

Our June meeting took place on Wednesday, June 5, at 6:30 pm at the Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. Our July meeting will take place on Wednesday, July 3, at 6:30 pm at the Bass Lake Firehall. All are welcome to attend. We had four guests that attended our June meeting: Beth Caples, Aubreanna McKeever, Lee Leighton, and Courtney Acree. We were happy to have them contribute to our meeting. We are also happy that Courtney Acree has decided to join our department! Welcome, Courtney! We are looking forward to working with you. Thank you for volunteering to help the residents and visitors of Ellsburg and the surrounding communities.

We are planning two big events this summer. The annual Melrude parade and picnic will take place on Saturday, July 6, from noon until 2 pm at the picnic grounds by the Melrude Town Hall and Firehall located at 1767 Melrude Road. The Melrude Community Club is hosting the picnic and selling the raffle tickets. There will be a parade, which anyone can participate in. We have decided not to put our large engines and tankers in the parade this year. It has become too difficult to find a place to turn them around and bring them back. It is also too difficult to see children darting onto the road to pick up candy. The engines and tankers will be on display at the firehall, but we will put our smaller vehicles in the parade. And yes, there will be candy! There will also be games, prizes, things to give away, and raffles. The food and games are free, but make sure that you bring enough money for all the great baskets and other things that will be raffled. There were some wonderful things last year, and we are hoping for the same this year. Raffle tickets are \$1.00 a piece for the baskets, and \$2.00 a piece for the bigger items. You are welcome to donate a basket to be raffled off. You are also welcome to put something into our donation boot at our fire table. We would be very grateful. We are trying to raise funds to purchase a new Jaws-of-Life to help us extricate victims stuck in a vehicle. Please stop by our table! We will have goodies and literature to give away, and we always love to chat. And yes, there will be water soakers, water balloons, plush Dalmatians, and the pie-eating contest!

This year, National Night Out is on Tuesday, August 6. We will have this free event at our Bass Lake Firehall on Mink Road. I think that everyone who attended last year enjoyed the food, entertainment, and just being able to sit and chat with their neighbors. Obviously, the children enjoyed the games and water balloons! We are still planning this event, and we hope that you will plan on joining us.

Lee Leighton, from East Bass Lake, has organized a group of volunteers to help with some projects at the firehall. They came on May 18 to straighten up our upstairs storage area, organized nuts and bolts, painted a trailer, and mounted a ladder and more lights on our rescue vehicle. On June 8, they came again to organize our outside storage container. We are very grateful to these "Friends of the EVFD". They really help us out by doing things that we just never get around to do. Thanks so much for your help!

On June 12, members of the Ellsburg, Cotton, Central Lakes, Virginia, and Kelsey fire departments, as well as Lee Leighton and Cody Anderson, met at the home of Todd and Megan Julin in Cotton to learn about the Minnesota Firewise Program. Gloria Erickson from the Firewise program, and Jeff Jackson from the DNR were the instructors. The Firewise program, sponsored by the MN DNR, assesses the homes built in the woods and fields of MN and makes recommendations to the homeowners on how to increase the chances that these homes could survive a wildfire. This program is not only for firefighters. It is for all of our residents. In the early 90's, experiments were done to determine why some areas and homes burned in a wildfire, but others didn't. Fuel was the key. Fuel for a wildfire in our area comes in the form of pine needles, mulch, leaves, and evergreen trees. When these materials are around a house, it only takes a spark or ember to get that fire going and for it to spread to the house. If there is a fire at your residence, could a fire department find your address and get an engine down your driveway? Gloria and Jeff taught us how to assess a residence.

Make sure that your red, reflective, sign with your house number is on a 6 foot pole close to the road and visible from both directions. Is the entrance to your driveway a tight entrance or one in

which vehicles can easily turn into? Cut trees and brush along the driveway to maintain a minimum clearance of 15 feet wide by 15 feet high to allow emergency vehicles to enter. Can a vehicle turn around in your driveway by your house? Your driveway should not end right at your front steps. Clear and mow an area where a vehicle can do a 3-point turn or fire trucks can set up.

Develop a 30 foot defensible space around your home. This space should have short, green grass, which makes fire stop. If there is a slope, increase the defensible space. Fire can go up a slope much faster than down a slope. Needle bearing trees are extremely flammable. Needles are the main wildland fire fuel. The needles from conifers close to your home can coat your roof and deck, get into your soffits and louvered vents, pile up in your gutters, and layer the ground. An ember from a fire could easily ignite any of these areas and result in a house fire. Replace conifer trees in your 30 foot space with hardwood trees, or space the pines far enough apart so that their crowns are 6 feet apart. Prune the lower branches of conifer trees at least 6 feet from the ground and remove any underbrush. These are suggestions, but not everyone wants to remove all the trees around their house. My house sits in the middle of an old Christmas tree farm. There is no way that I can get rid of all of those trees. So, there are other things that can be looked at to mitigate this fire risk.

Asphalt shingles can hold onto needles. The cheapest shingles that you can buy today are still better than good shingles bought 15-20 years ago. This is because today's shingles contain a fire retardant. If your shingles are old, replace them. Better yet, get a metal roof. Put fine metal screening over your attic louver vents to keep out debris. Cover your soffits. If you have a lot of needles and leaves that build up in your gutters, clean them frequently, or get rid of your gutters. Wood siding ignites easily. Paint it with fire retardant paint and caulk all the bottom seams closed. Vinyl siding melts but does not burn easily. Steel siding is good. Do not install siding all the way to the ground. Leave at least a 2 foot cement border. Don't mulch around the house. Use rock. Clean out under your deck and then put a fine skirting on to prevent needles and leaves from accumulating. Consider replacing your wooden deck boards with the maintenance free plastic wood options available today.

Keep firewood and LP tanks that are more than 150 pounds 30 feet away from your house. A full LP tank (at least 80% full) is relatively safe from rupture. A tank that is only 1/3 full can build up gases and rupture easily. It is safer for seasonal landowners to fill up their tanks before they leave for the winter. Don't store gas cans, open boats, or other machinery close to your home.

These are all just suggestions for improving the survivability of your property near a wildfire. No one will come to your home and demand that you widen your driveway, cut your trees... But if you would like someone to walk around your property with you to make recommendations, call us or visit us at the parade and picnic, or National Night Out. We are here for you!

