Prepare your home and landscape to resist wildfire

By KEITH VANDERVORT

ELY – Spring in the North Country of Minnesota means the start of wildfire season. “This is the perfect time of year to make your home safer from the threat of a wildfire,” said Gloria Erickson, Fire Adapted Communities coordinator for the Ely area.

The concept of the ignition zone was developed by the U.S. Forest Service in the late 1990s following break-through research by fire scientist Jack Cohen into how homes ignite by radiant heat.

“Because of these wildfire safety recommendations by this fire scientist we are able to provide actionable guidance for homeowners to help them prepare their homes and surrounding landscapes to resist wildfire,” she said.

Using the Zone Concept

The primary goal for Firewise landscaping is fuel reduction — limiting the amount of flammable vegetation and materials surrounding the home and increasing the moisture content of remaining vegetation. The home itself and everything around it up to 100 to 200 feet is known as the home ignition zone.

There are several things that can be done to work your way out.

Zone 1
- Iriscles the structure and all its attachments (wooden decks, fences, and boardwalks) back trees that overhang the house.
- Remove large potential fire sources close to the home.
- Use care with equipment and materials.
- Be sure the dwelling is well maintained.

Zone 2
- Remove fuel
- Mow the lawn and maintain it regularly.
- Prune trees; remove heavy accumulations of leaves or needles.
- Access to kitchen, bathrooms, and gym equipment must be clear and free from clutter.

Zone 3
- Where to catch embers or ignite by flames in the grass needs to be as far away from your dwelling as possible.
- Remove fuel sources close to the house.
- Prevent fire from spreading from the home and attachments out to about five feet.
- Keep grass mowed and well maintained.

Zone 4
- Prevent fire or burning debris from affecting your home.
- Prevent fire from spreading to your home.

Address the little things

- Property owners should address the little things first. Erickson said, “Start with the house and work your way out.”
- Keep roofs and gutters free of debris. If there is anything there, such as organic mush, woody shrubs and plants such as juniper bushes that can ignite and thus allow flames to touch the house.
- Remove fuel sources close to the home. The perimeter of the home and attachments out to about five feet are vulnerable if there is anything there, such as burning debris, woody shrubs, and plants such as juniper bushes that can ignite and thus allow flames to touch the house.
- Wind-driven fire will catch fuel sources and other embers that will pile up in corners where you might normally find accumulations of leaves or needles around your home. These corners, nooks and crannies should be free of any flammable materials. If there are any limbs or branches over the roof, or any branches close to touch the sides of the house, keep grass mowed and low watered if possible.

The home itself and everything around it up to 100 to 200 feet is known as the home ignition zone.

Jeff Jackson, Northeast Region Firewise specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, demonstrates how to make an Ely-area home safer from wildfire. (photo by K. Vandervort)