

# Mt Bache Loma Prieta Plus Firewise Community

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Hello, Neighbors, and thank you for your interest in Firewise!

We submitted our [application](#) to be an NFPA-recognized Firewise community on October 31, 2024. A big thank you to our steering committee and community participants for sharing their time, expertise, and feedback, empowering us to reach this stage!!

The application status is currently *pending* while under review by [Firewise USA™](#). The review stage typically takes about four weeks. We will update this document when we hear back.

Quick links:

- [Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County Website](#)
- [Mt Bache Loma Prieta Plus 2024 New Application PDF](#)
- [Risk Assessment PDF](#)
- [Action Plan PDF](#)

## 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

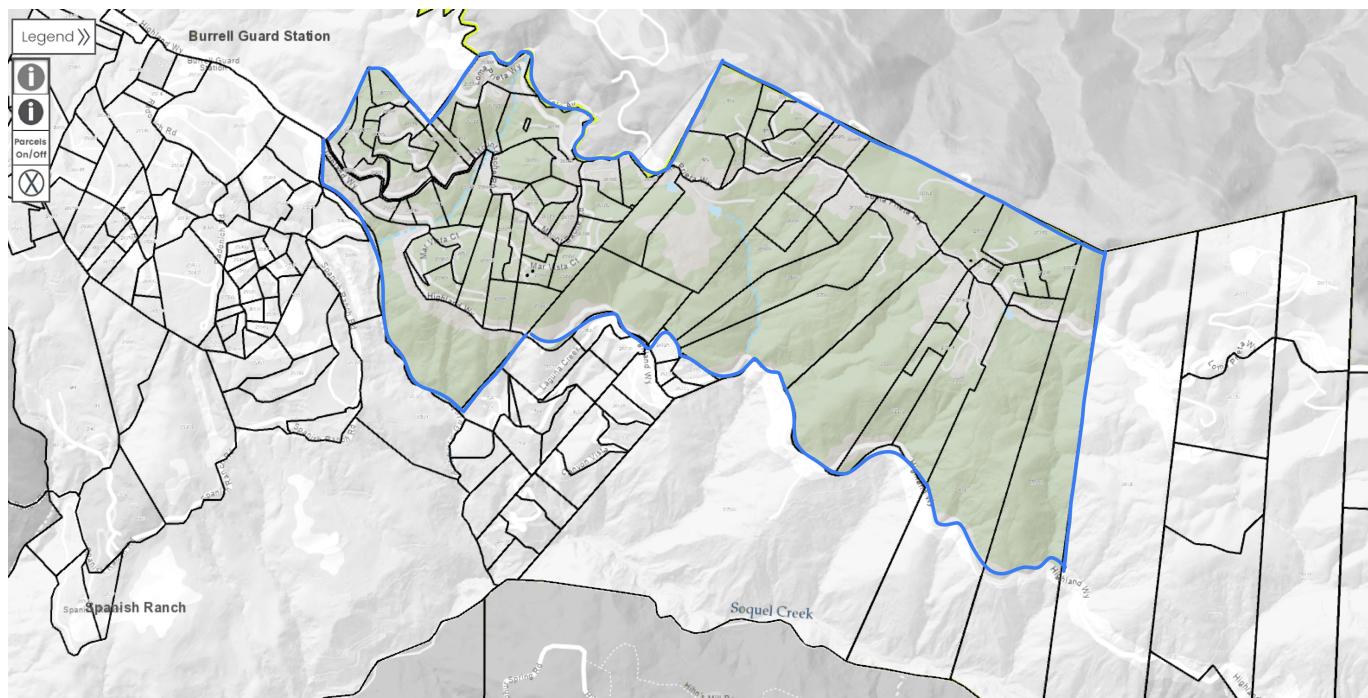
applying for Firewise status online. We can't do it alone! Feedback from our community participants is needed to be successful.

## Steering Committee

1. Amy Winkler, serving Lower Mount Bache and Haven Hill, [winkleramy@gmail.com](mailto:winkleramy@gmail.com)
2. Merry Fay, serving Rancho Prieta, [100wishes@comcast.net](mailto:100wishes@comcast.net)
3. Marilyn Thelen, serving Upper Mount Bache and Loma Prieta, [marilynthe@aol.com](mailto:marilynthe@aol.com)
4. Alyssa Plicka, serving Mar Vista and Highland, [aplicka001@gmail.com](mailto: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 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, evacuation routes, and adjacency to open spaces, without overextending ourselves.

The [GISWeb Assessors Map](#) of our proposed Firewise community is shown below. The boundary is drawn in blue and encompasses 76 dwellings across 79 properties. 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 and Highland Rd to our south.



## 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>.

The results of the community risk assessment survey and drive-through are used to fill out the Firewise Community Assessment template, required for our application. The completed form can be found [here](#).

### 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](mailto:winkleramy@gmail.com).

### Step 4: Develop a three-year plan

The steering committee shared a first draft with our survey responders via email and WhatsApp on October 15 for review and finalized the document for our application on October 31. The submitted document can be found [here](#).

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.

This year, our survey responders logged the equivalent investment of \$202,279 on home hardening and defensible space, far exceeding the required \$2,416.80, or \$31.80/year x 76 dwellings. This investment was in the form of both time and dollars spent, specifically 2,105 hours, considered an investment of \$66,939 by Firewise USA™, and \$135,340 direct monetary investment on contractors, equipment, home improvement costs, vehicle mileage, and landscaping. We estimate the vegetation removal within our community, through chipping, burning, and hauling, to be around 1,465.60 Cubic Yards this year. We are proud to live in such an industrious and conscientious community!

### Step 6: Create an online account

Our steering committee created an online account and submitted our [Firewise USA™ Application](#) on October 31, 2024. This application includes the [Community Risk Assessment](#) and [Action Plan](#) documents described in steps 2 and 4 and includes the steering committee members information, community boundary, and 2024 annual investment information from steps 1 and 5.

### 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. Remember to log your home hardening and defensible space efforts for our future renewal application and look out for emails and WhatsApp messages regarding social and educational events for our community!

## 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/>