



## Preparing for Wildfire in Alaska's Residential Areas

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### Alaska Fire Science Consortium

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Dr. Jen Schmidt (UAA) and retired Alaska forester John See tackle several practical questions about wildfire risk for residents of the Anchorage area in the new, illustrated 75-page report *Advancing Wildfire Preparedness and Planning in Anchorage*. The study was part of the [Arctic Urban Risks and Adaptations \(AURA\)](#) project, funded by the National Science Foundation. The science team worked closely with the Anchorage Fire Department and community councils. The authors make a poignant case (see right) for thinking about these questions ahead of time:

#### AM I PREPARED FOR WILDFIRE?

- What is the wildfire risk level where I live?
- What preparations are necessary for my family's safety if we need to evacuate?
- What can I do to improve the chances of my home surviving a wildfire?
- Is there any help available to assess my property's risk of a wildfire?
- Can working with my neighbors help to identify or improve egress routes in my subdivision?
- Is my wildfire risk greater if I live in an area that is not part of a MOA fire service area?
- Is it important to look for a home with fire hydrants or water sources close by?

The paper explores preparedness strategies, including: developing alternate egress routes, preparing homes through Firewise inspections and treatments (<https://forestry.alaska.gov/>), practicing evacuation

drills in neighborhoods, improving public notification systems, and working as a community to prepare.

*"One of the motivating factors for this report was the tragic . . . 2018 Camp Fire that burned over Paradise, California, in which at least 85 people died (Alexander et al. 2021). Many of these victims were attempting to evacuate the area to safety. A similar scenario could evolve [in] dozens of other locations within the Municipality of Anchorage if first responders are prevented from reaching the incident due to road blockage from active fire behavior. The time to focus on this problem is now, before the embers rain down . . ."*

Warming climate is increasing fire danger, with the two highest fire danger days on record in the Matsu valley within the last five years. Do you live in an area with recognized limitations to egress if a fire threatened? Did you know that Anchorage area homeowners have created 800+ acres of survivable space by treating areas around some 2,000 homes? Many home buyers are unaware that steep grades, "one way in" limited access roads and low-flow private wells are a significant challenge to first responders. This project mapped road networks and wildfire exposure levels in detail and held community meetings to discuss problems and solutions. Some products include a tool to determine your property's wildfire exposure level, a "hit list" of potential strategic fuel treatment areas, and mapping "nodes" or traffic intersections that will be valuable for law enforcement during evacuations for any cause.

[Download the report HERE.](#)

<https://sites.google.com/alaska.edu/jenschmidt/wildfire/egress>



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