

Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council
Community Assistance Grants Help Save Homes in Southern California

The 2003 firestorm in southern California will be remembered for its victims, heroes, destruction and strife. Also remembered are the lessons about empowerment and collaboration, where preparation and planning played an important role in protection from wildfire. Such is the case of the Lytle Creek Fire Council.



In two out of the three years since its inception, the Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council has received funding through the Bureau of Land Management's Community Assistance Program. These grants help empower local non-profit groups with guidance and resources to reduce wildfire threats in their community. Projects emphasize hazardous fuel reduction, fire protection planning, community risk assessments, and community fire prevention education.

The fire safe council worked with a disabled homeowner to remove branches away from her house and garage just weeks before the fire. Homes across the street were lost, but hers was saved.

With BLM funding, Lytle Creek's Fire Safe Council was able to work with residents in a community of approximately 1,000 people in an area approximately eight-miles long to create defensible space around 95 percent of the homes. The fire safe council defensible space project, in combination with U.S. Forest Service fuel breaks along national forest lands adjacent to the community, was their saving grace during the 2003 firestorm.



As the fires fed on upon the hills during the warm and windy days of October, Lytle Creek evacuations progressed until firefighters were pulling out of town. Jack Kennedy, a fire battalion chief, who'd worked with the council, spoke to the fire incident commander about holding firefighters in place. The community had done their job in creating defensible space and now the firefighters would use that space to defend it.

The 2003 fire came all the way up to the defensible space created behind these homes. None were burned.



“At one point, this community had been completely surrounded by wildfire” recalled Ellen Pollema, Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council president. But, with the heroic efforts of firefighters, and the planning and preparations done by the council membership, only 18 of 350 homes were lost to the fire.

Similar success stories throughout California are being collected by the California Fire Safe Council, demonstrating the importance of community-level collaborations in creating a fire safe environment.

For more information about the California Fire Safe Council contact Bruce Turbeville, Chairman, at (916) 762-2757. Questions related to the Lytle Creek Fire Safe Council can be directed to Ellen Pollema at (909) 466-7388.

BLM contact: Miriam H. Morrill, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist, California State Office (916) 978-4436