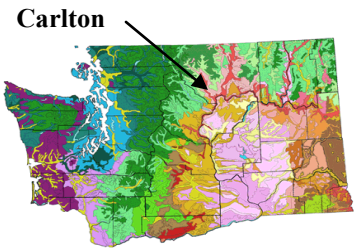
FEMA Best practices

Disaster Mitigation Working in Washington DR-4188-WA

Fire Resistant Construction and Fuel Reduction Work!



Carlton, WA – Ann and Louis Stanton enjoy their remote north central Washington home as a peaceful refuge. Their house and twenty acre property are near the end of a steep, winding, unpaved road high above the town of Carlton. It's many miles into a wilderness that they knew was prone to occasional wildfires.

It made sense for the Stantons to use fire resistant design and building materials, and to create "defensible space" around the house. A metal roof, cement board siding, fire resistant decking, and many other details contribute to reducing their risk.

For many years Louis has also been diligent about mowing the dry grasses that spring up near the house. He also follows Firewise recommendations to remove other excess vegetation, trees that are under 6 inches in diameter, low branches on mature trees, and a few of the larger trees that are too close to each other.

A fuel reduction project helped protect the home and landscape

When the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire exploded into a record-setting blaze, every bit of planning and all the hard work made a huge difference.

Louis stated, "If we hadn't done the clearing around the house, the fire fighting crew wouldn't have been here. It would not have been a defensible space."

Many factors contributed to the survival of their home. As the fire approached, Louis brought out his tractor and attached a blade that could help scrape a bare area to create an emergency fire line. His large water storage cistern, 20 gallon-per-minute well, and multiple spigot

The Stantons and their fire resistant home

sprinkler system were all employed in the fight to stop the fire. During part of the event firefighting crews were able to cut brush, dig another fire line, start back burn control fires, and help control hot spots. At various times, though, everyone had to evacuate the area and seek shelter down in Carlton.

Another major contribution to saving the home was the Stantons' participation in a wildfire fuel reduction project administered by Washington State Department of Natural Resources and funded with a National Fire Plan grant plus Okanogan County Title III funds. Through this program, a contractor was hired to assist the Stantons in thinning trees and removing excess fuels from all of their twenty acres. Several neighbors also took part in the program. The work had the additional effect of slowing the spread of fire to adjacent properties and forest land.

As strong winds pushed the fire through the area, the beneficial result of the work became apparent. An extreme fire that had been destroying everything in its path was reduced in intensity as it entered the treated areas. It continued along the forest floor and scorched the trunks of the mature trees, but most of them will survive, recover, and even thrive.

Another dramatic difference is that, although in the treated areas the forest floor was blackened by the fire, grasses and other plants are already coming back to life. In the untreated areas the organic materials, all the way down to the mineral soils, were broiled to a fine white ash.

Stanton property landscape during the 2014 fire

Stanton property landscape after the 2014 fire

Emergency fire line around house

More information:

www.firewise.org

www.fireadapted.org

Ready, Set, Go:
www.wildlandfirersg.org/

http://www.dnr.wa.gov/RecreationEducation/FirePreventionAssistance/Pages/Home.aspx

www.fema.gov/library
FEMA publication #468
At Home in the Woods—Lessons Learned in the Wildland / Urban Interface