

SUN PEAK FIRE NEWS

October 2022

Local Fire Mitigation Open Houses:

Using Fire to Fight Fire: Prescribed Fire & Smoke Management – **Please Attend - October 25, 6-8pm**

The Summit County Fuels Committee's Prescribed Fire Practitioners Group has organized this event for the Summit County community which will be held in-person and via Zoom at the Park City Municipal Council Chambers at 445 Marsac Avenue on **October 25th from 6-8pm**.

Agenda:

- 6:00pm: Meet and Mingle
- 6:10pm: Travis – Why we are here tonight and intro speakers
- 6:15pm: Brad Washa – Fire Ecology
- 6:30pm: Paul with DAQ
- 6:45pm: Stephanie with Wildlife habitat
- 7:00pm: Travis – Tie it all together – wrap it up and answer remaining questions

In person meeting:

- When: Oct. 25 from 6pm-7:30pm
- Where: Park City City Hall (445 Marsac Ave. Park City, UT 84060) in the Council Chambers Room

Online:

- When: Oct. 25 from 6pm-7:30pm
- Join Zoom Meeting -
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89088630426?pwd=RWU1aWVubE1Rb2NBQ3NMWUVhWVR2dz>
- Meeting ID: 890 8863 0426
- Passcode: 992883

Wildfire & Local Landscapes: Impacts of Changing Climate

This event was held at Swaner EcoCenter on September 20th but can be viewed via this YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5HtHbN6RCQ>

Wildfire Fuel Treatments in Parleys Canyon

Fire mitigation work will be visible along I-80 between Lambs Canyon and Summit Park over the next few weeks. Click here to learn more: <https://wildlife.utah.gov/news/utah-wildlife-news/1524-interagency-wildfire-fuel-treatments-in-parleys-canyon-to-address-watershed-health.html>

Sun Peak Fire Mitigation Project Update

by Chuck Mollard and Jorge Velarde, Co-Chairs of the Fire Mitigation Committee

We would like to give everyone a detailed summary of this project, why it was necessary, who has been involved, and what has been done to date. The HOA Board is doing all it can to do what is best for the Sun Peak community and we encourage everyone to submit questions and do your own research. We don't want any misinformation to spread.

Why Fire Mitigation?

Utah is one of the most wildfire prone states in the U.S. There are 800 to 1,300 wildfires in Utah annually. Between 1992 and 2012 the length of the fire season across the west increased by nearly six weeks. The drought that has hit the Western US is the driest and longest in recorded history and is expected to last through 2030.

The state of Utah switched to a proactive wildfire risk reduction strategy that became effective in 2017 with the legislative adoption of a new wildland fire policy. Summit County hired a Public Lands Manager who now oversees the Western Summit County Fuels Committee whose purpose is to coordinate with local communities who are proactively implementing areas of defensible space and fuel reduction.

Sun Peak Fire Mitigation Planning

According to FEMA, every \$1 spent on prevention saves \$6 in post-disaster recovery costs. Based on discussions with the State Forester, Summit County Land Management and Fire Departments and local communities who have already embarked on fire mitigation activities, the Sun Peak HOA Board began to identify, evaluate, and select a company who could provide us with a wildfire risk assessment. Furthermore, the Board wanted a company with proven expertise to provide an all-encompassing consideration of conditions affecting our wildfire risk as well as the consequences of the creation of defensible space and fuel reduction.

In 2021, Alpine Forestry was selected and engaged to perform a Wildfire Risk and Hazardous Fuels Assessment. They are a local company whose principals have a combined 40 years of wildland fire, emergency response and Resource Management experience, and have several nationally recognized certifications.

Their reports were completed in phases; Phase I was completed July 2021 and Phase II was completed in September 2021. Their assessment and proposed recommendations were reviewed and approved by the Western Summit County Fuels Committee.

Sun Peak and Alpine Forestry hosted a wildland fire mitigation open house on June 19, 2021, from 10:00 to 2:00 pm for homeowners to be briefed on wildfire risk in Sun Peak. Sun Peak also sent email notices and posted the information to Sunpeak.org regarding wildland fire risk on May 27, 2021, June 17, 2021. And announced on December 2, 2021, wildland fire risk would be discussed at the annual meeting held on December 16, 2021, via Zoom.

The proposed recommendations took in consideration our climate and weather, topography (slope, aspect, and terrain), fuel hazards, vegetation types, forest health, emergency response and infrastructure, and values at risk (homes and infrastructure such as water treatment, cable TV, phone lines, power lines, etc.).

Alpine's treatment recommendations:

The overall objective is to protect lives, property, and natural resources by creating strategically placed fuel breaks and restoring a healthy, diverse and fire resilient forest structure. Reducing hazardous fuels may limit, but not eliminate, wildfire risks. Each homeowner should evaluate the fuel risks on their property and do the work needed to protect their home. We encourage everyone to contact the Fire Department to come to your home and assess the fire risks of your property.

Firebreaks help reduce the likelihood of fire ignition. Furthermore, they slow down the spread of a fire providing emergency response teams with greater access and more time to fight a fire. You will notice that the work required to create the firebreaks will vary significantly by area. That is because of the difference in vegetation types, severity of slopes, vegetation and dead wood density, and proximity to homes.

Some homeowners have questioned the need to do a fire break above Rob's Trail and further down "because fires don't move downhill". Unfortunately, this is a common misconception. A fire will spread to where there is fuel and where the wind takes it. May we remind you that approximately 8,000 residences were evacuated last year due to the Parleys Canyon fire which included communities at Summit Park, Pinebrook, Millcreek Canyon and Lambs Canyon, all of which were "downhill" from where the fire was coming. An area greater than the acreage of our community burned in just two days with very little wind present.

The proposed firebreaks will be strategically placed around the Sun Peak community. Fire breaks will only affect 48 acres of the total 312 acres of open space we have. If you want to see where the firebreaks are going to be located, please visit our website at www.Sunpeak.org, go to the Fire Aware link, and click on the Phase 2 Final Wildfire Risk and Hazardous Fuels Assessment report. You will see the map on page 14. You can also stop by the office to see the larger map.

The creation of firebreaks will include some or all of the following:

- Selectively thinning white fir, subalpine fir, aspen, scrub oak, and maple.
- Removing ladder fuels.
- Reducing seasonal brush.
- Reducing dead and down material.
- Cutting branches of conifers that are close to the ground (below 6').

Sun Peak's Phase I fire mitigation

In June, prior to Alpine Forestry commencing the fire mitigation work, the HOA sent a notice to the homeowners bordering the areas of open space that was to be treated and advised the work would commence in July. This information was also contained in the HOA Summer newsletter which was posted on the website and sent to all homeowners on June 7 and June 15, 2022. Shortly thereafter, Alpine Forestry treated 20 acres along Rob's Trail (3 acres), Millennium Trail (5 acres along Hwy 224), and Southern fuel break (12 acres from the Enclave to Sun Peak Drive).

This winter the plan is to dispose of the wood piles by burning them. This is a process that is highly regulated. It will be coordinated with the Utah Division of Air Quality (DAQ) and Summit County Fire Department to obtain their approval. More importantly, regulations allow burning only when certain weather and atmospheric conditions are present.

Pile burning is the preferred method as it is the least expensive and is what most, if not all, surrounding communities have elected to do. Other disposal methods such as chipping would be very costly. In addition, the scaring of the land would be severe. Further, following the pile burning, ashes will provide new nutrients to the soil and if budget allows, the areas may be reseeded with native grasses.

Sun Peak's Phase II fire mitigation

The HOA has allocated \$70,000 per year for fire mitigation and has applied for a FEMA grant for treatment over a three-year period which, if approved, will provide Sun Peak an amount of over \$400,000. This grant, and possibly others, will provide the bulk of the funds needed for fire mitigation in Sun Peak and the annual \$70,000 will go toward maintenance as this is a never-ending process.

As mentioned previously, the plan has also taken in consideration the health of our forest and the habitat of the wildlife that lives in our community. The HOA has consulted not only with Alpine Forestry but also with other experts. The proposed plan of action will promote vegetation growth and will improve the health of the remaining trees. By thinning the forest, more sunlight will reach the forest floor, and more water and nutrients will be available to the remaining vegetation, and aspens will spread more rapidly. Our white fir and subalpine fir are unfortunately diseased, and many are dying. By selectively thinning them, some conifers may survive, and the aspens should spread more rapidly. Aspens are not "fire spreaders". The selective thinning improves habitat for the wildlife we are fortunate to have, and the more heavily wooded areas will continue providing shelter for these animals and their young.

What Sun Peak is doing is like what other communities in the Park City area have done to be proactive in mitigating the hazard of a potential catastrophic fire in their community. This includes Summit Park, Pinebrook, Tollgate, Enclave, Deer Valley, and others in Park City proper. Areas that have been treated in the last couple of years have witnessed a healthy regrowth of the forest and an abundance of wildflowers.

Alpine Forestry has the expertise in wildfire mitigation, and they have and will continue to use their best judgement in the amount and type of vegetation that needs to be removed to provide the best possible fire protection and health of our forest.

As advised at last Thursday's meeting, some Sun Peak homeowners have experienced significant increases in their homeowner's insurance policies and, in some cases, their policies have been cancelled due to the extreme fire hazard rating of our community (as rated by the insurance industry). In addition, some recent purchasers of homes in Sun Peak had difficulty obtaining wildfire insurance coverage required by a lender. Some major insurance companies are no longer writing new policies in areas with the fire risk rating we have.

While there have not been any house fires in Sun Peak caused by wildfire, we do not want to close the barn door after the horse has bolted. The wildfire hazard has continued to increase in the Park City area and, if no fire mitigation efforts are taken, it is just a matter of time until we may experience terrible consequences.

It is the responsibility of the board of directors to maintain and properly control the use of open space. We appreciate the support people have expressed regarding this much needed project. We look forward to continuing listening to your questions and concerns and will do our best to respond to them. In addition, the efforts are greatly appreciated by those that face the consequences of a fire in

our community as evidenced by the note sent by Summit County Fire District Battalion Chief Mike Owens who is the District Fire Marshall, Fire Prevention Bureau and who attended Thursday's meeting:

"The Park City Fire District recommends that all property owners take active steps to reduce the amount of fuel on their properties to reduce the likelihood that a fire starting on their property will spread to other properties and slow the fires approaching their property. Any work done to improve the fire resistance of a property, no matter how small, will influence the area as a whole. Property owners have a responsibility so as to not have a detrimental effect on their neighbors."

"Property owned by communities also must be maintained. Communities have a responsibility to remove fuels that would contribute to the rapid spread and growth of wildfire. The Park City Fire District recognizes the difficulty and expense that often prevents communities from maintaining the common space. The process followed and the work done by the Sun Peak Homeowner's Association on their community property serves as an example to other communities. It shows that with proper planning and efficient use of funds, communities can work together to reduce the wildfire fuel that has accumulated in our areas while also improving overall forest health."