

Treeways

March 2013

Learn Not To Burn

Wildfires and grass fires do not normally occur in a typical Minnesota city because there is just not enough burnable fuel lying around to carry a flame. That is not true in Sunfish Lake. In our city the brush and branches that we collect as we try to keep our homes neat and tidy can amount to quite a lot of material. Removal of invasive species such as buckthorn and honeysuckle generates a considerable amount of woody debris too. Piles of dry, woody debris near your home are a fire hazard and they are one reason why Sunfish Lake makes burning permits available for opening burning of woody debris. Keeping the dead, dry brush accumulations to a reasonable level is key to making our community FireWise.

Living FireWise within a forest is a three-zone management program. **Zone one is the structure zone**, in other words the area nearest the home or other structures. In this area you do not want to have burnable fuel available such as stacked wood, tall dry grass or wood fences that are attached to the house. Never stack firewood up against the structure. No junipers or other coniferous shrubs or trees are recommended in this area. Pine needle, cedar bark, and pine bark mulches are not recommended because they can easily catch fire but shredded hardwood mulch could be used because it burns with low intensity.

Zone two is the FireWise defensible zone and extends at least 30 feet away from all buildings and decks. If a FireWise designed landscape is in place and well maintained then this area will help prevent a wildfire from reaching Zone 1 and the structure. If a fire enters into a well maintained Zone two it burns poorly and with lesser intensity. Gardens, native prairie and evergreens should be designed as islands separated by mowed grass or other firebreaks. The crowns of trees should be separated by at least 10 feet, favor hardwood trees over evergreens, and prune the lower branches off to 6-10 feet above the ground to prevent fires from climbing into the trees' crowns.

Zone three is a general fuel reduction zone and extends 100 feet or further from structures. Firebrands can generate from this area when there are excessive fuels such as tall grass, heavy brush and densely planted coniferous trees. If properly maintained this zone will reduce the intensity of an approaching wildfire. A crown fire in a dense stand of conifers can easily throw off firebrands that may carry 100-200 yards or more downwind. Keeping grass mowed to 10 inches or less is a good idea. Prune the trees in Zone three so that the lowest branches are 6-10 feet above the ground and prune the understory brush so that the tops are at least 6 feet below the lowest branches of the forest trees. This type of pruning reduces the likelihood of a ground fire climbing into and starting an uncontrollable crown fire. The most critical area of Zone three is SW of the buildings since the most dangerous wildfires usually approach from this direction.

For more information regarding Living FireWise please call or plan to attend the Arbor Day Green Fair on May 4. Look for bare root tree availability elsewhere on the Sunfish Lake web site.

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