

# SCFC Prevention Dispatch

SC Firewise USA® Community Newsletter

January 2021



## INTERESTING NOTES

27 communities in SC have received \$212,375 in funding for projects in 2021.

## IN 2020 COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE REPORTED:

18,433 Cubic Yards of Debris Removed

20,692 Risk Reduction Hours

\$1,244,778.48 of Total Reduction Investment

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## Happy New Year from the SC Forestry Fire Prevention Team!

Welcome to 2021! We truly hope that you had a safe and wonderful holiday season. This year our team has decided to start a newsletter in the hope that we can keep each community informed of fire prevention happenings across our state. We are seeking input on things that you would like to see and read about. In the meantime, and to start off the new year, we would like to introduce our staff, the SCFC Prevention Team. Included with their picture is a brief bio and background of each member. This team is your contact for everything Firewise and can assist you in any way to make our state safer. Please reach out to us. We look forward to meeting with you post-Covid-19!

## Prevention Measures in South Carolina

Fire has always been a historical feature of the landscape in South Carolina.

The South Carolina Forestry Commission fights an average of 3,000 wildfires a year - many more than most western states. Approximately 98% of all wildfire causes in South Carolina are human-related.

As development increases, lives and property are threatened as never before.

Wildfires in developed areas are tough to control, partly due to access and other issues. We often have individual homes lost in the wildland-urban interface. In an effort to raise the public's awareness to this fire danger potential the South Carolina Forestry

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In 2009, 76 homes were destroyed and 97 damaged during the Highway 31 Fire.

# History of Firewise USA®

After the catastrophic fire season of 1985, representatives of National Fire Protection Association and the USDA Forest Service met to discuss the increasing trend of wind-driven fire in populated areas, and formed what is now the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program. In 1992, the advisory group for the program adopted the term “Firewise” to describe the state of being knowledgeable and prepared for wildfire in residential or urban settings. In 1999, the advisory group became the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Working Team of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, which oversees the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program and its Firewise Communities program. The Firewise website launched in 1996, and the national workshop series began in 1999. Today, the Firewise Communities team continues its mission of wildland/urban interface fire education through its website, workshop series, community recognition program, and information resources.



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RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

## Overview of the Firewise USA® Program

Over the past century, America’s population has nearly tripled, with much of the growth flowing into traditionally natural areas. This trend has created an extremely complex landscape that has come to be known as the wildland/urban interface. Encroaching development into forests, grasslands, and farms has put lives, property, and natural resources at risk from wildfire. Unfortunately, once a wildfire ignites, firefighters are limited in what they can do to protect the values in its path. The National Firewise Program is a national interagency program that encourages partnerships among communities, homeowners, private industry, tribes, and public agencies and officials to develop and implement local solutions for wildfire preparedness – before a fire starts.

Wildfires are a natural process. It is the vision of Firewise that, with adequate planning and cooperation among varying interests, wildfires can occur without disastrous loss of life, property, and resources. The National Firewise Program provides a number of wildland/urban interface resources for firefighter safety, community planning, landscaping, construction, and maintenance to help protect people, property, and natural resources from wildland fire. A Firewise Approach, the best approach to wildfire preparedness, involves utilizing the wide range of Firewise practices. The National Firewise Program offers a series of practical steps (landscaping, home construction and design, community planning, etc.) that individuals and communities can take to reduce their vulnerability to wildfire. Using at

least one element recommended by the National Firewise Program and adding other elements over time will begin to protect against the risk of fire in the wildland/urban interface. Examples of Firewise techniques for property owners include creating a defensible space around residential structures by thinning trees and brush; choosing fire-resistant plants; selecting ignition-resistant building materials; positioning structures away from slopes; and working with firefighters to develop emergency plans.





# Meet the Prevention Team



## Drake Carroll

State Firewise and Prevention Coordinator

My name is Drake Carroll and I am the Firewise and Prevention Coordinator for the state of South Carolina. I was born in Conway, SC in 1983. I would say life-long resident of Conway, but I did take some time away from living in Conway for school as well as my first position with SCFC. Growing up, I was always drawn to the outdoors. I enjoyed hunting, fishing, camping and would easily have fallen into the Horry county term of a “River Rat”. So when it came time to pick a path for college and a following career, it was a pretty easy fit for me to navigate towards forestry. I started my college education by attending Horry-Georgetown Technical College where I received an Associate’s degree in Forestry. After that, I felt I wanted to continue my education for a Bachelor’s degree in Forest Resource Management from Clemson University. I will take this time to mention I decided to go to Clemson when the football team was just mediocre at best. This was long before the days of being ranked and competing for National Championships. I graduated from Clemson in June of 2007 and started my career with the SC Forestry Commission one month to the day later. My first position with the Commission was as a Southern Pine Beetle Forester down in Moncks Corner, SC. I soon became the Project Forester for Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties and held that position for the next 5 years. I took another position with SCFC out of Florence to get back to Conway in 2012 so that I could get married and settle back in my hometown. I was married in 2013 and then switched over into the WUI side of the Forestry Commission as the Coastal Field Coordinator in 2014. I have worked in Firewise and Prevention since then and was promoted to State Coordinator last year. I am very happy to have this great team to work with and feel that our program is headed in a good direction. I want to also thank all of you community leaders. Your dedication and participation make a dramatic difference in our program and we could not have our success without you. I look forward to working with you all in 2021.



Drake on the Rough Fire near Stanley ID in 2016

# Chris Revels

Upstate Firewise and Prevention Field Coordinator



Chris on the Meyers Complex Fire near Philipsburg, MT in 2017

Hello Firewise Community: I am Chris Revels the Firewise and Prevention Coordinator for the South Carolina upstate. I am a native of York County, SC and currently reside in Smyrna, SC. I graduated from York Comprehensive High School in 1976. I attended Clemson University and graduated in 1980 with a degree in Parks and Recreation Tourism with an emphasis in Natural Resource Management. Upon graduation from Clemson, I entered the National Park Service (NPS) as a Seasonal Park Ranger and gained fulltime status in 1982. I took a short hiatus away

from the NPS in 1988 but returned in 1994 as Chief Ranger of Kings Mountain National Military Park. As Chief Ranger I was responsible for oversight of the fire, law enforcement, resource management, and interpretive divisions. In my later years with the NPS I inherited oversight of the fire, law enforcement, and resource management responsibilities at Cowpens National Battlefield, and Ninety Six National Historic Site. During my 34 years with the National Park Service I was very active in the wildland fire program and was recognized with the Brad Cella Fuels Management Award for the National Park Service. I retired from the NPS in January of 2019 and began my second career with the SC Forestry Commission. My first position was a Forest Tech (Tractor Plow Operator) and I moved into the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) position in August of 2019.

I am married to Vicki Wilson of Belton, SC and have twin boys both of whom are law enforcement officers (one State Trooper and one Rock Hill City Police). In my spare time I have a small antiques and collectibles business and enjoy restoring antique furniture. I also serve on the York School District One Board of Trustees (2004 –present).

My current position allows me to engage with individuals and communities to promote Firewise practices and fuels management. A large portion of my position is spent drafting plans and developing strategies for communities. I also get to spend time in the field with a drip torch in hand practicing prescribed fire, my true passion.

# Andy Johnson

Coastal Region Firewise and Prevention Coordinator



Good day, Folks!

My name is Andy Johnson and I am the Coastal Firewise and Prevention Coordinator. I was exposed to fire at an early age, serving as a cadet on a fire dept. in Aiken CO at age 16 and to this day. The training and experience I received early on was a huge factor in my life direction. I started my career with SC Forestry in late 2007 as a Tractor-plow Operator. Serving in this role was truly a wonderful job-arguably the best job the Commission has to offer. However, through this position, I quickly learned just how far behind we were when it came to mitigating wildfire risk around homes in the Wildland Urban Interface. This program has since been bolstered and it's very exciting to see the progress that's being made.



After about five years as a Tractor Plow Operator, I was presented with the chance to lead the crew that I had been working with as a Sector Fire Management Officer. In this role, I was able to plan and conduct prescribed burning among many other challenges. I realized through this position that this one tool, prescribed fire, can make a huge difference when it comes to protecting home in the Wildland Urban Interface. I fell in love with what I call "conducting an orchestra".

In October of 2019, I was once again given a great opportunity to come to work with this team. Prevention is the future and is in the forefront of my mind. I enjoy meeting with government and community leaders across the State and offering assistance any way that I can.

I have assisted with Wildfires all across this country. From Oregon to South Carolina, I have been exposed to many WUI environments. Although we see mostly Western States on the news with homes being lost to fire, this is a very relative topic to us here in South Carolina.

Personally, I live in Aiken County on the land and home in which I was raised as a child. My biggest accomplishment is still a work in progress... I am the father of two teenagers that keep me on my toes. We enjoy being outdoors. We spend a lot of time fishing at home and at nearby spots. We do a great deal of camping (glamping). I also enjoy cooking for friends and family. In the midst of this chaotic world, we always make time for conversation and stories around a dinner table.

I'm the newest to the group. I haven't been afforded the chance to get out and meet with a lot of you, yet. Hopefully, after this pandemic is settled, I can visit more. I look forward to those days! If I can be of any assistance to you, please don't hesitate to contact me.



# 5 Minutes for Prevention



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## Tip # 1: Install Spark Arresters on Chimneys

This wildfire prevention tip is unique to the Southeast region of the U.S. The typical wildfire season for this region and our state is in the winter to early spring of the year. This is when our weather and fuels align to increase our risk of wildfire. It is not completely uncommon for these factors to align when it is still cold enough for our homeowners to have fires in their fireplaces. So without a proper spark arrestor, it is very possible for the sparks from a fireplace to come out of the chimney and land in the dry fuels collected around the home in the flower bed, on the roof and also in the gutters.



## Prevention Tips To Help Mitigate Risk

## Tip # 2: Clean fuel out of gutters and off of roofs

The number one way that a home is damaged from wildfires is from blown fire embers and the most common area for fuel build up around the home is on the roof and in gutters. So with this being said, we can not be stress enough the importance of keeping fuel from building up in these areas. So as we enter into our fire season, it is important to clean the gutters out because I am sure there is a lot of litter and fuel build up from all of the trees near your homes.



# Prevention Measures in South Carolina

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Commission implemented the Firewise USA™ program with efforts focused primarily in populated areas historically known to have a high wildfire occurrence. In 2009, South Carolina had 76 homes destroyed and 97 others damaged in one major wildfire that burned over 19,000 acres. The Highway 31 Fire in Horry County happened in an area that had traditionally seen many large fires. To make matters worse, parts of this area was developed and houses were built with no idea of what may be brewing.

This historic fire caused more attention to be focused on wildfire prevention. Prior to this event, South Carolina only had four Firewise USA™ Communities. Today, community involvement has increased to 36 Firewise USA™ communities across the state.

The Forestry Commission uses the Firewise USA™ Program to educate communities and homeowners in high risk areas on ways they can take ownership of protecting their homes from damage or destruction from potential wildfire. SC Forestry Commission personnel conduct wildfire risk assessments that can be used to write action plans for communities.

During workshops to communities and homeowners groups the Commission presents the scope of the issue and recommends simple steps homeowners can take to mitigate the risk to their homes. By incorporating simple steps that are often routine for most homeowners, we have witnessed a major reduction in home loss from wildfires.

The Forestry Commission also conducts wildfire hazard and risk assessments of communities interested in reducing their wildfire risks. From the data collected during these assessments a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is developed. The objective of this plan is to set clear priorities for wildfire threat mitigation. Included are prioritized recommendations for reducing wildland fuels and structure ignitability in order to better protect the community and its essential infrastructure. Today, Over 1300 communities have been assessed throughout South Carolina with almost 642 rating at High to Extreme Risk to wildfire. Of these communities, 213 plans have been completed.



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Residents reducing wildfire risks



Members of the Catawba Nation Community were presented with a Firewise USA® Recognition plaque and signage Jan. 23



# SC WUI/Prevention Calendar

## Upcoming Events to Look Out For

- **Beginning of 2021 Community Grant Year**

If your community was approved for the 2021 grant for community wildfire mitigation, you may begin your projects at any time. If you have any questions about your proposed projects, or if you would like to adjust those projects, please contact one of our team members and we can assist you with that request. We are very hopeful that 2021 will be a very successful and safe year for all of our communities

- **End of February: Grant applications are due for State Farm Wildfire Community Preparedness Day projects**

Wildfire Community Preparedness Day is the first Saturday in May. State Farm typically awards \$500 to communities around the country to help fund their planned community projects. Once the information for 2021 is finalized, we will pass along the information from the NFPA so that you may submit your applications if you wish to do so. This is a nationwide opportunity, but many of our communities have been selected and awarded grants in the past.

- **Next Newsletter**

Our next newsletter should be published in early April. If you have questions, comments or desired topics please contact a member of our WUI Team and submit those to us by the early part of March.

**We're looking for your help!**

### Help us make this Newsletter better by

- Sending in photos of events and work being done around your community
- Letting us know if you have something planned that you would like to see here
- Giving us feedback

**Drop us an email or call!**