

Viktor on Wildland Fire

by Penny Randell

Taking an in-depth and personal account of property and what invades and surrounds it is the first step in saving lives, animals, and homes from fire. Viktor the elk here with some valuable facts and information about living in a wildland-urban interface (WUI), as here in the foothills of Evergreen, Colorado. We elk are seriously affected by such, as it remains a legitimate concern for all of us. Any area where structures and other development by humans intermingle with wildland vegetation is considered a WUI and steps to insure human safety should be taken seriously.

Begin by establishing an area around your home or other buildings that should be cleared of natural or manmade fuels. This is what is known as defensible space and is designed to give your home a fighting chance against wildfire. Create three zones. Zone one is considered to be up to 30 feet from a structure or nearest to your home. This zone deserves maximum effort and should always be completely cleared. Decks are particularly vulnerable, as is anything under the deck. Zone two is 30 to 100 feet out and is usually slash, brush, and grassland. The third zone is 100 ft. and beyond. History reveals that taking such steps gives your home an 85% chance of survival and not doing so results in a 15% chance.

Here in Colorado fires are a threat 365 days a year. In certain areas of vegetation, it's not **if** fire will happen, but **when**. To address these issues, a whole bunch of folks with the USDA Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Fire Administration, among others, got together and created what is called the *Ready, Set, Go! Program*. Once defensible space has been created, attention should rest solely on family. Ready means establishing a Family Disaster Plan that includes meeting locations and a plan to evacuate large animals if appropriate. Fire extinguishers should always be on hand, and shut-off controls for gas, electric, and water should be readily known. Too, an emergency supply kit should be placed both in your home and car.

Once the *Ready* part of the program is completed, *Set* comes into play. This is the part that equals BE PREPARED! Check in with inciweb.nwccg.gov to stay informed about local fire weather. Next, evacuate if you know you are out of time. Otherwise, take time to alert all family and neighbors, close all windows and doors, remove shades and curtains from windows, turn off all pilot lights and air conditioning, and move furniture to the middle of the room. Again, if there is time extinguish any small fires surrounding your house. Have a ladder available and cover attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals if possible.

Go! This is when you act by vacating your property. A controlled, yet speedy exit gives you and your family the best chance of survival. Roads must be cleared early on so firefighters can access property without entanglement with residents. Go to a predetermined area that is free of fire risk, such as a Red Cross shelter or hotel. Keep several travel routes in mind, for some may be blocked. Again, the emergency kit must always be on hand, along with adequate water, food staples, and don't forget that pets should have their food supplies, too. Make effort to always have a flashlight and a battery-powered radio to keep up with valuable information. Eye glasses, medications, important family documents, and insurance info should be ready to go at all times, as well.

But what about Evergreen in particular? Well, that's another part of the plan. The Evergreen Fire Protection District sponsors and encourages a community program that has proven to be invaluable. The Community Wildlife Protection Implementation Plan (CWPIP), developed by the Health Forest Restoration Act of 2003 and the Colorado State Forest Service has been put into practice in eight of our districts thus far. That's good, but could be better. As it turns out, our community has 30 areas in total, therefore, few folks have been properly informed. However, about a month ago a committee of 10 residents organized a CWPIP in area 21 and the turnout was very impressive.

Another option to help reduce the threat of fire enveloping your home is Fire Wise landscaping. Surprisingly, the foliage you plant, coupled with regular maintenance can be consequential. True, all vegetation, be it natural or otherwise, can serve a fuel to a fire, but with a small amount of research safer alternatives can be found. However, where and how you plant may even be more significant than what you plant. Always remember that a plant's water content is crucial and most responsible for its volatility. Choose deciduous plants as their leaves maintain more moisture and therefore are less flammable.

Because we live in one of the highest risk areas in Colorado, it would be wise to take seriously such measures as given here. Today more and more people are moving to wildland areas, and that means even more chances for fire. In addition, fires caused by humans are increasing. Our woodlands are producing more trees, plants, leaves, and needles, all of which contribute to fuel that spreads fire. Slash collection and burning is a regular occurrence. Evergreen Fire Rescue at www.jeffco.us/2493/Slash-Collection posts dates concerning such. Too, signing up for Code Red is another step in the right direction. Using the Code Red Mobile Alert App can assist you in case of a fire and even save lives.

Recent rains have brought a sigh of relief to all of us in the community. However, that's not the end of the story and wildfire continues to be a threat. Communicate with your neighbors in your unit and create an evacuation plan. Volunteer for community projects designed to remove slash and make your home safer. Remember we elk live here, too, and are depending on you to keep these lands viable and safe. So long for this time and I'll impart more information in the near future.