

# WILDLAND FIRE TERMINOLOGY

**Canopy** - The stratum containing the crowns of the tallest vegetation present (living or dead), usually above 20 feet.

**Convection** – 1. The transfer of heat by the movement of a gas or liquid; convection, conduction, and radiation are the principal means of energy transfer. 2. As specialized in meteorology, atmospheric motions that are predominantly vertical in the absence of wind (which distinguishes this process from advection), resulting in vertical transport and mixing of atmospheric properties.

**Crawler tractor** – A tracked vehicle (typically with a front-mounted blade and rear-attached plow) used to suppress wildfires.

**Crown fire** - A fire that advances from top to top of trees or shrubs more or less independent of a surface fire. Crown fires are sometimes classed as running or dependent to distinguish the degree of independence from the surface fire.

**Cul-de-sac** – Usually refers to the circular “dead end” of a street or road.

**Defensible space** – An area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfires toward the structure. Defensible space provides room for firefighters to do their jobs and in the absence of firefighters; this safety zone increases the likelihood that the structure will survive on its own. Defensible space also helps contain a structure fire to the surrounding property and prevents its spread to adjacent wildlands.

**Dry hydrant** – A simple cost-effective solution that allows fire engines access to rural water supplies like ponds, lakes, streams and cisterns. It consists of an arrangement of pvc piping with one end in the water and the other end extending to dry, solid land which allows a fire truck to hook-up and draft water.

**Ecological** - Fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats which may include land, air and or water.

**Ecosystem** - An interacting natural system including all the component organisms together with the abiotic environment and processes affecting them.

**Fire Plow** - A heavy-duty plowshare or disc plow usually pulled by a tractor to construct a fireline.

**Fire resistant tree** - A species with compact, resin-free, thick corky bark and less flammable foliage that has a relatively lower probability of being killed or scarred by a fire than a fire sensitive tree.

**Firebrands** - Flaming or glowing fuel particles that can be carried naturally by wind, convection currents, or gravity into unburned fuels.

**Firewise Communities** – National program/initiative with a focus on collective responsibility for wildland fire protection in the wildland urban interface.

**Firewise Communities USA** – Recognition program for subdivisions, neighborhoods or communities that take action to protect themselves from wildland fire.

**Firewise construction** – The use of materials and systems in the design and construction of a building or other structure to safeguard against the spread of fire within the building or structure as well as the spread of fire to other buildings or structures or to adjacent forest or wildland areas.

**Firewise landscaping** – Landscaping with the intent of preventing the spread of fire from forests or wildland to a structure.

**Firewise Virginia** – <http://www.firewisevirginia.org> - Virginia's program/initiative for wildland fire protection in the wildland urban interface.

**Forest** – An ecosystem characterized by more or less dense and extensive tree cover commonly including meadows, streams and clearings.

**Fuel(s)** - Can be classified as “wildland” which means the dead and living vegetation which is available to burn during a wildfire, or “interface” which refers to the structures, vehicles, power lines and hazardous materials. These interface fuels compound the dangers and difficulties of suppressing a wildfire.

**Fuel model** - Simulated fuel complex for which all fuel descriptors required for the solution of a mathematical rate of spread model have been specified.

**Hammerhead -T** – Widened area at the terminus of a dead-end road providing for a 3-point turn for emergency equipment.

**Hazard assessment** – Procedure for determining the vulnerability of a specific area to wildland fire.

**Home ignition zone** – Area extending outward from a structure 100-200 feet in all directions that has a significant influence on structural ignitions.

**Infrastructure** – The physical support systems of a community including roads, power lines, water and sewage.

**Intermix interface** – An interface area where structures are interspersed/scattered among forest or wildland fuels.

**Ladder fuels** - Fuels that provide vertical continuity between strata, thereby allowing fire to carry from surface fuels into the crowns of trees or shrubs with relative ease. Ladder fuels help initiate and assure the continuation of crowning.

**Land manager** – Individual responsible for management of forest, range or wildland areas.

**Mitigation** – Action taken to reduce or eliminate an existing hazard.

**NFPA 1141** – Standard for Fire Protection in Planned Building Groups (1998). Additional information from the National Fire Protection Association can be obtained at <http://www.nfpa.org/codes/index.asp>.

**NFPA 1142** – Standard on Water Supplies for Suburban and Rural Fire Fights (2001). Additional information from the National Fire Protection Association can be obtained at <http://www.nfpa.org/codes/index.asp>.

**NFPA 1144** – Standard for the Protection of Life and Property from Wildfire (2002). Additional information from the National Fire Protection Association can be obtained at <http://www.nfpa.org/codes/index.asp>.

**National Association of State Foresters (NASF)** - An organization (formed in 1920) consisting of the State Forester from each state and territory which promotes cooperation in forestry and natural resource management among the states and territories, the federal government and private forestry groups. The NASF promotes legislation, programs and activities that will advance the practice of forestry and use of forest products.

**National Fire Prevention Week** – Traditionally the second week of October. Commemorates the Great Chicago Fire and Peshtigo Fire (WI) of October 8, 1871.

**National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)** - Nonprofit educational and technical association formed in 1896, headquartered in Quincy, Massachusetts, and devoted to the protection of life and property from fire through development of standards of fire protection and public education.

**National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)** - A group formed under the direction of the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to improve the coordination and effectiveness of wildland fire activities and provide a forum to discuss, recommend appropriate action, or resolve issues and problems of substantive nature.

**Non-combustible** – A material that, in the form in which it is used and under the conditions anticipated, will not aid combustion or add appreciable heat to an ambient fire.

**Occluded interface** – Islands of forest or wildlands surrounded by development.

**Overstory** – The portion of trees in a forest that forms the uppermost layer (tree tops).

**Prescribed fire** - The controlled application of fire to wildland fuels in either the natural or modified state, under specified environmental conditions, which allows a fire to be confined to a predetermined area and produces the fire behavior and characteristics necessary to attain planned fire treatment and silvicultural and wildlife management objectives.

**Radiation** - Transfer of heat in straight lines through a gas or vacuum other than the heating of intervening space.

**Relative Humidity (RH or Rh)** - The ratio of the amount of moisture in the air to the maximum amount of moisture that air would contain if it were saturated. The ratio of the actual vapor pressure to the saturated vapor pressure.

**Risk** - A number related to the potential of firebrands to which a given area will be exposed during the rating day. A causative agent. The chance of fire starting as determined by the presence and activity of causative agents.

**Shoulder** – The road right-of-way (paved or unpaved) immediately adjacent to the outside traffic lane.

**Shrub** - A woody perennial plant differing from a perennial herb by its persistent and woody stem and from a tree by its low stature and habit of branching from the base.

**Silvicultural** - The science and practice of caring for the forests with respect to human objectives.

**Skirting** – A type of barrier used to keep unwanted debris from accumulating underneath a structure whose floor is raised off the ground.

**Soffit** – Typically a board or sheathing that encloses the eaves (roof overhang) of a structure, equipped with screened openings for ventilation of the attic.

**Structural firefighter** – Firefighter whose primary responsibility is to respond to fires in buildings (structural fires).

**Suppression** - All the work of extinguishing or confining a fire, beginning with its discovery.

**Surface fire** - Fire that burns loose debris on the surface, which includes dead branches, leaves, and low vegetation.

**Tree** – A woody perennial plant typically with a single stem at least 5 inches in diameter and mature height of at least 15 feet.

**Tree protection ordinance** – Municipal or county ordinance regulating tree removal.

**Triage** – To sort or arrange by priority.

**Turnaround** – A portion of a roadway, unobstructed by parking, where emergency vehicles can safely reverse directions.

**Understory** – Lesser vegetation (underbrush) below the canopy of a forest or wildland area.

**Wildfire** - A fire occurring on wildland that is not meeting management objectives, thus requiring a suppression response.

**Wildfire disaster cycle** – Cycle of destruction in the wildland-urban interface where homes are burned, rebuilt and lost again as a result of wildland fire.

**Wildland** - An area in which development is essentially non-existent, except for roads, railroads, powerlines, and similar transportation facilities. Structures, if any, are widely scattered.

**Wildland firefighter** – Firefighter trained to respond to fires in forested or wildland areas.

**Wildland/Urban Interface** - The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

**Wildland fire** - Any fire occurring on the wildlands, regardless of ignition source, damages or benefits.



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