



81



82

BUCKHORN LEGACY

Firewise Communities USA Plan

November 2022

Introduction

The Buckhorn Legacy Community of Peeples Valley is situated at the base of Yarnell Hill west of Peeples Valley proper. This community was created in the 1990s through a series of major lot splits. The Firewise Community is partially controlled by CC&Rs regulating construction design, storage, and business limitations and promoting rural living. Homes in this community are typically custom-built on 5 to 20-acre parcels within a dense pinion- juniper-scrub oak wildland-urban interface. Properties in this area are highly sought after because of the location, privacy, views, and wildlife in the surrounding area.

Goals and Objectives of the Firewise Plan

1. Increase homeowner engagement in fire prevention and emergency preparation in the event of a fire. We do this by providing information and education through personal contacts and Fire Department outreach by the Wildland Division. Sponsor projects to assist homeowners in maintaining survivable space in and immediately around the home.
2. Assist homeowners in maintaining defensible and survivable space immediately around homes.
3. Management of the mature landscape around homes and easement areas of our community to enhance survivable space and mitigate fire spread. We do this through an annual assessment of these areas by the Wildland Division, Firewise Coordinator, and homeowners which includes the principles of fire-adapted communities. The annual assessment guides vegetation management by the stakeholders responsible for those areas.
4. Reduce the accumulation of flammable debris in and on the easement land and surrounding private dwellings. We do this by working with representatives of the Peeples Valley Fire District Wildland Division and Fuels Crews to obtain information about fuels maintenance/mitigation plans, fuels removal targets or goals, and exploring opportunities to remove flammable vegetation that creates risk for damage to our community and adjacent neighborhoods from wildfire.
5. Create adjacent neighborhood Firewise Communities in the Model Creek and Ruger Ranch Homeowners Associations to reduce flammable debris on the north, west, and south side of our neighborhood. We do this by invitation to join in our educational events, sharing our experience of becoming a Firewise Community, and seeking opportunities to conduct joint projects that increase survivable space in our community.

The Firewise Committee Representatives

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Community Location

The Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Site is located in West Peeples Valley, directly north of Model Creek on Buckhorn Road. The latitude is approximately 34.282593 and the longitude is approximately -112.771392. Our neighborhood is surrounded by Arizona State Trust Land and private ranches and neighborhoods.

Ownership

The home sites on Buckhorn Legacy Community are built on private 5 to 20-acre parcels of land that adjacent to Arizona State Trust lands to the north, Model Creek neighborhood to the west and south, and Peeples Valley Proper to the east.



There are a total of 46 parcels within the Site, and there are 18 single-family homes in the Buckhorn Legacy Site. Individual dwellings are dispersed on 5 to 20-acre parcels. There are currently seven new residences under construction or planned for the next year.

There are thirty-nine people who reside in these homes of which twenty-two are full-time residents. Several of the residences are considered second homes and are occupied only part of the time. The development has no amenities and is accessed only by an improved all-weather road with an alternate gated access road connecting to Model Creek Road. The BLQ Road Association is a private non-profit incorporated association that manages the road maintenance plan according to the association guidelines and By-Laws. Some property owners have chosen to remain off the grid, providing their own water and power. Several owners are connected to the power grid and the local water district's domestic water system. All owners are on septic systems for wastewater treatment.



Topography

The Buckhorn Legacy Site is situated immediately below Yarnell Hill, the most prominent land feature in the nearby area and southeast of Rocky Boy Peak. The terrain consists of gentle slopes with medium to heavy scrub oak, Manzanita, Pinion, and Juniper. There are two creeks that both border and parallel the site. On one side is Buckhorn Creek and the other creek is unnamed. Both creeks drain into Model Creek south of the Firewise Community.



Vegetation and Fuels

The native fuels are mature scrub oak, manzanita, pinion, and juniper interspersed with annual grasses. There is very little imported nonnative decorative landscaping used by homeowners. Aging trees or shrubs maintain the esthetics of the community and owners prefer to maintain a natural environment. The primary vegetation immediately surrounding the community at Buckhorn and Legacy is Pinion/ Juniper/Chaparral Forest. Fire-prone vegetation like manzanita contributes to the potential for hot and fast-moving fires when the right conditions exist, like low humidity and high winds. The Peoples Valley Fire District considers this area a heavy fuel model.



Climate and Weather

Buckhorn Legacy is approximately 4,600 feet above sea level. The climate is generally mild year-round with July being the warmest month with an average high temperature of 94°F and January the coldest with an average low temperature of 30°F. The driest month is May followed shortly thereafter by the monsoon season beginning approximately mid-July and lasting until the end of September. The most precipitation falls in August with an average of 2.3 inches. The average total precipitation per year is 16.9 inches. April is the month with the most wind (average 7 mph).

Predominant winds are typically west to southwest. Diurnal winds are evident from spring through fall peaking daily between early afternoon and sunset. The site experiences monsoons each summer and adds to the seasonal fine fuel loading after significant monsoons. Monsoons also bring an increase in wildfire ignition threats through lightning strikes. Winter snowfall amounts in Peoples Valley have a tendency to moderate wildfire threat depending on the amounts recorded.

Wildlife

Common wildlife in the area includes mule deer, javelina, coyote, bobcat, mountain lions, bears, foxes, several venomous and non-venomous snakes, and a wide variety of migratory and indigenous birds.

Fire History

The fire characteristics for the area and fuel type are continually elevated but dependent upon live and dead fuel moisture. As expected, summer and fall are periods of greatest threat for wildfire. The area has significant fire history. Buckhorn Legacy site experienced a very dramatic and significant threat from the 2013 Yarnell Hill fire. That fire came within 1,200 feet of the site before changing direction and burning away from Peeples Valley. In 2022 we experienced another lightning strike fire on state lands that could potentially have become a significant incident were it not for quick detection and rapid response by fire authorities.

Winter is considered a lower risk for fire; however, as fuels dry throughout spring, fire danger increases. The Buckhorn Legacy Community itself has no recorded wildland fire experience in the designated site.



Community Infrastructure

There are multiple roads in Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community, most averaging 24' in width. These roads are dirt based with a series of bar ditches and culverts for drainage. South Hidden Trail is a dead-end road at the center of Buckhorn loop which is 24' in width. Legacy Lane is also a dead-end road located near the entrance to the Firewise Community and has the same road standard.



Peeples Valley Fire District (PVFD) is the first responding agency to our neighborhood. PVFD has one station located approximately 1 to 2 miles from the Firewise Community. The station is staffed 24 hours per day Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. During the balance of the week, daytime staffing and Fuels Crews are first responders covering the community. They are supported by paid call firefighters responding from throughout the community. The firefighting fleet includes two Type 1 and three Type 6 fire engines, two water tenders, and several command and staff SUVs. In addition, PVFD owns and operates a skid steer masticator and two Vermeer Chippers for fuels reduction. According to the Insurance Services Office, the current ISO Public Protection Classification is Class 6. There are no fire hydrants in the Buckhorn Legacy Community. There are several private water tanks set up for emergency fire department access. The electrical grid is operated by Arizona Public Service. All power distribution is underground with above-ground transformers and distribution boxes.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP)/Other Hazard Ratings

The Peeples Valley Fire District currently does not have a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The district has contracted with VANA FIRE Wildfire Protection Services to develop a comprehensive CWPP that will include this Firewise Community. PVFD does provide education, risk assessment, and home evaluations free of charge. In preparation for our Firewise Community Application, a Community Wildfire Hazard Severity / Risk Assessment of the Buckhorn Legacy Community was conducted by Matt Rust, Prevention Officer AZDFFM. His assessment concluded the Buckhorn Legacy Community be assigned a Moderate Hazard Risk Factor for wildfire. He identified several areas of improvement and they are included in our Objectives. Rating for roads, heavy fuels, defensible space, topography and fire weather conditions, and building and water sources were problematic. Some of these rating areas could be addressed in future Objectives for this Community. The Buckhorn Legacy Community Accomplishments

Wildfire preparation has always been a concern for residents of the Buckhorn Legacy Community. Many residents in the community were living here when the Yarnell Fire occurred in 2013. At the recommendation of Fire Chief Shawn Bomar, several residents began hazardous fuels reduction around their properties to develop or increase defensible space and mitigate the threat of wildfire. This work was performed by the newly created PVFD Fuels Crews utilizing PVFD-owned chippers, engines, and equipment. Costs for the mitigation were paid for by Firewise Community residents at either daily rates or half-day rates. In 2021, PVFD received grant funding to initiate a Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program creating or widening roadside fuel breaks on Buckhorn Drive and Model Creek Road. In anticipation of this project, the Buckhorn Legacy Road Association undertook a project to reconstruct the entire two miles of Buckhorn Drive. This improvement provided safe emergency evacuation routes for the residents and improved the ingress of firefighting resources. While improving the roadway, with the approval of property owners, we were able to brush back the roadway to easements further enhancing the planned fuel breaks yet to be constructed. It then becomes the responsibility of the homeowners to maintain these established defensive areas. This maintenance will become part of the annual Firewise Community investment.

Buckhorn Legacy Road Association dues will fund the maintenance of the roadway into and out of this community.

A Firewise Plan was developed by Ray Paiz, PVFD Community Firewise Coordinator, for the Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community. The plan will be distributed to all members of the Road Association and discussed at the next Association meeting. Included will be the assessment conducted by AZDFFM, their narrative and defensible space literature. The PVFD Wildfire Risk Assessment Officer and Community Firewise Coordinator will be engaged each year to provide a report on all residences where the owner wishes to have their home evaluated for the coming year's fire season.

The Buckhorn Legacy Community Project Goals

- Conduct home Wildfire Risk Assessments on 100% of residences, outbuildings, and improvements in the Buckhorn Legacy Community
- Establish minimum defensible space around residences where none exist
- Improve defensible space to minimum standards where it is identified as not meeting Firewise standards
- Develop a plan for reducing or eliminating green waste accumulation on each parcel
- Ensure emergency evacuation routes are maintained

- Provide annual outreach informing residents about the threat of wildfire and how to prepare
- Conduct semiannual neighborhood fuels reduction days
- Engage AZDFFM and PVFD to begin the design and construction of a fuel break north of the community

Annual Event to encourage vegetation maintenance and removal

In an effort to encourage all community members to manage their own defensible space, the Buck Legacy Road Association will sponsor a Defensible Space Creation Day targeting the most threatened residences identified by Risk Assessment. A dumpster will be centrally located in the community for 14 days allowing the community to implement its own vegetation maintenance plan on individual parcels.

Community Investment

There are 18 residential dwelling units in the Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community. The Arizona Firewise program requires an investment of one volunteer hour or \$28.00 spent in wildfire risk reduction per dwelling per year. Therefore, the requirement for the Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community is 18 hours of volunteer time or expenditures of \$504.00 per year. The Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community spent \$56,935.00 in 2022 for road, evacuation route, and fuels improvement as well as tree removal. The budget has not been set for 2023. However, it can be anticipated we will reach our minimum required expenditure to maintain membership in good standing due to projected activities for the coming year.

Since the budgeted expenditures for Firewise maintenance have not been set we will be tracking volunteer hours. Individual homeowner efforts and expenditures related to fire risk reduction and Firewise improvements will be recorded where the homeowner permits. However, informal accounting for volunteer time spent on the Wildfire Hazard Severity/Risk Assessment, completing the annual Firewise application, vegetation maintenance, and fuels mitigation plan, and the educational outreach plan will collectively exceed our minimum 18 hours.

Community Firewise Day

Firewise Day in Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community has not been established or celebrated this cycle as our application is new. It is anticipated we will establish a date in early spring 2023 as Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community Day. This will provide adequate time to review our Goals with the Firewise Community and implement our Objectives for the year. We intend to invite the PVFD and AZDFFM to participate to the extent their scheduling permits. The Buckhorn Legacy Firewise Community will promote this event through advertisements on social media, our local Yellow Sheet Paper, and door hangers.

Buckhorn Legacy Community Aerial Map

