

“WHAT WE HEARD”

Rogue Valley Firewise Leadership Summit & Learning Exchange

October 10–11, 2026



Two days. Different communities. Shared commitments.

Across two days, 65 resident leaders representing over 50 rural and urban Firewise USA® Communities from throughout the Rogue Valley came together to exchange ideas, celebrate accomplishments, talk about challenges, and explore ways to sustain community-led wildfire preparedness. The goal of this first-of-its-kind summit was meant to create a peer network of Firewise leaders to learn and share together.

The conversations revealed a wealth of local knowledge, practical solutions, and a shared commitment to helping neighbors prepare for wildfire.

This summary captures key themes, examples, and ideas shared by participants. It is not a comprehensive record of every discussion, but a reflection of what we heard and what we can carry forward together.

Five themes emerged across both days

1. Keeping neighbors engaged takes creativity and persistence.

Initial enthusiasm does not always translate into sustained participation. Leaders are finding that relationships, personal invitations, visible progress, and practical opportunities to help are essential.

2. Small, achievable actions create momentum.

Communities want action plans that are realistic, relevant, and easy to put into practice rather than lengthy documents that sit on a shelf. [Firebrand made the Action Plan template from Josephine County available on its website for leaders to download and use.](#)

3. Wildfire risk doesn't stop at property boundaries.

Adjacent public lands, absentee landowners, common areas, and neighboring properties present challenges that individual residents cannot always address alone. Instilling a sense of shared community values, neighborhood “competition”, and collective action can help overcome stasis.

4. Strong partnerships make more possible.

Fire districts, land management agencies, nonprofits, HOAs, and resident volunteers bring different resources and expertise. Coordinating these relationships helps communities accomplish more.

5. Long-term success requires shared leadership.

Many Firewise communities depend on a small number of dedicated volunteers. Building leadership teams, welcoming new residents, and preparing for leadership transitions are important for sustainability.

Across both days, one message stood out: Firewise works best when it is something neighbors do together, not something one or two people have to carry alone.

RURAL FIREWISE

What We Heard from Rural Leaders

October 10, 2026

Rural leaders described communities with widely varying property sizes, extensive forest and vegetation management needs, and strong traditions of independence. Their conversations emphasized the importance of building relationships, coordinating across property boundaries, and maintaining momentum over time.

Keeping the momentum alive

What we heard: Recruiting neighbors and sustaining participation remain persistent challenges. Some residents value privacy and independence, while others are interested but have limited time or resources. Leaders emphasized that residents want to see tangible progress.

Ideas shared:

- Use neighborhood walks, personal conversations, phone trees, and communication channels that residents already trust.
- Welcome new homeowners with Firewise information and local contacts.
- Organize visible projects that demonstrate what preparedness looks like.
- Make annual reporting easier and identify smaller neighborhood groups within large Firewise communities.

Working across the landscape

What we heard: Public lands, large parcels, absentee ownership, and disconnected property treatments can complicate community-level mitigation.

What's working: Jackson Creek Firewise shared an example of working with its fire district, grant resources, and Northwest Youth Corps to complete work on a 160-acre parcel. Birdsey Creek described relationships with ODF, fire departments, and BLM as important community strengths.

These examples reinforced the value of patient, sustained partnerships.

Building stronger action plans

Mike McLaughlin from Josephine County encouraged communities to make Actions Plans that are “SAM”: Simple, Achievable, and Manageable, while also considering sustainability and measurable

progress. Tucker Teutsch from Firebrand suggested the acronym be “SSAMM” — to include the goals of “Sustainable” and “Measurable”.

Leaders discussed expanding action plans beyond vegetation management to include evacuation preparation, communications, neighbor assistance, and participation in Community Wildfire Protection Plan processes.

Planning for the long term

Rural leaders raised concerns about aging volunteer boards, limited resources, changing grant availability, and the challenge of maintaining work already completed.

Ideas included sharing leadership responsibilities, drawing on residents' professional skills, strengthening peer connections, and identifying projects that can continue without outside funding.

A rural success worth sharing

Thompson Creek Firewise described using neighborhood “walk and talk” conversations and incentives to build participation and move projects forward. The “Carrot”: meaningful engagement often begins with being present, listening, and helping neighbors identify achievable actions. The “Stick”: Residents who submit annual reporting are eligible for fuels reduction grants. Households who do not cannot take part until reporting is complete.

URBAN & SUBURBAN FIREWISE

What We Heard from Urban and Suburban Leaders

October 11, 2026

Urban and suburban leaders described communities with smaller lots, shared infrastructure, HOAs, common spaces, and interconnected wildfire risks. Their discussions highlighted practical approaches for engaging residents, maintaining mitigation investments, and working across neighborhood boundaries.

Making participation personal

What we heard: Regular communication alone does not always lead to action. Residents are more likely to participate when they understand what needs to be done and have an approachable neighbor who can help.

Ideas shared:

- Distribute leadership responsibilities among committee members.
- Connect through neighborhood events, door-to-door conversations, and existing social networks.
- Conduct home assessments with residents present.
- Combine wildfire preparedness with potlucks, community gatherings, and other enjoyable activities.

Park Estates described an active committee with distributed responsibilities, while other communities shared the value of informal neighborhood connections to move mitigation forward.

Making mitigation manageable

What we heard: Residents can feel overwhelmed by the amount of work involved in wildfire preparedness, particularly where homes and landscaping are closely connected. Leaders encouraged starting with achievable, high-impact actions, including attention to the first five feet around homes, routine gutter cleaning, and addressing combustible materials near structures.

Participants also discussed keeping action plans active by reviewing them regularly and breaking larger goals into smaller annual tasks.

Shared spaces, shared challenges

HOA common areas, adjacent properties, fences, vegetation, and limited access routes were recurring concerns.

What's working: Communities shared approaches including annual budgets for common-area maintenance, coordinated contractor services to pursue discounts, vegetation removal partnerships, and neighborhood green-waste collection.

Mill Pond described combining its annual dumpster day with food, neighbor assistance, and a social gathering, turning a maintenance project into an opportunity for community connection.

Looking out for neighbors

Urban and suburban leaders also discussed evacuation preparedness and the importance of considering residents who may need additional assistance.

Mountain View Estates shared an example of practicing emergency alerts with residents in partnership with Firebrand and the fire department, helping neighbors become more familiar with emergency communication.

An idea worth exploring

One participant proposed a labor exchange between HOAs to help neighboring communities complete mitigation work. This illustrates the potential for Firewise communities to support one another beyond their individual boundaries.

MOVING FORWARD

Ideas Worth Sharing. Connections Worth Keeping.

The summit demonstrated that Firewise leaders are not simply organizing neighborhood projects. They are building relationships, sharing knowledge, coordinating resources, and helping communities become more prepared for wildfire.

Ideas to bring home

Make participation easy.

Invite neighbors into small, achievable activities and offer different ways to contribute. Keep the door open to welcome new households into your Firewise Community.

Keep your action plan alive.

Choose realistic annual priorities, revisit progress regularly, and adjust to your community's needs. Consider using the available Action Plan template to help standardize plans across the region using the SAM/SSAMM framework.

Share the responsibility.

Build committees, recruit new volunteers, and create opportunities for residents to take ownership of specific tasks. A Firewise Community is not a “community” if it relies on a single person — sharing responsibility helps combat burnout, scales the work, and support when it's time for a leadership transition.

Celebrate visible progress.

Show neighbors what has been accomplished and recognize the people making it happen. Lift up your successes for all to enjoy at neighborhood events.

Connect beyond your neighborhood.

Share ideas with other Firewise leaders and build relationships with local agencies and resource providers. Resilience happens at the speed of relationships, and often “who you know” is just as important as “what you know”.

What we're taking away at Ready NOW

The conversations highlighted several opportunities for continued learning and collaboration, and this is how Firebrand is hoping to support:

- ☒ Easier tools for tracking and reporting neighborhood mitigation activities.
- ☒ Examples and templates that make Firewise action planning more useful.
- ☒ Creating more opportunities for Firewise leaders to exchange ideas and learn from one another with a professional in the room (COMING SOON - Recurring Zoom hours with Tucker and Kara TBD)
- ☒ Practical guidance for sustaining participation and preparing new volunteer leaders.
- ☒ Better connections between resident-led projects and regional partners.

These are emerging opportunities informed by participant discussions, and can lead to new program commitments.

One action before next wildfire season

What is one idea you heard at the summit that could make a difference in your own Firewise community?

It might be welcoming a new neighbor, organizing a green-waste day, updating your action plan, recruiting a committee member, or reaching out to a neighboring community. *Whatever you choose, progress starts with the next achievable step. Remember: You can always reach out to us for help.*

Thank you for leading the way

To every resident leader who attended: thank you for your time, your willingness to share what you've learned, and the work you continue to do in your neighborhoods. The Rogue Valley's wildfire resilience is strengthened by your commitment, creativity, and connections!

Special thanks to Jen Warren from the Oregon State Fire Marshal for taking the notes that allowed us to create this summary.

In Partnership With



Oregon State University
Extension Service



**PACIFIC
POWER**

