Is Your Home Wildfire Surviveable?

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Despite our region's scenic beauty, to a wildland fire manager, the Columbia River Gorge is a wind tunnel lined with flammable materials. Last year's Sheldon Ridge Fire between Mosier and Hood River, OR burned several thousand acres in less than a day. In the event of a larger fire, or multiple Sheldon Ridge Fires, firefighters will not be able to protect everyone's home and outbuildings in the rural urban interface.

There are several things that you can do to increase the chances of your dwelling surviving a wildfire. The key steps to think of are: LEAN, CLEAN AND GREEN.

LEAN means limiting the number of plants within at least a 30 feet radius from around your home; 60 to 90 feet on the downhill side if you live on a hill. Keep conifer trees pruned up 10 to 20 feet and thin to separate their crowns by at least 20 to 30 feet. CLEAN means removing dead wood and other flammable materials in a like distance; keep firewood stacked well away from your home; and relocate your propane tank a safe distance away if necessary. GREEN means fostering low growing herbaceous ground covers of limited flammability; keep your grass mowed.

As a heads up, look out for WSU, Hood River and Wasco County Wildfire Survey teams in the yellow and green fire gear who may be assessing wildfire hazards in your neighborhood this summer. They and your local rural fire district can help answer your questions on wildfire survivability.

More tips can be found in "Living with Fire" available from your local WSU/OSU Extension, Washington DNR, or Oregon Department of Forestry offices. Or contact Ole Helgerson, 509-427-9427, or Peter Mackwell, 509-427-4130.