

Fire Safe Community Programs Comparison: Fire Adapted, Firewise, Fire Resilient.

Fire Adapted

What is a fire adapted community?

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group defines a fire adapted community as “A human community consisting of informed and prepared citizens collaboratively planning and taking action to safely coexist with wildland fire.” More fully, a fire adapted community is a knowledgeable, engaged community where actions of residents and agencies in relation to infrastructure, buildings, landscaping and the surrounding ecosystem lessen the need for extensive protection actions and enable the community to safely accept fire as part of the surrounding landscape.

Because every community is unique, the steps and strategies they take to improve their wildfire resilience will vary from place to place.

Who is FAC for?

Because all stakeholders share wildfire risk, a fire adapted community strategy stresses that everyone shares responsibility. Stakeholders in a fire adapted community include residents, businesses, policy-makers, land managers and emergency responders, as well as local, state, tribal and federal governments.

What is the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network?

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) is a national network of people working to build sustainable wildfire resilience capacity in fire-prone communities. The Network is the result of a partnership among The Nature Conservancy, the Watershed Research and Training Center and the USDA Forest Service, as well as the many wildfire resilience practitioners who make up our membership.

What is FAC Net working toward?

FAC Net’s mission is to connect and support people and communities who are striving to live more safely with wildfire. Fire adaptation is an alternative to the costly, dangerous and insufficient fire-suppression model.

The Network has the following objectives:

Demonstrate fire adaptation in a variety of contexts representative of the diversity of communities with wildfire risk in the US;
Innovate and experiment with new practices to enhance fire adaptation before, during and after wildfires; Share and spread knowledge and practice among Network members; and
Spark and support the fire adaptation efforts of other practitioners in locations outside the Network.
By modeling a viable alternative to the current fire management paradigm, FAC Net members are leading the change toward fire resilience in the United States.

Is “fire adapted communities” just a new name for Firewise?

No. The Firewise USA recognition program is one of many strategies a community can use to address its fire risk, and it targets primarily residents. Community fire adaptation includes additional actors (fire departments, business owners, land managers, etc.) and strategies (such as evacuation planning, developing and updating community wildfire protection plans, adopting WUI codes and ordinances, conducting controlled burns and performing post-fire recovery planning). “Fire adapted communities” is not a program; rather, it is a holistic and adaptive approach to help communities live safely with wildfires.

How can my community be recognized for our fire adaptation work?

There is no formal fire adapted communities recognition program. The communities shown on various maps (including the map on this website) represent people and places that are interested in fire adaptation and want to connect with other people and places working on these issues. The map simply depicts the network of engaged people and places and does not indicate a “level” of activity, or provide information about conditions in those locations. Anyone, anywhere could be taking fire adaptation actions.

Why is there no fire adapted communities recognition program?

Fire adapted communities is all about community wildfire resilience. By definition, resilience is a continuous process that includes regular assessment and adaptation, and there is no end-point. An important element of community resilience is social connectedness.

What do you mean by “learning network”?

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is an example of a “generative social-impact network,” which is defined as “a set of people who voluntarily organize themselves for collective action to solve a large, complex social problem” (Plastrik et al. 2014). In the case of FAC Net, our members have organized themselves to work wildfire resilience.

Why is a learning network a good way to address wildfire issues?

Unlike coalitions or alliances, generative networks tackle problems that require a good deal of time and adaptive management to address. The members develop powerful, enduring relationships, and members (vs. staff) do most of the group’s work. The long-term, cooperative, and nimble nature of this generative network makes it ideal for addressing the dynamic problem of community resiliency to wildfire.

How can I join the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network?

We welcome individuals and organizations actively working on fire adaptation to join FAC Net as affiliate members. If you are interested in joining FAC Net, please read about membership and then apply to create a profile. When you become a member, you commit to advancing the practice of fire adaptation and to sharing and learning with other community wildfire resilience practitioners.

Firewise USA®

What is the Firewise USA® program?

The Firewise USA® Program encourages local solutions for safety by involving homeowners in taking individual responsibility for preparing their homes from the risk of wildfire. The program provides resources to help homeowners learn how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to work together to take action now to prevent losses. Initiated in 2002 with 12 pilot neighborhoods, the national Firewise USA® Recognition Program has more than 1,500 recognized Firewise USA® sites in 40 states, as well as a participation retention rate of 80 percent over the past decade. The program, aimed at homeowners, provides specific criteria for communities regarding wildfire preparedness, and based on this criteria, offers national recognition for their work.

The Firewise USA® program is co-sponsored by the [USDA Forest Service](#), the [U.S. Department of the Interior](#), and the [National Association of State Foresters](#).

Who is Firewise for?

As America's population continues to expand, much of the development to accommodate that growth has flowed into traditionally natural areas. A trend toward migration from urban centers and suburbs into formerly rural and wild areas places many more people in the path of potential wildfire. Threats to life and property from wildfires and costs for suppressing them are expanding at an astounding rate.

Since 1970, more than 10,000 homes and 20,000 other structures and facilities have been lost to severe wildland fires. Once a fire starts, there is only so much fire service professionals can do to protect structures. The Firewise USA® Program empowers individual homeowners to take an active role in protecting structures before a fire starts.

What is a Firewise USA® community?

Firewise communities are those that have taken appropriate measures to become more resistant to wildfire structural damage.

Firewise techniques include minimizing the risk of home ignition by carefully landscaping around residential structures such as thinning trees and brush and choosing fire-resistant plants, selecting ignition-resistant building materials and positioning structures away from slopes.

In addition, communities that have earned the special distinction of being recognized under the Firewise USA™ Program have followed a systematic approach to organizing and implementing a Firewise mitigation plan in their neighborhood.

What is Firewise working toward?

One of the benefits of participating in the Firewise program is that communities receive continuing support because of the communication that occurs among the Firewise Board, the local fire department and state or federal wildfire agency representatives. The action plan created by each community is implemented via annual Firewise Day events (local mitigation activities) and, thus, wildfire readiness improves in the long term.

Other benefits: Get framework for action; Learn about wildfire; Get peace of mind; Community-building; Build citizen pride; Get publicity; Access to funding and assistance; Insurance discount for USAA members (CA).

Firewise has the following objectives:

The Firewise USA® program’s goal is to promote community-wide participation in the use of technology, policy and practices that minimize the loss of life and property to wildfire, independent of firefighting efforts. The Firewise USA® program is seamlessly contained in this goal, as communities learn when they begin the recognition process.

Is “Firewise” just another name for fire adapted communities?

No, being a Firewise USA® site is a great step toward improving the chances of a home’s survival from wildfire. But your home and neighborhood is just one important part of a whole community that requires protection. This means residents must look at everything at risk from including businesses, infrastructure, cultural resources and natural areas. Fire Adapted Communities, an initiative coordinated by NFPA and USDA Forest Service addresses this “whole” community approach.

Fire Adapted Communities is a collaborative approach to reducing wildfire risks throughout an entire community and helps connect all those who play a role in wildfire preparedness like community officials, planners or developers, residents and business owners, emergency responders, insurance representatives and land managers and public utilities, with the organizations and programs that provide resources for their (these) specific wildfire preparedness needs. NFPA’s Firewise USA® Program is a key component of the fire adapted approach and provides the framework to help residents reduce the risk of losing their homes and property to wildfire.

How can my community be recognized as a Firewise community?

1. Complete a community assessment and create a plan
2. Form a Firewise Board
3. Hold a Firewise Day event
4. Invest a minimum of \$2/capita in local wildfire mitigation projects. (Volunteer hours, equipment use, time contributed by agency fire staff, and grant funding can be included)
5. Submit an application

What is the Firewise recognition program?

Those communities successfully meeting the requirements and becoming a recognized Firewise USA® site receive a sign for the community to post which signifies their Firewise USA® status and “Residents Reducing Wildfire Risks.” As a Firewise USA® site, the national organization provides access to educational brochures, templates, training and state representative resources. Being a recognized site requires reporting the ongoing work residents complete each year to reduce their wildfire risks, while addressing the areas identified in their community’s wildfire assessment. Every year participating sites must submit an annual renewal to maintain their “In Good Standing” status.

Why is Firewise a good way a good way to address wildfire issues?

A written wildfire risk assessment becomes a community-wide view that identifies areas of successful wildfire risk reduction and areas where improvements could be made. Emphasis is on the general conditions of homes and related home ignition zones. The assessment is a living document and is updated every five years.

How can I start a Firewise USA® site?

- [Contact your state liaison](#) to learn more about the requirements and how to get started

Organize it: Form a board/committee that's comprised of residents and other applicable wildfire stakeholders. Consider inviting the local fire department, state forestry agency, elected officials, emergency manager, and if applicable the property management company to participate. This group will collaborate on identifying the site's boundary and size. Firewise sites need to have a minimum of 8 individual single family dwelling units and are limited to a maximum of 2,500. Multiple sites can be located within a single large master-planned community/HOA.

Plan it: Obtain a written wildfire risk assessment from your state forestry agency or fire department. The assessment should be a community-wide view that identifies areas of successful wildfire risk reduction and areas where improvements could be made. Emphasis should be on the general conditions of homes and related home ignition zones. The assessment is a living document and needs to be updated every five years.

Your board/committee will develop an action plan - a prioritized list of risk reduction projects/investments, along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities. Action plans should be updated at a minimum of at least every three years.

Do it: Host an outreach event and work with neighbors on addressing items in the action plan. These efforts will go towards your site's annual wildfire risk reduction investment.

At a minimum, each site is required to annually invest the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in wildfire risk reduction actions. If your site has identified 100 homes within its boundary, than 100 hours of work or the monetary equivalent need to be completed for that year.

Complete application: *New applications can be completed online at portal.firewise.org. Tell us about the actions and efforts in your community to engage residents and complete mitigation work at the home level. Once all the criteria has been completed, the electronic application can be submitted.*

Wildland Fire Resilient Landscapes Activities

Wildland Fire Resilient Landscapes (WFRL) activities, proposed in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 President's Budget, defined several key concepts - the integration and coordination between Interior's four wildland fire management bureaus and their natural resource counterparts, and landscape-scale activities in partnership with other Federal, tribal, state, and local government and nongovernmental partners. Bureaus would leverage funds to restore and maintain fire resilient landscapes.

The FY 2015 President's Budget request included funding to establish a new "Resilient Landscapes" activity to improve the integrity and resilience of forests and rangelands by restoring natural vegetation landscapes to specific conditions and maintain fire resiliency. Subsequently, as a pilot initiative, Congress provided \$10 million in the FY 2015 Fuels Management program to fund resilient landscape activities.

WFRL activities is an approach to achieve fire resiliency goals across landscapes with the collaborative efforts defined in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and in support of Secretarial Order 3336 - Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration. These activities strengthen the Wildland Fire Management program's overall ability to restore and maintain landscapes across all jurisdictions, so they are resilient to fire related disturbances in accordance with management objectives. The wildland fire approach to WFRL uses an integrated, place-based approach of partnerships among programs, activities, and organizations to increase resilience to fire. Close collaboration between the wildland fire and resource management programs is essential to address broad land-health outcomes and the ecological role of fire in fire-adapted ecosystems.

The Department placed priority on proposals where landscape characteristics were at elevated risk posed by wildfire and where fire risk could be mitigated (reduce the chance of large, catastrophic fires) and re-establish the ecological function of fire for enhancing or protection of critical natural resources and watersheds. The Resilient Landscape Collaboratives (i.e., approved proposals) received funding at a scale to provide results over five to ten years that will significantly contribute to long-term outcomes. Those proposals with the ability to begin work in FY 2015 received priority. FY 2016 funding supported the continuation of FY 2015 projects. New proposals were solicited for FY 2017.

<https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/wildland-fire-resilient-landscapes-program>

Resilient Landscapes

Healthy, thriving ecosystems are less vulnerable to extreme wildfires that can devastate watersheds, destroy wildlife habitat, and risk lives. Healthy ecosystems can adapt to climate change, invasive species, and insect infestations. Unfortunately, keeping fire out of wildlands has left forests and grasslands crowded with flammable vegetation. Climate change has made fire seasons longer and droughts and insect infestations worse. Whole landscapes are now vulnerable to devastating, extreme wildfires.

The U.S. Forest Service is working with partners to restore healthy, resilient, fire-adapted ecosystems. Restoring ecosystems includes thinning crowded forests and using prescribed fire on two to three million acres each year, which can help prevent the buildup of flammable vegetation that feeds extreme wildfires. Assessments of more than 1,400 fuel treatments since 2006 have shown that they are effective in reducing both the cost and damage from wildfires. In certain locations, when conditions are right, we will even manage naturally caused wildfires to perform their natural role in controlling fuel buildup, rejuvenating vegetation, and restoring ecosystems that benefit from fire.

Thinning, prescribed fires, and managing naturally caused wildfires to achieve natural resource management objectives can help prevent extreme wildfires with minimal impacts to air quality while smoke from extreme wildfires may pose significant risks to public health and safety.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire/resilient-landscapes>