

Resilience

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RESILIENCE ISN'T SOMETHING
YOU HOPE FOR.

IT'S SOMETHING YOU BUILD.



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PLUS

**MONTHLY CHORE - UPCOMING EVENTS - PBA PROJECTS
FIRE-RESISTANT HOMES**



Shade

WHERE ECOSYSTEM
PROTECTION &
SUSTAINABLE TIMBER
MEET WILDFIRE
RESILIENCE

The word “shade” means more here than relief from the sun. It’s the living canopy of a forest — the big trees that hold water in the soil, slow down winds, and shelter entire ecosystems. It’s also the goal of shaded fuel breaks: to protect communities from wildfire while keeping forests productive and ecosystems intact.

When we thin with care, removing the fast-burning species and leaving the largest to grow, we do more than create fire buffers. We provide and protect sustainable timber, preserve clean watersheds, and give native plants and wildlife the conditions they need to thrive.

Shaded fuel breaks are not only firelines. When applied at scale, they can stretch across ridges, valleys, and watersheds — covering entire forests where possible. These aren’t scars on the landscape; they’re living systems of resilience, designed to slow fire, sustain timber, and keep our ecosystems healthy.

A Forest Worker's Perspective

"These are the forests screaming for help before the flames ever arrive."

The chainsaw buzzes, then cuts out. The ridge goes quiet except for the wind in the fir tops. We're here above Rock Creek, cutting out underbrush and small trees. Some of the hottest-burning species crowd the ground layer — Pacific bay laurel, tanoak, live oak, ceanothus. Their leaves are loaded with oils, and whether you cut them or burn them, they resprout from the stump. They're not weaker — they're adapted to frequent wildfire, springing back after low-intensity burns.

The conifers tell a different story. When they're small, they're vulnerable — thin-barked, shallow-rooted, easily killed by flames. Only after decades do they gain the thick bark and towering crowns that make them fire-resistant. But in overcrowded forests like this one, too many young fir and pine are packed shoulder to shoulder, competing for light, stunted and stressed. They'll never reach resilience if fire comes through now.

This ridge used to be an old-growth Douglas fir and pine stand. Fire suppression here began in the 1870s, cutting off the natural and Indigenous fire cycle. The slope was logged in the 1960s and '70s. Now, after 150 years without cultural fire and 50 years of regrowth, we're left with a dense mat of brush and trees — fuel stacked on fuel. Historically, there were about 30 large trees per acre. Today, there are 900–2,000, unnaturally overcrowded and ripe for both disease and catastrophic burning.

That's why we're here — thinning, piling, and burning excess fuels so that both strategies can play their part: hardwoods sprouting back in patches, conifers standing tall above them, and fire returning as a manager, not a threat.



Shaded fuel break above Hiouchi



Shaded fuel breaks on top of French Hill (above) and below (left)

The Myth of “Fight and Replant”

“You can plant a tree, but only fire and space can grow a forest.”

Many believe the answer is to fight fires harder, salvage the burned forest, and replant. But that drains resources from green forests — still standing, but overloaded with fuel. The truth is, there’s more merchantable timber here in the green than in the black after a burn. Acting before flames means thinning strategically, taking some timber, and leaving the healthiest trees. That builds resilience, safeguards long-term timber supply, and protects habitat, soils, and water. For now, we’re playing catch-up after 150 years of deferred, and often absent, forest management.

Spending billions on suppression and salvage while starving proactive management is like bailing water without fixing the hole. Unlike salvage, which often sets the stage for more flammable regrowth, shaded fuel breaks keep the strongest trees in place, hold moisture, and break up fuels in a way that works with fire instead of against it.



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn near Boulder Creek.

A shaded fuel break isn’t a reset; it’s a restoration step. By keeping the largest, healthiest trees and removing the smaller, overcrowded growth, we create forests more resilient to fire, disease, and drought. Ecologically, they restore the structure of fire-adapted forests. Economically, they provide usable wood today while protecting tomorrow’s timber supply.



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn near Boulder Creek.

It’s often assumed that high-severity fire requires replanting to prevent brush fields. In reality, conifers naturally reseed, even after large-scale mortality events. The real challenge is not regeneration but survival time. In plantations, young trees are typically crowded and vulnerable, and fire often recurs before they develop the bark and height needed to resist flames. This traps forests in a reset cycle — brush to sapling, sapling to burn — with minimal timber yield and degraded ecological function.



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn near Boulder Creek.



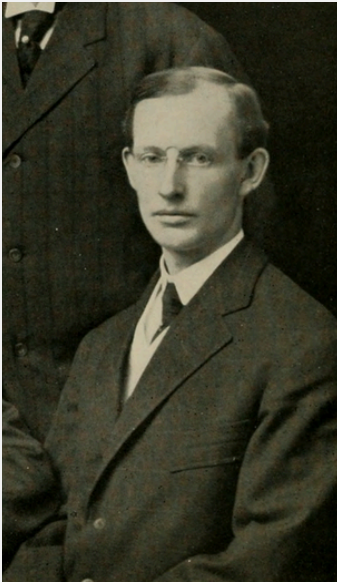
A Letter That Should Have Changed Forestry

"For the entire period of operation we have centered exclusively on lumber — without raising a hand to afford protection."

In August of 1935, Clinton Walker of the Red River Lumber Company wrote a letter to his brother. At the time, his family's mill was one of the largest timber operations in the American West, harvesting vast tracts of pine and fir near Lassen. Yet even from within the heart of the industry, Walker saw the mounting costs of fire exclusion and short-sighted logging.



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn near Boulder Creek.



"It is regrettable that the house of Walker has no forest man. Kenneth [Walker] covers the nearest, but he seems to be absorbed in the performance of log contracts; our annual fire and insect losses are staggering. A systematic annual light burning at the right season of the year would reduce and ultimately eliminate these sources of loss and the cost would be insignificant as compared to the loss and yearly fire hazard conditions in the forests. Burning by means of power burners on or dragged behind tractors could be done very cheaply and the prospective danger of injuring hollow hulled trees could be eliminated by following the burning with a few shovels. For the entire period of the Walker family timber operation we have centered our attention exclusively to lumber operation. We are doing nothing but slash down that wonderful forest and letting the fire and beetles burn and eat us down year by year without raising a hand to afford protection from these annual staggering losses."

— Clinton Walker, Red River Lumber Company, August 10, 1935



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn between Rock Creek and Redwood State Park.

"It is regrettable that the house of Walker has no forest man..." he began, lamenting that the company focused only on cutting trees while ignoring the role of fire. His words read less like a timber executive's report and more like a plea for balance: without regular, light burning, the forest itself would collapse under its own weight.

Almost a century later, his warning feels prophetic. Annual fire and insect losses are still staggering, only now multiplied by climate change and decades of suppression. What Walker proposed then — systematic, low-cost burning — is what we are only beginning to embrace now, through prescribed fire and shaded fuel breaks.

Benefits of Shaded Fuel Breaks

“Suppression alone is not enough – and delay only makes the choice harder.”

Shaded fuel breaks succeed because they strike a balance. Instead of letting fuels pile up until the next fire burns uncontrollably, or cutting everything and leaving the land raw and exposed, shaded fuel breaks selectively remove what drives dangerous fire while protecting what makes the forest strong.

How they work is simple. Crews thin out the smaller, crowded trees and brush — the “ladder fuels” that allow flames to climb from the ground into the crowns. The biggest, healthiest trees are left standing, shading the ground and holding the forest together. That shade slows the flush of brush, keeps soils moist, and protects the microorganisms that recycle nutrients and sustain forest health. With the ladder fuels gone, fire stays lower to the ground, burning cooler and slower. Instead of torching whole stands, fire goes back to its old job: thinning, cleaning, and renewing.



Shaded fuel break creation in southeast Gasquet, California

What this means for people and forests is profound. In a shaded fuel break, firefighters have a safe place to work. Flame lengths are shorter, spotting is reduced, and engines and hand crews can anchor, flank, and hold a line instead of watching helplessly as flames leap the crowns. For the forest, it means less blowdown in storms, less soil damage in fires, and conditions where prescribed fire can be safely reintroduced. With fire restored as a tool, fuels are kept in balance, nutrients return to the soil, and young conifers are given the decades they need to grow into fire-resistant trees.

Why this matters now is clear. Doing nothing has left us with overcrowded forests — 900 to 2,000 stems per acre where there were once only 30 or 40. Cutting everything exposes the ground, dries the soils, and invites brush fields that burn even hotter the next time. Only shaded fuel breaks give us the balance between protection and productivity. They safeguard homes and watersheds, protect the timber resource for future harvests, and keep wildlife habitat intact.

When to act is no longer a question. We’re already behind. Each season of delay adds more fuel, more risk, and more cost. Shaded fuel breaks are the first step toward a future where fire works for us again, not against us. They are the foundation of the Del Norte Fire Safe Council’s strategy: creating forests that can withstand fires, sustain jobs, and support life without being destroyed by it.

That’s the forest we’re working toward — not just for today’s fire season, but for the next century.

Future: The Promise of Prescribed Fire

Shaded fuel breaks are not the end point — they’re the beginning. By reducing fuels and keeping the strongest trees in place, they create the only conditions where fire can safely return as a tool. Prescribed burns can then be introduced at the right season and intensity, maintaining balance instead of waiting for the next catastrophe. Over time, this cycle of thinning and burning keeps forests productive for timber, resilient for wildlife, and safe for the communities that live among them. In short, shaded fuel breaks open the door to restoring the natural and cultural role of fire — steady, manageable, and life-giving.

SHADED FUEL BREAKS



ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS

- **Soil Protection:** Retains canopy shade, preventing erosion, protecting microbes, and recycling nutrients with low-intensity fire.
- **Moisture Retention:** Keeps ground cooler and wetter; shaded soils dry slower and resist ignition.
- **Wildlife Habitat:** Maintains mature forest structure instead of resetting to brush fields or plantations.
- **Natural Patterns Restored:** Encourages mosaics of big trees, openings, and understory diversity, mimicking fire-adapted ecosystems.



COMMUNITY BENEFITS

- **Sustainable Timber Supply:** Thinning produces usable wood today while protecting long-term harvest potential.
- **Local Jobs:** Supports forestry crews, mills, and fire professionals.
- **Community Safety:** Provides buffers around neighborhoods, evacuation routes, and critical infrastructure.
- **Cost Savings:** Reduces reliance on expensive suppression, shifting investment to proactive management



FIRE BEHAVIOR BENEFITS

- **Lower Flame Heights:** Converts crown fires into surface fires that can be managed.
- **Reduced Spotting:** Fewer ladder fuels mean fewer embers lofted ahead of the main fire.
- **Storm Resilience:** Big trees buffer winds, reducing blowdown and jackpots of fuel.
- **Firefighter Safety:** Creates defensible zones where crews can anchor, flank, and hold fire lines.
- **Foundation for Prescribed Fire:** Makes it possible to safely reintroduce managed fire, keeping fuels in balance long-term.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SHADED FUEL BREAKS, OUR PROJECTS, AND HOW YOU CAN BE MORE FIRE SAFE PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBPAGE.

WWW.DELNORTEFSC.ORG

2025

Resilience in Action

Del Norte Fire Safe Council

**Creativity, Adaptation, Hard Work
Putting Boots on the Ground**

Spring & Summer Accomplishments

This spring and summer have been a season of progress for the Del Norte Fire Safe Council, with major accomplishments across three cornerstone efforts: the Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project (RCCWRP), the Del Norte Wildfire Resilience Project (DNWRP), and the County Coordinator Program.

Through the RCCWRP, we worked side by side with landowners to reduce fuels, improve defensible space, and strengthen evacuation corridors in the Rock Creek community. These accomplishments were made possible with generous support from the California State Coastal Conservancy and through partnership with the Smith River Alliance. Together, we are demonstrating what locally driven, community-scale wildfire resilience can look like.

The DNWRP has been the engine of much of our fuels reduction work across Del Norte County. Since April, our Wildfire Resilience Crew has created defensible space around 64 high-risk homes, constructed 142 acres of shaded fuel breaks, completed 27 acres of prescribed burns, and chipped more than 51,000 cubic yards of hazardous vegetation. This ongoing project, funded by the USDA's Community Wildfire Defense Grant, will continue through 2028, helping to protect communities while creating local jobs and training opportunities.

At the same time, the County Coordinator Program, supported by CAL FIRE and the California Fire Safe Council, has allowed us to connect these projects to the broader community. From leading outreach efforts and hosting preparedness meetings to supporting communities and helping guide policy conversations, the County Coordinator role ensures that local voices are represented and that projects are tied together under a shared vision of resilience.

Each of these programs stands on its own, but together they are building a safer, more fire-adapted Del Norte County. We are deeply grateful to our partners and funders for making this work possible.

Summer Numbers

Defensible Space Created
64 Homes

Wildfire Risk Assessments
88 Homes

Hazardous Vegetation Removed
51,852 Cu. Yds. Chipped
27000 Cu. Yds. Burned

Shaded Fuel Break Created
142.04 Acres

Prescribed Fire
27.15 Acres

Major Projects and Community Impact

Del Norte Wildfire Resilience Project

Since April 2025 our Wildfire Resilience Crew has really ramped up work on this project working in the heart of our communities—concentrating on direct protection of residences and businesses during wildfire season. Free home assessments, defensible space, and shaded fuel breaks remain our strongest lines of defense when wildfire comes.

Defensible Space Around Homes

In five months, we've created defensible space around an additional 64 high-risk homes. Each one represents a safer family, a stronger neighborhood, and another step toward reducing the chance of home-to-home fire spread.

Shaded Fuel Breaks Across the Landscape

We also created fuel breaks within and adjacent to communities in Del Norte. Lowering fire risk, creating healthier forests to enjoy, and improving evacuation routes. Since April we now have 142 additional acres of completed shaded fuel breaks, thinning hazardous vegetation while keeping the canopy intact. These aren't just firelines—they are living buffers that slow wildfire, provide safer ground for firefighters, and keep forests healthy for the long term.

A Long-Term Commitment

All of this work is part of the Del Norte Wildfire Resilience Project (DNWRP), an ongoing effort that will continue through 2028. But the DNWRP is just one of several major projects the Fire Safe Council is leading—each focused on protecting communities, restoring landscapes, and preparing Del Norte County for the wildfire challenges ahead.

Made Possible Through Partnership

This progress has been fueled by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the USDA's Community Wildfire Defense Grant program. Their investment supports not just acres treated, but also local jobs, training for our wildfire workforce, and long-term community resilience.

DNWRP By the Numbers April thru August 2025

🏠 **64 high-risk homes with new defensible space**

🌲 **142 acres of shaded fuel breaks completed**

🔥 **27 acres of prescribed burns conducted**

🌿 **51,852 cubic yards of hazardous vegetation chipped**



Turning Hazard Into Resource

This year we've tackled hazardous fuels in two powerful ways. Our crews chipped more than 51,852 cubic yards of vegetation—removing a major wildfire threat and turning it into a resource for erosion control and soil health. At the same time, we reintroduced good fire on 27 acres of land through prescribed burns. These planned fires recycle nutrients, restore ecological balance, and reduce fuels before wildfire has the chance to do it in a destructive way.

The Risk We Refuse to Take

Rx Fire Opinion

From the Dillon Fire to our own backyards, resilience means taking managed risks.



Del Norte PBA member using piles to broadcast burn near Boulder Creek.

Smoke curls low across a meadow. It's thin, gray, and temporary — it stings your eyes for a moment and then lifts. It is the smell of leaving our forests healthier, communities safer, the soil richer, the air clearer. This is the smoke of a prescribed fire, carefully lit, monitored, and contained. It's the smoke of a risk taken — and managed.

Most of us would rather avoid it. We don't like the smell, the haze, or the thought of flames near our homes. We prefer the comforting story of forests that never burn, firefighters arriving just in time, and government agencies stepping in after disaster using emergency funds. But it's a dangerous story.

Because fire is coming, no matter what we tell ourselves. The only real choice is whether we meet it on our terms — or on nature's.

It's September, and the Dillon Fire is burning towards the Siskiyou Wilderness. That reality isn't something we get to vote on—it is simply happening. Personally, I believe this fire should be allowed to run its course. It can clear out built-up fuels, reset ecosystems, and do the work we've long delayed. For decades, we've suppressed every flame, and now our forests carry far more fuel than they can sustain. When wildfire returns, it burns hotter, faster, and farther. In this case, letting it burn in a wild landscape may be the most responsible choice.

The real problem lies elsewhere. Too many places never took the lower-risk option at the right time of year. Prescribed fire—under controlled conditions in the spring or fall—could have already reduced fuels and created buffers around communities. Instead, we've hesitated. We've refused to accept smoke in the cool season, the narrow burn windows, or the calculated risks of small escapes. And so we inherit the greater risks of fire in mid-summer: high winds, dry fuels, and no margin for error.



Above: Low-moderate intensity burn on Smith River NRA.

Below: DNFSC Wildfire Resilience Crew burning a buffer around a residents home.



And now, while the Dillon Fire moves into the backcountry, other fires are sparking across the state—many closer to cities and towns. How many fire resources do we have to fight them all? The number is not infinite, nor should it be. Every crew, every engine, every aircraft tied up in one place is unavailable in another. When we rely only on suppression, we stretch people and budgets thin while the fires keep coming.

Fire is happening. It just is. The choice we face isn't whether to have fire—it's whether to have it on our terms. When we act with intention, prescribed burns make forests healthier, homes safer, and communities stronger. When we delay, we surrender those choices, and fire comes roaring back in ways we can't control.

The Risks We Avoid

We avoid prescribed burns because they're not perfect. They carry liability. They can escape. They take training, equipment, planning, and a willingness to live with smoke on calm spring days.

We avoid thinning projects because they mean chainsaws in the woods, temporary disruption, or the sight of stumps where brush once stood. We avoid hard conversations about home hardening because retrofitting roofs, vents, and siding costs money — often more than families feel they can spare.

So we do nothing. And we honor heroes. And we think we've chosen safety. But the truth is, by refusing small risks today, we are embracing catastrophic ones tomorrow.



Floating a water storage tank across the South Fork Smith for a remote off grid resident. Preparation for reintroducing good fire.



South Fork Smith Canyon. An area in need of more fire.

The Risks We Live With

When fire comes in August, it doesn't ask permission. It doesn't stop at the edge of town or respect property lines. It rides the wind, devours the hills, and jumps from one roof to the next.

The smoke we refused in April becomes weeks of choking, unbreathable air in September. The escape we feared from a controlled burn becomes a wildfire with no control at all.

The money we saved by skipping defensible space becomes billions lost in destroyed homes and lives turned upside down. A prescribed fire that escapes may burn a hundred acres. A wildfire in the same fuels can take a hundred thousand.

That is the risk we are living with now.

The Risk Worth Taking

Yes, prescribed fire is a risk. But it's a calculated one — lit under the right weather, with crews on hand, with lines prepared and plans in place.

Yes, thinning is disruptive. But it opens the forest, restores water, protects the big trees, and gives firefighters a chance to hold the line.

Yes, home hardening costs more. But a \$10,000 investment in a roof or vents today may save a \$400,000 home tomorrow — and keep entire neighborhoods from igniting house to house.

These are the risks we've long refused — yet they are the only ones that offer us a future where fire is not a disaster, but a force of renewal.

Prescribed fire is not without risk. It makes smoke, requires narrow weather windows, and carries the small chance of an escape. But compared to megafires that erase whole towns and scar ecosystems, those risks are necessary and manageable. Every acre will burn — our only choice is how.

But we need support. We need to show agencies that we want to take the smaller risk. That's why we need neighbors to pitch in, not just agencies. The Del Norte Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) brings people together to learn fire, prepare land, and share responsibility.

The fire is coming. Will we keep refusing small risks — or accept them, and choose resilience?

👉 Join us at www.delnortefsc.org/pba. Take the risk. Be part of the solution.



Evening after a small burn along the Smith River.



Del Norte PBA: Rock Creek Spring Burn Workshops - A Success Story

This spring, the Del Norte Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) put fire back on the land—safely, skillfully, and with purpose. Over two weekends in March and April, members and volunteers gathered at Rock Creek Ranch to conduct live-fire training burns that reduced hazardous fuels, restored ecosystem health, and built community skills for future projects.

Hands-On Learning

Each workshop blended classroom-style instruction with field application. Participants learned:

- How to read fire behavior in real time.
- Techniques for ignition, holding, and mop-up.
- Safety protocols and communications for burn crews.
- How prescribed fire fits into long-term land management goals.

From drip torch basics to managing smoke and protecting control lines, every attendee had the chance to work side-by-side with experienced burn bosses.

Fuel Reduction with Lasting Impact

We treated nearly 20 acres and burned hundreds of hand piles left from recent fuels reduction work. The result was more than just blackened ground—it was a stronger, safer landscape. These burns removed hazardous fuels, broke up continuous vegetation, and set the stage for healthier forests and easier maintenance in the years ahead.

Community Building

Just as important as the acres treated were the relationships forged. Landowners, local residents, tribal members, and agency partners all worked shoulder-to-shoulder, sharing knowledge and building trust. Many participants left with plans to host or assist with burns on their own properties.

Why It Matters

Every successful burn builds capacity. The skills, confidence, and networks developed in Rock Creek will ripple outward—making future burns more effective, more frequent, and more community-led.

We thank all the volunteers, partners, and landowners who made these burns possible. The success at Rock Creek proves that with the right training, support, and teamwork, good fire can—and should—be part of our wildfire resilience strategy.



Drip torch demonstration.

Fall Community Prescribed Burns (Weather-Dependent)

This fall we're planning live, hands-on prescribed burns in Gasquet, Rock Creek, and Big Flat. Exact dates will be announced when weather and fuel conditions line up. These are community burns—run with care, patience, and a strong emphasis on learning—so no experience is necessary. You'll work alongside experienced burners, meet neighbors who care about land stewardship, and yes, have some fun doing meaningful work that makes our communities safer.

What to expect on a PBA burn

- A thorough safety briefing, go/no-go check, and test fire before ignition.
- Clear roles (ignition, holding, water support, lookout, mop-up) with mentors to guide you.
- Learning basic firing patterns (backing fire, strip-head), reading smoke and wind, and spotting/communicating issues early.
- Slow, methodical operations with frequent check-ins—if conditions aren't right, we stand down.
- A focus on stewardship goals: reducing ladder fuels, improving defensible space, and promoting healthier fire on the landscape.

What to bring

- Natural-fiber clothing (cotton/wool), long sleeves and pants; sturdy leather boots; eye protection, gloves, water, and lunch.
- We'll provide tools, basic PPE as available, and on-site training.

To receive date/time notifications and meeting points, please sign up for the Del Norte Prescribed Burn Association (PBA)—it's free and the best way to get updates when burn windows open: www.delnortefsc.org/pba.

*Pre burn safety talk, Rock Creek (right)
Pile burning in March (below).*

Fall Burning Season - Get Involved!

Joining the Del Norte PBA is easy and FREE!

Become a member on our website,
www.delnortefsc.org/pba

Spread the word - Tell your friends,
neighbors, and family about prescribed fire!

To learn more, contact us at
aaron@delnortefsc.org or visit
www.delnortefsc.org/pba



Interviews

McKenzy Fernandez Wildfire Resilience Crew Member

Meet McKenzie Fernandez: A Year with the DNFSC Wildfire Resilience Crew

As part of the Del Norte Fire Safe Council's Wildfire Resilience Crew, McKenzie Fernandez has quickly become a vital part of the team, bringing her passion for natural resources and wildfire prevention to the forefront of the community. In this interview, we hear from McKenzie herself about her journey, the skills she's developed, and the impact of her work.

1. Can you tell us about your background and what led you to join the DNFSC Wildfire Resilience Crew?

I am from Del Norte County, and I've always felt deeply connected to this area. From the towering Redwoods to the beautiful Smith River, I feel lucky to call this place home. I briefly lived in Redding, California, where I earned a degree in Natural Resources at Shasta College. During my time there, I saw firsthand the devastation that wildfires cause, not just to communities, but to our natural resources as well. That experience solidified my desire to be part of the solution. Now, with the Del Norte Fire Safe Council, I'm able to make a real difference in our community through projects like defensible space creation and fuel break implementation.



2. As a crew member for just over a year, what specific skills or knowledge have you gained that you feel have made the biggest impact on your work?

Over the past year, I've learned a lot about wildfire resilience. One of the most valuable lessons has been the importance of creating effective fuel breaks without needing to clear-cut areas. Understanding that some vegetation can remain within a fuel break while still achieving its purpose has been an eye-opener. I've also gained knowledge in speaking with homeowners, helping them understand that they don't have to sacrifice privacy for fire safety. Instead, it's about strategically clearing brush around their homes. This communication and education have been key to getting the community on board.

McKenzy Fernandez Wildfire Resilience Crew Member

3. What's been the most rewarding project or task you've worked on during your time with the crew, and why?

The most rewarding project I've worked on so far is the Wetherall fuel break in Gasquet. This fuel break is essential for the community, providing firefighters with a critical advantage if a wildfire were to threaten Gasquet. Knowing that the work we've done can help protect the community and its residents from such a devastating event makes it especially meaningful.

4. In your experience, what has been the most challenging aspect of working on wildfire resilience projects, and how have you worked through those challenges?

The biggest challenge I've faced has been the unpredictability of weather and terrain. Some days, we're working on relatively flat ground with perfect weather, while the next day, we're navigating steep slopes and stormy conditions. I've learned to be flexible and adapt to whatever the day brings, always prioritizing safety while still accomplishing the tasks at hand. It's all about finding solutions on the fly and remaining focused on the bigger picture.



5. How do you feel about the community engagement aspects of your role, particularly in helping homeowners create defensible space or working with local agencies?

I feel that the community is becoming increasingly engaged in creating defensible space. We've had numerous residents reach out to us for assistance, which is truly exciting. A lot of people don't know we offer these services, so once we work on one property, it often sparks interest in the surrounding homes. The snowball effect is real—more and more people want to make their properties fire-safe after seeing the positive impact in their neighborhoods. It's incredible to witness the community come together to take action and improve fire safety.



McKenzy Fernandez Wildfire Resilience Crew Member



6. How do you stay motivated during long hours or physically demanding tasks, especially when working in difficult conditions like during a fire season?

Staying motivated is easy when I think about the difference we're making for the community. I know that through our work, we're not only creating fuel breaks and defensible space but also helping to ensure that firefighters have the resources they need to get ahead of wildfires. The sense of purpose that comes with knowing we're making our community safer is a powerful motivator.

7. Looking forward, what are some goals or skills you hope to develop in your next year with the DNFSC Wildfire Resilience Crew?

In the upcoming year, I want to focus on improving my communication with homeowners. I'd love to better explain the steps they can take on their properties to increase fire safety. Additionally, I'm looking to increase my community outreach efforts to ensure more people are aware of our services and the importance of fire preparedness.



8. How do you think the work of the Wildfire Resilience Crew is impacting the broader efforts in Del Norte County to reduce wildfire risks and promote safety?

I believe we're having a significant impact in the community. As we continue to reach more residents and help them make their properties fire-safe, it's not just beneficial for them—it's crucial for the broader community. The work we're doing is contributing to a more resilient Del Norte County, one where both homes and natural resources are better protected from the devastating effects of wildfires.



THIS MONTH'S CHORE

Clearing the Way for Safety

Every year brings its share of outdoor chores—mowing, gardening, maintenance—but in fire-prone areas like ours, there's one chore that stands out in importance, but often gets left behind: clearing your road frontage.

Over the years, brush and low-hanging trees have steadily crept into our roadsides, narrowing the space for emergency vehicles and shrinking our evacuation routes. In a wildfire, seconds count. When brush crowds the road or overgrown trees lower visibility, it delays first responders and increases evacuation time—putting lives at risk.

Even more dangerous are the so-called brush fences—those thick, untrimmed hedges people grow for privacy. They may block your neighbor's view, but in fire season, they become a dangerous wick between homes. These overgrown hedgerows are often dry, woody, and perfectly placed to carry flames from one structure to the next.

Let's be clear: fire doesn't respect property lines. Your brush becomes your neighbor's risk—and vice versa. If everyone does a little, we all gain a lot. A clear, pruned, accessible road doesn't just protect your home. It protects your block.

This month's chore is simple:

- Clear brush from the roadside edge of your property.
- Limb up trees that hang low into the road or driveway.
- Remove or severely reduce any overgrown hedges or brush used as privacy screens.

We've seen it time and again: clean roads and yards slow fires, give crews room to work, and save homes.

Let's make sure that if—or when—fire comes, we're not wishing we had done more. This month, do your part. Clear the way.



Before



After

Your *Priorities* Your Communities *After Fire* Choice

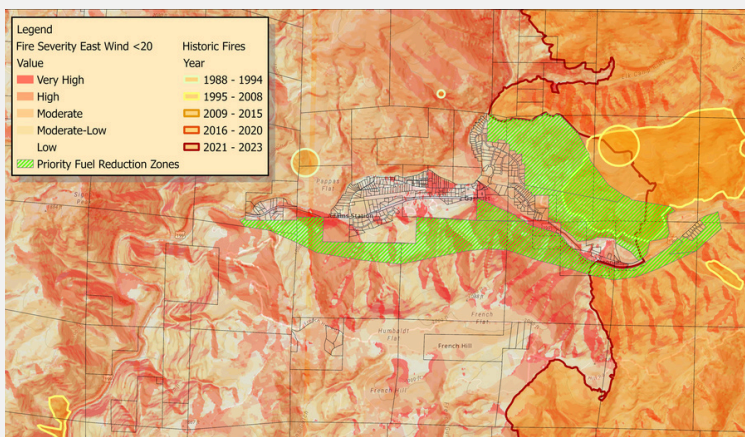
BURNT-AREA SALVAGE OVERSHADOWS COMMUNITY PROTECTION ON FEDERAL LAND

In August 2023, lightning storms ignited dozens of fires across Del Norte County. Some merged into the Smith River Complex, one of the largest wildfires in county history. Flames crossed remote ridgetop fuel breaks and advanced toward low-lying communities.

A shift in weather slowed the fire, giving firefighters time to prepare firing operations that ultimately halted its advance just outside Gasquet.

The event was not unpredictable, but it was instructive. It demonstrated that more work is needed near communities, and that remote fuel breaks alone are not sufficient. Without reinforcement through prescribed fire, those lines are unlikely to hold under extreme conditions.

Fire severity mapping — conducted both by the Incident Management Team during the Smith River Complex and later by the Del Norte Fire Safe Council — identified vulnerabilities across the landscape. The maps pinpoint specific areas where the combination of vegetation type, terrain, weather patterns, past logging, and decades of fire exclusion creates critical priority zones. These are the places that must be treated as soon as possible if we are to reduce community risk.



Priority fuel reduction needs in Gasquet (green) waiting for approval in lieu of salvage operations to the east.

Around the same time, the Forest Service finalized the Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management Project — a forest-wide Environmental Assessment intended to accelerate thinning, prescribed fire, and cultural burning. While not developed in response to the Smith River Complex, the EA provides a framework for treatments to move forward more quickly, without new review for each individual project.

The tools were in place.

Yet in the aftermath of the Smith River Complex, priorities shifted.

Salvage Logging Takes the Lead

Following the fire, the Little Jones Fuel Reduction Project was redirected into a salvage logging operation. This shift focused on removing dead and dying timber under a categorical exclusion. The work advanced quickly, though it also left surface fuels, road impacts, and additional clean-up requirements.

A new project, the Smith River Complex Wildfire Resiliency and Revegetation Project, is now scheduled to begin in 2026. It includes more salvage logging on the opposite side of the river, again proceeding under a categorical exclusion.

Fuel Reduction Delayed

At the same time, priority projects identified after the fires — shaded fuel breaks near towns, thinning, and prescribed fire in green forests — have been put on hold. The district has cited limited capacity, with resources directed toward salvage. The 2026 salvage project further extends the timeline for community-focused work.

Priorities After Fire

Burnt-area salvage overshadows community protection

This comes as forests across the region experience uncharacteristically high-severity burns — fires that kill mature trees, reset ecosystems, and increase vulnerability to erosion and invasive species. Protective treatments near communities remain time-sensitive.

A clear example is unfolding now with the Garnet Fire, where one of the largest intact old-growth forests outside of national parks is burning at high severity. Years of delay in implementing planned prescribed burning left this landscape vulnerable, and the current fire is reshaping a forest that had stood for centuries.

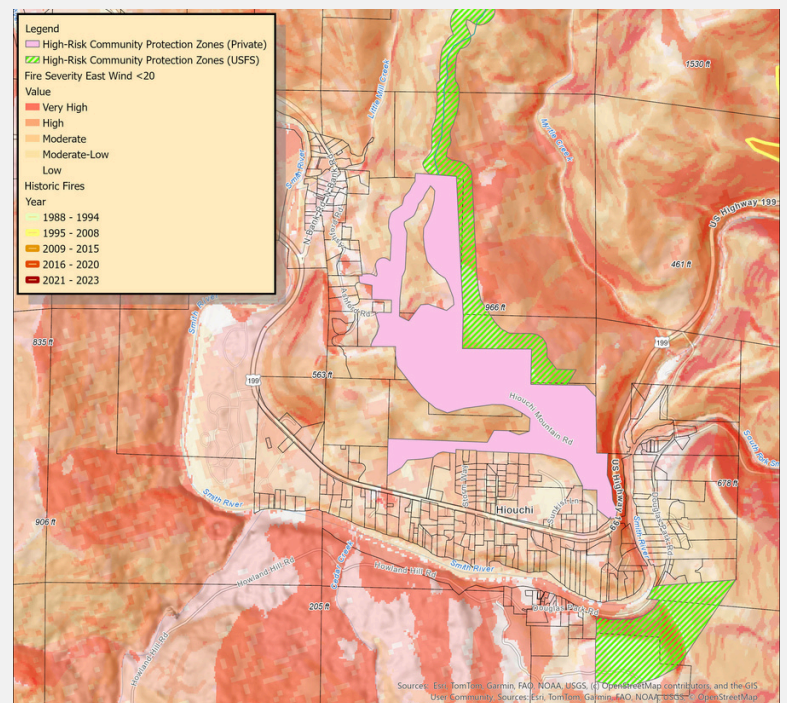


Efforts Toward Community Protection

There are also proposals aimed at treating federal lands near communities. The Gasquet District, in partnership with the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, has developed a proposal to treat areas across the Middle Fork Smith, northwest of Gasquet. While this project has not yet secured funding, it represents a potential step toward building buffers in a moderate risk area around Gasquet.

The Del Norte Fire Safe Council has also submitted a state grant proposal to treat federal lands adjacent to Hiouchi and Low Divide. If awarded, the project would extend shaded fuel breaks and reduce fuels in high-priority areas.

At present, these are the only active efforts to initiate federal land treatments in Del Norte County aimed directly at community protection. With both looking toward state funding sources, it points to a broader issue of funding: how should responsibility for fuels treatments on federal land be divided between state and federal sources?



Priority fuel reduction areas identified on federal land (green) and private (pink) proposed with state funding.

Comparing the Numbers

Current salvage operations are projected to cost \$20–30 million, with timber value returns of roughly \$200k–\$500k. By comparison, the same level of investment could support approximately:

- 10 projects similar to the map above protecting Hiouchi.
- 8,000–12,000 acres of shaded fuel breaks (~\$2,500/acre)
- 33,000–50,000 acres of prescribed fire (~\$600/acre)
- Or a mix of both, creating overlapping layers of protection around communities and critical corridors

Priorities After Fire

Burnt-area salvage overshadows community protection

A Question of Priorities

Both salvage and fuels reduction have roles in forest management. Salvage addresses hazard trees and provides some economic return. Community fuels reduction directly lowers wildfire risk where people live. With limited capacity and resources, the question is one of priorities and sequencing: which actions should come first, and where?

The Six Rivers Fire & Fuels EA provides a framework to accelerate treatments of all types. How that framework is applied — whether toward salvage, shaded fuel breaks, or prescribed fire near communities — will shape the county's resilience to future fire events.

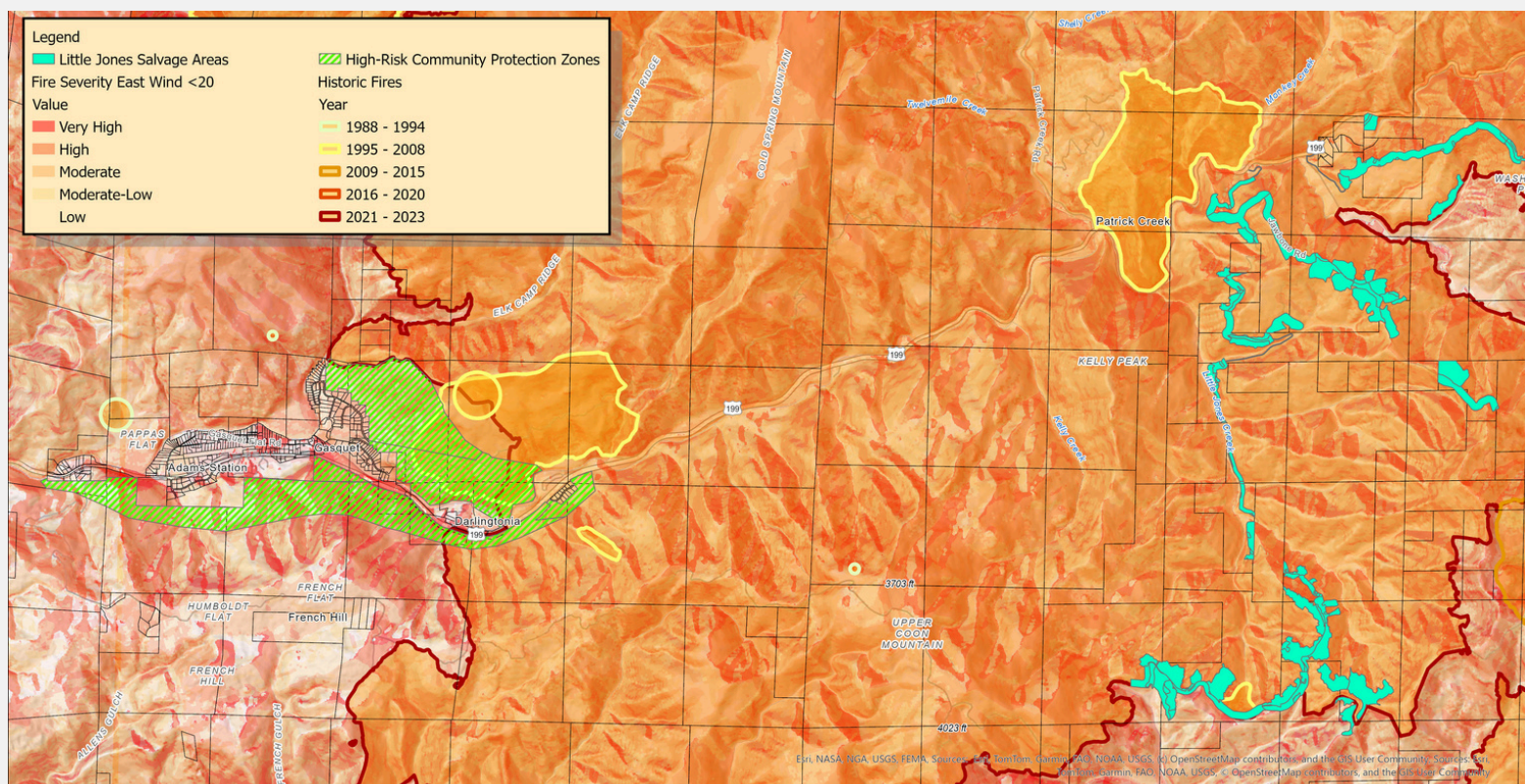
What We Can Do

Community members can play an active role in this discussion by:

- Learning about project types. Understand the goals and trade-offs of salvage, shaded fuel breaks, and prescribed fire.
- Participating in public processes. Attend public meetings to hear proposals and provide feedback.
- Asking questions. Seek clarity on how proposed projects align with community protection, forest health, and long-term resilience.
- Engaging locally. Work with Fire Safe Councils, Resource Conservation Districts, or Prescribed Burn Associations to stay connected and involved.
- Communicating priorities. Share perspectives with local, state, and federal leaders to help shape how resources are directed.

With multiple needs competing for attention, establishing clear priorities will determine whether near-term investments focus first on salvage logging, community protection, or a combination of both.

The Choices



First round of ongoing hazard tree/salvage operations (light blue)
Second round of hazard tree/salvage operations (2026) not shown (north)
Priority fuel reduction on federal land waiting for approval (green)
Smith River Complex Wildfire (orange/red border)

Fire Resistant Homes

Understanding and supporting the implementation of fuel reduction, prescribed fire, and defensible space is a massive step in the right direction. However, building fire-resistant homes can't be left out as an extremely important part of the solution. Building a fire-resistant home typically only costs 10-25% more than a standard home, and these upfront costs can significantly reduce risks, increase value, and reduce long-term expenses. The final cost difference depends on several key factors:

Cost of Fire-Resistant Homes

Fire-resistant homes are designed with specific materials and methods to minimize fire risks.

These include:

- Roofing: Metal, clay, or concrete tiles (fire-resistant roofing costs \$10–\$30 per square foot compared to \$5–\$10 for asphalt shingles).
- Siding: Fiber cement, stucco, or fire-treated wood (costs \$5–\$15 per square foot compared to \$3–\$7 for vinyl).
- Windows: Double-paned or tempered glass (\$500–\$1,000 per window compared to \$300–\$600).
- Vents: Ember-resistant vents (\$10–\$20 each compared to \$5–\$10).
- Landscaping: Defensible space and fire-resistant plants (\$1.50 - \$3.00 per square foot).
- Construction Costs: Building a fire-resistant home can cost 10% to 20% more than a regular home, depending on the level of fire-hardening.

Cost Savings and Benefits

While the upfront costs are higher, fire-resistant homes:

- Lower Rates in High-Risk Areas: Homeowners in wildfire-prone areas may see insurance premiums reduced by 20% to 40% for fire-resistant homes, depending on the level of fireproofing and local insurance policies.
- Improve Survivability: Fire-resistant materials and systems (like sprinklers and ember-resistant vents) significantly improve the chances of survival during a wildfire, giving occupants more time to evacuate safely.
- Increase property value, making homes increasingly desirable in wildfire-prone regions.
- Improve energy efficiency, double-paned windows and heavy insulation lead to savings on heating and cooling costs over the home's lifespan.
- Reduce the risk of embers igniting nearby structures, contributing to community-wide wildfire resilience.

Home Size	Standard Home Cost	Fire-Resistant Home Cost	Cost Difference
1,500 sq. ft.	\$225,000 - \$375,000	\$270,000 - \$450,000	+\$45,000 - \$75,000
2,000 sq. ft.	\$300,000 - \$500,000	\$360,000 - \$600,000	+\$60,000 - \$100,000
2,500 sq. ft.	\$375,000 - \$625,000	\$450,000 - \$750,000	+\$75,000 - \$125,000



Component	Standard Materials	Fire-Resistant Materials	Cost Difference
Exterior Walls	Wood siding: \$5-\$8/sq. ft.	Fiber cement, stucco, or masonry: \$6-\$15/sq. ft.	+\$1-\$7/sq. ft.
Roofing	Asphalt shingles: \$4-\$7/sq. ft.	Metal, tile, or Class A shingles: \$6-\$12/sq. ft.	+\$2-\$5/sq. ft.
Windows	Single-pane glass: \$15-\$20/sq. ft.	Double-paned, tempered glass: \$25-\$40/sq. ft.	+\$10-\$20/sq. ft.
Doors	Standard wood door: \$400-\$600	Fire-rated door: \$500-\$1,000	+\$100-\$400 per door
Decking	Wood decking: \$10-\$15/sq. ft.	Fire-resistant composite, metal, or treated wood: \$15-\$25/sq. ft.	+\$5-\$10/sq. ft.
Framing	Wood framing: \$6-\$10/sq. ft.	Heavy timber or fire-resistant steel: \$10-\$15/sq. ft.	+\$4-\$5/sq. ft.
Ventilation	Standard vents: \$50-\$80 each	Ember-resistant vents: \$120-\$200 each	+\$70-\$120 per vent
Sprinkler System	Not included	\$1.50-\$3 per sq. ft.	+\$3,000-\$6,000 for 2,000 sq. ft.
Landscaping	Basic: \$1/sq. ft.	Defensible space landscaping: \$1.50-\$3/sq. ft.	+\$0.50-\$2/sq. ft.



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WWW.DELNORTEFSC.ORG

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RESILIENCE



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