

## A New Resident Takes Action

By Joe N.

As a new homeowner on wooded property on Dry Creek Road, I started by gathering as much information as I could about my new surroundings. I then developed an action plan by coordinating with my new neighbors and the Mount Veeder community. Realizing that risk mitigation for wildland fire is a big undertaking that is never really finished, I decided to approach it in phases. My first steps were to sign up for local alert systems, learn more about wildland fire risk and mitigation, and get involved with the local fire response community.

To get information to help me think about the surrounding forest from a fire risk mitigation and conservation standpoint, I contacted the Napa County Resource Conservation district. The NRCD referred me to two important resources to get the process started – local tree expert Bill Pramuk and Cal Fire representative Jill Butler.

Bill Pramuk visited my property and quickly identified the tree species. He helped me to understand which ones are the most flammable (the conifers and bay laurels) and which are good barrier trees (live oaks, madrones, toyons) and he also told me how tree root structure contributes to erosion control and soil retention on steep terrain. Bill also explained approaches for thinning and pruning trees and provided a list of local companies who can do the grunt work of thinning the forest, expanding defensible space and chipping the resultant brush. I chose Bruce Hurst Tree Service to do the largest phases of this work.

I discussed a number of topics with Cal Fire, including having adequate water storage and pumping ability for fire response, maintaining defensible space around homes, structures and access roads and potential ignition sources of fires as well as the speed of an advancing fire under certain conditions (north wind, southeast wind). Cal Fire also gave me information about the local Mount Veeder Fire Safe Council and the Dry Creek-Lokoya Volunteer Fire department.

I wanted to introduce myself to my neighbors, request a meeting and explain some of the projects I was undertaking, so I went to Google maps and identified the surrounding ten property owners and neighbors. After I drove down the street and looked at street addresses, I consulted county property records to get the addresses of the property owners. I then hand-delivered a written letter to every individual's Dry Creek Road mailbox as well as mailing the same letter to the addresses I obtained from the county. Nine of the ten property owners responded. All were supportive, several were undertaking similar actions, several had already done a lot of work, and several requested information and contacts to be shared in order to undertake similar programs on their own properties. I met with and spoke to each neighbor and got all their contact information for future coordination.

Because my property is on an east-facing slope with the house situated in the middle of the property with half the forest above the house and half below, the priority was on fuel reduction below the house. Bruce Hurst forest crews completed the first phase of fuel reduction on 6 acres below the house over the course of 2 months. At the same time, I had a 5,000 gallon water storage tank installed for better fire response. I have purchased an additional 5,000 gallons of water storage capacity to be hooked up for rain catchment from eaves and gutters and will be installing a 10,000 gallon storage tank on the property in 2015 that will also be filled from rain catchment.

Additionally, I contacted the Mount Veeder Fire Safe Council through their website ([www.mtveederfiresafe.org](http://www.mtveederfiresafe.org)) and asked to join them in order to become more involved in planning and advocacy for the protection of this incredible wildland location. I also introduced myself to Chief Erik Madison and Assistant Chief Gary Green of the Dry Creek-Lokoya Volunteer Fire Department and submitted an application to become a volunteer firefighter. Members of MVFSC provided more definitive answers to the question of how to be alerted to a fire in the area -- sign up for Nixle ([www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com)), join Mount Veeder Nextdoor ([mountveeder.nextdoor.com](http://mountveeder.nextdoor.com)), and become a volunteer firefighter.

The second phase of my risk mitigation strategy will be to complete fuel reduction on the 6 acres above my house and to build pathways and trails through it that are wide enough for an ATV. In the event a fire is advancing up the slope from Dry Creek Road, I want to have escape routes to get to the Old Ridge Road shaded fuel break. I am working with the owner of the vineyard just above my property to install two new gates along their perimeter fence for use in the event of an emergency and they have been entirely accommodating. I also plan to install a pump and hydrant connection to my stored water supply.

I've learned a lot through this process. There are three conscious or unconscious choices you can make with regard to the risk of wildland fire:

- 1) Denial of fire risk and avoidance of action
- 2) Fear of fire risk without action or
- 3) Education with thoughtful action

Practically speaking, there are real things we can do to reduce fire risk with the financial means at our disposal. Phase it out, don't get overwhelmed by it and most importantly take action. We live in a really beautiful place so get out into the woods and enjoy the surroundings while you are thinking about how to protect it.