

Forest Health and Wildfire Safety

With the snow barely gone or hiding in the shade it is hard to think about the wildfires of summer. Yet, as with most things, a little forward thinking can go a long ways. Whether you hang your hat in a cabin deep in the woods or a house in the open valley, wildfire is just another thing to keep in the corner of your brain.

Providing a level of safety for your home from wildfire, whether it is a grass fire or a forest fire, is a great excuse to evaluate the health of the trees you cherish for summer shade and winter shelter. Whether you live in the woods or in the valley now is a great time to look at how your trees faired over our winter. Did your evergreens suffer any winterburn or broken tops? How about your deciduous trees? Without the leaves of summer, you can easily see if your deciduous trees have broken branches or need pruning.

Evaluating your tree's health and developing a plan to remedy any problems you may find now is a great time to consider some actions that can improve your forest's health and home's wildfire safety. Starting near your home and other structures you can do some simple tasks with basic tools such as a bow saw and hand pruners. Pruning low branches around the house is a great place to start. Focus your efforts on evergreens and remove the lower branches from the lesser of either the first 12 feet or 1/3 the height of the tree. This creates space below trees where in the event of wildfire the fire is less likely to be able to climb to the tops of the tree.

While you have the bow saw and pruners out, think about removing some of the smaller conifer trees that are mixed in with your larger trees. This bit of thinning is a first step towards creating space between the trees you leave. Providing this space frees more water and nutrients for the tress you leave, resulting in healthier trees. If you thin enough you might even be able to reduce the risk of a wildfire moving from tree to tree.

How about those deciduous trees in your yard? What can you do with them to help your forest health and improve your wildfire safety? No matter if the tree is a deciduous or evergreen, providing space between your home and trees will help improve your homes wildfire safety. Trees that are dead and leaning over road may become a barrier during an emergency and by removing you are providing the remaining trees more space to grow and be healthy.

Every forest, yard, and shelterbelt is different. Gallatin County MSU Extension will gladly help you evaluate and discuss your options. Additionally, financial assistance is available to help with improving forest health and wildfire safety. Give us a ring are stop in.

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