



# NEIGHBORHOOD AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

## Wildfire Adapted Missoula County

### **Abstract**

Get Connected with Wildfire Professionals, Experts and Resources and Move Your Community to Become Fire Adapted

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# Neighborhood Ambassador Approach Overview

A neighborhood ambassador approach is a mechanism for reaching out to and engaging with neighborhoods to help them understand their wildfire risk and encourage and motivate residents to act to reduce that risk. The very nature of the approach builds community and promotes taking personal responsibility for where you live—regardless of whether you live within or outside of the wildland-urban interface. Within this approach, offerings can be tailored to the needs and context of a community while still meeting the overarching purpose of engaging residents in fulfilling their role in living with fire.

As a nation, we have been moving toward a different way of managing wildfire. This approach is called the Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy and includes three interconnected goals:

1. Creating fire resilient landscapes
2. Creating fire adapted communities
3. Providing for safe and effective fire response

The neighborhood ambassador approach will initially bring together a local coordinating group comprised of local, state and federal land and fire management agencies including local fire departments (here on after referred to as ‘partners’). Residents work collaboratively with partners on wildfire preparedness actions.

Over time, the coordinating group will likely include other community partners like resource conservation districts, state wildlife agencies, tribal entities, local businesses, and other non-profit organizations, like The Nature Conservancy.

With the neighborhood ambassador approach, residents serve as volunteers to help engage and motivate their neighbors. Experience and research has shown that most people want to do something—they often just don’t know how or where to start. Research also shows they are more likely to connect and make choices based on the advice or behavior of family, friends or neighbors.

## BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN AMBASSADOR

- Accomplish actions like improved access and egress, reflective signage, home hardening and evacuation preparedness projects in addition to fuels reduction
- Enhancing relationships with fire departments and other local partners
- Build a network of residents who share the same goals and move other communities to achieve the same preparedness goals
- Creating opportunities for cross-boundary projects by encouraging the U.S. Forest Service to undertake Good Neighbor Authority projects
- Leveraging volunteer hours as soft match on most grants
- Building a network of supporters who can encourage and support county wildfire policies and codes

## What Are the Roles of the Ambassador and Their Partners?

Activity	Ambassador Responsibility	Coordinator/Partner Responsibility
Community Meeting	Finds Meeting Location Advertises meeting to neighbors	Arrange for wildfire mitigation specialists to give presentation
Community Wildfire Risk Assessment	Recruits 2+ neighbors to participate in the assessment Gets HOA Support to perform assessment Determines community project boundaries Takes Before and After pictures	Coordinator schedules partner participation Supports assessment Follows up w/NA on action items
Neighborhood Wildfire Protection Plan	Supports in the writing of the Neighborhood CWPP Develop and implement action plan within community	Compiles assessment data into a Wildfire Protection Plan Provides recommended action items Presents final report to community
Mitigation Projects	Serves as project coordinator by securing HOA support Solicits bids and gets contractor Oversees project completion	Writes scope of work for NA to use in getting bids Provide contractor list Inspect project completion

Depending on who your partners are and what their availability is, they may also undertake some of the coordinator responsibilities listed above, especially tasks like writing a scope of work or a prescription for a fuels treatment project. This list is just a few examples to get the program started and is not all encompassing.

## Who Makes a Good Ambassador?

The best ambassadors are ones who are concerned about their neighborhoods wildfire risk and passionate about building community. Successful ambassadors can engage with their neighbors without being overly pushy or critical. Ambassadors need to understand that they do not have to take on all the tasks by themselves.

A co-ambassador, or simply asking for neighbors help by taking photos or tracking volunteer hours, can be extremely helpful and make for a better program. Many residents are more than willing to help if there is a leader to take charge.

### HELPFUL HINTS

- Ambassadors write a letter to neighbors informing them they now have a ambassador for wildfire preparation
- Ambassadors collect email addresses from neighbors so they can share information
- Bring in local fire personnel the share information on ongoing fire(s), prescribed fires, and other mitigation efforts
- Have ambassadors share successes and lessons learned around the community and with other ambassadors

# Building the Program

These are some examples of what other communities have done to build their program. Every community has different needs and goals, and these programs have some room for customization. The whole idea behind these programs is risk reduction, disaster mitigation and preparation.

## *Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or Community Wildfire Risk Assessment*

Offering some level of planning support can be very helpful in both getting communities started on mitigation and other wildfire preparedness activities, and also in keeping them engaged over time.

## *Slash Disposal Programs*

Ambassadors will quickly run into issues of what to do with the material created through vegetation management. Examples of disposal programs include:

- Slash depots
- Chipper rental rebates
- County / community chipping program
- Agency-led chipper days
- Air curtain burner rental
- Pile burning education
- Biomass-heated facilities

## *Cost-Share Fuels Reduction*

Many residents may be able and motivated to undertake fuels reduction projects on their own, but this can be a great program to assist residents who need financial assistance. Inquire with DNRC to learn more.

## *Wildfire Preparedness Workshop*

The first step in mobilizing a community to undertake wildfire preparedness principle may be organizing a workshop/presentations in your neighborhood. The ambassador serves as the coordinator of the community and connects the neighborhood to local fire professionals to engage the community and bring awareness to programs and actions the community can take.