

# A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH WILDFIRE

**August 15, 2023...**



I woke up early to the sound of lightning and the sight of little rain. As a firefighter, I knew the 100+ degree temperatures, coupled with low fuel moisture and a relatively slow local fire season, made for a dangerous combination. At the time, I was in Southern Oregon, and on my way home, I drove up Elk Camp Ridge, where I could see several visible smokes in the hills. I knew this was going to be a long one.

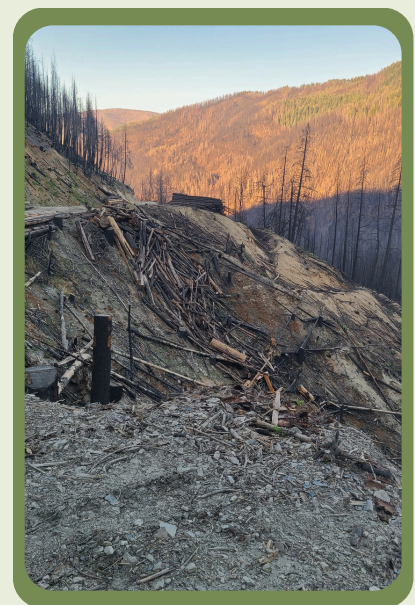
A few days later, the community of Gasquet was evacuated. A couple of crew members and I, working for the Del Norte Fire Safe Council (DNFSC), decided to stay and help amongst thousands of first responders already assisting the effort. We paused our current projects and helped our communities as best we could. From prepping homes and running generators, to communicating with evacuees and directing fire personnel, we immersed ourselves in the collective efforts of thousands of first responders, and it helped.

But the burning question remains: When this happens again, what can we do better?

## **Lessons Learned?**

Today's wildfires are resetting our landscape, correcting over a century of mismanagement from many levels, and yes we the public are guilty too. The future of our landscape and communities depend on our actions now. Wildfires are inevitable, and despite firefighters' efforts, our forests and climate are making it impossible to prevent every fire. So, what can we do?

We need to think big picture, and learn from past successes and failures. This is challenging due to economic interests, entrenched practices, and new ideas that may pose more questions than answers. For example, is the current practice of salvage logging and replanting happening today helping us get out of this problem or keeping us in it? Do we let fires go, or do we put them out? When fires have already reset much of the landscape, what do we do after? Is it a blend of old and new? These are all difficult questions to answer with so many opinions, interests, and information. So perhaps if we understand the role of wildfires in the past, we can understand how we got here in the first place, and together we can plan for a better future.



# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

## Understanding the Role of Wildfires



While crises often highlight heroic acts and community resilience, we cannot rely solely on heroes to break this cycle. The Smith River Complex is just one of many events underscoring the need for a better path forward. As a community, we must first recognize that we live in a fire-prone landscape, historically marked by numerous fires but suppressed for over a century. We need to acknowledge that our actions have shaped this landscape, and we are now re-learning what it means to coexist with it.

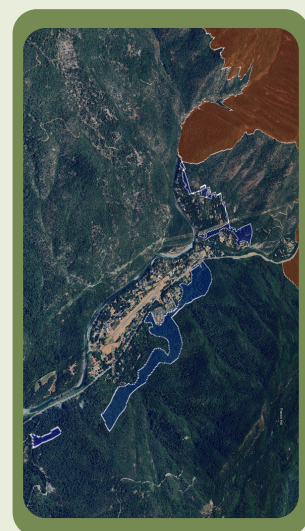
We are currently experiencing unusually intense wildfires, prompting a significant reset in our forests. Wildfires have historically been nature's way of renewing the environment, with both flora and fauna, including humans, adapting to live with fire. However, over the past century, we prioritized stopping wildfires, halting cultural and natural burning. We became adept at extinguishing fires, aided by wetter summer weather patterns of the past and forests previously made resilient by millennia of natural fires.

Over the last 100 years, we also changed our landscape by removing many of the larger fire-resilient trees and replanting smaller ones, ensuring thicker forests. Our summers have been warming and drying, fire seasons are longer. We also expanded, building our homes deeper into the forests, living in a landscape without taking precautions, expecting firefighters to do the rest. This has helped set the stage for the intense fires we face today.

Despite what some may say, we can still live here, but we must work together, acknowledge our situation, and adapt to help our emergency responders protect our communities. There is another path, but it's not going to be easy. It's going to take grit and determination, and it will require us all to work together.

## A Plan for the Future

The Del Norte Fire Safe Council amongst other agencies are implementing projects to help us reintroduce fire close to our communities, but on our terms. To achieve this, we must prepare our adjacent forests and communities for fire. This involves ensuring each structure is resilient to wildfire, reducing surface and ladder fuels around the structure, and ensuring they can be defended if necessary. We also are strategically thinning our forests while retaining enough shade to keep fuels moist and create beneficial microclimates. All in preparation for reintroducing fire, while also helping our communities survive until then. How can you help? We must have honest conversations about what reintroducing fire to the landscape will mean, what type of structures we should live in, and the preparatory work we all will need to take responsibility for now and in the future.



The DNFSC is currently working on three projects in Gasquet, Hiouchi, and Rock Creek. These projects aim to prepare the landscape for the reintroduction of fire. We have already begun some parts of these projects while we are waiting on others as we navigate regulatory requirements and securing additional funding. We have hired a local, four-person, full-time wildfire resilience crew, and they are working hard right now.

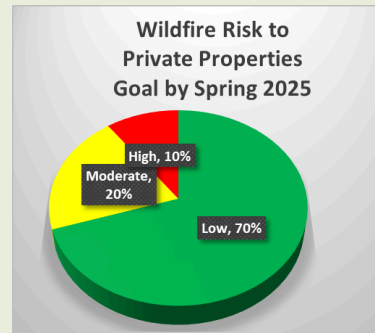
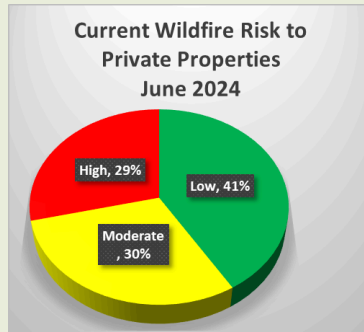
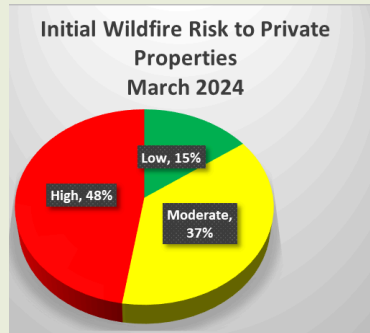
# PROJECT UPDATES

## Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project

The Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project is a strategic initiative developed in collaboration between the Smith River Alliance and the Del Norte Fire Safe Council, aimed at bolstering wildfire resilience within the Rock Creek and Boulder Creek communities. Thanks to generous funding from the Coastal Conservancy, this project combines expanding defensible space around homes with shaded fuel breaks to protect residents while improving river and forest health.

The first phase of the project has started, and we have been working with property owners to reduce hazardous fuels on their properties. This effort has been paying off.

For more information visit our website  
at the bottom of this email  
[www.delnortfsc.org](http://www.delnortfsc.org)



| Hazardous Vegetation Removed<br>Cubic Yards March - May 2024 |             |
|--|-------------|
| Rock Creek   | 3981        |
| Boulder Creek  | 875         |
| Northside of Smith River                                     | 3200        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>8056</b> |

That's 63 semi trailers full!

| Defensible Space Improvements by Property |                                    |                                   |                              |                      |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Wildfire Risk to Residential Properties   | Initial Risk Assessment March 2024 | Current Risk Assessment June 2024 | Change since Project Started | Project Goal by 2025 |
| High Risk                                 | 38                                 | 23                                | -15                          | 8                    |
| Moderate Risk                             | 30                                 | 24                                | -6                           | 16                   |
| Low Risk                                  | 12                                 | 33                                | 21                           | 56                   |



# DEL NORTE FIRE SAFE COUNCIL TEAM MEMBERS



**Aaron**  
County Coordinator



**Garrett**  
Project Manager



**Camie**  
Communications  
Manager

## Our Boots on the ground...



**Brad**  
DNFSC Crew Leader

*Having the river, forest, and coast so close is what drew him to this area. This job gives him the opportunity to help our communities out, while also working outdoors. In his free time Brad enjoys the river, family, hunting, and sports.*



**Patrick**  
Lead Sawyer

*Has lived in the area since childhood, appreciating the outdoors and tight-knit communities. With this job, he aims to enhance fire safety and protect homes and forests. His favorite activities include hunting, fishing, camping, spending time by the river, and assisting community members.*



**McKenzy**  
Wildfire Resilience Crew Member

*Enjoys the area's natural resources like rivers and redwoods. She hopes to gain life skills from the job. Her favorite activities include hunting, summer river visits, hiking, and exploring national parks.*



**Isaac**  
Wildfire Resilience Crew Member

*Loves the slower pace and fishing in the area. He aims to support communities through his job. His favorite after-work activities include snowboarding, fishing, riding a mini-bike, playing video games, and spending time outdoors.*



# THIS MONTH'S CHORE

## Del Norte Fire Safe Council August To-Do List

Take some time this month and help our first responders.

- Ensure Visible Address:
  - Make sure your residence has a clearly visible address sign that is easy to read from the road.
- Clear Property Access:
  - Maintain good and clear access to your property for emergency vehicles. Trim overhanging branches and remove any obstacles.
- Clean Gutters and Roofs:
  - Regularly clear gutters and roofs of leaves, pine needles, and other flammable materials to reduce fire risk.
- Clear Immediate Area:
  - Keep the 30-foot zone around your residence free of flammable vegetation and debris. Trim grass, remove dead plants, and store firewood away from the house.

Following these steps can significantly reduce the risk of wildfire damage to your home and improve safety for you and your neighbors.

It also helps our fire responders in case of fire, and should give you some peace of mind when a fire breaks out near you. These chores are part of our responsibility when living in the areas we do.





# FUTURE PROJECT PUBLIC INPUT MEETINGS

## Introducing Del Norte Wildfire Public Input Sessions

DNFSC in coordination with the USFS wants to hear your ideas for future fuel breaks and putting fire on the ground. We want to hear your concerns, interests, and local knowledge, and use those to develop the best plan. This will be more of a workshop, where the public will have time to interact with other wildfire mitigation personnel.

We need your help to plan future projects in the areas you know best. We will give a short presentation, and then allow the public one on one time with our staff and other organizations to give input and just talk fire. We will have maps of your areas on paper, and on a projector screen to help get your input. We will then be using your recommendations to help your communities develop the best plan for the future.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SERVICES, OUR PROJECTS, AND HOW YOU CAN BE MORE FIRE SAFE PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBPAGE.**

**[WWW.DELNORTEFSC.ORG/SERVICES](http://WWW.DELNORTEFSC.ORG/SERVICES)**

We never expect but greatly appreciate donations.

The Del Norte Fire Safe Council is a 501-c3 non-profit organization. All charitable gifts are tax-deductible per IRS tax rules and our EIN is 94-3413884

We accept donations at [www.delnortefsc.org](http://www.delnortefsc.org)

or by check:  
Del Norte Fire Safe Council  
Po Box 1135  
Crescent City, CA 95531

**We appreciate your help!**

**SPECIFIC MEETING  
DETAILS WILL BE  
ANNOUNCED ON OUR  
WEBSITE SOON.**

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

LATE - AUGUST  
GASQUET AND HIOUCHI

SEPTEMBER  
ROCK CREEK/BIG FLAT  
SMITH RIVER

OCTOBER  
CRESCENT CITY

