Relatively small investments of time and effort will reap great rewards in wildfire safety.

### 3) Description of Walker, the Severe Case Wildland Fire Characteristics That Could Threaten the Area

Fire intensity and spread rate depend on the fuel type and condition (live/dead), the weather conditions prior and during ignition, and the topography. Generally the following relationships hold between the fire behavior and the fuel, weather and topography.

- Fine fuels ignite more easily and spread faster with higher intensities than coarser fuels.
- For a given fuel, the more there is and the more continuous it is, the faster the fire spreads and the higher the intensities. Fine fuels take a shorter time to burn out than coarser fuels.
- The weather conditions affect the moisture content of the dead and live vegetative fuels. Dead fine fuel moisture content is highly dependent on the relative humidity and the degree of sun exposure. The lower the relative humidity and the greater the sun exposure, the lower will be the fuel moisture content. Lower fuel moistures produce higher spread rates and fire intensities.
- Wind speed significantly influences the rate of fire spread and fire intensity. The higher the wind speed, the greater the spread rate and intensity.
- Topography influences fire behavior principally by the steepness of the slope. However, the configuration of the terrain such as narrow draws, saddles and so forth can influence fire spread and intensity. In general, the steeper the slope, the higher the uphill fire spread and intensity.

### 4) Site Description

Walker is a group of private properties/residences, some of which border National Forest Service Land. The residences are intermingled within the forested terrain. Many parcels within the community are undeveloped. Many property owners are absent and/or part-time occupants of the community.

### 5) Assessment Process

Mr. Roysdon completed the assessment using the Wildland Fire Risk and Hazard Severity Assessment Form, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1144 standard. This form scores risk with regard to means of access, vegetation (Fuel Models), topography, building/roofing materials of current residences, available fire protection, and placement of utilities. The total points scored on the hazard assessment were 114, indicating extreme hazard.

## 6) Important Considerations

The Firewise Communities/USA program seeks to create a sustainable balance that will allow communities to live safely while maintaining environmental harmony in a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) setting.

Homeowners already balance their decisions about fire protection measures against their desire for certain flammable components on their properties. It is important for them to understand the implications of the choices they are making. These choices directly relate to the ignitability of their home ignition zones during a wildfire.

## 7) Successful Firewise Modifications

When adequately prepared, a house can likely withstand a wildfire without the intervention of the fire service. Further, a house and its surrounding community can be both Firewise and compatible with the area's ecosystem. The Firewise Communities/USA program is designed to enable communities to achieve a high level of protection against WUI fire loss even as a sustainable ecosystem balance is maintained.

A homeowner/community must focus attention on the home ignition zone and eliminate the fire's potential relationship with the house. This can be accomplished by disconnecting the house from high and/or low-intensity fire that could occur around it.

## 8) Next Steps

After reviewing the contents of this assessment and its recommendations, the Walker Firewise Board in cooperation with the Walker Community Action Alliance will determine whether or not it wishes to continue seeking Firewise Communities/USA recognition.

The Firewise Communities/USA representative will contact the Firewise Board representative by December 4, 2010 to receive its decision.

If the site assessment and recommendations are accepted and recognition will be sought, the Walker Firewise Board will create agreed-upon, area-specific solutions to the Firewise recommendations and create an action plan in cooperation with the Walker Fire Protection Association.

Assuming the assessment area seeks to achieve national Firewise Communities/USA recognition status, it will integrate the following standards into its plan of action:

- Sponsor a local Firewise board, task force, committee, commission or department that maintains the Firewise Community program and status.
- Involve a WUI specialist and create a plan to identify agreed-upon, achievable local solutions.

- Invest a minimum of \$2.00 annually per capita in its local Firewise activities. (Work done by municipal employees or volunteers, using municipal or other equipment, can be included, as can state/federal grants dedicated to that purpose.)
- Observe a Firewise Communities/USA Day each year that is dedicated to a local Firewise project.
- Submit an annual report to Firewise Communities/USA. This report documents continuing participation in the program.

## 9) Additional Considerations

Walker residents are reminded to be conscious of keeping high-intensity fire more than 100 feet from their homes. It is important for them to avoid fire contact with their structures. This includes firebrands. The assessment team recommends the establishment of a 'fire free zone', allowing no fire to burn within ten feet of a house by removing fuels located there. It is a bad idea for fire to touch a house during a wildfire. Remember that, while wildfire cannot be eliminated from a property, it can be reduced in intensity. Homeowners are reminded that street signs, addresses, road widths and firefighting equipment do not keep a house from igniting. Proper attention to their home ignition zones does. They should identify the things that will ignite their homes and address those. Weather is, of course, of great concern during wildfire season. When fire weather is severe, homeowners should remember not to leave flammable items outside. This includes rattan doormats, flammable patio furniture, firewood stacked next to the house, or other flammables.