

# SUN PEAK FIRE NEWS

November 22, 2022

## Sun Peak Fire Committee News

by Jorge Velarde, Chuck Mollard and Roger Sawyer, Fire Committee Members

On November 19<sup>th</sup>, the Fire Safety Committee hosted a meeting with homeowners, both in person and via Zoom. There were 23 homeowners in attendance at the clubhouse and 17 via Zoom.

Roger Sawyer, Board member and fire safety committee member, led the meeting. Other people present were:

- Bruce Shapiro, HOA General Counsel
- Chuck Mollard and Jorge Velarde, Fire Safety Committee Co-chairmen
- Teresa Wharton, HOA Manager
- Brad Washa, independent consultant, 33 years in Federal Wildland Fire Management
- David Telian and Matt Castellon, Co-owners of Alpine Forestry, 40 years of combined wildland fire, emergency response and resource management
- Don Brown and David Geffen, Pinebrook Board and Fire Safety Committee members
- Brett Denny, Summit Land Conservancy, representing the Enclave via Zoom

The purpose of the meeting was to give an update on the Sun Peak fire mitigation project and to discuss and answer the questions and concerns of homeowners as well as those raised via a petition by some homeowners. To that purpose, the experts present provided the answers regarding why we need to treat the forest, why we have an obligation to do so, and the importance of working with other neighboring communities.

Brad Washa noted the Parleys Canyon Fire could have spread to the surrounding communities and things were in alignment for success after an unsuccessful initial attack on the fire. Among other items he reviewed was the need to have fire adapted communities and stressed that the majority of home loss is not from radiant heat but from ember showers (spotting).

With specific regard to Sun Peak, he noted there were major forest health issues within the mixed conifer and aspen decline. Therefore, he stressed it was very important for the community to create resilient landscapes to reduce the impacts of fire, insects, and disease. In addition, he stressed it is important for the residents to harden their home so that it can stand on its own in case of a fire.

In conclusion, he stated treated areas and defensible space also provide for firefighter safety which is paramount when they must decide if they are going to move firefighters to an area to fight a fire. If an area, or a home, has not been “treated”, firefighters may not put themselves at risk if a successful and safe defensive position is not possible.

Pinebrook and the Enclave attended to give us a recap of their fire mitigation project, and their experience so far. A letter from the Enclave's President was read, stating how happy they are with the fire mitigation and forest ecology work so far. They both have chosen to burn most of their wood piles and have found that Alpine is not only very professional in fire mitigation, but also excellent stewards of the land in the community.

We then proceeded to address the various questions raised as outlined in the agenda circulated prior to the meeting.

- It was explained why Alpine was selected and their qualifications were highlighted. Their recommendations are indeed best practices and their recommendations have been reviewed and approved by other experts. No one present provided names of experts who disagree with the work done by Alpine.
- Alpine Forestry provided a detailed explanation of the process they followed with an assessment of the Sun Peak open space and how best to phase in a proper fire mitigation plan. They reviewed on a map of Sun Peak the work that has been performed and the reasoning behind this first phase. It was noted the work plan takes in consideration concerns about water runoff, avalanche hazards, soil health and moisture retention.
- We had a long discussion about pile burning. The experts explained the process they go through to choose between pile disposal methodologies. The only area where chipping or shipping material off site to a landfill was an option was around Rob's Trailhead, given current budgetary constraints. The substantial majority of the piles will have to be burned, which will be done when climatic conditions allow it and meet Utah Department of Air Quality parameters (and their approval).

Bruce Shapiro HOA General counsel stated that the HOA has the right to grant a variance within the CCR's to approve pile burning on Sun Peak open space and private homeowners may also be allowed to burn their piles on a case-by-case basis. The Board will publish specific guidelines and parameters under which pile burning in private property may be allowed.

- It was explained that the main deviation from Alpine's original plan was so that our firebreak connects with the work done by the Enclave. No areas have been clear cut. The treatment that can be seen higher up the mountain was done by the Enclave. They own 65 acres above their development.
- We discussed the concern that all conifers will eventually be removed. The experts clarified that there is no intention to remove all the conifers. The goal is to improve the health of the forest and make it more resilient which will require the removal of under growth and some thinning to reduce competition, thus improving the health of the remaining trees. A healthier forest will attract more wildlife and improve biodiversity. The extent of forest thinning will be discussed in meetings to be held next spring prior to the start of the 2023 fire mitigation program.
- Teresa explained how our fire mitigation budget has been spent this year. She also gave an update on the FEMA grant we are soon to receive. Such a grant will give us approximately \$3 for every \$1 we contribute to fire mitigation.
- Roger Sawyer explained that our current HOA dues generate a \$70,000 budget for open space maintenance, the bulk of which will be for fire mitigation. 2023 HOA dues will not increase from those in the 2022 budget.

Due to time limitations, the issue of wildfire impacts on homeowner's Insurance was not discussed at the meeting but are included here.

Several Sunpeak residents have received notices that their Homeowner's insurance policies will not be renewed, due to the companies' decision to reduce their exposure to wildfire risk. Others have seen significant increases in their premiums. In one case, a homeowner's policy was not renewed, requiring an interim high-cost supplemental temporary plan, until landscaping changes were made by Alpine Forestry to increase the "defensible" space around the structure, after which the policy was re-instated.

Firewise USA, part of the National Fire Protection Association, recommends extending the defensible space to at least 100 feet from structures. Following the construction of the southwest fire break during 2022 this parameter can now be met for those properties bordering the open space in this area.

- We informed the homeowners in attendance that Sunpeak HOA is working to contract with Brad Washa on fire mitigation services.
- Regarding communications on the project, the fire safety committee committed to provide updates as needed via the newsletter, and to have meetings with homeowners before the work resumes in 2023. At that time, we will discuss plans with the experts. We also intend to invite homeowners to do "walks of the forest" with experts to better understand what should be done in the next phase and in the future.

It was observed that the improved community participation and awareness will facilitate the flow of information.

We are appreciative of homeowners' attendance and trust that our experts have answered and clarified the questions and concerns that were included in the petition. We are encouraged to see so many homeowners are wanting to become more involved in this important, long-term project to improve the health of our forest and the safety of our community.

Subsequent to the meeting, Brad Washa and Chuck Mollard volunteered to lead some "walks in the forest" during the period after Thanksgiving up until December 9. In order to coordinate directly with homeowners that have interest in joining the walk, we ask you to send an email to Chuck at [chuckmollard@gmail.com](mailto:chuckmollard@gmail.com) and he will put you on an email mailing list. He will then advise you of the date a walk is scheduled. This will be an RSVP event and will be limited to the first fifteen homeowners to respond. If there is greater interest, they will schedule another event.