

Oracle Fire Department receives \$24K grant to create community fuel break

By John Hernandez
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The Oracle Fire Department (OFD) has been busy improving the safety of Oracle from fire damage by creating a “community fuel break” in one of the most hazardous spots in the area.

A \$24,000 grant allowed them to create a mile long leg, 132-foot wide fuel break that extends from Mount Lemmon Road heading north past the Waste Management transfer station. The area borders Oracle State Park and homes along Blazing Star Road. It is part of an 18-mile long community fuel break that is being worked on.

The area was previously covered with dense vegetation and trees which posed a severe fire hazard.

“It was so thick, you couldn’t walk through it,” said Larry Southard, OFD Battalion Chief and Fire Prevention Officer.

The Oracle Fire Department, working with the Arizona State Forestry Division and their Wildland Fire Crew from the Arizona Department of Corrections, were able to clear the vegetation and build the fuel break.

“The purpose of a fuel break isn’t to stop the fire, but to change the type of fire behavior making it more manageable,” said Southard. “It makes it easier for fire suppression; it puts the brakes on the fire.”

About six homes in the immediate area are directly impacted by the fuel break and many houses west of these homes are being indirectly protected.

The Oracle State Park forest area is also protected from the structures should they catch fire.

Assistant Fire Management Officer Karl Sieglaff and Larz Garcia, Grants Specialist for the Arizona State Forestry Division, were in Oracle on Monday, Sept. 13, to inspect the fuel break. They were pleased with the work that had been done and felt that the objectives of protecting structures were met.



Photo: L to R: Karl Sieglaff, Larry Southard, Tina Acosta, and Larz Garcia.



The thickness of the brush before cutting.

Larz also spoke about the impact of fuel break on the natural habitat of the area.

“When you thin out the vegetation, in time you are benefiting the animal corridors and the native plants,” he said.

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The community fuel break is only part of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that is being implemented in and around Oracle. Community Wildfire Protection Plans are developed with communities and government agencies to identify wildfire hazards and to determine actions to minimize the dangers if wildfires should occur. CWPPs are also a requirement and make it easier to access important Federal funding sources.

The fuel break project is a collaboration between the State Parks, Arizona Department of Forestry and the Oracle Fire Department.

Charlotte Poole, a member of the Oracle Firewise Board, is very interested in the fuel break.

“When I learned that Larry Southard, Battalion Chief of the OFD, had applied for and received the grants necessary to improve the fuel break around Oracle, I had to see the segment currently

worked on,” Poole said. “I was amazed at the impact and could see it will protect Oracle residents from fires spreading from our beautiful forests.”

She continued, “Homeowners on the edge of town have done a great job of clearing their land and with the state land and National Forest land cleared, we will have a much needed buffer so the fire could just lay down and not spread. It’s quite impressive and well worth checking out how good it looks.”

Poole and other members of the Firewise Board are very grateful to the Oracle Fire Department and Department of Forestry for a job well done.



Arizona State Forestry workers from Arizona Department of Corrections doing brush abatement work above Cody Loop in Oracle.

Workers from the Arizona State Prison in Florence have been doing a fantastic job according to homeowners in the area.



The fuel break area after brush abatement.