

## **Resilience Redefined: Napa Firewise's Holistic Approach**

***By Stephanie Smithers, Guest Columnist***

The recent wildfires in Los Angeles, and the increasingly frequent and intense fires across California, serve as a stark reminder of the urgent challenges we face with extreme climate. In Napa Valley, we are not immune. While we cherish our landscapes, we must acknowledge the growing wildfire threat, exacerbated by rising temperatures and drought.

Napa Firewise's pre-fire mitigation mission is based on anticipation. The organization has been implementing proactive solutions to build a fire-resilient legacy for generations to come. Recognizing the wildfire trifecta of weather, topography, and fuel, Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCFF) understood it could not command the winds or reshape the mountains, so it focuses on intelligently modifying the fuels that feed the flames.

NCFF has evolved into an integrated provider of wildfire resilience services, functioning as a singular hub for comprehensive solutions that support residents, commercial businesses, and communities. With the strategic support of Napa County, NCFF has secured significant grants that directly fund critical fuel reduction projects throughout the county. NCFF empowers residents through cost-share programs, enabling them to actively defend their properties, and leverages its expertise to offer strategic consulting to landowners and businesses.

Acknowledging that changing climate conditions now demand year-round preparedness, NCFF operates with a bias towards action. The organization showcases its commitment through projects that transcend city borders, safeguarding both rural and suburban regions of Napa County.

In the Atlas Peak corridor, NCFF created a critical evacuation route by improving existing roads to provide safe passage for residents and first responders. In Capell Valley and Coombsville, it engineered vital fire road arteries to slow the spread of wildfire and improve firefighting access. At Timberhill Park, a protective buffer was established, safeguarding the neighborhoods of Browns Valley and Partrick Rd. In Angwin, NCFF successfully removed more than 105,000 cubic feet of potential fuel (grasses, brush, trees, dead organic matter).

NCFF has gone beyond mitigating risk, cultivating a culture of resilience. Through synergistic partnerships and forest health grants, the organization is restoring local ecosystems. Demonstrating that wildfire mitigation and ecological restoration are not mutually exclusive, NCFF projects have enhanced carbon sequestration, bolstered watershed health, and ensured the long-term vitality of Napa's natural resources at the Yountville Veterans Home and Pacific Union College forest. The organization is actively shaping a future where wildfire resilience and environmental stewardship go hand-in-hand.

“Waiting for a wildfire is not an option,” explained Joseph Nordlinger, NCCF CEO. “We are taking proactive steps to build resilience layers with CAL FIRE to achieve more rapid containment and extinguishment.”

NCCF’s latest initiative focuses on Enhanced Resilience Sites. Recognizing that true resilience extends beyond wildfire preparedness, it has been developing designated areas that integrate fuel reduction with watershed restoration and habitat enhancement. Resilience activities in these topographically strategic sites include vegetation thinning, hardened structures, mapped water resources, access, and utilities such as backup generators, multiple power feeds, and backup water tanks.

“These Enhanced Resilience Sites are a crucial part of our strategy to protect Napa Valley. NCCF will create 100 sites in 10 years,” explained Nordlinger.

These sites serve as models for holistic land management, demonstrating how wildfire mitigation can simultaneously bolster water resources, support biodiversity, and protect vital carbon storage. NCCF emphasized that what happens on the hillsides of Napa County directly impacts the valley floor, from water to wildfire. To fund these critical projects, and to assist disadvantaged private landowners, the organization looks to raise \$2.25 million annually from private donors, supplemented by grants and participating landowner fees.

### **Actions You Can Take:**

Napa Firewise will continue to take action to shape the future, evolving and adapting to find proactive solutions. It encourages residents to:

- evaluate their own risk and take part in resiliency efforts by joining your fire safe council
- subscribe to Napa Firewise communications,
- consider investing in a resilient future through contributions to Napa Firewise projects or donations to your local fire safe council.

Visit [napafirewise.org](http://napafirewise.org) or email [info@napafirewise.org](mailto:info@napafirewise.org) to learn more.

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*Photo Caption: A pre-burn briefing for the 50-acre prescribed burn in the Wildhorse Valley area of South Napa in November 2024. A collaborative effort with NCCF, CAL FIRE/Napa County Fire, and Napa City Fire Department. Photo credit: Michael Cuffe.*

