



Yosemite West Property & Homeowners, Inc.

Yosemite West Defensible Space Project Overview

Dear Neighbors,

YWPHI has been awarded a \$75,655 National Fire Plan grant from the U.S.D.A. Forest Service through the California Fire Safe Council (see <http://www.yosemitewest.org/grants.htm>). National Fire Plan grants assist “Communities at Risk” with fuel reduction, and Yosemite West is identified as a “Community at Risk” from wildfire (see <http://www.yosemitewest.org/fatrisk.htm>). Implementation of the National Fire Plan and recent catastrophic wildfires in California have made substantial federal funding available. YWPHI is proud to assist landowners who want to reduce the risk of wildland fire.

The purpose of the grant is to create defensible space in accordance with California law and the guidelines in PRC§4291 on 30% of the parcels (or approximately 90 of the 293 parcels in Yosemite West) or on 36 of the 109 acres in Yosemite West. The project is described in Appendix H - Project Summary #1 of the *Yosemite West Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)*, approved by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors in June 2008. The project area is identified as YW-006 on the Phase I Projects/Parcels Map, also in Appendix H. The approved CWPP was mailed on CD to all property owners of record in Yosemite West in August 2008. You can also download the CWPP at <http://www.yosemitewest.org/ywcpwp.pdf>.

Defensible space is the area within the perimeter of a parcel, development, neighborhood or community where basic wildland fire prevention practices and measures are implemented, providing the key point of defense from a wildland fire or an escaping structural fire. The perimeter is the area of a parcel or development excluding physical structures. Properly maintained emergency vehicle access, emergency water reserves, street signs, building identification, and fuel reduction are the essential defensible space characteristics of a perimeter area.

Creating and maintaining defensible space is just one step in mitigating wildland fire losses. The primary concept is built-in fire prevention. Each home built in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) must have a basic level of self-protection, including water, adequate roads, flammable vegetation clearance and proper building identification. Each landowner must accept responsibility for incorporating basic perimeter fire prevention measures into the design and construction of wildland structures. This incorporation of defensible space provides a margin of safety for wildland and structural firefighters, provides a point of attack or defense, and increases the survivability of the home. Take the **YOSEMITE WEST DEFENSIBLE SPACE REALITY CHECK** (see insert) to better understand the facts about defensible space.

The Advantages

Participating in the Yosemite West Defensible Space Project and working collaboratively with YWPHI gives landowners several important advantages.

- YWPHI has written and submitted grant applications and secured more than \$131,000 funding for this fuel reduction project and other fire safety projects that benefit all of Yosemite West.
- In California, the agencies that provide grants for fuel reduction projects only work with established nonprofit organizations (such as YWPHI), fire safe councils, and other government or non-government entities. These grants are *not* available to individuals.
- The grant-funded project minimizes the financial and physical burden to the landowner in complying with the California's 100-foot defensible space law.
- The project realizes substantial cost savings associated with economies of scale. It is more cost effective to perform fuel reduction on multiple acres owned by several landowners than to have landowners working independently.
- YWPHI represents the community through ongoing cooperation and collaboration with all of the agencies involved in implementing the National Fire Plan.
- The project liaises fire science specialists, foresters, and other specialists with professional expertise.
- YWPHI works with the donor, agencies and contractors on landowners' behalf.

The Goals

- The project improves community-wide defensible space by reducing surface, ladder and aerial fuels to create a fire-resilient forest to protect life, property and natural resources. The goal is not to increase property values, although that might be a result. Nor is the goal to "clear-cut" the forest or to harvest timber for commercial purposes or for improved forest health, although a healthier forest is a potential outcome.
- The project provides technical and cost-share assistance to landowners for fuel reduction to lessen the threat of wildland fire to their homes and the community.
- The project helps homeowners create a minimum of 100-foot defensible space in compliance with PRC§4291. A goal for built parcels is to see at least 44 houses (or 50% of the 88 houses) improve their Hazard Value from the undesirable and dangerous Red Zone and Orange Zone (using the 2008 Red Zone Fire Risk Assessment conducted by the Mariposa County Fire

Department) into the Yellow Zone. Currently only 24% of the houses in Yosemite West are in the Yellow Zone. The project increases that percentage to at least 62%. (Refer to <http://www.yosemitewest.org/mcfdgjs.htm> for further information.)

- The goal for unbuilt parcels is to remove all ladder fuels and trees less than 6 inches diameter at breast height (dbh), in effect creating a shaded fuel break. The project treats vacant lots with heavy buildup of small cedars and firs, manzanita, and dead trees. Unbuilt lots on the perimeter of the community are especially important and are given priority, because they link up with the existing shaded fuel breaks adjacent to the community and would substantially enhance defensible space for Yosemite West.
- Most landowners want to address the fire hazard, but may have differing ideas on how to address the problem. No two landowners likely have the same vision about how hazardous fuel reduction should be implemented in their community. The project endeavors to understand and thoroughly address landowners' concerns by applying the best fire science available.

The Process

→ Step 1 - *Information*

Please read the materials in this information packet, which is being mailed to every property owner of record at the address listed by the Mariposa County Assessor's office as of April 1, 2009.

→ Step 2 - *Volunteer*

We are asking for volunteers to become "block captains," who are willing to contact neighbors to enlist participation. Start talking to your neighbors to generate participation in your community fuel reduction project.

→ Step 3 - *Questions & Answers*

Attend the upcoming community planning meetings to ask any questions you may have:

Wednesday, May 13, 7-8 p.m. - and - Saturday, May 16, 5-6 p.m.

Both meetings will cover the same material; you are welcome to attend either or both meetings. If you can't come in person, you can participate via conference call. To attend by phone, please dial ☎ 800-786-1922 a few minutes before the designated time, and enter participant number 66638246#.

→ Step 4 - *Formalities*

Please complete and submit the following two documents by July 1, 2009:

(a) The **Letter of Commitment** (<http://www.yosemitewest.org/grants.htm#loc.pdf>) is the legal document that addresses issues related to expectations, responsibilities and liabilities. The Letter of Commitment is with YWPHI which is implementing the project.

(b) The project requires that landowners make a match or **In-Kind Contribution** (<http://www.yosemitewest.org/grants.htm#ikc.pdf>) of a minimum of \$160 per parcel (it can be made by volunteer labor or in actual dollars) towards the project's total cost.

→ Step 5 - Compliance

YWPHI is currently waiting for approval of the required environmental and cultural compliance for the California Environmental Quality Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and National Historic Preservation Act, which protect threatened and endangered wildlife and sensitive plants, soil and water quality, and archaeologically significant sites. All compliance work has been done, and approval is expected shortly.

→ Step 6 - Start Date

Once the compliance documentation has been approved, the California Fire Safe Council will transfer funds to the project's fiscal sponsor and give approval for work on the ground to start. We do not know exactly when this will occur, but anticipate it will be by late June 2009. Please visit <http://www.yosemitewest.org/grants.htm> for updates.

→ Step 7 - Scheduling

Participating landowners who have signed up to participate by returning the Letter of Commitment and In-Kind Contribution form by July 1, 2009 will be contacted by email and/or telephone to be informed of the scheduling. If you want to be present on your property when the work is done, this will give you time to arrange to be there when the contractor comes.

→ Step 8 - Completion

Fuel reduction starts and continues through Summer 2009 with successful completion expected by Fall 2009. Digital photography for each parcel will be used to document the property before work starts and to show improvement after work ends. The contractor will provide a three- or four-person hand crew using chainsaws, pole saws, loppers, and a chipper.

→ Step 9 - Outcome

The Red Zone Fire Risk Assessment will be updated in Fall 2009 to measure improvement.

→ Step 10 - Maintenance

The forest will grow back unless you maintain your defensible space. This can become part of your annual spring routine. The work will be easier, because this initial treatment will leave you with more defensible space.

Thank you for your interest in collaborating with your neighbors to address the hazardous fuels that pose a risk to your safety, your home and the environment.

Sincerely,
John Mock, Ph.D.
Chair, YWPHI Fire Safety Committee



firesafety@yosemitewest.org