



BIGHORN BASIN FIRESMART

BIGHORN BASIN FIREWISE COMMUNITIES

ISSUE #7—SPRING 2012

THESE THINGS DON'T JUST HAPPEN IN ARIZONA!



The above photo was taken in early March, when a wildfire burned more than 200 acres along the river south of Worland. 25 homes were evacuated, but, thanks to the efforts of Washakie and Big Horn County forces, assisted by BLM engines and a helicopter, no homes were lost. But it was close.



Brent Godfrey, Big Horn County Fire Warden, passes on this warning:
With the dry weather, fuels are "ready to burn," so pay attention.

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Roof and chimney clearance

Sparks from a chimney connected to a fireplace or wood-burning stove could catch tree branches on fire. To reduce the chance of this happening, trim all branches ten feet away from a chimney that vents a wood-burning fireplace or stove.



All dead branches overhanging any portion of the roof must be removed. Dead wood catches fire easier than live, green wood. Airborne embers could cause dead branches to ignite, starting a crown fire in the trees above your home's roof, or dropping burning debris onto your roof's surface.

Trimming limbs hanging over the roof can be dangerous. Consider hiring a certified arborist or tree care professional for this job.



The above illustration was provided by the Oregon Department of Forestry. Their Firewise program has created several illustrations that are appropriate for the Firewise program in our area, and has given permission to use them for Bighorn Basin Firesmart.

After the Beetle, Where Do We Go From Here?

By: Brian Russell, Wyoming State Forestry Division

Old Mother Nature has been busy recently, turning many forests in Wyoming red. Forests that have not been killed by bark beetles are now being threatened by beetle infestation. Healthy forests adjacent to beetle-killed areas are often threatened by wildfire. As areas of beetle-kill increase fuel loading over time, the potential for intense wildfires across entire landscapes greatly increases. As fire intensity increases so does the severity and size of these fires resulting in dramatically escalating financial commitments and loss of values.



Mountain pine beetle is marching across many of our forests in Wyoming, leaving red trees in its wake.



Over half of the water in Wyoming originates from our high elevation forests. How will the beetle epidemic affect our water supply?

The decline in the health of our forests has not occurred overnight. The problem has been developing over a long period. The current beetle epidemic is one symptom of this decline. The drought over the last 10-15 years, and some say climate change over a much longer period, have contributed to forest health problems. Drought and climate change should not receive all the blame, however. Forests have experienced long periods of warm and dry weather in the past. A more likely contributor to the problem has been we the people. Humans have contributed far more to the loss of the forests through our improper or, in many cases, complete absence of forest management.

How has improper forest management contributed to the current situation? Over the last 100 years or so, as man has become the primary force behind forest management, many forests in Wyoming have experienced a downward spiral. Effective fire suppression and a lack of landscape level forest management have resulted in a *general lack of forest diversity*. Most of our forests are now comprised of old, unhealthy and weak trees. This problem is not just limited to public lands, but all ownerships across the landscape.

The widespread impact of bark beetle epidemics across the state has been overwhelming, but does not mean forest management should end. On the contrary, we must look to the desired future condition of our forests, and actively manage toward that condition. For instance, in many young forests, trees are too tightly spaced. These dense young forests require thinning to improve and the overall health of remaining live trees.

Managing our forests is a continual cycle. Active forest management is not just the responsibility of government agencies, but the responsibility of all forest owners. Together we can manage the forests for multiple benefits including wood products, clean water, wildlife and fisheries habitat, and recreation. It needs to be done over the long term.

Forest and rangeland environments have evolved with some form of disturbance such as fires, floods and drought. Fire on some level has always been a part of this disturbance process. Whether it is a low intensity surface fire in the lower elevation ponderosa pine forests every 5-30 years, or a high intensity crown fire in the high elevation spruce/fir forests every 300 years. Fire has been an integral component of forest health. Mimicking these historical fires using prescribed fire is becoming more prevalent and should be further expanded to meet management objectives.

If forests in Wyoming are to become healthy and resilient again, forest management must include comprehensive management planning. Plans should include site specific treatments to address all issues and concerns associated with the ecosystem. In some instances forest management may be accomplished by wildfires that are allowed to burn in the re-



Many forests in Wyoming are over 80% dead, with the only living stands of trees being those planted in clearcuts.

remote backcountry, *when conditions are right*. A safer, more effective treatment method, however, may involve thinning forests *first* to improve forest health and reduce heavy fuels, then using prescribed/intentional fire to maintain desirable forest conditions. Furthermore, some treatments may require a commercial timber harvest with no burning component. To yield benefits society wants and needs (and sometimes takes for granted), forests must be actively managed. Management may come in many different forms depending on site-specific conditions.

In many of our forests, it may seem like we are starting all over and have no control over the outcome, 10, 20, or even 100 years from now. However, we can greatly influence the ways the forest will grow and the benefits the forest will provide us. Attaining a healthy functioning forest requires a commitment to actively managing the forest. Active management requires an investment in time and financial resources, and with those investments, society will see the greatest benefits. The current bark beetle epidemics are likely a result of 100 years of fire suppression and a lack of well planned forest management. The outcome has been a decrease in forest diversity. Our future policies should reverse that trend.



YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD OF SOME OTHER PROGRAMS RELATED TO FIREWISE. HERE ARE TWO.

“Ready, Set, Go!” The Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) Program seeks to develop and improve the dialogue between fire departments and the residents they serve. The fire department personnel can explain what fire resources are available during an event and the role that individuals can play in preparedness and early evacuation – if called for by their local officials – to increase the safety of residents and responding firefighters to a wildland fire. The RSG Program works in complimentary and collaborative fashion with Firewise and other existing wildland fire public education efforts to amplify preparedness and encourage residents to take personal responsibility for preparing their property and family for WUI/wildland fire. Their website [“http://wildlandfirersg.org/”](http://wildlandfirersg.org/) short video is worth the four minutes it takes to watch.

“SHELTER IN PLACE” or “STAY and DEFEND or LEAVE EARLY”

This was an idea that had rural homeowners staying “sheltered” in their homes during a wildfire. It depended on participants being trained on how to protect their home, keeping a good inventory of emergency supplies, and having the home and all outbuildings Firewise. Most wildfire professionals generally rejected the concept, as it assumed that most rural residents had the physical and mental fitness for the job. They also pointed out that many of the recent firefighting fatalities in the U.S. were people defending their own homes.

This policy got a reality check in Australia in 2009, when a series of fires burned more than 2,000 homes, and killed 173 people. **113 of the dead were found near their burned homes**, apparently killed while staying to defend their property.

The debate on this continues.

The Spring 2012 issue of [WYOMING TREE NEWS](#) includes a short article on the Greybull River fuels treatment project in the town of Greybull. The magazine can be found at:

<http://slf-web.state.wy.us/forestrydivision/treenews/aprtreenews.pdf>

Also in the issue of [Wyoming Tree News](#) are articles on:

- ◇ Spraying pine trees to protect them from mountain pine beetle attack.
- ◇ How to obtain a “Wyoming Tree Owner’s Manual.”
- ◇ “Wyoming Best Management Practices—Water Quality Protection Guidelines.”

Hard copies can be obtained from the Wyoming State Forestry Division at 307-777-7586, or from jay.hein@wyo.gov

2012 MOUNTAIN CABINOWNER’S PICNIC AND FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

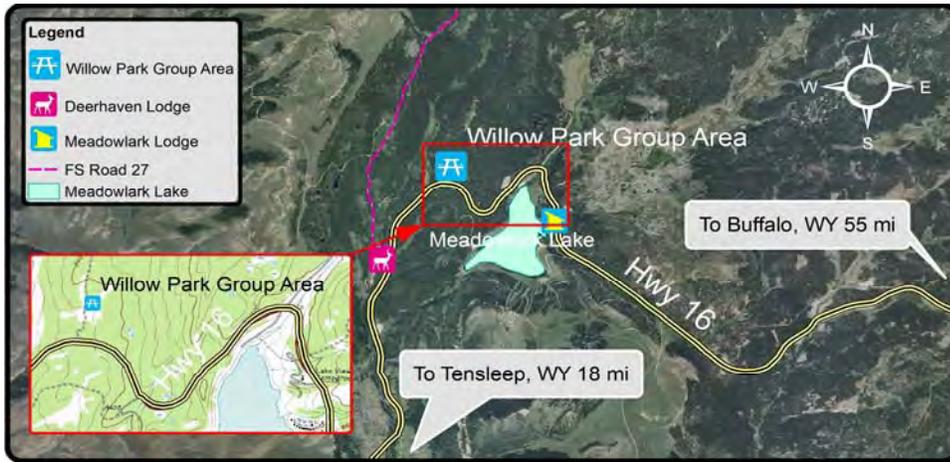
This year, three picnics are scheduled to acquaint mountain cabin owners with Firewise principles and the Big Horn County Firewise Coordinators. Cabin owners are invited to attend the picnic closest to their cabin. Big Horn County Firewise will provide the food. The picnics will be:

June 16, 11:30 to 3.00 P.M. at the Willow Park Group Area

July 7, 10.00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. in the Ranger Creek Group Area

July 28, 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at Porcupine Campground

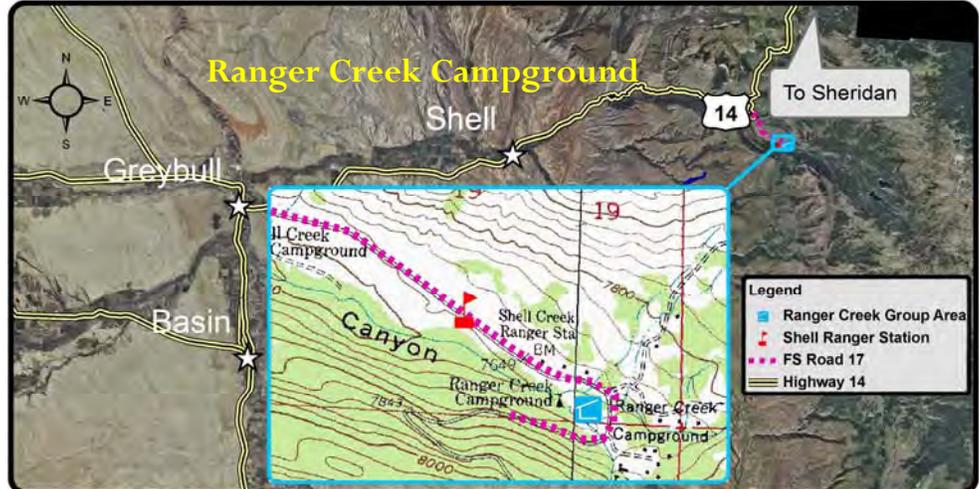
MAPS OF THE PICNIC SITES ARE BELOW. RSVPs ARE REQUESTED



← June 16,



July 7, 2012 ⇒



← July 28,





In the southwestern quarter of the country, a combination of prevalent fine fuels, and the possibility of a drier than normal season could lead to significant fire concerns as the season progresses.

Big Horn County Firewise
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