City Council Report

Subject: Informational Report on Fire Fuel Reduction Activities

Presented by: William Hack, Fire Chief **Date: 03/13/2018**

Department: Fire Department and Public Services

Due to recent fires within the State of California, most notably in Sonoma County and the City of Santa Rosa, the Fire Department has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the City's vegetation management and fuel reduction programs. The Fire Department has determined that there are several areas of risk that justify an increased level of concern and attention. In previous years the primary focus of Fire Fuel Reduction efforts has only included weeds and grasses in vacant parcels and public open space. The Department intends to increase the scope of Community Risk Reduction activities and implement a more systematic and effective Fire Fuel Reduction Program. The areas of increased concern and activity are identified in Attachment 1 (titled "Locations with Increased Fire Threat"), and include Public Open Space, Vacant Private Land, and Developed Private Land.

The legal authority to conduct Vegetation Management Activities is provided locally in at least four places:

- Rocklin City Ordinance 2015-0182, adopted July 14, 2015 – provides the authority to conduct fire fuel load reduction activities on any property
- Rocklin City Ordinance 541, adopted February 11, 1986 – defines maintenance standards for vacant parcels
- Public Resource Code 4291 - provides authority and identifies fuel reduction requirements for properties in the wildland urban interface
- California Government Code 51186 – provides authority for vegetation management activities on private lands

The first step in the City's proactive and holistic Fire Fuel Reduction Program has already begun. In February, the City began vegetation management of designated public open space through our Grazing Program. The next step will be to educate the public on the requirements of the Fire Fuel Reduction Program, as identified in Attachment 2 (titled "Fire Fuel Reduction Guide and Inspection Checklist"). This year's educational outreach will include in person meetings with high risk neighborhoods, distribution through direct mailing, a website hosted by the Fire Department and Public Services, social media, and traditional media. This webpage will be updated to include links to outside organizations that provide preventative education, such as CAL FIRE and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This information will provide direction to residents throughout the City who desire additional information on how to reduce fire risk on their property. The identified high risk areas will receive notices in the mail and staff will meet with neighborhood groups to educate home owners on fire fuel

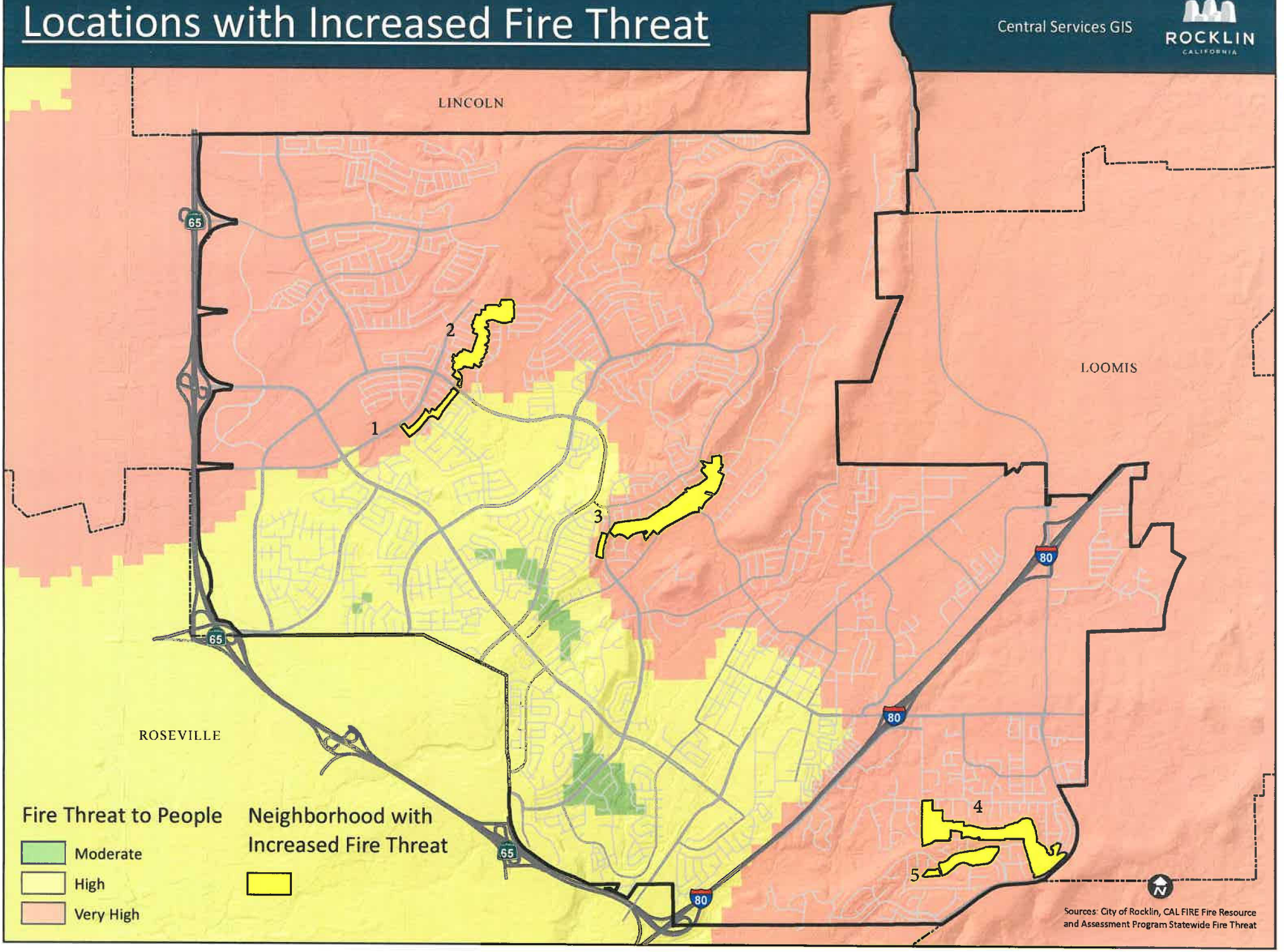
reduction activities that must occur on their property. Specific fire fuel reduction plans can be created with each property owner to assist them in reducing the risks on their property.

The final step in the program is enforcement. Neither the Fire Department nor Public Services plan on being heavy handed in our enforcement activity. We believe that most properties will comply completely with the program requirements or make substantial improvements in risk reduction. When an area of high risk has not made marked improvement, or the risk is so high that it is a clear and present danger to the public, the Fire Department or Public Service will utilize Code Enforcement to encourage or gain compliance.

Locations with Increased Fire Threat

Central Services GIS

ROCKLIN
CALIFORNIA



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ROCKLIN, CA 95765
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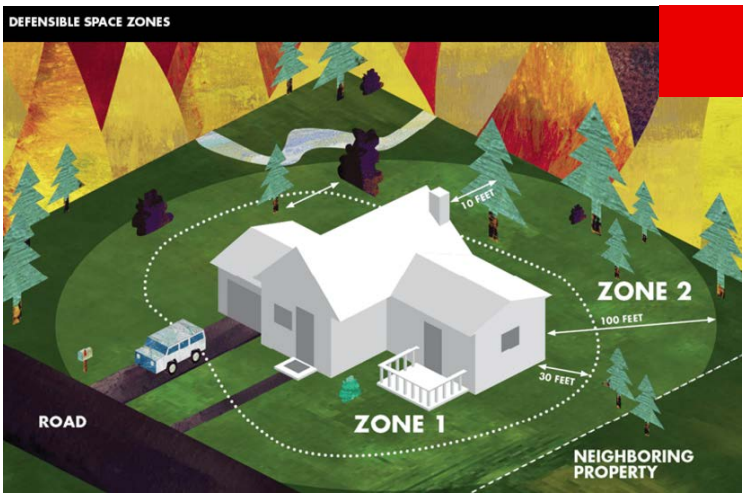
FIRE FUEL REDUCTION GUIDE &

INSPECTION CHECKLIST



Open spaces are valued for their nature and beauty; if we choose to live within these areas we must do our part to protect our homes and our community. Living within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) provides us with a sense of nature, yet there are dangers that must be mitigated and each of us should do our part. In the over 4,000 acres of undeveloped land within the city of Rocklin, fire fuel reduction actives are a must.

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI):

The wildland/urban interface is any location where a fire can spread from vegetation (wildland fuels) to buildings (urban fuels), resulting in multiple house fires that overwhelm fire protection efforts. We may not be able to stop wildfires but we can mitigate that risk by planning and proper fuel management. Creating a defensible space around our homes may help to reduce risk to our lives, properties, community, firefighters; and it is the law.

As a resident and/ or owner of property near or adjacent to wildland areas, you are required by California's Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 4291, to maintain a defensible space around your house and other structures. Included are additional requirements under the California Fire Code (CFC), and California Building Code (CBC). Completing these items increases the chances that your home will survive a wildfire, and will reduce the danger to firefighters, neighbors, and surrounding natural resources. The attached Defensible Space Checklist will help you determine what you need to do to comply with the law and reduce your vulnerability to the threat of wildfire.

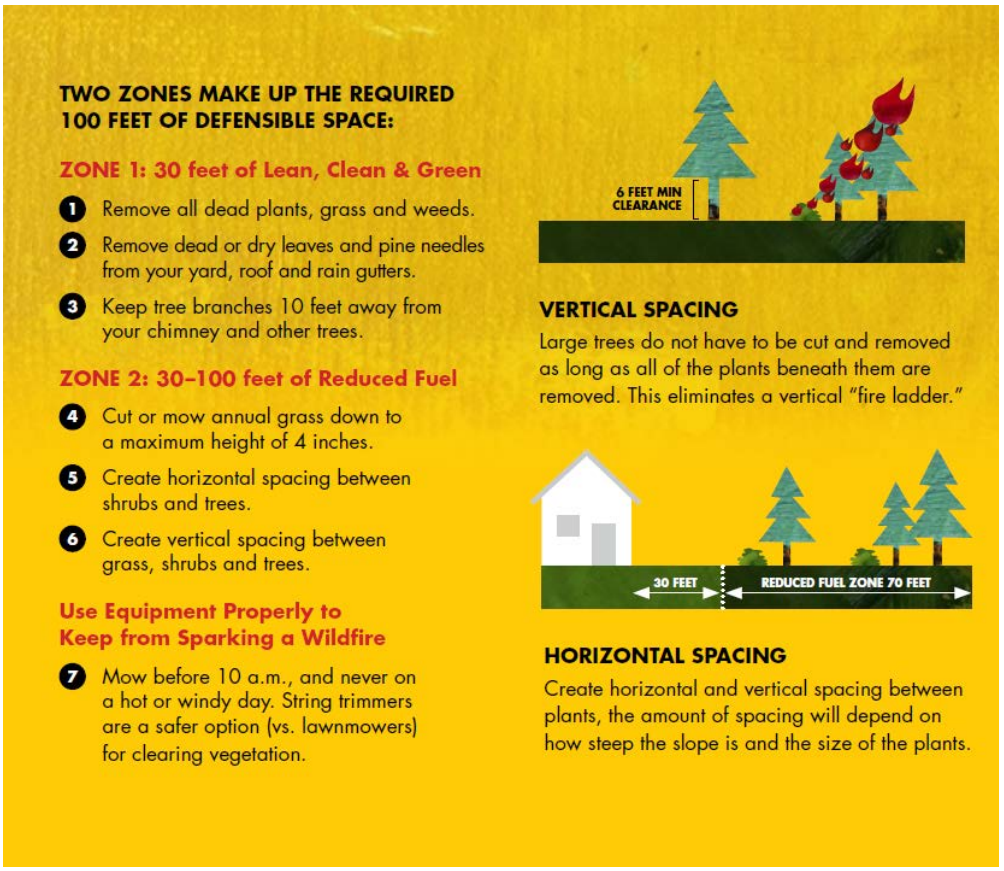
What is "Defensible Space?"

"Defensible space" is a perimeter created around a structure where vegetation is treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards a structure, reduce the chance of a structure fire burning to the surrounding area, and provides a safe perimeter for firefighters to protect a structure.

A homeowner's clearing responsibility is limited to 100 feet away from his or her building or structure or to the property line, whichever is less, and limited to their land. While individual property owners are not required to clear beyond 100 feet, groups of property owners are encouraged to extend clearances beyond the 100 foot requirement in order to create community-wide defensible spaces.

Once you have completed the assessment, you will have a better idea of the scope of your project, and you can prioritize your next steps. Don't be overly concerned if the size of the project seems daunting. The goal is to take this one step at a time.

Your priorities should focus on making the most impact with the least amount of effort. Removing dead and dying vegetation (including dry leaves, pine needles, limbs and small branches, brush parts, dead materials on the ground, unused timber, and debris piles) is first in both zones, starting closest to the house.



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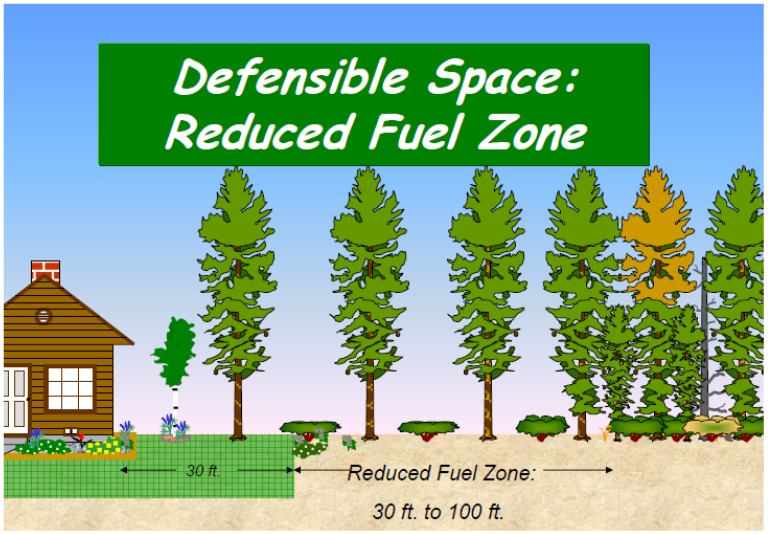

<u>Reduced Fuel Zone</u>:
This is the space 30 to 100 feet beyond any structure, or to the property line, whichever is nearest. Be aware of one special provision in this area: Dead/dying leaves, needles and mowed dry grass may remain on the ground to a depth of 3-4 inches.

1. Break up the continuity of fire fuels by removal and spacing.
2. Ladder fuels, or fuels that tend to help a ground fire spread from ground level into the upper reaches of trees and brush, need to be removed.

BEFORE **AFTER**

DEFENSIBLE SPACE ZONES INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Defensible Space Zone: 1'-30' from Structure

Special requirements within the first 30 feet surrounding any structure or to the property line, whichever is nearest:

- ☐ Remove all dead or dying leaves, needles, grass.
- ☐ Maintain any tree, adjacent to or overhanging any building, free of dead or dying wood.
- ☐ Maintain the roof and gutters of all buildings free of leaves, needles, or other vegetation.
- ☐ Remove all limbs within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe opening.
- ☐ Remove limbs from above roof and decking.
- ☐ Cover all chimney or stovepipe openings with a metal screen having openings no larger than 1/2 inch in size.
- ☐ Clear 10 feet around woodpile(s); maintain free of needles, leaves, and other flammable debris. During fire season, store firewood as far as possible from structures, and protect woodpiles with fire resistant covering.

Guidelines for Reducing Fuel in Both Zones

In the 1'-100' perimeter around your home or structure, remove all DEAD/DYING vegetation or non-vegetative debris:

- ☐ Remove all dead or dying brush, trees, limbs and branches within 15 feet of the ground. This includes dead material within dense plants such as juniper or rosemary.
- ☐ Logs or stumps embedded in the soil must either be removed or isolated from other vegetation and structures.
- ☐ Remove, or clear around and cover with fire-resistant covering, all flammable non-vegetative material or household debris so that wind-driven firebrands or embers cannot land on or in this material and start a fire.

Thin, prune and remove LIVE vegetation:

- ☐ Prune trees (remove limbs), up to at least 6 feet, (or 1/3 - 1/2 the tree height for small trees), more on slopes.
- ☐ If retaining a "continuous forest canopy", where limbs of one tree touch those of another, prune trees to 15 feet (or 1/3 of tree height for trees under 30 feet, whichever is less).
- ☐ Thin, remove, and space seedling/sapling trees. Prune remaining select trees up to 1/2 their height.
- ☐ Create vertical spacing between tops of short plants and any limbs above them, or 3 times the height of the lower plant.
- ☐ If possible, break up continuous masses of vegetation by separating trees, bushes, and clumps of ground-cover vegetation with cleared areas. For privacy, consider spacing plants in a checkerboard pattern rather than a solid row.
- ☐ You may keep well-maintained and appropriately-watered lawns, ground cover plants, ornamental shrubbery, and trees that are well-spaced, well-pruned, free of all dead material, and which will not spread fire to structures or other vegetation.
- ☐ You may keep ornamental trees or shrubs which have branches down to the ground, but you must remove all dead material within, beneath, and surrounding them.

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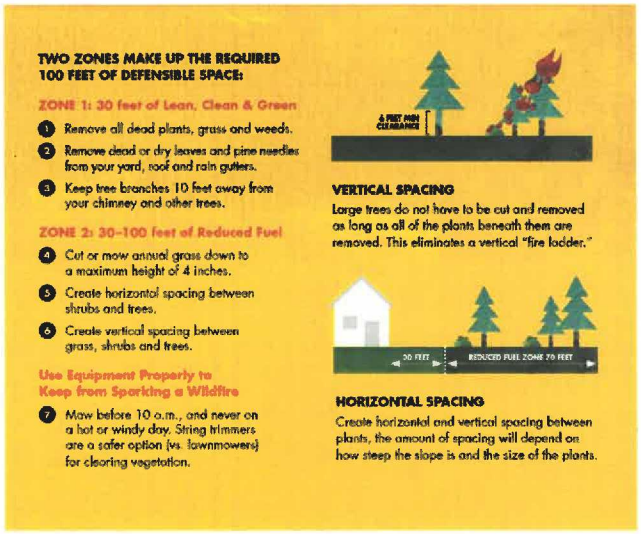

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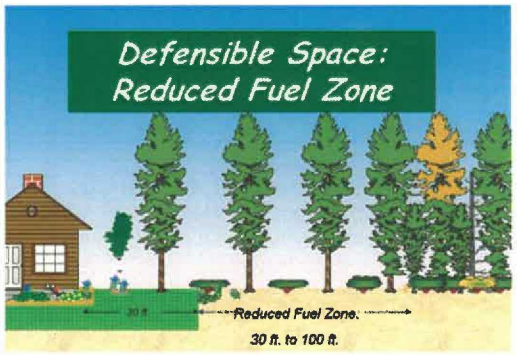

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