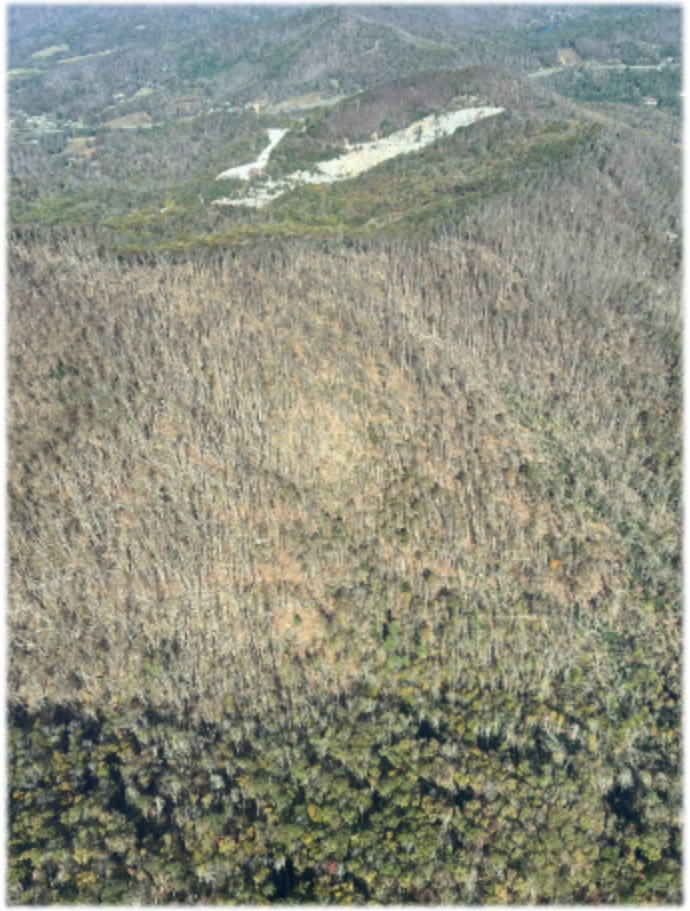
WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS & RESILIENCE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Emergency Services

HELENE'S IMPACT ON FORESTS



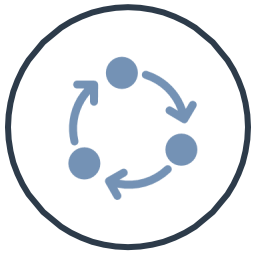
- 45,163 acres of severe forest damaged
- 16.9% of county forestland significantly impacted
- Increased fuel load
- Limited access
- **Result: Significant increase in wildfire fuel and risk**

OUR WILDFIRE STRATEGY



Prevention

Education, awareness, defensible space



Operations

Emergency response, coordination



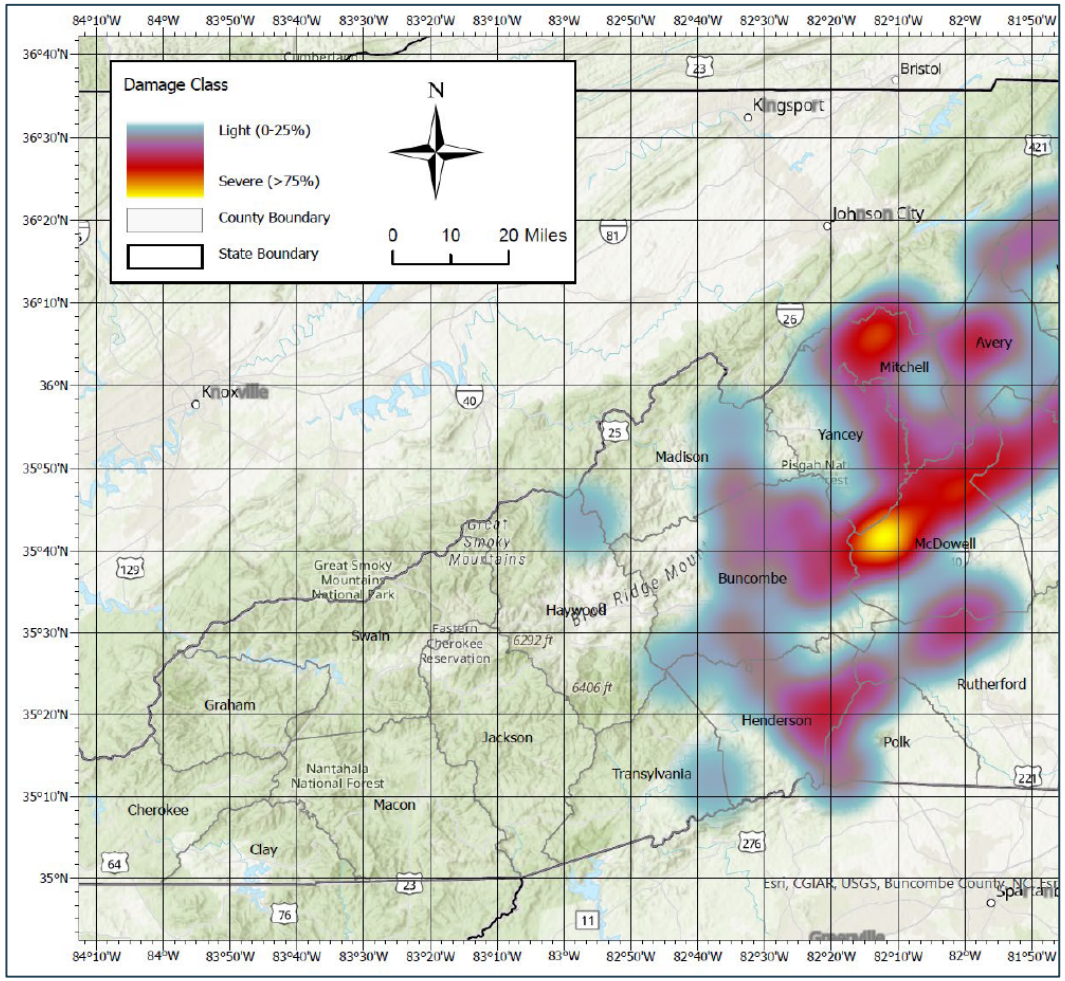
Projects & Mitigation

Long-term mitigation and resilience



PREVENTION

PREVENTION STRATEGY



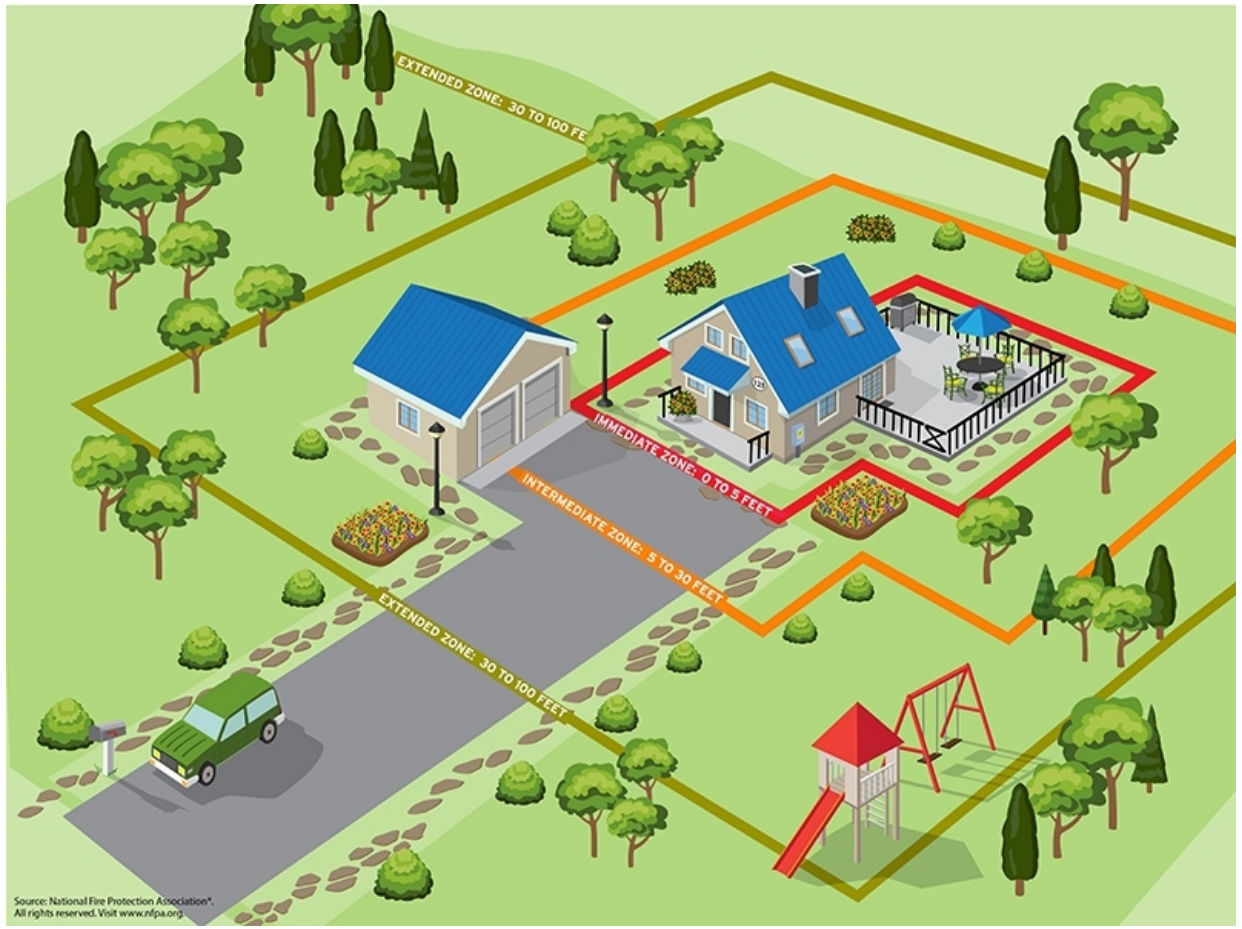
- Focus on reducing ignition risk
- Increase public awareness
- Increase public engagement and action
- Encourage behavior change

PREVENTION IN ACTION

- Social media campaigns (in development)
- Defensible space education
- Community outreach
- Partner coordination
  - Buncombe County Fire Departments
  - NC Forest Service
  - US Forest Service
- Prevention Projects



WHAT CAN YOU DO



- Up to 5 ft remove vegetation and install noncombustible ground cover materials such as rock, stone, gravel, or pavers.
- 5 to 30 ft Use noncombustible or low-fire-risk ground covers to interrupt the potential path of an oncoming fire.
- 30 to 100ft Remove excess vegetation, plant only vegetation that is selected and spaced to reduce the risk of wildfire. Use noncombustible or low-fire-risk ground covers to interrupt the potential path of an oncoming fire.

FIRE RISK GROUND COVER

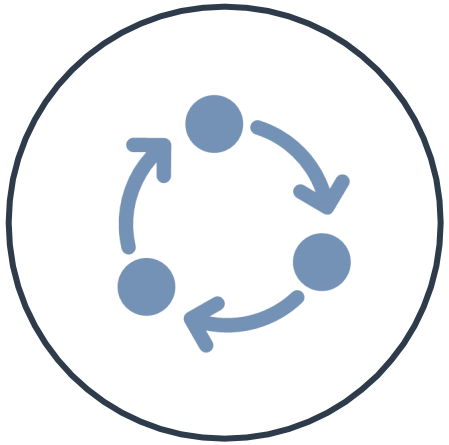
LOW RISK

- Live trimmed grass
- Impatiens
- Sumac
- Flowering Dogwood
- Eastern Redbud

HIGH RISK

- Pine Straw
- Virgina Creeper
- Laurel
- Rhododendron
- Holly

Fire-Resistant Landscaping in North Carolina
NC State Extension



OPERATIONS

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

- Increased fuel load across county
- Limited access due to debris
- Resource demands for extended incidents
- Need for continued coordination and training

WILDLAND TASK FORCE

BUNCOMBE COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS' ASSOCIATION

WILDLAND and STRUCTURAL PROTECTION TASK FORCE POLICY

Incident Region	EOC Staffing
North	West (On Call, rostered by West Buncombe)
South	East (Swannanoa or Black Mountain)
West	North (Weaverville or Reems Creek)
East	South (Skyland or Fairview)

Wildland Task Force Assignments

	Manpower Requirement	North	South	West	East
Brush Truck	2	Reems Creek Jupiter	Reynolds Asheville B11	Leicester Upper Hominy	Asheville B8 Riceville
Tanker	1	Barnardsville	Garren Creek	French Broad	Broad River
Chief	1	Weaverville (Pri) Reems Creek (Alt)	Skyland (Pri) Fairview (Alt)	Enka (Pri) W. Buncombe (Alt)	Black Mountain (Pri) Swannanoa (Alt)
Hand crew	3	Weaverville Woodfin	Skyland Fairview	W. Buncombe Enka	Black Mountain Swannanoa

Structural Protection Task Force Assignments

	Manpower Requirement	North	South	West	East
Engine	3	Weaverville Woodfin	Fairview Skyland	West Buncombe Enka	Black Mountain Swannanoa
Tanker	1	Barnardsville	Garren Creek	French Broad	Broad River
Chief	1	Weaverville (Pri) Reems Creek (Alt)	Skyland (Pri) Fairview (Alt)	Enka (Pri) W. Buncombe (Alt)	Black Mountain (Pri) Swannanoa (Alt)
Brush Truck	2	Reems Creek Jupiter	Reynolds Asheville B11	Upper Hominy Leicester	Asheville B8 Riceville

- Implemented by Buncombe County Fire Chiefs' Association
- County divided into operational regions
- Predefined response structure for rapid wildfire deployment
- Resources assigned by region for rapid deployment



PROJECTS

PROJECT: OPERATIONAL COORDINATION & RESOURCE MGMT.

What It Is

- Systems to coordinate response resources (including WebEOC)

Benefits

- Faster, more efficient wildfire response
- Better situational awareness



What We're Doing

- Improving resource tracking and deployment
- Enhancing coordination between agencies

What's Next

- Continue WebEOC training with Fire Departments
- Utilize County information to inform response decisions

PROJECT: WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT-DATABASE

What It Is

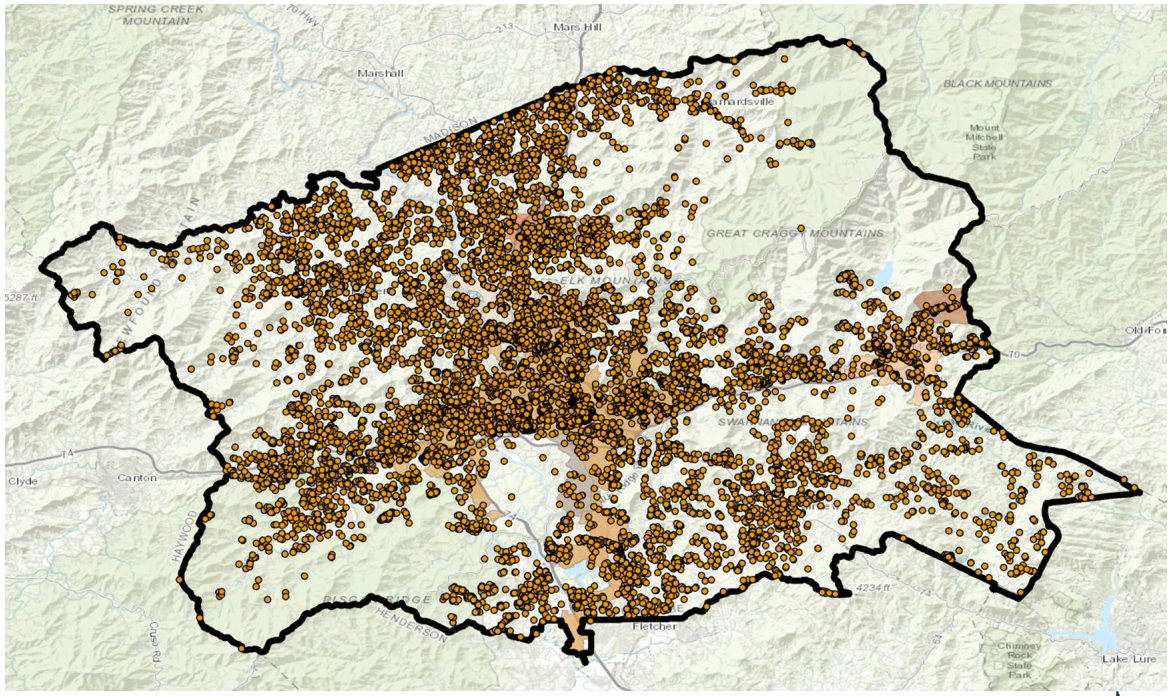
- Identifying wildfire-prone areas post-Helene

Benefits

- Better targeting of mitigation efforts
- Improved preparedness

What We're Doing

- Incorporating new fuel load conditions
- Updating planning assumptions



What's Next

- Utilize HMGP Funding to support assessments and technology
- Providing current data to community with additional staff resources

PROJECT: COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION

What It Is

- Public awareness and prevention campaign

Benefits

- Reduced ignition risk
- Increased community preparedness

What We're Doing

- Social media campaigns
- Defensible space education and risk reduction

What's Next

- Requested HMGP funding to support all hazards CRR
- Begin the wildland CRR with public and community partners



PROJECT: COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANS

What It Is

- A comprehensive plan coordinated with the NC Forest Service.

Benefits

- Identifies risk at the district level
- Provides strategies for response and mitigation

What We're Doing

- Swannanoa and Barnardsville Fire Districts are Complete
- Requesting HMGP for additional district assessments

What's Next

- Utilize the plans already developed to enhance response and education
- If funding is not available through HMGP utilize staff to complete additional plans

PROJECT: WEATHER, WILDFIRE AND LANDSLIDE MONITORING

What It Is

- Weather, wildfire and landslide monitoring equipment at 36 locations on tower sites and fire stations

Benefits

- Provides situational awareness in all topographical areas
- Provides enhanced response with earlier notification



What We're Doing

- Partnership with other counties to identify funding resources for camera systems
- Requesting HMGP for 36 monitoring sites

What's Next

- Continue to seek alternate funding with partner agencies
- If alternate funding is unavailable seek capital investment

PROJECT: AI WILDFIRE DETECTION & CAMERA NETWORK

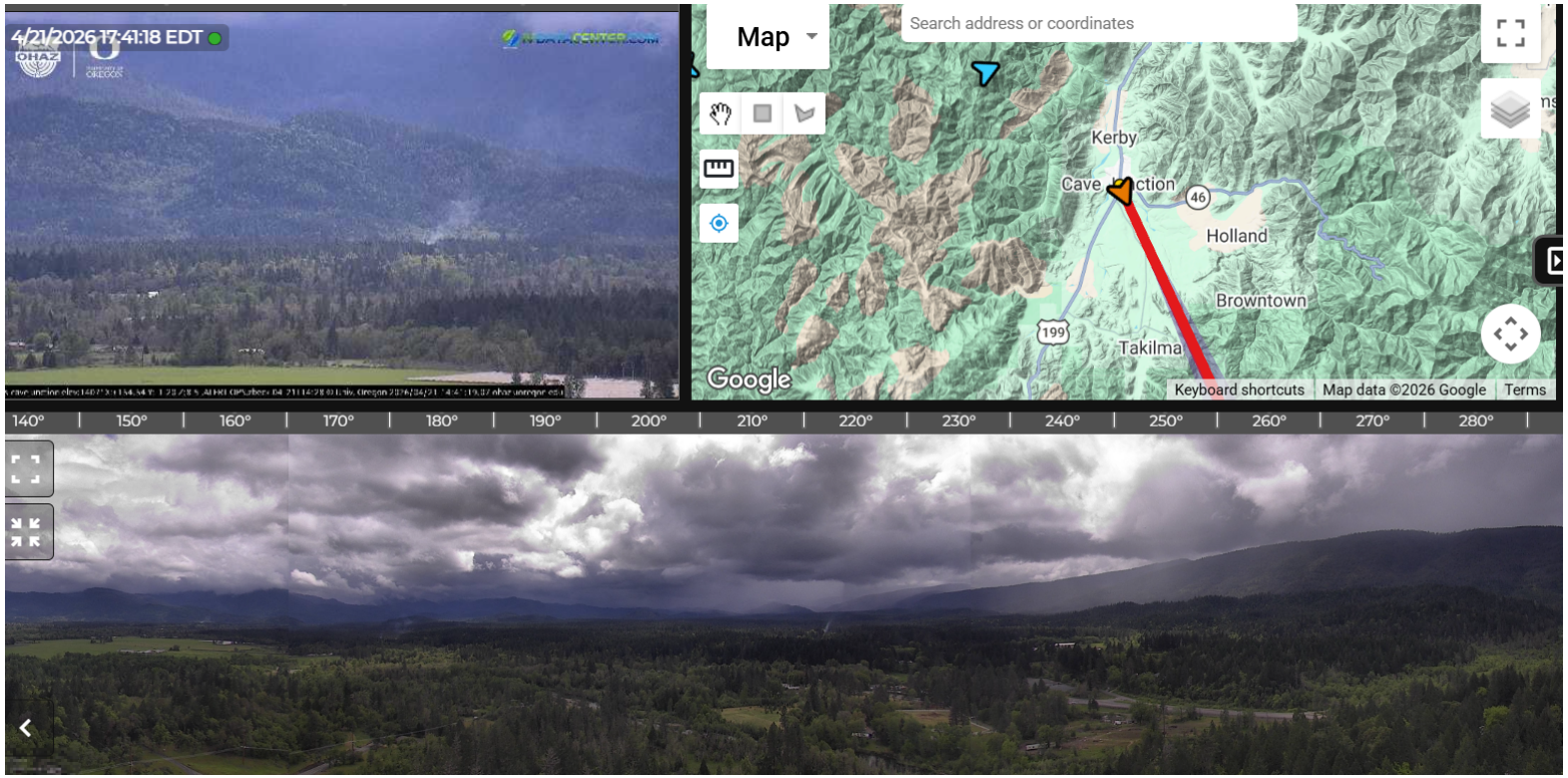


Photo property of ALERTCalifornia | UC San Diego

What It Is

- Network of mountaintop cameras with AI smoke detection
- Early wildfire detection and situational awareness system
- Regional pilot with Buncombe, Henderson, and McDowell counties

PROJECT: READY SET GO EVACUATION PROGRAM

What It Is

- A nationally recognized program for evacuation preparedness and activation.

Benefits

- Regional all hazards evacuation planning
- Consistent planning and activation



What We're Doing

- Coordinating with State agencies to develop common operating plan
- Coordinating with other Counties to have consistent mapping and coordination

What's Next

- Continue to coordinate with other Counties and State
- Implementation of Ready Set Go in Buncombe County

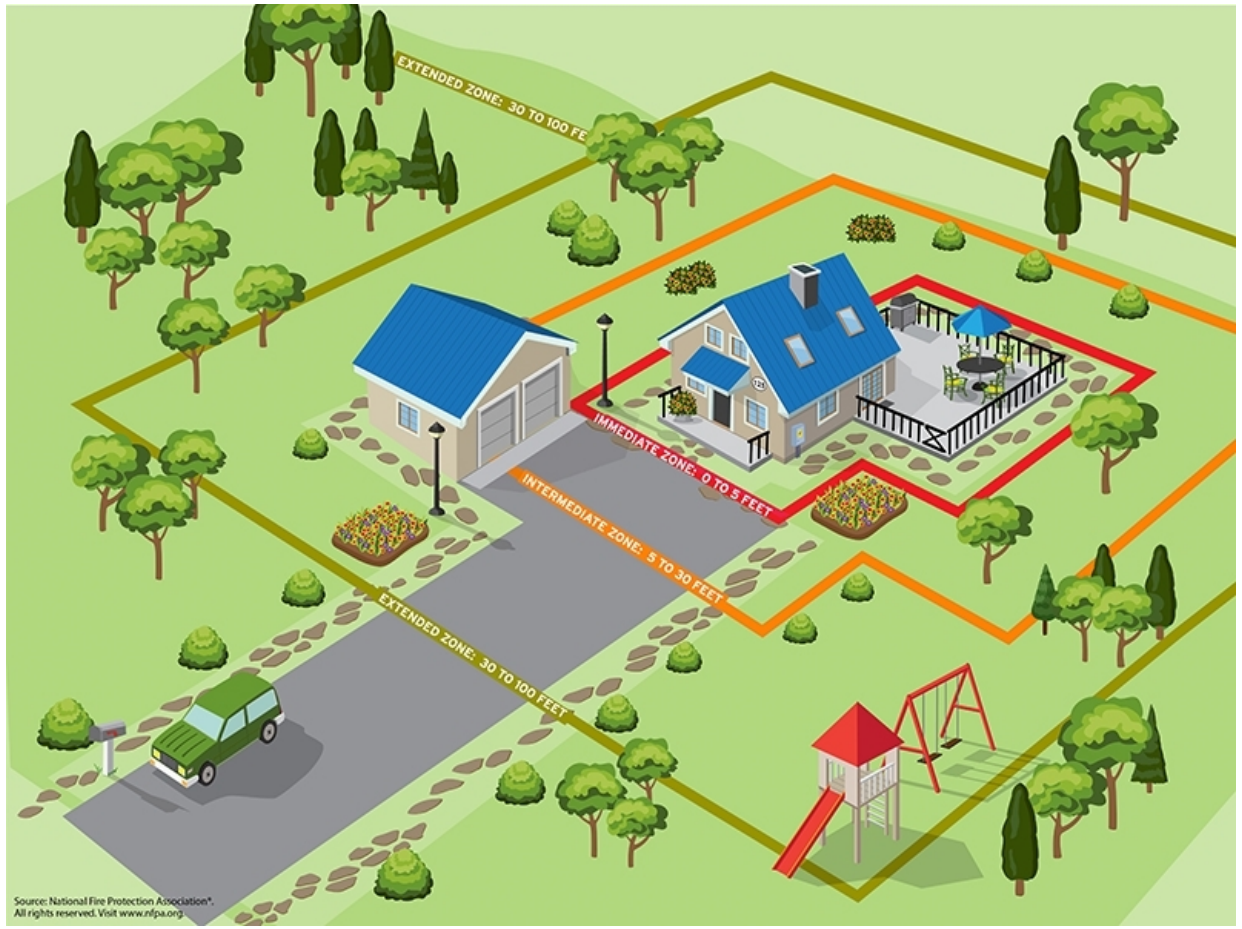
KEY TAKEAWAYS



Party Rock Fire Progression 2016

- Wildfire risk has increased post-Helene
- Severe drought creates significant risk
- Community is engaged and concerned
- Continue to respond through:
  - Prevention
  - Preparedness
  - Operations
  - Resiliency Projects
- Continue to invest in reducing and responding to wildfire risk

Questions



- Create A Defensible Space
- Remove Dead Vegetation
- Have an Evacuation Plan
- Maintain Awareness

- Wildfire Safety is a Community Solution