

Neighborhoods unite to fight wildfires Nevada delivers \$300,000 in grants to make homes more fire safe

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It only took a second or two for Kevin Kjer and his father-in-law, Bob McDowell, to realize they had to organize and act.

"We were extreme. We were the only ones at the top," Kjer, co-chair of the Chimney Rock chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

"All it does is take a little spark down here somewhere ... dead wood is stacked up like bonfire. It's scary. It's just waiting."

The Chimney Rock neighborhood - 554 homes on the north side of Kingsbury Grade between Pine Ridge Road and Terrace View Drive - received a fire hazard rating of "extreme" in a wildfire risk assessment report released in July.

"We saw this report and said it's time to stop talking and time to start doing," Kjer said.

The property owners who have joined the chapter recently found out that the request it made for a \$150,000 grant was approved by the Nevada Division of Forestry. The Cave Rock chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council received a similar \$150,000 grant to help pay for tree removal to create defensible space around 88 homes.

The fire danger is extreme at Chimney Rock because the terrain is steep and packed with dead and living pine trees. So far, 78 property owners have joined the fire safe group, but one of its goals is to get more neighbors on board.

"This is a monumental step compared to where we were four or five years ago," said Elwood Miller, coordinator of the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

Miller spoke about Thursday night to a handful of chapter members who gathered to discuss the grant at the Kingsbury General Improvement District. He told the group what paperwork and planning has to get done so that fire hazard trees can be removed from the private property come July or August.

Patrick Atherton, a Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District Board member, show off a pile of wood cut from forest that surrounds Hidden Woods, a neighborhood on the East Shore. The work, completed last summer as part of a wildfire defensible space project, was coordinated by the Hidden Woods Chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council and funded by a grant from Nevada Division of Forestry.



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The \$150,000 grant requires homeowners who participate in the program to sign a liability waiver and pay a \$300 fee. Because the grant will not cover the cost of all the fuel reduction work that needs to be done at Chimney Rock, work this summer will focus on 104 properties that make up the perimeter of the neighborhood.

"It's like putting a ring around a campfire, in very rough terms," said Rick Nicholson, fire marshall at Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District, which is contributing \$15,000 in cash and labor to the neighborhood effort.

Hidden Woods and Glenbrook are two neighborhoods on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe that have completed work similar to what Chimney Rock plans. To fund the work, they too became chapters of the fire safe council and applied for and received state grant money.

"People should take a drive in (Hidden Woods) and see what we're talking about when we talk about fuels management and defensible space," Nicholson said. "We're not talking about clear-cutting ... it looks beautiful."

To join the Chimney Rock Chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, contact Kjer at (775) 588-6354. For information on how to form a new fire safe chapter within Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District, contact Nicholson at (775) 588-3591.