

Mt Bache - Loma Prieta Plus Firewise Community

Hello, Neighbors! We are close to submitting our application to be an NFPA-recognized Firewise community. We will periodically update this document to reflect our current status. Thank you for your interest in Firewise!

Why Join Firewise

As we all know, living in the Santa Cruz Mountains is a beautiful experience but also a great challenge. Our forest ecosystem has undergone major changes in the last 150 years and needs our stewardship to adapt and thrive. We have learned from recent wildfire activity that we need to do more. The Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz formed in 2016 to educate and mobilize local residents to protect their lives, homes, communities, and environment from wildfire. The first step is to join Firewise! Firewise communities are self-organized neighborhoods, recognized by the National Fire Protection Agency, that build community resilience to wildfire and support the health of the forest and riparian ecosystems we are a part of and love so much.

How to Join Firewise

1. Form a steering committee of 2-5 neighbors. Determine a continuous community boundary of at least eight households willing to participate in Firewise
2. Perform community risk assessment with a local fire professional
3. Host or attend an educational event once per year
4. Develop a three-year plan, informed by community risk assessment
5. Document community's annual efforts, e.g. cleaning gutters, yard work, any home hardening improvements. Show at least one hour or \$30 spent per year per household for these activities.
6. Create an online account. Submit documentation from previous steps. Renew every three years.

So what progress have we made so far and what do we have left to do?

Step 1: Form a steering committee and determine a community boundary

We are lucky to have many people willing to participate in our steering committee! We are working with Lynn Sestak to complete the next steps, including determining our continuous community boundary, compiling participant responses to our community risk assessment, setting goals for the next three years, and applying for Firewise status online. We can't do it alone! Feedback from our community participants is needed to be successful.

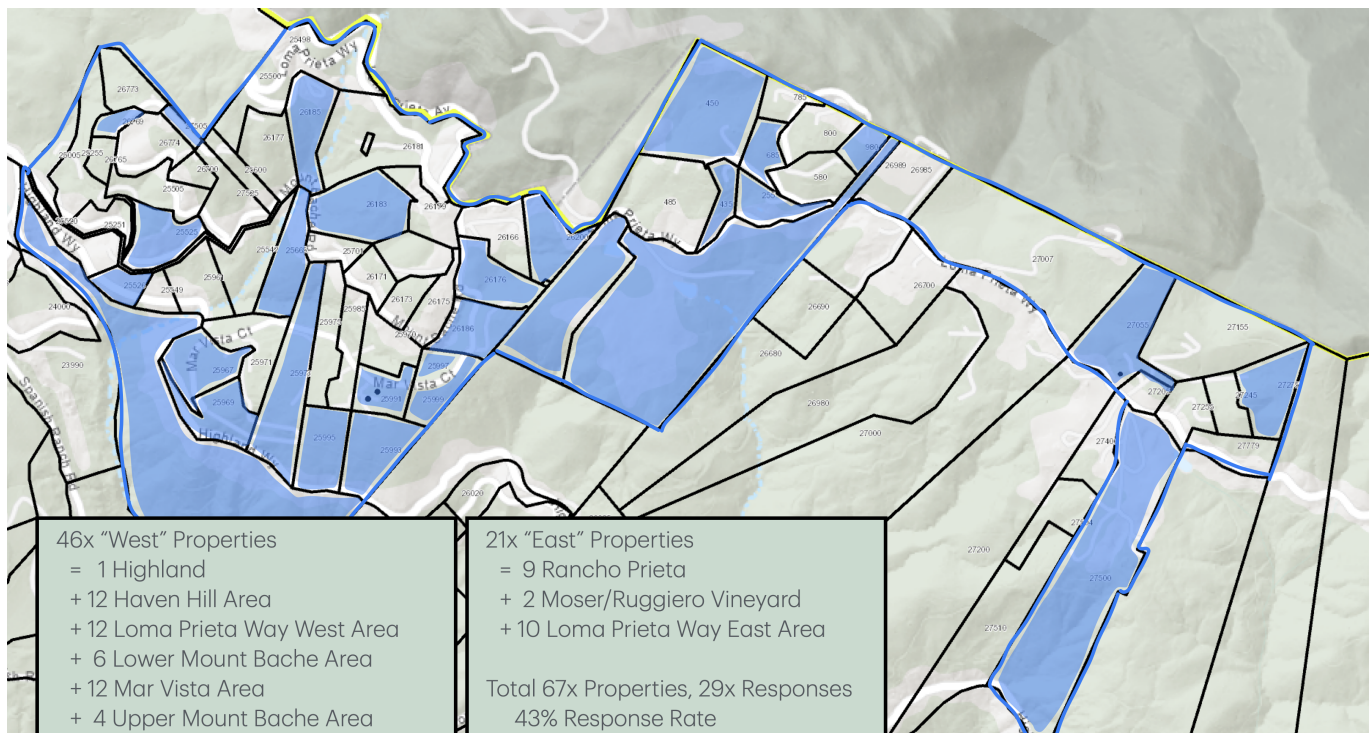
Steering Committee

1. Amy Winkler, serving Lower Mount Bache and Haven Hill, winkleramy@gmail.com
2. Merry Fay, serving Rancho Prieta, 100wishes@comcast.net
3. Marilyn Thelen, serving Upper Mount Bache and Loma Prieta, marilynthel@aol.com
4. Alyssa Plicka, serving Mar Vista and Highland, aplicka001@gmail.com

Our steering committee circulated a google form survey to gauge interest in Firewise participation and the level of wildfire readiness of individual properties within our neighborhoods. An anonymized summary of the

survey results can be viewed [here](#). This survey opened in late August and closed on September 30. A big thank you to all our participants!! We heard from 27 residents, representing 29 properties. We even heard from residents outside our original outreach area and ultimately widened our community boundary to accommodate everyone. We tried to draw a reasonable boundary to include all survey participants, as well as considering shared risks like road access and adjacency to open spaces, without overextending ourselves.

The [GISWeb Assessors Map](#) of our proposed Firewise community is shown below. The proposed boundary is drawn in blue and encompasses 67 properties. The properties of survey participants are highlighted in blue. The community boundary is informed by a multiple factors, including survey response, shared road access / evacuation route, the county line to our north, and the Spanish Ranch Firewise community boundary to our south. These responses will inform our three-year plan and ensure we can include and contact those interested in participating.



Step 2: Perform community risk assessment with a local fire professional

A community risk assessment needs to be performed initially to apply for Firewise and then once every five years to remain in good standing. The steering committee is responsible for completing the community risk assessment document with input from all participating residents via the community risk assessment survey and a community drive-through with local fire professional. Our community drive-through took place with Lynn Sestak on September 24, 2024, who put together a report for our application. The report can be viewed [here](#).

The community drive-through does not include any individual property assessments, only the general conditions of the community, such as roadside vegetation. Individual property assessments are completely voluntary and can be requested from the Fire Safe Council by filling out the request form at this website: <https://www.firesafesantacruz.org/HIZ>.

Step 3: Host or attend an educational event once per year

This year, 2024, our community event was a Zoom call with Lynn Sestak, volunteering as the Firewise Coordinator for Santa Cruz County, to share information and answer questions about Firewise. This event took place Thursday, August 8, at 6pm. A recording of Lynn's Zoom presentation can be found [here](#). A copy of the slides can be found [here](#).

In order to share information about this event and future events, our steering committee needs to know how to best contact you. We have contact details for all our survey responders. If you have not completed the survey but want to stay informed of future Firewise updates and events, please share your name, email address, and/or phone number with our steering committee by emailing Amy at winkleramy@gmail.com.

Step 4: Develop a three-year plan

The steering committee will be drafting and circulating a proposed three-year plan in mid-October.

This plan is informed by the community risk assessment and by the shared concerns of our residents. In the community risk assessment survey, participants could share the issues most important to them and how they are willing to contribute. Some issues to keep in mind include:

- **Home Hardening:** Embers are the #1 cause of home ignition during wildfire! Hardening the home and Zone 0 yard against embers is the most cost effective
- **Fuel Reduction & Defensible Space:** Direct flames and radiant heat are the two additional paths to home ignition. Keep fire as far away and as low intensity as possible. Defensible Space is required by law and increases the odds that firefighters will be willing to "make a stand" for our homes
- **Wildfire Preparedness & Evacuation Planning:** Prepare our neighborhood to quickly and safely evacuate if need be. Make it easy for first responder vehicles to drive in. Some communities have phone chains or a WhatsApp group to share evacuation information and check on neighbors.
- **Education & Outreach:** Learn and share how to manage our forest and riparian areas to promote a healthy and resilient ecosystem. Learn about and share county resources and information on home hardening and defensible space.

Step 5: Document community's annual efforts

Keep track of how much time and/or money you spend on home hardening, defensible space, wildfire preparedness, and/or education activities. Our steering committee will reach out annually to request this information via your preferred contact method. A Firewise community in good standing must show a combined effort equivalent to at least one hour or \$30 spent per household per year.

Step 6: Create an online account

Once we complete steps 1-5, our steering committee will apply and share any feedback from the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) on our application to be a recognized Firewise Community.

Step 7: Reap the benefits!

Enjoy of a greater sense of community and resilience to whatever challenges come our way! Living in an NFPA-Firewise community also comes with state and local benefits, such as early access to the Free Chipping Program, provided by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, and an insurance discount with the California Fair Plan.

Resources for Property Owners

For property-specific, one-on-one guidance on home hardening and defensible space, we recommend the following resources:

- Request a free home ignition zone assessments from the Fire Safe Council,
<https://www.firesafesantacruz.org/HIZ>
- Request a free on-site survey from the Resource Conservation District, for expert guidance on land management for both defensible space and maintaining a healthy ecosystem,
<https://www.rcdsantacruz.org/request-services>
- Learn more about the why and how to harden your home and maintain defensible space, including where to buy noncombustible or Class A fire-rated materials for roofing, siding, fences, decks, etc.,
<https://firesafemarin.org/harden-your-home/>