

Considerations for Wildland Fire Prevention, Mitigation and Post Fire Restoration on Boy Scout Council Properties

Every year, various regions of the country experience wildfire seasons that can be catastrophic. Prolonged drought, fuel accumulation, forest mortality from insects and disease, coupled with expanding development in the urban/wildland interface can lead to destructive and costly wildfires. When weather conditions, topography and accumulations of dry fuel align, fires can be unstoppable. Virtually every region of the country can experience high fire danger and catastrophic fire occurrence.

The Boy Scouts of America maintains camp properties across the United States. These properties tend to be located in the urban/wildland interface, or often in remote forested areas where Scouts can experience the natural environment. This paper provides some recommendations for Local Scout Council Planners, Council Conservation Committees, Camp Directors, Camp Rangers and other decision makers to consider to increase preparedness for wildland fire, and what to do if a wildfire occurs on your camp property.

Fire Prevention and Preparedness:

“Only You Can Prevent Wildfires”... Through the assistance of the US Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and the National Association of State Foresters, Smokey Bear has been spreading this message for more than 70 years. Smokey Bear’s message has changed slightly from the use of the term forest fires, to wildfires. Fires are a part of the environment and naturally occur in many places in our country. While wildfires may not be avoidable, the damage they cause can be reduced with planning and prevention.



Photo: M. Huneke Firefighters monitor a wildfire near Cody, Wyoming, 2016.

Firewise: Resources are available for Scout Camps to become more “fire wise.” Visit the [Firewise](#) website to learn about approaches for making your Scout Camp properties and facilities more fire resistant. The website offers tips that camps can consider for structure protection, vegetation and landscape management, building construction and facility layout.

Consider contacting your State Forestry Agency for local recommendations and potential opportunities for grant funds and financial assistance that may be available through programs in your state and community.

Preplanning: Do you have a Camp Wildfire Plan? Preplanning with your local fire warden, state forestry official or local volunteer fire department is a good practice. In many states, technical and financial assistance may be available from state forestry agencies or local fire protection agencies. Check with your insurance carrier and investigate if preplanning and risk reduction can reduce your insurance rates. Preplanning and inviting local first responders to visit and familiarize themselves with your camp properties will create efficiencies during an actual emergency.

A Fire Plan is a helpful document that identifies values at risk, hazards, resources and pre-planned strategies for dealing with a wildfire. Here are some items to consider in a fire plan.



Photo: M. Huneke **Consider values at risk. Preplanning to protect historic cabins and valuable program facilities can make a difference.**

- Identify fuel conditions that are of concern and approaches for reducing risk in the fire environment.
- Identify and obtain coordinates for nearby water sources such as dip sites and draft sites.
- Identify opportunities to enhance water sources and access to them.
- Establish agreements where required for using neighboring property dip sites and access.
- Identify resource concerns and access issues that should be considered before using a water source.
- Identify and obtain coordinates for helicopter landing sites and aviation hazards such as towers and utility lines.
- Identify bridge weights, septic tank locations, overhead and underground utilities that may pose a hazard to responding resources.
- Identify locked gates, fences, cattle guards, etc. that may impact access.
- Identify roads and turn-arounds that are suitable (and not suitable) for fire engine access.
- Identify staging areas and preplan sites where heavy equipment can be unloaded.
- Identify a safety zone where individuals could shelter in place.
- Develop structure protection plans, identify which buildings are defensible and which are not.
- Plan, install and maintain fuel breaks, access trails and fire roads.
- Identify protocols for dealing with livestock or horses if they are on the property.
- Include pictures, maps and aerial photos.
- Identify routine annual maintenance needs such as raking leaves away from cabins, removing leaves and pine needles from roofs and rain gutters, storing firewood away from structures, etc.
- Conduct drills with first responders, state and municipal emergency management officials.
- Preplan evacuations, escape routes, gathering points and trigger points for evacuations.
- Ensure fire plan is current and all partners have copies.
- Post state fire regulations in conspicuous locations and ensure campers are aware of the current fire danger.

Mitigation: Depending on your state or location, financial assistance may be available from a variety of sources for performing fuels reduction and other efforts to reduce the wildfire risk in the wildland areas in and around your camp property. Your state forestry agency may be able to assist or provide grant funds. Funding may also be available from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for fuel break construction, water source development, fuels reduction or timber stand improvement practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program ([EQIP](#)) although funding levels and practice availability varies from state to state.

Wildfire versus Controlled/Prescribed Fire

Fire is not uniformly bad. Often it is a normal and important element of a healthy ecosystem. Land managers use fire where it is environmentally appropriate. This natural resource management tool can be applied to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires by limiting the build-up of fuel that can create conditions for a wildfire, to restore wildlife habitat and help maintain forests or habitats that are healthy. This is often performed on sites that have evolved with fire.

“The elimination of naturally occurring wildland fire due to fire suppression and fragmentation of the landscape by agriculture and urban development has led to a decline in diversity, abundance, and nutritional value of habitats. The overgrowth of brush and trees in natural areas and the increased likelihood of large, damaging fires have the potential to do substantial harm to wildlife.

Fast-moving fires can overwhelm or trap younger and slower animals, just as these fires pose a great threat to human life and property. High-intensity fires may decimate plants serving as food sources and delay repopulation of wildlife in burned areas.

Fire remains a critical tool for the management of wildlife habitat. Fire managers plan prescribed burns that cleanse and rejuvenate natural areas and present less of a threat to wildlife than large, fast-moving, high-intensity wildland fires.



Image: USFWS

Prescribed burns can be designed to burn slower and at lower intensity than wildland fire. Prescribed burns also ensure escape routes for wildlife and can be timed to avoid mating and nesting seasons.” (Karen Miranda Gleason and Shawn Gillette. Fire Management Today, USFWS)

Restoration and Rehabilitation: In the event that a wildfire causes damage to your camp property, reforestation or revegetation of burned areas should be performed to restore the proper conditions. Reforestation, watershed protection, and habitat restoration needs are sources of good conservation projects meeting merit badge requirements and potential Hornaday project requirements.

Image: USFWS



Primary considerations for restoration should include:

- Stabilizing the soil. This is critical to support future vegetative growth and prevent siltation of aquatic habitats. Slopes are the highest priority to address.
- Along with appropriate technical ecosystem restoration guidance, develop a plan that will create the most appropriate habitat or future forest condition. This may be different than what existed before the fire.
- Ensure that plant materials used in restoration are native, locally produced, indigenous, and best suited for the site, habitat and camp needs.
- Recognize that wildfires can alter the hydrology of a site. Groundwater discharge and streamflow may be impacted which could affect camp resources, facilities and program.

Rehabilitation of fire lines and dozer lines, impacted water sources, safety zones and staging areas may be required. Salvage and removal of fire damaged and weakened trees should be considered, especially if safety issues are a concern. Remember that standing dead trees in natural areas are habitat.

There are resources available to restore and rehabilitate the burned area. With all of these practices, it is recommended to begin your search for assistance by contacting the state forestry and wildlife agency. As with prevention and mitigation, financial and technical assistance for restoration work may be available from state and federal sources. The state forestry and wildlife agencies, state or regional native plant societies, and environmental not-for profit organizations often can assist.

The previously mentioned NRCS EQIP Program may provide funding for reforestation and restoration in your state. Additionally, the USDA Farm Service Agency manages the Emergency Forest Restoration Program ([EFRP](#)), which can provide funding for forest restoration following a qualifying natural disaster such as a wildfire. There may also be local or state programs or grant funds which may be available through the state forestry agency.



Finally, consider seeking assistance from legal counsel and from your insurance provider. Funding may also be available from the agency responsible for the fire or the responsible party through a civil action.

Photo: M. Huneke **Structures lost on the Gap Fire in Northern California, 2016**

Need Help?

For more information, contact your [state forester](#), wildlife management department, state or local native plant society, conservation not-for profit organization or your local federal land management office.

The BSA's [National Conservation and Environment Task Force](#) has agency representatives and subject matter experts that are also available to assist you.

Fire prevention, pre-suppression, rehabilitation and restoration needs could serve as excellent conservation projects for Scouts working toward one of the [William T. Hornaday Awards](#). Consider encouraging Scout Conservation Projects to complete the work needed on the camp property.