

FOOTHILLS OBSERVER



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A forest stewardship and wildfire mitigation newsletter for the rural landowner, provided by Fremont County Firewise

Summer 2011



Being Ember Aware

By Ron Wempen

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Summer seems to have arrived in Fremont County, but it has been a cool and wet progression. This is not a bad thing and will do wonders once again for helping ease the drought.

But with well watered plants comes nicely grown grasses and weeds.

I originally thought it would be interesting to track the number of structures lost this year nationwide to wildfire. It did not take long to realize that this would be a monumental task considering how widespread and large fires became in the southwest. What I do know, is that the number of homes lost already this

year to wildfire is in the high hundreds.

And, I know these homes belonged to owners who most likely did not believe a fire would happen to them. It is always somewhere else.

Well Fremont County, we have some really nice growing grass which will dry out this summer and fall, and I would challenge you to not let your guard down because it has been wet.

I never want to see homes lost here, but know it is a matter of time before we are faced with such a fire.

With this risk at hand, I would like to review with you some items

for making your home or cabin a little more safe.

Studies have been, and are currently continuing, on what really causes homes to burn. The root cause lies in the “little things”. You have all heard about this before, but I want to remind you that these little things are most always in the form of embers. Flames do burn structures down, but research is showing that embers burn the majority of structure.

So, what should we consider to protect our homes from these little things:

- Wood Roofs, of course
- Openings in roof
- Debris on the roof
- Skylights—plastic construction or places to catch embers
- Windows—double pane with well maintained wood or aluminum

- Vents—cover all attic or eave vents with 1/8” screen
- Rain gutters clean
- Siding—fill any gaps or voids—oil or paint if dry
- Deck—clean and freshly sealed
- Deck accessories—properly stored in the garage when not in use—remove anything that is combustible
- Under deck clean and closed in
- Remove any flower boxes from patio or windows
- Make sure garage doors shut and seal tight
- Maintain wooden fences, and do not directly attach to home
- Maintain 3-5’ clear space by home

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Planning for the Future

By Brian Russell

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Diverse & Managed

As everyone knows in Fremont County, our forests have been impacted by bark beetles to some degree. A lot of the forested acres that are impacted are in areas with over mature and overstocked timber stands. Throw in several years of drought and the overstocked stands become stressed leading to epidemic levels of bark beetles.

With an active thinning program, landowners can lessen the impacts of bark beetle attacks and decrease wildland fire behavior. Other important objectives in managing your forest are diversifying age classes amongst trees, increasing species diversity where possible, and managing stand densities at appropriate levels. All of which will help to maintain a healthier timberstand and forest at the landscape level

and benefit wildlife.

These healthy levels can be accomplished by actively thinning your timberstands appropriately. Sometimes this involves pre-commercial thinning (when trees are too small or have no economic value) and other times this involves commercial thinning.

In the next 10 to 20 years, new growth will result in timber stands becoming stocked again. Some of these stands may require pre-commercial thinning over time. Even at young ages, timberstands need to be thinned to help residual trees grow faster and bigger. If young timberstands are not thinned, tree growth will stagnate and eventually lead to overstocked timberstands again. This in turn could lead to declines in healthy forests.

With a thinning practice, it gives landowners a chance to manipulate forest stand conditions, instead of taking chances with Mother Nature. After all, we have all seen what can happen with a hands off approach to forest management.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE!

Wildfire Survival

It Takes a Community

As the year progresses, it is important to review a few items about slash piles.

For those subdivisions that have the luxury of having a place to put material that is removed, we must remember that the piles are on someone's property. It maybe another private landowner who has so graciously allowed it to be placed there, or it might be on the U.S. Forest Service or BLM. Either way, we need to respect the use the same way.

The intention of the piles are to dispose of woody debris from fuel treatment projects. Nothing more. From time to time, other items are

Found in the piles. These items must be removed by someone, and then properly disposed of. This abuse of the pile could jeopardize the piles existence all together.

So, just remember that wood cleaned up from your land is all that may be taken there. No, milled lumber may not. Only because this usually has nails or other material in and on it.

Other items that have been found in the piles that are not to be there are:

- *Household garbage
- *Used tires
- *Metal items
- *Building construction material



Slash Pile Use

Tid Bit— Something to Ponder

As spring and summer have arrived here in Fremont County, the discussions of flooding have been numerous.

I picked up on a article from the Associated Press about something which could happen here, just not this year.

A new study suggests the mountain pine beetle outbreak in the West could trigger earlier snowmelt and increased water yields from snowpack under beetle killed

trees.

University of Colorado doctoral student Evan Pugh and his team monitored trees near Rocky Mountain National Park in the 2009 and 2010 winters.

His study found snow accumulation was about 15% higher under trees whose needles had fallen off than other stands, whose branches and needles collected snow. Pugh says trees without needles let more sunlight through the canopy, and dead needles on the

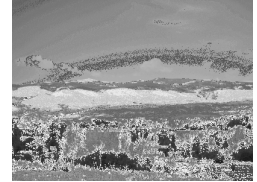
ground absorb sunlight, allowing for faster snowmelt. Dead trees also don't suck up water from the soil.

Pugh said that could boost potential flood risks, but also water availability.

The logic of Evan's study makes perfect sense, I just can not say how this played into the spring here at home.

And, where would this all play into global warming??

That is another topic, Ron.



Lander Foothill's 5-31-11

The Fremont Rockcress

As we carry out work to make our properties firewise, it must be remembered that we need to consider what effect our actions have on the environment. No one wants to destroy any of the beauty of our lands.

The Fremont Rockcress, first discovered in 1981, is a small plant that is found only in Fremont County near South Pass.

Since 1994, the rockcress has been a "species of concern" by the Bureau of Land Management. A count in 2003 revealed 900 of the tiny plants in one particular area on South Pass, but in 2010, only 350 could be found.

No one is sure what has caused the decline, although there is speculation it could be drought related.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has studied the rockcress for a year time period and has concluded that the plant needs protection.

As a result, they recommended the plant as a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act.



New Website Up & Running

As was mentioned in the Spring 2011 Foothills Observer, a new website was coming.

It's here, it is up, and everyone really likes the new look. The content of the site did not change, but it was laid out in a cleaner format.

Now, with that said, if something needs changed, it can happen. This was the biggest

reason for having the website change to begin with. Things needed updated, and the webhost could not do what we asked.

The content of the new site can be changed from the Firewise office, and rather fast. Additionally, if you have an event or function that needs mentioned, send it to me and I will place it on the

events calendar to be viewed by everyone.

As the summer goes along, if you have meetings or work days, send me a little note about it (even a photo) and I will put it on the site. This is the sort of thing I want since it gives you credit for what you are doing!



Fremontcountyfirewise.com

FREMONT COUNTY FIREWISE

Wildfire Safety Through Prevention & Education

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WERE ON THE WEB!

WWW.FREMONTCOUNTYFIREWISE.COM

Foothills Observer Going Electronic



Electronic Mail

As the price of things continue to increase, it has become ever more important to look at ways to save money for other uses in the program.

One of the things that could help with this matter would be to email the quarterly publication of this newsletter out to those of you who would like to receive it that way.

I understand that some folks don't have the means to get email, or just do not want to receive mailings of this nature. This is fine, a postal service mailed copy can still be sent to you.

But, if you would be interested, send me a note by email with your address. I will set you up to receive an elec-

tronic copy. As you do this, be sure to let me know what your current postal service address is as well, so that I can suspend the mailing from that list. Some folks have different addresses and this will help with sorting that issue out.

Remember, the current and past issues of the Foothills Observer are always available on the Fremont County Firewise website as well.