

# Big puppy and little stuff

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Can you believe it? Our puppy Maggie turned one year old on April Fool's Day! No joke: our 86-pound Akita pup is huge! And since larger breeds stay puppies longer than smaller breeds, we'll continue to enjoy her sweet, playful personality for some time.

Maggie has definitely joined our family "pack." We enjoy the little things that she does: sharing her toys, keeping herself occupied when we're outside working, and letting us know that the wild turkeys are on the deck again. She loves to travel, especially to the beach!

Of course, going for walks in our woods is the best. Maggie notices the smallest things—spiders, butterflies, a hawk up riding the lofts. Watching her try to climb a tree to catch a lizard is just hilarious! Isn't it always the little things in life that mean the most?

And yes, *this is the time of year* when all of us in the Applegate need to address those annual "little things": leaves, pine needles, weeds. Even though here in Buncom we've had *over 29 inches* of rain since the "rain year" began on the first of October, *we are not guaranteed a free pass* during fire season! We could still have plenty of wildfires this summer, caused by humans and lightning.

**Why are fine fuels** so important? Because, *over 90 percent* of homes that burn in a wildfire do so because of flying embers, *not* from the main front of a fire. Embers or firebrands can travel up to a mile ahead of a nearby wildfire. Where they land is a crapshoot; however, what they find if they land on or near your house *is something you can affect!*

If you're like us, you didn't fully understand or appreciate the threat of wildfire when you bought or built your home in the Applegate. A home's location, design, and building materials all play a role in how fire-safe the home can be.

We can't change the location of our house. So, we make sure our driveway is well-marked and vegetation is thinned for safe access/egress. Living in the woods, we thin our trees 30-100 feet out from the house, limb up ladder fuels, and remove dead materials. Extra thinning can also help mitigate a steep slope or the not-so-safe location of a propane tank.

**The location of your home in relation to other buildings** (your "home ignition zone" or HIZ) is important: *radiant heat* causes fire to spread from structure to structure. Thirty feet is the *minimum* safe distance

to keep between buildings, whether it's a garage, shed or neighboring houses. If you haven't already, please define *your* HIZ right away, so that you can make sure you're being as safe as possible this summer. Then, keep it clean and clear!

We usually can't change our home's building design, so we have to be aware of and inspect eaves, overhangs, open spaces under decks, "valleys" in the roof, curved tile roofing, and re-entrant (interior) corners of the building. Debris from birds or insects, as well as dry leaves, needles, twigs, or moss, can all collect in these spots, providing beds of fuel for embers. Remove all fine fuels **prior to and during** fire season.

Building materials can, of course, be replaced as a home ages. Increasing a roof's fire rating, and changing to double-pane windows are great improvements. Siding and deck materials should be clean and well maintained; if replacement is needed, a fire-resistant alternative should be considered.

**Mitigation and maintenance** are the operative words here. If you can't immediately change out a building



Maggie, the big tree-climbing puppy, is after another lizard.

feature to something more fire-safe, then keep it in good shape. Do *at least annual* vegetation thinning and/or maintenance work. Lastly, be aware of and monitor your vulnerable spots during fire season. And have a hose ready!

**Lots of "little things" to consider** for a safe fire season in the Applegate. I sure wish Maggie could help us haul slash!

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## "This has been a great opportunity to bring the neighborhood together."

### ■ FIREWISE

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manzanita and other ladder fuels next to the homes. They were greatly appreciated by all the neighbors. Carey Chaput from the Applegate Fire Department also came by to offer her support and expertise. We all got together for a barbecue lunch to celebrate our hard work. This has been a great opportunity to bring the neighborhood together to work on our defensible space and also take time to visit with each other. We look forward to receiving our certification soon."

**What is a Firewise Community?** Simply, a group of homeowners who live in the wildland-urban interface and want to be better prepared against losing their homes

to wildfire. They work together with local agencies (ODF, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, the county, etc.) as appropriate to develop a plan that addresses and mitigates their risks; they form a leadership board; they pledge to maintain work annually; they eagerly share experiences with other community members who are interested in being Firewise, and they eventually get national Firewise Community recognition.

There are no size requirements—7, 20 or 50 homes all qualify. A stretch of road, a cluster of homes, a neighborhood or small town could all work

together to be more fire-safe, prepared, and Firewise by taking these steps.

**Step 1:** An interested rural landowner (someone like you) starts talking to neighbors about working together to make their neighborhood homes more fire-resilient. Or, they call ODF to talk about how to get started, to find out what the process is, or exactly what they should say to their neighbors and friends to gain interest.

**Step 2:** The group of interested homeowners meets to talk about the process of becoming Firewise. A board is elected to lead the group. Some ideas, concerns, or specific tasks might be initially identified as work to be accomplished.

The group agrees to participate in this process, to help with the work, and to maintain the work annually. The board contacts the local ODF Firewise-fuels specialist and provides the participants' information. A site visit by ODF is then scheduled.

**Step 3:** ODF contacts the neighbors, makes appointments, and conducts the neighborhood Risk Assessment: where are the fuels, what are the threats, what needs to be accomplished to make this community fire-safe and Firewise?

**Step 4:** An action plan is agreed upon by all, a date is set for the work party, and the work is done by a crew from ODF and the neighbors. Everyone relaxes at the end of that work day with a good meal, good friends, and a sense of accomplishment.

**Step 5:** ODF submits the neighborhood, their assessment, and their completed work to the national Firewise organization for accreditation.

**Step 6:** Accreditation is received, along with Firewise Community signs to post, and a date for next year's work party is set!

**Southwest Oregon's ODF currently has grant dollars** to cover the costs of its work crews! So, if you are interested in learning more, contact Herb Johnson (Jackson County) at 541-664-3328 or Joe Pryts (Josephine County) at 541-474-3152. And talk to your neighbors!

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*For more information about Firewise Communities, including the Recognition Program, visit [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).*



This ODF work crew helped seven households off Griffin Lane clean up defensible space in order to be accredited as a Firewise Community.

**Griffin Lane-Anderson Firewise Community Work Project**  
April 13, 2016  
Spend the morning working on your defensible space; 30-100' around your home.

Are your gutters clean?  
Twigs picked up next to your home?  
Leaves picked up next to your home?  
Trees limbed up to 12'?  
Is your portion of Griffin Lane clean from debris?

Reward yourself for all your hard work or work that's already done.  
Workers' barbecue at Peggy's about 12:30pm.  
Beer & brats will be provided.  
Bring a side or a sweet to share if you wish.  
BOYS if you don't like beer! RSVP to Peggy

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