

SHIELD-O Terrace Subdivision

Wildfire Plan

11/2013

Introduction

A presentation was made to the Snowmass/Capitol Creek Caucus on July 22nd 2013 to discuss wildfire preparedness. As a result the Shield-O Terrace Home Owners Association (SOTHA) requested assistance from Pitkin County to create a wildfire plan for the subdivision. On August 12th a meeting was held that included representatives from SOTHA, Pitkin County and the Basalt and Snowmass Wildcat fire departments. That meeting resulted in identifying goals, objectives and responsibilities for creating a plan. This plan is tied to the Pitkin County, 2011 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) as “Activity (M-2)” to prioritize subdivisions in the County at risk for wildfire. This document contains information about the subdivision and recommendations to reduce the risk and intensity of wildfire to residents and emergency responders.

The SOTHA Board members worked extensively to promote this effort. The property owner’s participation, spirit of cooperation and attitude of shared responsibility is appreciated by participating local, State and Federal agencies.

Overview

Shield-O Terrace is a residential subdivision located at 7000 Snowmass Creek Road, Snowmass, Colorado 81654. The subdivision is approximately 300 acres in size and surrounded by private land. Lots range from 2 to 80 acres in size. Elevation ranges from 7900-8300 ft. on a southeast aspect with slopes ranging from 10-50%. Homes within the subdivision are accessed by the main Shield-O Terrace Road and branch roads, Casey Court, Blue Sage Lane and Old Pond Way. Shield-O Mesa Road connects at the top of the subdivision and provides another means of ingress/egress. There are 24 homes in the subdivision with total, 2013 valuations at \$19,163,300. Utilities are supplied by underground electric lines and individual propane gas tanks. The subdivision is served by the Basalt & Rural Fire Protection District which has mutual aid agreements with the neighboring Snowmass Wildcat Fire Department for response in the area. Basalt Fire station 44 is the closest, located 5 miles away at 1909 Snowmass Creek Road. The vegetation consists mostly of dense mountain shrub species with scattered sagebrush, grasses and forbs. The area provides winter range for deer and elk. The dominate shrub is mature Gamble Oak which is fire dependent or requires other disturbances such as thinning as part of its reproduction cycle. There is a general high risk for wildfire in the area due to vegetation type, density, steep slopes and potential ignition from natural or manmade causes. Fires in mountain shrub species can spread rapidly especially during periods of high temperatures, low humidity and gusty winds. There is no documented history of large wildfire occurrence in the immediate area.

Evidence from recent large fires in Colorado has proven that flying, burning, embers from an advancing wildfire, which can travel a mile or more, caused the ignition of homes with or without adequate defensible space and fire resistant construction. There is no way to predict a home's vulnerability to an ember assault as it depends mainly on its proximity to wildfire fuels, wind direction/speed and topography.

Past Actions

- The SOTHA has performed annual mitigation work to improve fuel breaks along the main and branch roads.
- Two 10,000 gallon water storage tanks for fire suppression were installed along Shield-O Road.
- An emergency plan was created in 2000 with the neighboring Shield-O Mesa Road Improvement and Maintenance Association to provide information and procedures to residents regarding emergency evacuation.

Current Actions

During the fall of 2013 elements of the plan were initiated for participating property owners.

- Ready, Set, Go brochures were distributed describing wildfire preparedness, defensible space, reducing home ignitibility and evacuation planning
- Residents were advised to sign up for the Pitkin Alert emergency notification system
- Residents were advised to report any threat (smoke or flames) to 911
- SOTHA is formalizing agreements with adjacent landowners for evacuation and safe zone locations. Emergency responders will be informed of these locations. Residents will follow evacuation instructions from Pitkin Alert, law enforcement or the fire departments. If no instructions are received and residents feel threatened they should not hesitate to evacuate.

Evacuation routes identified:

- 1a) Snowmass Creek Road to Highway 82 past Conoco
- 1b) Snowmass Creek Road to Snowmass Village via Snowmass Divide
- 2 Zeigler Road
- 3 Wildcat Ranch Road (rear entrance past Deaf Camp)
- 4 Watson Divide

Safe zones identified:

- 1) Hawley Smith Ranch – Top of Shield O Road
- 2) Eagle's Rise Ranch (formerly Moon Run Ranch) – Off Snowmass Creek Road, south

- In October 2013 a majority of the owners agreed to have an individual wildfire assessment conducted on their property. An owner can request an assessment at any time by contacting the Basalt Fire Department at (970) 704-0675 or the Pitkin County Emergency Manager at (970) 920-5234. A written copy of the recommendations will be available at the time of assessment.
- A project to improve existing fuel breaks along approximately 5000 ft. (4 acres) of the main roads was completed in October 2013. A significant amount of hazardous vegetation was removed by hand crews and chipped back onto the ground
- A map of the area was created for residents identifying evacuation routes and safe zone locations
- A tactical map was created of the subdivision for emergency responders identifying roads, addresses, safe zone, water sources, GPS coordinates and potential risk of structural ignition to aid in decision making

Future Actions

- Continue annual fuel reduction projects along on roads to provide safer ingress for emergency responders and egress for residents
- Many homes in the subdivision have the minimum 30 ft. defensible space. Owners are encouraged to extend mitigation to 100 ft. or the property line. This provides safer locations for fire suppression activities
- Continue annual wildfire education and preparedness presentations to the Snowmass/Capitol Creek Caucus
- Explore grant opportunities for homeowners
- Identify County road easements for mitigation projects

Recommendations

Following these recommendations will not guarantee a home will survive a wildfire. There will always be some risk regardless of mitigation efforts or structural characteristics.

- Home construction varies throughout the subdivision. It is highly recommended that wood shake roofs and wood decks be replaced with fire resistant materials
- Wood siding that touches the ground is a concern due to burning embers piling up against it but it's also expensive to replace. If possible, replace the bottom 2 ft. with non flammable materials like stone or metal
- Remove vegetation a minimum of 10 ft. from either side of driveways
- Trim grasses to 6" a minimum of 10 ft. from any structure
- Remove all flammable material 5 ft. from any structure including decorative bark, replace with rock. This does not include less flammable ornamental plants, trees or shrubs

- Residents should have 4 inch reflective addresses that are visible and at least 4 ft. off the ground. This is especially important for medical emergencies. If emergency responders can't find you they can't help you.
 - Create defensible space a minimum of 30 ft. around any structures allowing emergency responders a safe place to work and minimize direct flame impingement. Remove all flammable materials from underneath wood decks. See the CSFS link below for specifics.
 - Use 1/8 inch or smaller wire mesh to enclose wood decks at ground level. This helps prevent embers from accumulating underneath.
 - Remove firewood from decks or next to flammable siding
 - Separate wood fences attached to a structure with 3 ft. of chain link metal
 - Trim tree and shrub branches to 1/3rd the height to reduce ground fire ignition
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- To learn more about creating wildfire defensible space around your home and view wildfire maps (COWRAP) visit the CSFS website at www.csfs.colostate.edu
 - To view the Pitkin County Wildfire mitigation maps visit: www.aspenpitkin.com/Departments/GIS-Mapping