



**Wrightwood
FireSafe
COUNCIL**

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Wrightwood Healthy Forest & Restoration Guidelines

How did we get where we are today?

Many factors have contributed to our forest's increasing tree mortality and bark beetle infestation; however two key contributors are overcrowding and drought.

Years ago, California forests were regularly thinned by small lightning fires or intentional burns set by early native populations. Yet for the last hundred years or so, our forests have not experienced a natural cycle of small frequent fires. This has led to an over abundance of trees, a thick understory of highly flammable fuels and a forest lacking in plant diversity.

Naturally occurring cycles of dryer weather, and human factors such as domestic water use and snow making, have combined to deplete our local ground water. The forest, as it is today, cannot be sustained on the limited water resources available.

These factors have resulted in an unnatural and unhealthy forest; creating conditions that can lead to unstoppable wildfires.

What is Wrightwood's greatest threat?

The Forest Service has a fuel reduction proposal for Wrightwood under development for National Forest lands surrounding the town. However, the Forest Service plan is not the complete solution. Residents must understand that there are large parcels of undeveloped private land between the residential area of Wrightwood and the National Forest boundaries. These dense, unhealthy areas of private forest, weakened by drought present a substantial fire hazard to all the

homes and residents of Wrightwood.

All private lands, developed or not, require our immediate attention to reduce the threat of fire and to restore a healthy forest environment.

What do we need to do?

To restore the forest to a natural healthy state, residents must create a forest environment with fewer trees and a dramatically thinned understory. This will reduce fire intensity, keep fire out of the tree crowns and allow fire suppression efforts to be more effective. Another benefit to a more open park-like forest is that it will leave more water resources available, allowing trees to naturally defend against bark beetle attack.

How do we do this?

The Forest Service has used a team of experts to develop fuel reduction plans for the Big Pines Recreation Area and Lone Pine Canyon. Both areas are representative of the forest condition in and immediately surrounding Wrightwood. The proposals include steps that will effectively reduce the fuel load, restore the forest to a natural healthy state and improve wildlife habitat.

Drawing upon the Forest Service proposals and information acquired at Forest Stewardship workshops, the Wrightwood Fire Safe Council has compiled the following guidelines to help reduce the threat of fire and create a healthier forest.

Guidelines for Creating a Healthy Forest

If you need help assessing your property, the Wrightwood Fire Safe Council can assist you.

The ideal healthy forest is an open, park-like stand with widely spaced

overstory trees (conifers and hardwoods). Most standing dead trees are removed and live trees are thinned. The understory consists of scattered shrubs, small trees, grasses and wildflowers. This breaks up the “fuel connectivity” and reduces the risk of high-intensity fire.

Overstory that portion of the trees, in a forest of more than one story, forming the upper canopy layer

Understory all vegetation growing under an overstory

□ **Thin conifers (pines) to approximately 90 trees per acre*.**

Generally, the crowns of adjacent trees should not be touching. This creates fuel connectivity and competition for ground water.

Crown part of a tree or woody plant bearing live branches and foliage

□ **Thin hardwood stands to approximately 120 trees per acre*.**

Our area contains a substantial amount of hardwoods such as Oak and Mountain Mahogany. These varieties are “ladder fuels” that can carry a fire up into the crowns of the pines. Hardwood specimens that are under conifers should be removed. Trim, but leave those that are standing in the open.

□ **Prune limbs (dead and living) of remaining trees to provide 10 feet of clearance above the ground or up to 50% of the tree height, which ever is lower. If the tree is standing on a slope, the pruning height is measured on the high side of the grade.**

□ **Reduce shrub component ground cover to 15%.**

In other words, 85% of the area is left open.

□ **Remove downed trees, branches (slash) and shrubs from the area.**

The best option is to chip the material and spread the resulting mulch as it

helps keep the ground moist. The chips should not be more than 3 inches deep as it can impede water absorption from rain and snow events. Do not pile chips or slash closer than 6' to tree trunks.

Wildlife habitat preservation

Many species depend upon forest floor litter and standing dead wood (snags), for their habitat and denning. For this reason some dead fall and snags must be left to provide a friendly habitat for wildlife.

- Leave two snags (standing dead trees) per acre in areas that are primarily made up of conifer and oak trees. Around riparian (wetland, river-stream bank) habitats, there should be five snags per acre if possible.
- Leave five to nine deadfalls (rotting trees on the ground) per acre. Try not to disturb existing deadfalls during restoration work.
- Leave trees used by wildlife such as woodpecker acorn storage trees (granary trees) and trees with nest holes or visible nests.

** It is a good idea to maintain a diverse selection of tree type and age when thinning. Wrightwood is predominately a Jeffery Pine forest. Try to retain other species whenever possible such as Douglas Fir, Oaks, Sugar Pine, Coulter Pine, Incense Cedar, Fir, and Piñon Pine. Try to leave the remaining trees in a random pattern with occasional clumping. While preference should be given to retaining trees over 14" dbh (diameter at breast height, about 4.5' from the ground), it is also critical to leave trees of varying ages.*