

Parks and Open Space

Wildfire Mitigation Policy

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Wildfire Mitigation Policy

Background

The City of Aspen Parks and Open Space department and the Aspen Fire Protection District (AFPD) have developed a unified approach to wildfire mitigation strategies within city limits. City staff have developed this policy and matrix to provide guidelines that help analyze the risk that properties face and the opportunities for vegetation removal to help mitigate that risk. The City's goal is to balance the long-term benefits of a healthy urban forest with the recognized need to make our homes resilient to the threat of wildfire.

The department has further worked with the AFPD to determine standards for mapping of wildfire risk, as well as best practices for wildfire mitigation actions and an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the City and AFPD memorializes this arrangement.

This policy works in tandem with Ordinance 11 of 2024, which updates the City of Aspen Municipal Code to provide allowance for property owners to remove trees and shrubs around structures in order to reduce wildfire fuels.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines that balance a healthy urban forest and tree preservation, with fuel reduction and tree removals on properties within the City of Aspen. Trees are an important part of our community, and while this policy aims to keep our community safe from wildfire, we recognize that a healthy urban forest provides a variety of benefits to the community and the larger ecosystem.

Fire Mitigation Best Practices

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) has developed the Firewise USA program to help residents reduce wildfire risks on their property. This model has been adapted across the country by local organizations to reflect local risks and provide region specific guidance. This third-party program provides the foundation for the Parks and Open Space Departments understanding of best practices for landscape management in relation to structures.

Critical to the Firewise program is the definition of the home ignition zone and how to manage the 'defensible space' surrounding structures. Defensible space is the area around a structure that has been modified to reduce fire hazard by creating space between potential fuel sources. Critical to the idea of defensible space is the establishment of management zones within the landscape that recognize the role that fuel continuity can play in wildfire behavior.

Zone 1	0 – 5 Feet from Structure	This zone is designed to prevent flames from coming in direct contact with the structure.
Zone 2	5 – 30 Feet from Structure	This zone is designed to give an approaching fire less fuel, which will help reduce the intensity as it gets nearer to structures.
Zone 3	30 – 100 Feet from Structure	This zone focuses on mitigation that keeps fire on the ground, but it's also a space to make choices that can improve forest health. Healthy forests include trees of multiple ages, sizes and species, where adequate growing room is maintained over time.

HOME IGNITION ZONE [HIZ]

is the home and the area around the home (or structure). The HIZ takes into account both the potential of the structure to ignite and the quality of defensible space surrounding it.

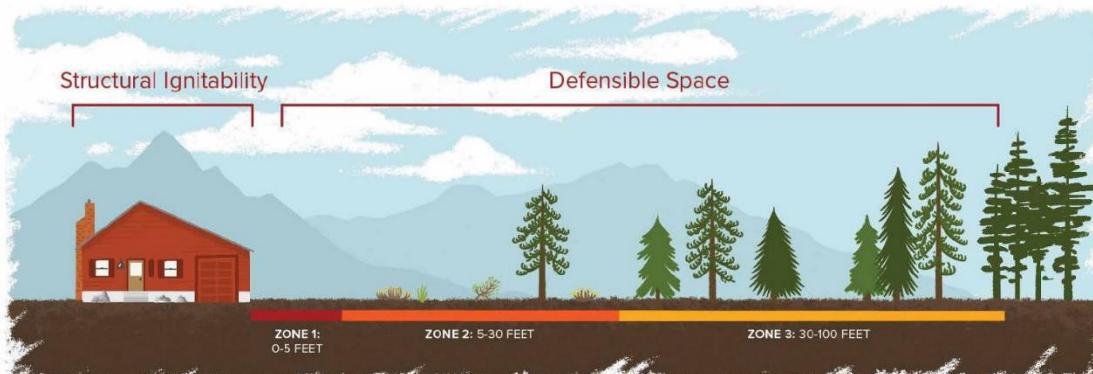


Illustration: Bonnie Palmatory, Colorado State University

Mapping Wildfire Risk

Mapping Wildfire risk is an evolving science that involves a complex analysis of topography, vegetation type, aspect and many other environmental factors. The importance of an accurate and up to date wildfire risk map is recognized by both the AFD and the Parks department as a foundational tool for understanding the risk that specific properties face in the event of a wildfire. Not all properties in the City of Aspen have the same level of risk, and as a result, allowances for the removal of trees and shrubs for fuel reduction take into account the defined risk for a given properties location within the map. The mapping tool used by The City of Aspen will be from a third-party and vetted for accuracy by the Aspen Fire Protection District.

Criteria for removal or relocation of trees identified as wildfire risk

The criteria for the removal of vegetation is outlined in the following Wildfire Mitigation Matrix and has been developed using Firewise best management practices and wildfire risk mapping.

A property owner intending to remove trees for fire mitigation purposes should follow these steps before proceeding with removal.

1. Contact the Aspen Fire Protection District for a free home assessment.
2. After the home assessment is complete, apply for a tree removal permit from the Parks and Open Space Department and include the home assessment as a part of the submission.
3. Meet with the City forester onsite to discuss the trees proposed for removal and verify the strategies proposed per management zone. **The City Forester will make the final determination on what will be allowed for removal or relocation based on the 'Wildfire Mitigation Matrix' (shown below).
4. Following the receipt of a tree removal permit, the tree(s) may be removed by the homeowner or a licensed tree care provider.
5. If replanting of wildfire resistant trees is stipulated as part of the permit, schedule an inspection with the forester once that work is complete.

WILDFIRE TREE MITIGATION			
AREA RISK	ZONE 1 / 0 - 5 ft	ZONE 2 / 5 - 30 ft.	ZONE 3 / 30 ft. and beyond
Very High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All removals allowed • Planting trees not allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All removals considered • Planting fire-resistant trees encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of evergreen trees considered • Planting fire-resistant trees encouraged
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All removals allowed • Planting trees not allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of evergreen trees considered • Planting fire-resistant trees encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removals considered for fire mitigation reasons • Planting of all trees allowed, fire-resistant trees encouraged
Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All removals allowed • Planting trees not allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removals considered for fire mitigation reasons • Planting of all trees allowed, fire-resistant trees encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planting of all trees allowed, fire-resistant trees encouraged
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All removals allowed • Planting trees considered per Firewise guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removals considered for fire mitigation reasons • Planting of all trees allowed, fire-resistant trees encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planting of all trees allowed, fire-resistant trees encouraged
NOTES:			
* A tree's location is determined by half or more of the trunk at the base existing within a given zone.			
* Pruning and/or retention groups of trees may be suggested by City Forester as an alternative to removal where practical.			
*Please refer to CSU list of fire-resistant and non-fire resistant trees.			
* Trees considered "landmark trees" will be reviewed and considered for removal by the City Forester.			
*Effectiveness of tree-related mitigation efforts will depend on reduction of other fuels in the landscape and structure hardening.			
* Vegetation and terrain considerations on specific properties may allow for greater removals			

As a condition of approval of the removal or relocation of vegetation, the Parks and Recreation Director may require that the owner replace any removed or relocated tree with a tree or shrub designated as a fire-resistant species. The Parks and Open Space Department will maintain a list of suitable fire-resistant tree and plant species and make that list available to the public via its website or at the Parks and Open Space office.

Pruning or limbing of vegetation may be recommended or required by the City Forester in lieu of removal.

Fees for Tree Removal

The valuation of a tree is set forth in Sec. 2.12.080. Parks Department fees of the Municipal Code. This valuation will be applied as the baseline value for trees proposed for fire mitigation removal. When a fire-resistant species is planted to mitigate the value of the removed tree, the value of the fire-resistant plant shall be factored into the fee determination to incentivize replanting with fire resistant plants, instead of vegetation removal and cash-in-lieu payments.

1. Trees removed within 5 feet of a structure **will not** be subject to mitigation fees as defined in the City of Aspen Municipal Code.
2. Trees removed within 5 – 30 feet of a structure **will** be subject to mitigation fees as defined in the City of Aspen Municipal Code.



- a. Replanting of fire-resistant species within this zone will offset mitigation fees at a ratio of 2:1. For example the removal of an existing tree with mitigation value of \$1,000 can be fully offset by the planting of a fire-resistant tree or shrub species valued at \$500.
3. Trees removed within 30 - 100 feet of a structure **will** be subject to mitigation fees as defined in the City of Aspen Municipal Code.
 - a. Replanting of fire-resistant species within this zone will offset mitigation fees at a ratio of 1:1. For example the removal of an existing tree with mitigation value of \$1,000 can be fully offset by the planting of a fire-resistant tree or shrub species valued at \$1,000.

Please note the following conditions:

1. The City Forester may also determine that a full or partial fee waiver is warranted.
2. Replanting of Firewise species needs to occur to receive a reduction in calculated fees. If the homeowner elects to not replant trees, the entire calculated fee will be assessed.
3. This policy is intended for stand-alone tree permits for existing structures in the City.

The Wildfire Mitigation Policy may be amended, updated and expanded from time to time by City Council Resolution. At least one copy of the Wildfire Mitigation Policy shall be available for public inspection at the offices of the Parks and Open Space Department.



Appendix A – List of Fire Resistant Vegetation (shrubs and trees) for Planting

Fire Resistant Tree List	
Latin Name	Common Name
<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	aspen
<i>Populus angustifolia</i>	narrowleaf cottowood
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	saskatoon serviceberry
<i>Prunus virginiana melanocarpa</i>	western chokecherry
<i>Betula fontinalis</i>	River birch

*other related or appropriate species may be considered with fire resistant characteristics such as:

- Trees with low sap or resin content (examples: many deciduous species).
- Trees with high moisture content
- Trees with open, loose branches with allow volume of total vegetation