

Songbird Community Assessment June 1, 2023

Contributors:

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Tyler Corbin -- BLM,

Ryan Cox -- Colorado State Forest Service,

Scott Nielsen – Durango Fire Protection District

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Alex Graf -- Wildfire Adapted Partnership

2023 Songbird Community Wildfire Risk Assessment

Purpose

1. The Community Assessment is intended to help Songbird homeowners plan for the specific wildfire risks and challenges within our community.
2. This assessment will provide a baseline evaluation of Songbird that the SOA Board and its representatives can use to support our community outreach.
3. This assessment and plan will be used to apply for Firewise USA® status.
4. Most importantly, it will serve as a guide for work within the neighborhood to obtain help from Wildfire Adapted Partnership to directly support the efforts of the Songbird community.

On April, 18th 2023 the Songbird neighborhood, in partnership with WAP, conducted a field day walk-through to assess wildfire risks to the community. Representatives Deana Harms and Tyler Corbin from BLM, Ryan Cox from Colorado State Forest Service, Scott Nielsen and Pete Stockwell from Durango Fire Protection District, Alison Layman from La Plata County, Alex Graf from Wildfire Adapted Partnership, Songbird Ambassadors Meg Hearing and Jenny Goodwin, and the Songbird community residents walked all roads in the neighborhood, detailed prioritized wildfire risk reduction activities and had a robust conversation with community members.

All community residents were invited to this scheduled assessment by email. Upon completing this assessment with the local Fire Marshal and WAP affiliates, those attending compiled notes and determined short-term goals and action steps to reduce hazards to Songbird and our homes.

Assessment findings were sent to Songbird residents by email and/or invitation to a community gathering, to which the Wildfire Adapted Partnership County Coordinator and one or more of the professionals who were present during the onsite community assessment were invited.

This assessment is intended to be a resource for our community and the plans developed from it are to be implemented in a collaborative manner and will be updated and modified as needed.

Introduction

Songbird is located in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and has a single point of access and egress; consequently, La Plata County has rated our subdivision as an area of the “highest level of concern” for the risk of damage from wildfire. “When residential development is exposed to extreme wildfire conditions, numerous houses can ignite and burn simultaneously, overwhelming firefighters and reducing fire protection effectiveness” despite our location adjacent to Durango City limits and the proximity of fire hydrants on our streets. “The most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner” (from “Living with Wildfire – A Guide for the Homeowner”).

This community assessment is prepared to reflect the values of the residents of Songbird for reducing hazardous fuels and creating awareness about wildfire issues in our community. It

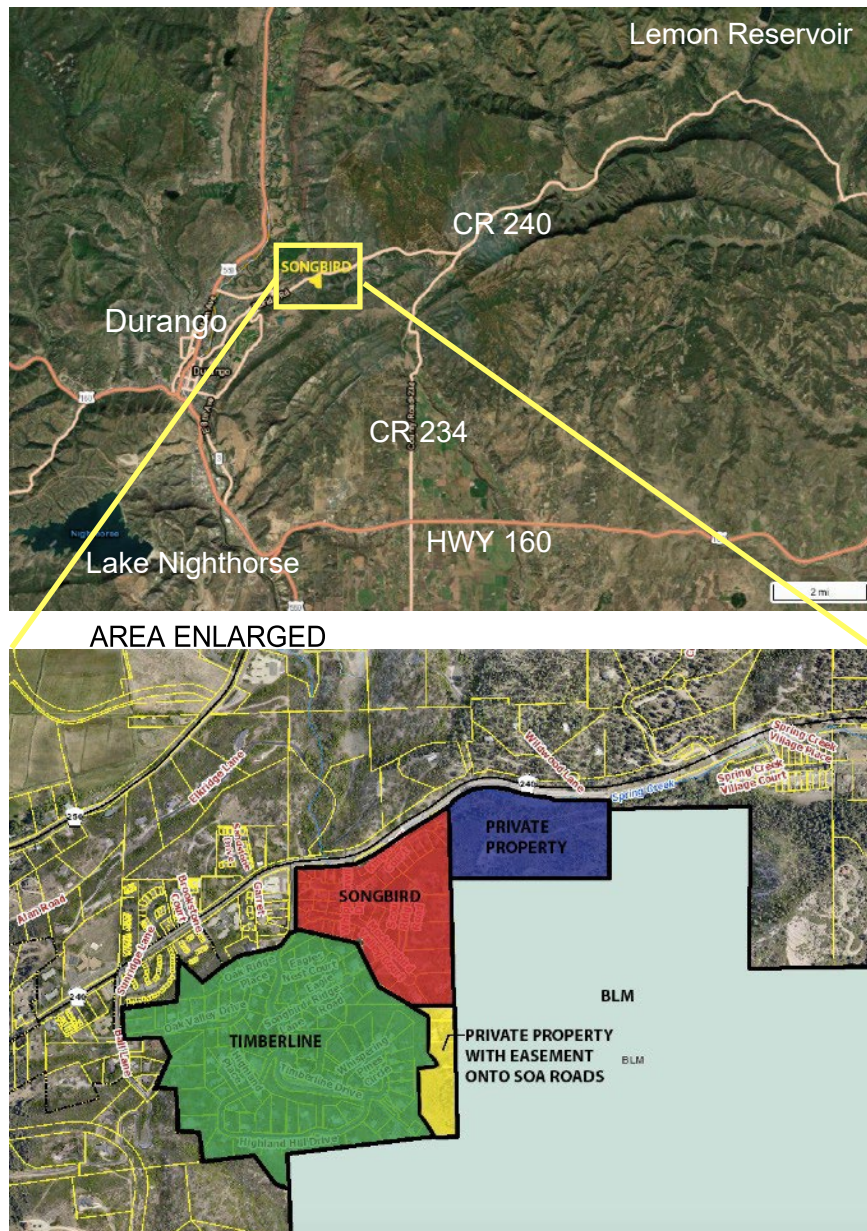
will be a tool that will allow our residents to live in our beautiful woodland urban interface as safe as possible and will be modified as needed.



Location

Songbird is located 3.2 miles east of downtown Durango, Colorado in La Plata County along County Road 240/Florida Road. The latitude is 37.303500N and longitude is 107.833980W. The elevation ranges from 6,700 feet up to 7,200 feet. Along County Road 240, the topography is flat but quickly gains elevation into steep mountainous hillsides to the south.

Our adjacent landowners to the south are residents of Timberline View Estates and three Private Lot owners with an easement to access Songbird roads; to the east are 532 acres of BLM and 20 acres of private property; to the west is the Hornbaker subdivision and beyond the City of Durango; to the north is County Road 240 with private properties in the Elk Ridge subdivision. Songbird is located within the Durango Fire Station 3 district.



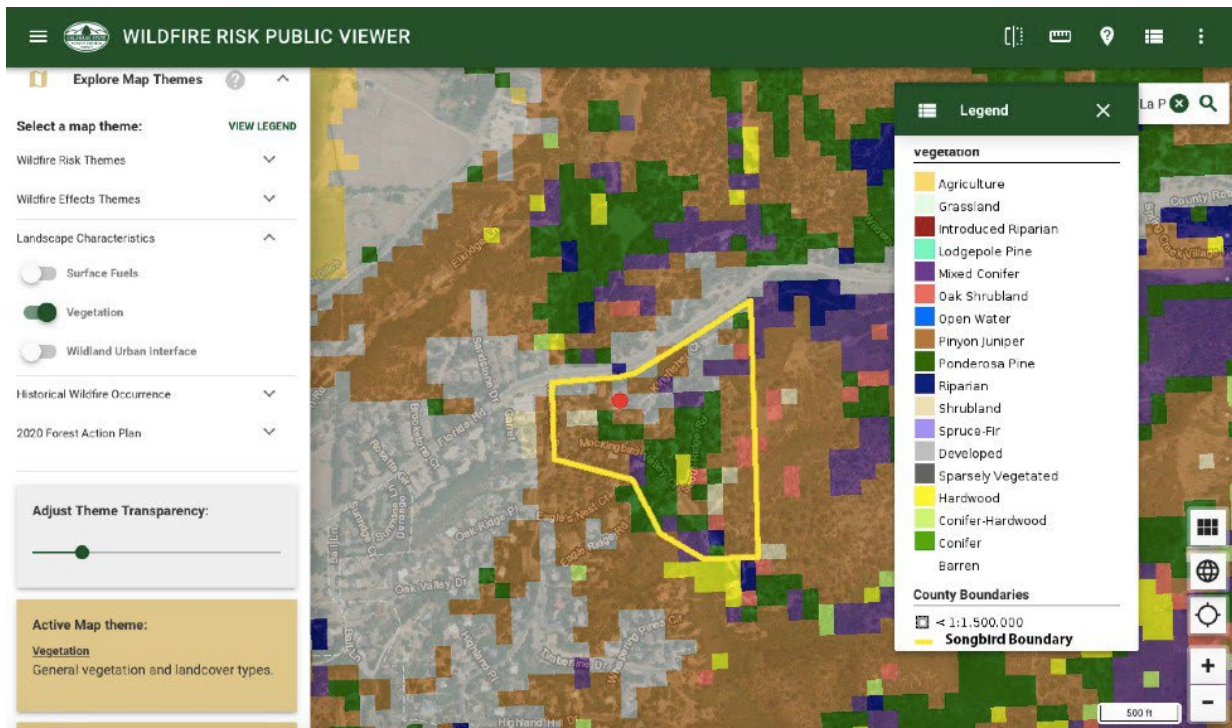
Vegetation

The predominant ground cover is a mixture of urban development and two types of forest: cottonwoods with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain juniper understory, ponderosa pine with Gambel oak understory in the community, and on a larger scale there is more ponderosa pine mixed with spruce/fir with gambel oak, pinion pine and Rocky Mountain juniper understory. The density of vegetation varies from locations throughout the community.

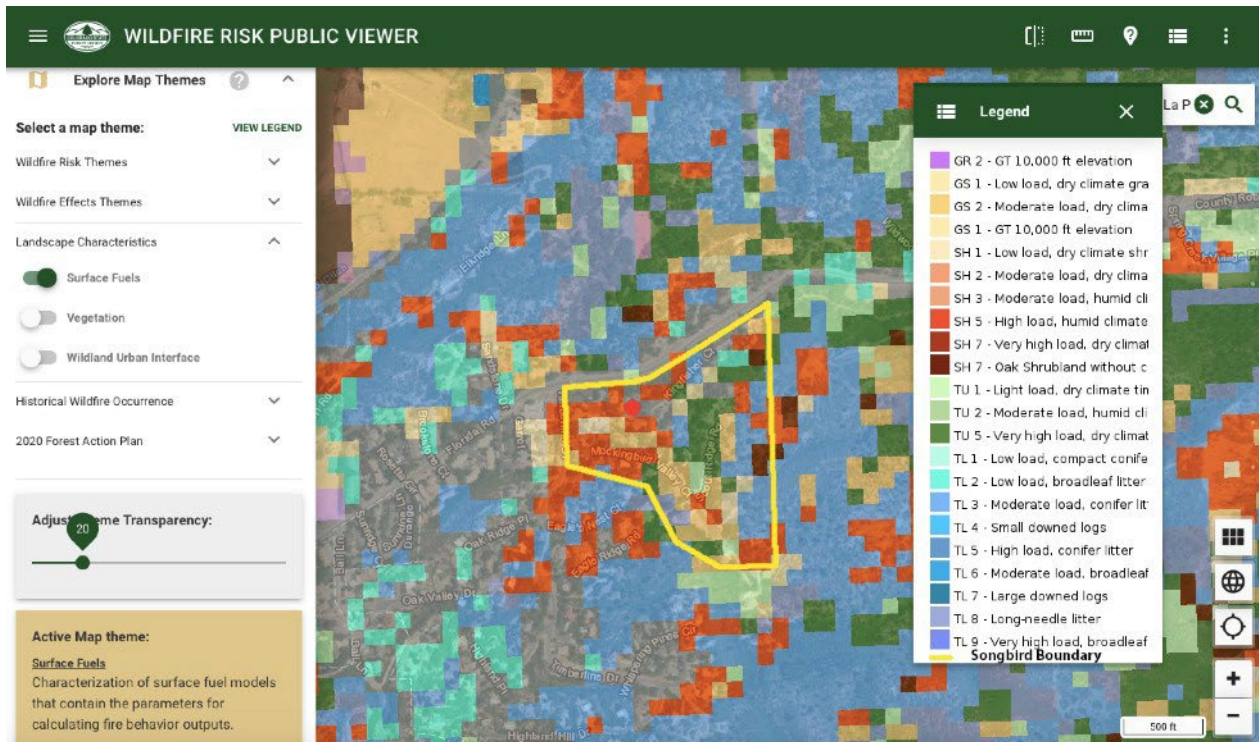
The lower elevation in-between and behind homes along upper Kingfisher Court and lower Mockingbird Valley Court there is dense growth with high load Gambel oak and humid shrubbery. From CR 240 to the highest elevations along Scout Ridge Road and upper Mockingbird Valley Court the subdivision has eight lots that directly border BLM parcels. The BLM land is dense with moderate loads of conifer litter and high loads of dryland shrubbery and Gambel oak.

There are currently three undeveloped vacant lots remaining in the development. While some mitigation has been performed recently, the HOA will continue to work with these owners to ensure a satisfactory wildfire mitigation strategy to minimize fire impacts from the BLM land into our community. The HOA will also continue to work with the eight owners along our eastern border to ensure a satisfactory wildfire mitigation strategy to minimize fire impacts from the BLM into our community.

Vegetation Map by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer

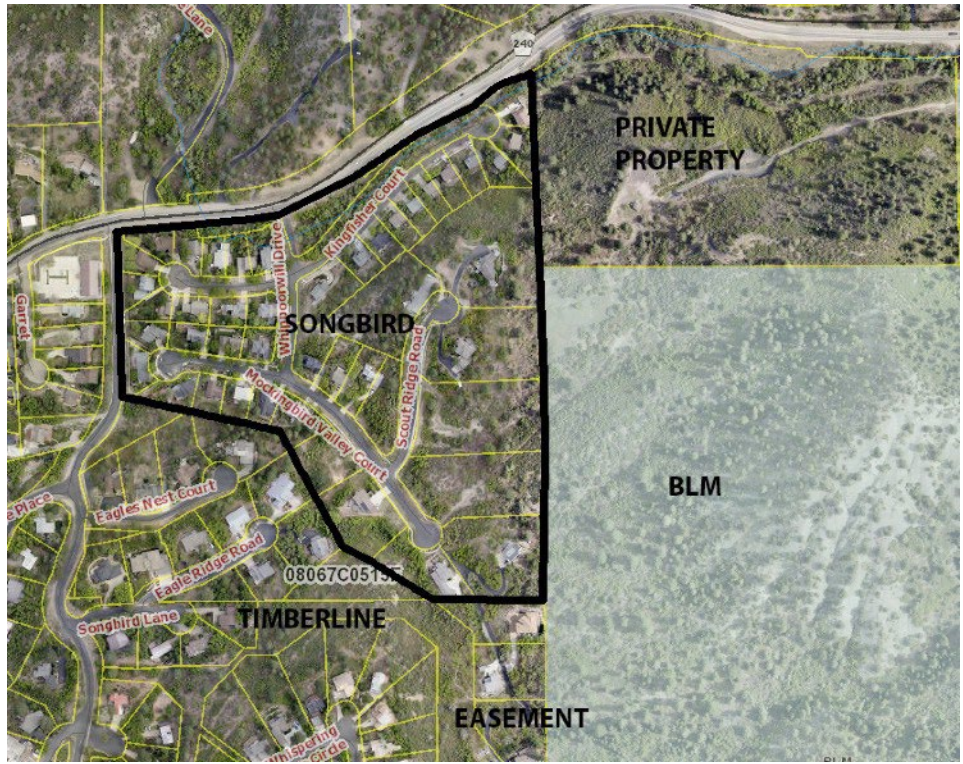


Surface Fuels by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



***To view more information about the Colorado Wildfire Risk Public Viewer map theme descriptions please click link below.**

https://co-pub.coloradoforestatlas.org/docs/CSFS-Wildfire_Risk_Public_Viewer_Map_Theme_Description.pdf



Fire History

La Plata County is no stranger to wildfires and the probability of wildfire occurrence in any given area of the county is very likely. The majority of Songbird’s vegetation types are either fire dependent, or fire adapted with fire being the dominant historical natural disturbance type. In 2002, the Missionary Ridge Fire sent shock waves through the county as it burned over 70,000 acres and 56 homes and outbuildings. Then in 2018, the 416 Fire burned 52,778 acres and caused 1,300 homes and businesses to evacuate. Both the 416 Fire and Missionary Ridge Fire remain in the top 10 largest fires in Colorado history and both took place in La Plata County. The long history of wildfires shows evidence of the active fire regime within the county. For a list of significant fires in La Plata County over a 20-year period, see Table 3. The severity of these fires led to many Community Fire Plans to be developed in 2006 in the region, yet La Plata County aims to have an updated and unifying document as wildfires have become an expected occurrence.

TABLE 3: Significant La Plata County Wildfires Over Twenty-Year Period (2002-2022)		
Date	Fire Name	Size (acres)
2002	Missionary Ridge Fire	73,000
2009	Pinon Fire	111
2011	Sambrito 2	522
2012	Vallecito Fire	1,400
2012	Lightner Fire	57
2012	Goblin Fire	1074
2012	Air Park Fire	500

2012	Stateline Fire: (FireID:637721)	350
2012	X Rock	8
2014	Sunnyside	53
2017	Lightner Creek Fire	412
2018	416 Fire	54,129
2018	358 Fire	51
2020	84 Fire	25
2020	Six Shooter	182
2020	East Canyon Fire	2,905
2021	Vosburg Pike Fire	70
2022	Ute Pass Fire	30
2022	Bear Dance Fire	89
2022	Perins Peak Fire	106
2022	Twin Buttes Fire	3.6

The Community

Songbird has a total acreage of 28.56. Primarily Songbird is composed of private landowners but there is a small amount of community property shared amongst the HOA. This shared property is composed of a one-acre parcel and common areas that are in between our roads and sidewalks. The one-acre parcel runs in between County Road 240 and Kingfisher Court. It is primarily a drainage area for Spring Creek, County Road 240, and Kingfisher Court. In the fall of 2021, spring of 2022 and fall of 2022 the community did a large 6-day fire mitigation project to clear out dead trees and mitigate Gamble oak along Kingfisher Court.

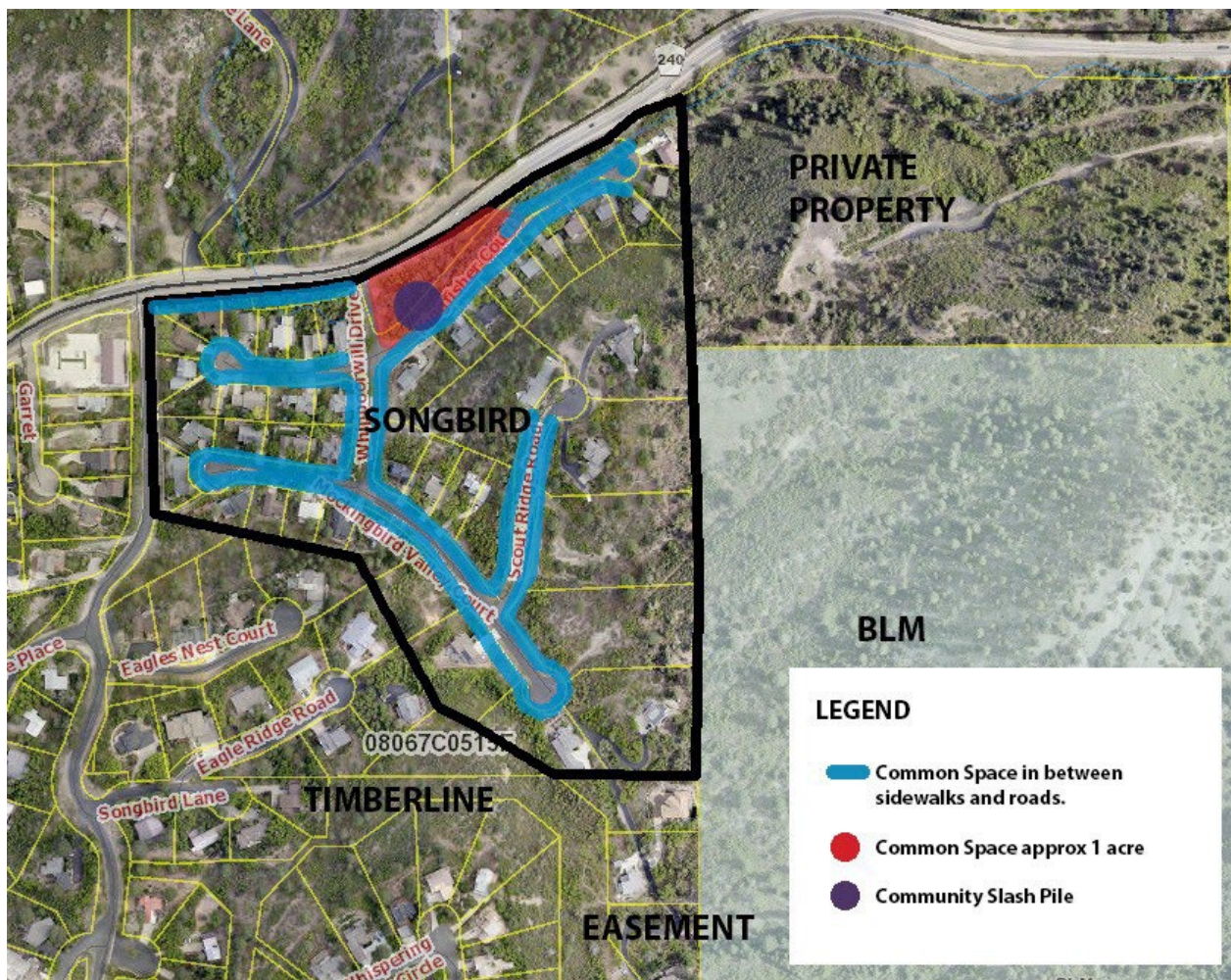
The other community property maintained by the HOA is all common areas that run in between our roads and sidewalks. This area was planted and developed 22 years ago at the commencement of the Songbird development. Primarily these common areas are graveled and have 2 trees per lot consisting of aspen, maple, honey locust, and ash hardwood trees. Some areas have grass and shrubs. Primarily this area is a drainage swale to capture road water runoff and a place for snow storage in the winter. The maintenance of this area entails mowing grass and weeds, trimming trees of dead branches, removing dead trees and re planting trees when required.

There are 45 total lots ranging from .27 acres to 2.39 acres. There are 42 homes with various building materials ranging from stucco, cedar siding, hardy board, and roofs consisting of primarily asphalt shingles and a few metal roofs. Wooden and composite decks are a common feature. There are approximately 120 residents ranging in all ages. The community is mostly full-time residents with a few part-time residents. There are a few full-time rentals. In 2021, the HOA voted to only allow monthly vacation rentals.

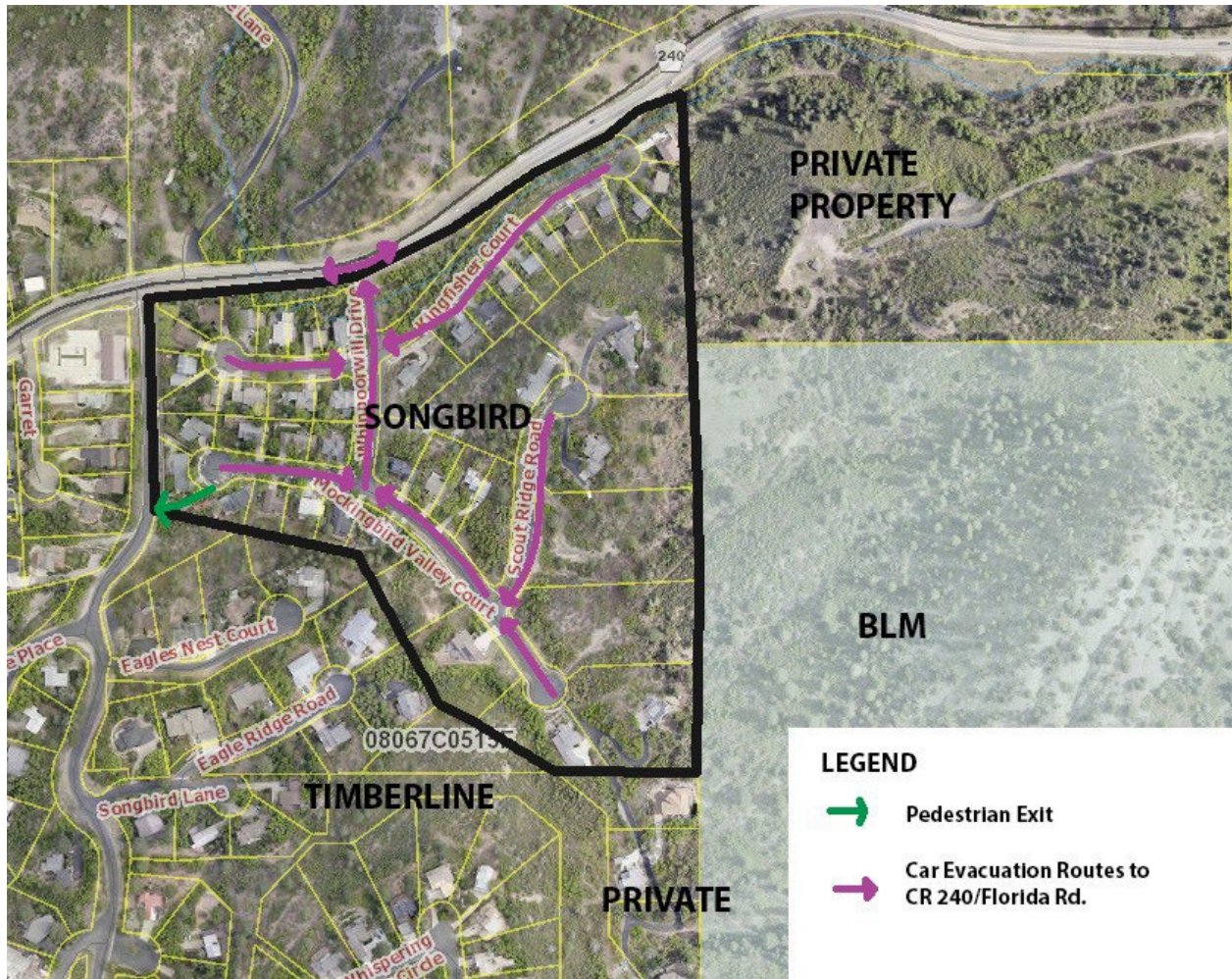
There are 3 private lots at the end of upper Mockingbird Valley Court that have been granted an easement of use onto Songbirds roads. These lots have the option to join the HOA membership at their own discretion.

There is an 8 ft. tall metal fence that wraps around our community along Timberline Drive (west) turning east along CR 240/Florida Rd. and running for 2 lots. Then it picks back up at the entrance east of Whippoorwill Drive and continues along CR 240/Florida for about 200 ft. These fenced areas were installed to reduce sound pollution from entering our community. It has been discussed that due its metal fabrication it could also serve as a fire break from CR 240. It has also been discussed that it would be desirable to finish fencing the holes along CR 240 but there are county easements and drainage issues that may make this difficult.

There is only one main entrance and access into the community off of County Road 240 onto Whippoorwill Drive. The main roads are all paved with asphalt. The width of the roads are at least twenty feet wide. They are all dead ends with cul-de-sacs. The cul-de-sacs are at least forty feet in diameter. There is current street signage but most addresses are affixed onto homes.

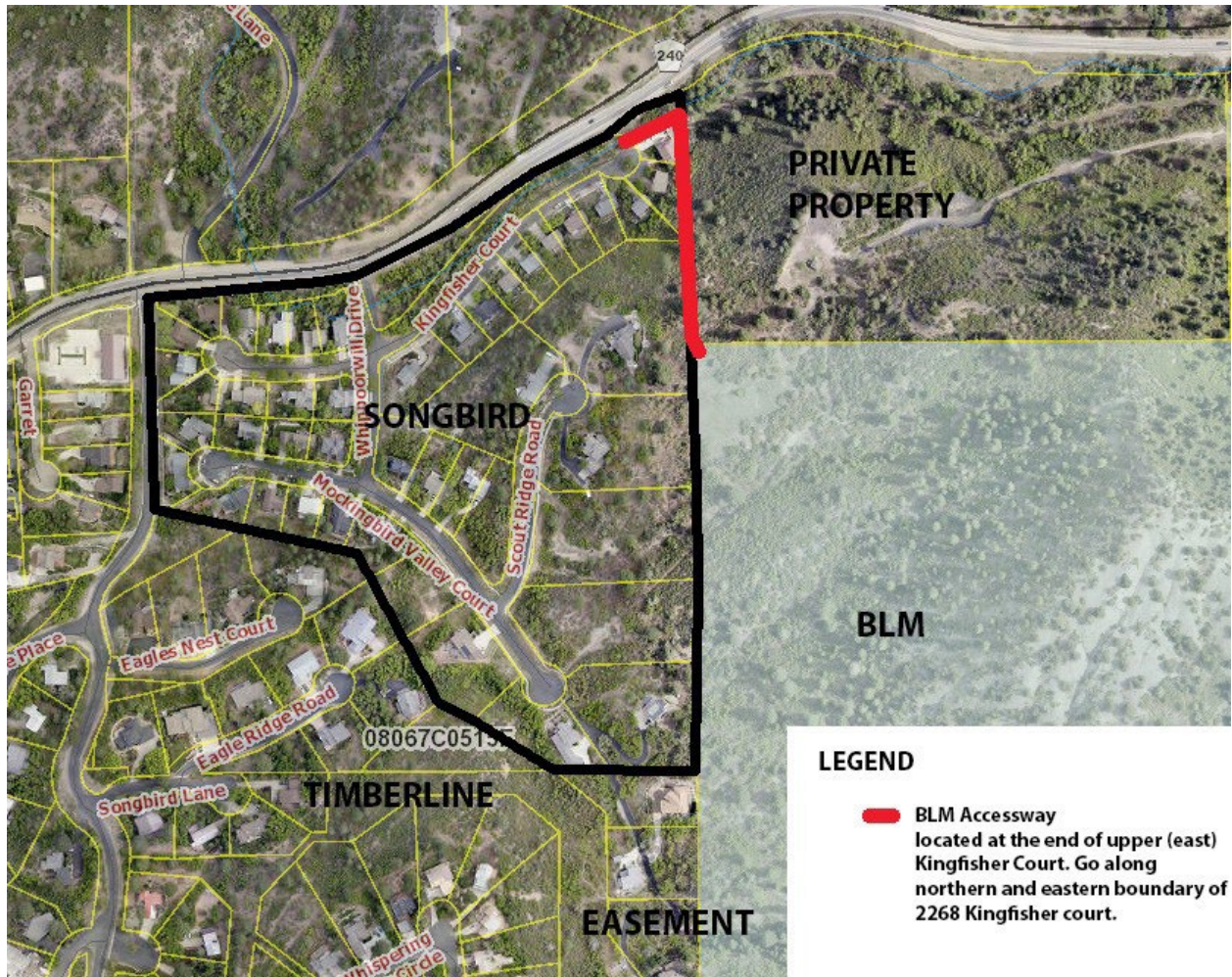


SOA Community Common Spaces



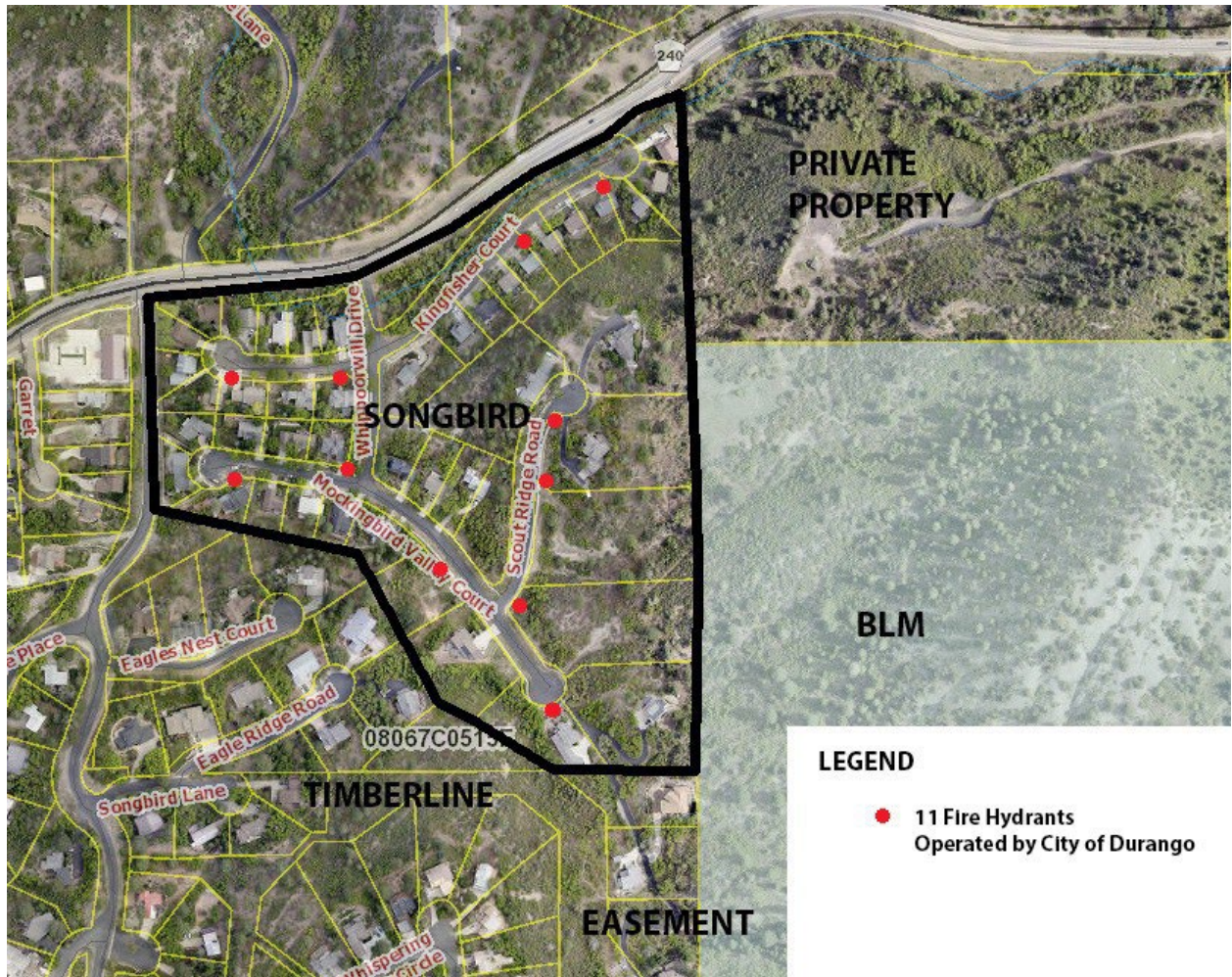
Evacuation Map

Our evacuation map is straight forward due to Songbird only having one egress/ingress onto County Road 240/Florida Road. There is an emergency access easement that cuts between lower Mockingbird Valley Court and onto Timberline Road. This easement is currently paved as a sidewalk and should be used for pedestrian access in case of an emergency. It should never be blocked by parked vehicles. (See map above) The evacuation map is posted at the entrance of Whippoorwill Drive.



BLM Access from SOA

There is BLM access on the upper end of Kingfisher Court (east side) in between our property border and the private property line. (See map above)



Fire Hydrant Locations

Although Songbird is an HOA, it has city water that is maintained from the City of Durango. There are eleven fire hydrants located along the streets of the community maintained by the City of Durango (see map above). The closest water source is the Animas River.

Past and Current Wildfire Preparedness Activities

In 2021, two Songbird members joined Wildfire Adapted Partnership's Neighborhood Ambassador Program. In doing so Songbird qualified for a kickstart grant where we spent 6 days conducting fire mitigation in the one-acre community parcel along County Road 240. This totaled about \$8,800 in mitigation.

In 2021, the HOA designated \$3,500, in 2022 it designated \$5,000, and in 2023 it designated \$5,000 for wildfire mitigation within the community. We also established a community slash pile where we encourage home owners to bring cut slash to a common space for us to chip or remove excess fuels. The Ambassadors have created a webpage on our HOA website that is dedicated to educating our homeowners about CSFS guidelines in regards to the Home Ignition Zone. <http://www.songbirddurango.org/info.php?pnun=862792c6921b01>

The Ambassadors are actively engaging homeowners to perform fire mitigation. Although, it is challenging because almost 90% of our community is private homeowners. Most of whom do not know the wildfire risks to our community.

In the spring of 2023, we had a risk assessment conducted to identify heavy fuel loads and how to actively engage those homeowners. The designated \$5,000 from the HOA will help reduce fuel loads within and along property boundaries. The Ambassadors are currently recording dollars and time spent on individual lots and community projects.

On January 1st, 2023 the following Wildfire Mitigation Policy was adopted by the Songbird Owners Association in coordination with Wildfire Adapted Partnership and the Durango Fire Marshall:

As agreed between state and local officials by the guiding principles from Colorado State Forest Service Defensible Space Zone Guidelines and Wildfire Mitigation Standards, the Songbird Owners Association will adopt the following policy as a guide for owners to fulfill their wildfire mitigation responsibilities specified in the Protective Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions CCRs), Article VII, Paragraph A. "Each owner shall be responsible for complying with the most current Colorado State and Durango Fire District wildfire mitigation guidance found on line...." Due to changes in website construction, the URL referenced in the CCRs is difficult to navigate; so, for the convenience of our owners, the most current version of the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Pamphlet is available in the document's sections of our Songbird Owners' Association website. (www.songbirddurango.org). An amendment to the CCRs to eliminate this difficulty will be drafted in coming months, but in the interim the following URL is the most current HIZ and as supplemented by this letter will be Songbird policy. <https://csfs.colostate.edu/2021/05/10/home-ignition-zone-guide-for-wildfire/>.

The two primary determinants of a home's ability to survive a wildfire are the structure's ignitability and the quality of the surrounding defensible space. Together, these two factors define a concept called the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ), which includes the structure and the area around it. Unfortunately, the Zone guidance is vague on the issue of "vacant" lots and state policy fails even to define what a "vacant lot" is. The Association, WAP representatives, and the Durango Fire Marshall have agreed to use Zone 3 guidance for our two remaining "vacant lots" which we agreed to define as lots without structures. The following policy goes slightly beyond Zone 3 guidance since there is a vast difference in the potential for property damage from a fire

on a vacant lot located in the middle of the forest as opposed to a fire in a vacant lot in the center of a housing development as is the case in Songbird.

Structural Ignitability

- *Ensure the roof has a Class A fire rating*
- *Remove all leaves, needles and other debris from decks, roofs and gutters*
- *Screen attic, roof, eaves and foundation vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh*
- *Screen or wall-in stilt foundations and decks with 1/8-inch metal mesh*
- *Use tempered glass for windows; two or more panes are recommended*
- *Create 6 inches of vertical clearance between the ground and home siding*
- *Replace combustible fencing or gates, at least within 5 feet of the home*

Defensible Space Zones

Creating an effective defensible space involves establishing a series of management zones. Develop these zones around each building on your property, including detached garages, storage buildings, barns and other structures. For more specific information within these zones refer to The Home Ignition Zone Guideline from CSFS or seek guidance from our WAP reps or the Fire Marshall.

- ***Zone 1*** (0-5 feet from the home) *is the area nearest the home and other structures. It requires the most vigilant work to reduce wildfire hazards. This zone is designed to prevent flames from coming in direct contact with the structure. Use nonflammable, hard surface materials in the zone, such as rock, gravel, sand, cement, bare earth or stone/concrete pavers.*
- ***Zone 2*** (5-30 feet from the home) *is the area transitioning away from the home where fuels should be reduced. This is designed to give an approaching fire less fuel, which will help reduce its intensity as it gets nearer to your home or any structures.*
- ***Zone 3*** (30-100 feet from the home) *is the area farthest from the home. It extends 100 feet from the home. This zone focuses on mitigation that keeps fire on the ground, but it's also a space to make choices that can improve forest health. Healthy forests include trees of multiple ages, sizes and species, where adequate growing room is maintained over time. If the distance of 100 feet to the edge of Zone 3 stretches beyond your property lines, it's encouraged to work with adjoining property owners to complete an appropriate defensible space. If your house is on steep slopes or has certain topographic considerations, this zone may be larger.*

Top Priorities for Defensible Space

- *Mow grass and weeds to a height of 4 inches or less. **
- *Rake and remove all pine needles and other flammable debris from a 5-foot radius around the foundation of your home and deck. **
- *Treat or mow shrubs that re-sprout aggressively (such as Gambel oak and threeleaf sumac) every 3-5 years or more depending on growth rates.*
- *Remove branches that hang over the roof and chimney.*

- *Dispose of slash from thinning trees and shrubs by chipping, hauling to a disposal site or piling in open areas for burning later. Any accumulation of slash that's chipped or otherwise accumulated should be isolated 30 feet or more from the home. **
- *Avoid creating continuous areas of wood chips on the ground when chipping logs and/or slash. Break up the layer of wood chips by adding nonflammable material, or allow for wide gaps of at least 3 feet between chip accumulation *address as needed, typically more than once a year.*

Firewood

- *Keep firewood stacked uphill from (or at the same elevation as) any structures, and keep the woodpile at least 30 feet away from the home.*
- *Do not stack firewood between remaining trees, underneath the deck, or on the deck.*
- *Remove flammable vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles.*

Propane Tanks

- *Keep aboveground tanks at least 30 feet from the home, preferably on the same elevation as the house.*
- *Remove flammable vegetation within 10 feet of all propane tanks and gas meters.*

Driveways

- *Maintain at least 10 feet between tree crowns and keep trees a minimum of 30 feet back from each side of the driveway along the entire distance from the house to the main access road. (Can a firetruck drive through/into your driveway?)*
- *Remove any remaining ladder fuels beneath trees after thinning.*
- *Remove any shrubs that are within 10 feet of the outer edge of tree crowns.*
- *Space shrubs apart at least two-and-a-half times their mature height, as measured from the edge of the shrubs.*
- *Post signs at the end of the driveway with your house number that are noncombustible, reflective and easily visible to emergency responders.*

Vacant Lots within a Subdivision

- *Remove any dead trees and shrubs*
- *Maintain at least 10 feet between tree crowns*
- *Remove any remaining ladder fuels beneath trees after thinning.*
- *Remove any shrubs that are within 10 feet of the outer edge of tree crowns.*
- *Treat or mow shrubs that re-sprout aggressively (such as Gambel oak and three leaf sumac) every 3-5 years or more depending on growth rates.*
- *Dispose of slash from thinning trees and shrubs by chipping, hauling to a disposal site, or burning (guidance below).*

Solutions for Managing Slash

- *Properly thin and prune trees and shrubs as you address the Home Ignition Zone. The sticks and other debris left from cutting trees and shrubs is called slash. Slash is a fuel*

for wildfire, so ensure this debris is properly managed on your property. It is critical that any slash is located as far from your house as possible:

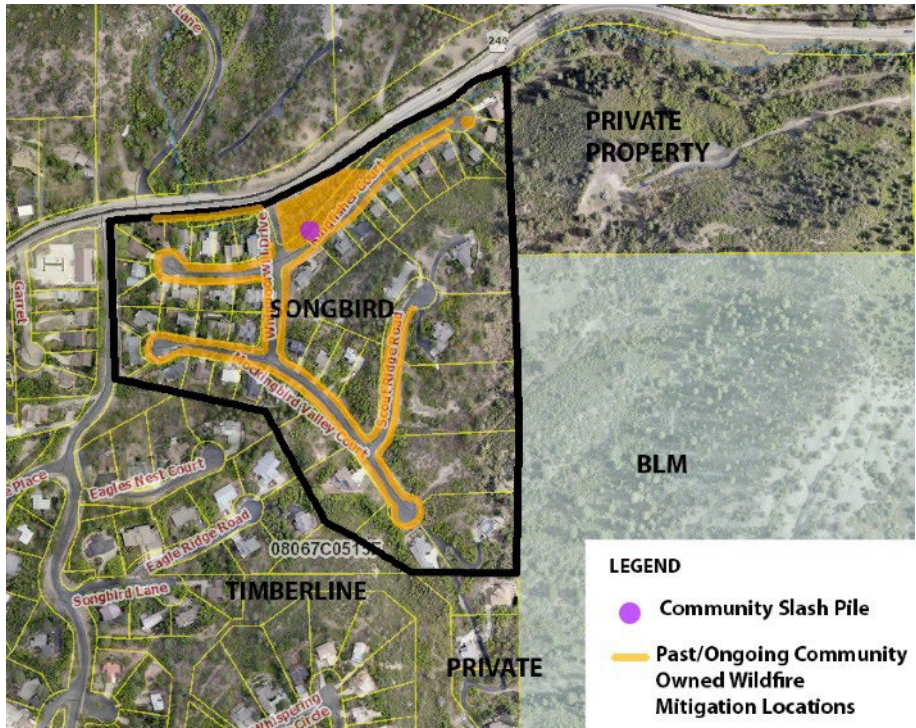
- Spread slash and wood chips over a large area of ground to avoid heavy accumulations and large piles. The ground spread will help speed decomposition.
- Burning slash piles is permissible, but before doing so, always contact your county sheriff's office or local fire department for current information or possible restrictions. Please advise the SOA Board of your intent. See further guidance below.
- Lop and scatter slash by cutting it into small pieces (generally less than 24 inches long) and distributing it over a wide patch of ground, to a depth not exceeding 18 inches. Material over 4 inches in diameter should not be scattered.

Community Slash Pile

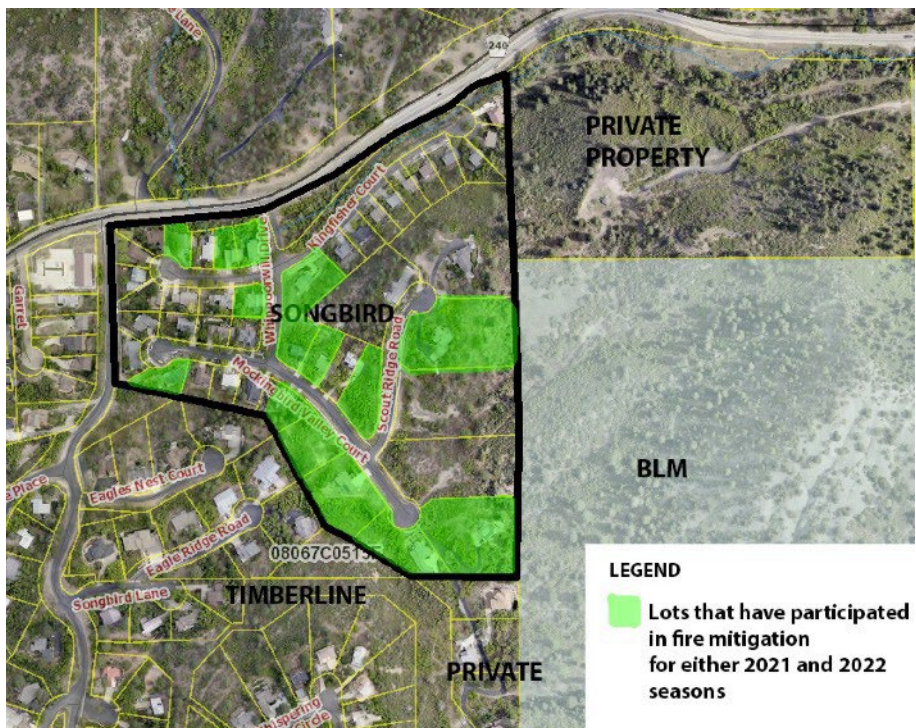
- The Community Slash Pile will enable owners to clear slash from their lot on a small piece of SOA common property prior to ultimate disposal by chipping or removal at SOA expense.
- The designated area for this seasonal slash pile is the flat pull-out area located on East Kingfisher in the community open space on the Florida side of Kingfisher Road.
- Homeowners are encouraged to perform their own fire mitigation work and place slash at this location for removal.
- **The Community Slash Pile is to be utilized for slash dumping only during the months May and October.** This is to ensure we don't increase our fire hazard during the summer months and create an unsightly area for long periods of time.
- Placing slash as far away from the road and into a stacked and tidy pile with butt ends aligned toward the road is highly encouraged in order to allow for as much space for neighbors to work and for easy chipping.
- DO NOT place root balls or tree branches larger than 6" in diameter into the slash pile.

Open Burning

- Open burns are small burns typical for wood piles, vegetation and yard waste or slash.
- Open burn permits must be obtained from the Durango Fire Protection District.
- Please notify the SOA Board for approval of open burning prior to proceeding.
- Snow must be on the ground prior to burning. Weather forecasts must not have winds greater than 10 mph.
- Each burn pile is small enough that it will be cold by sunset.
- Pile size is limited to 4'x4'x4'. Only one pile can be burned at a time.
- Open burning greater than 4x4 and up to 8x8 requires both a state of Colorado air quality control permit and a Durango Fire Protection District Permit. Only one pile can be burned at a time. In place monitoring of any burn is mandatory.



Community Owned Areas that have been actively mitigated in the past five years.



Private owners that have recorded to WAP Ambassadors performing fire mitigation for 2021 and 2022 seasons.

Before Pictures of 1 acre Community Open Space



During Clean Up of 1 acre of Community Open Space



After Clean Up of 1 acre Open Space in Fall of 2022



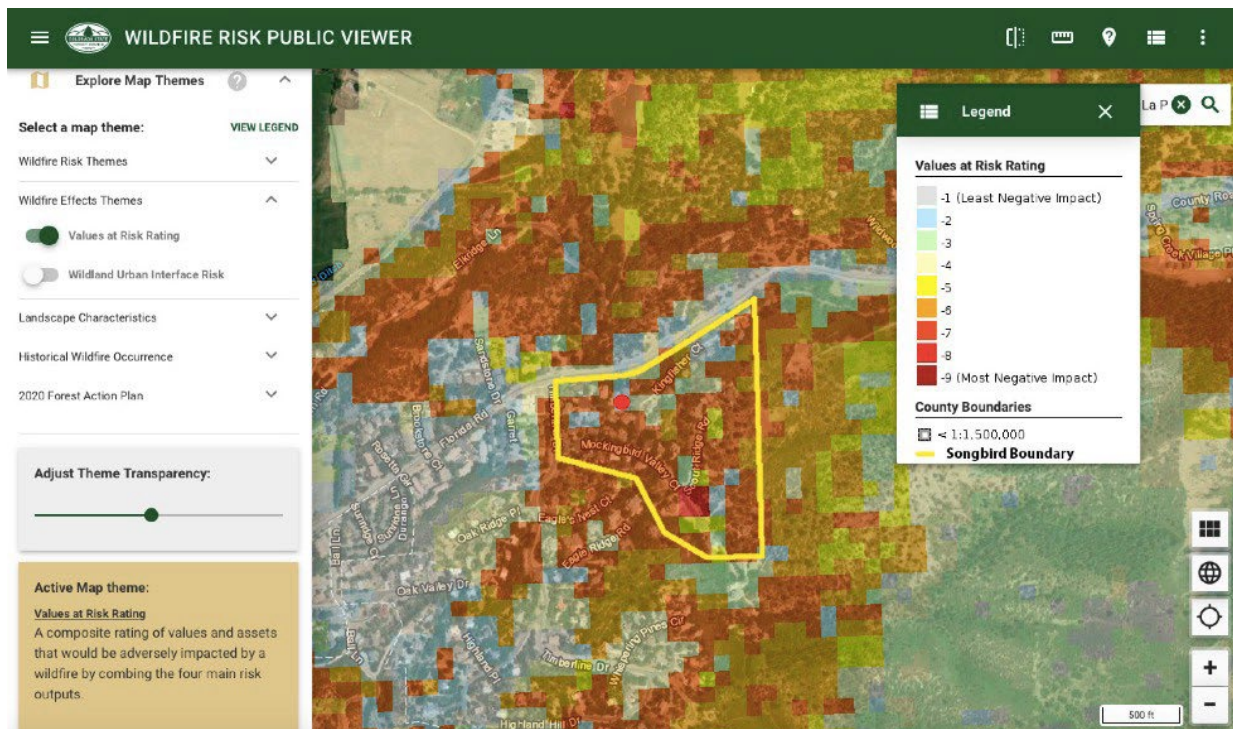
Values At Risk

Our values at risk are the established feeling of the older landscape from the hardwood trees that line our roads. It is the beauty of the mountainside and the drainage ways that are currently established. Many of the drainage ways are just swales next to the roadsides where some are relatively steep. If a burn scar was to occur above the community, flooding will likely overwhelm our current drainage swales. Our homes are relatively densely located and if a fire were to occur many homes could ignite and quickly overwhelm firefighters. There are power lines that line County Road 240 (Florida Road) and if it were to be knocked out it would effect all of the communities east of us.

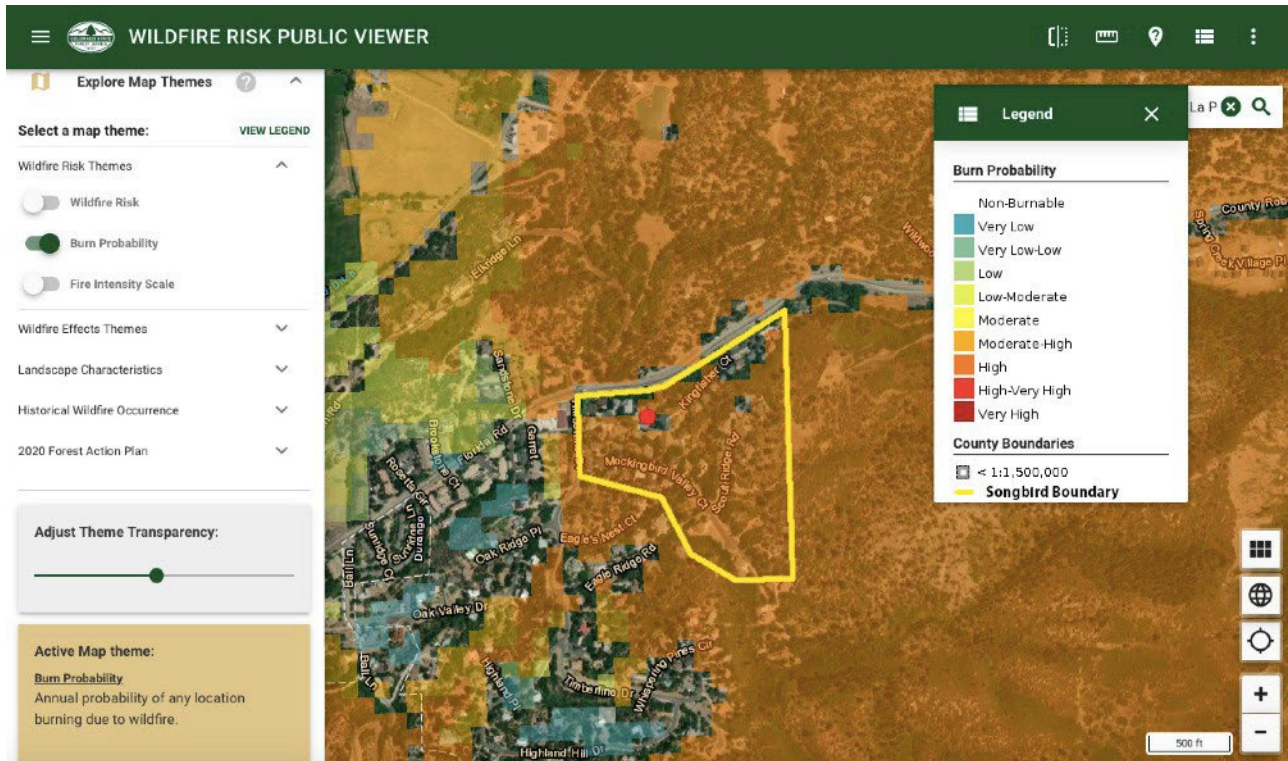
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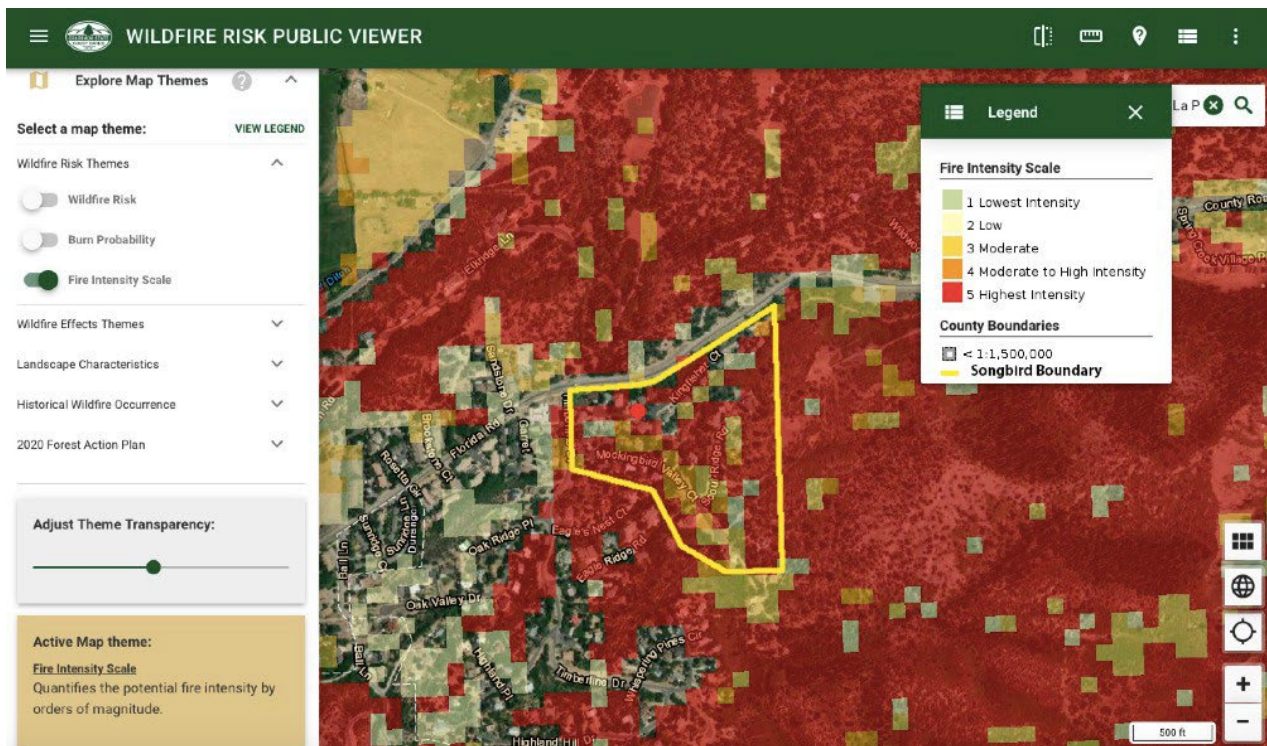
Values At Risk Rating by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



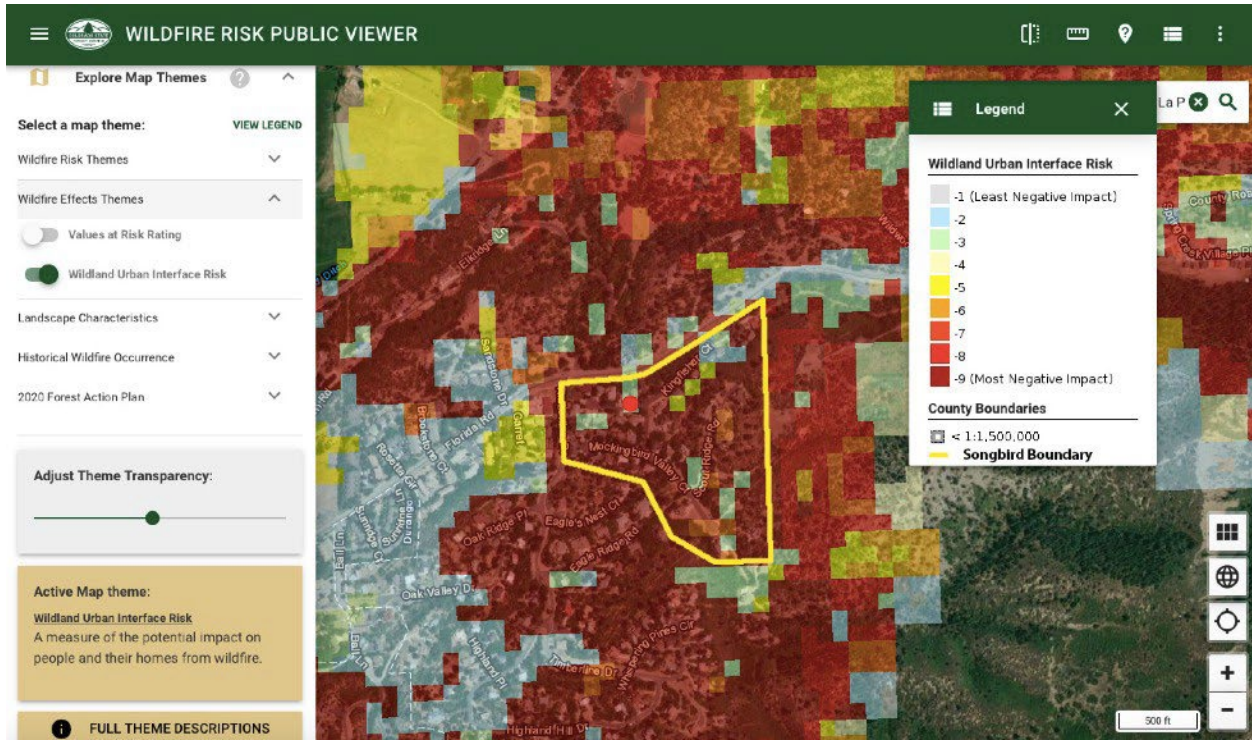
Burn Probability by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



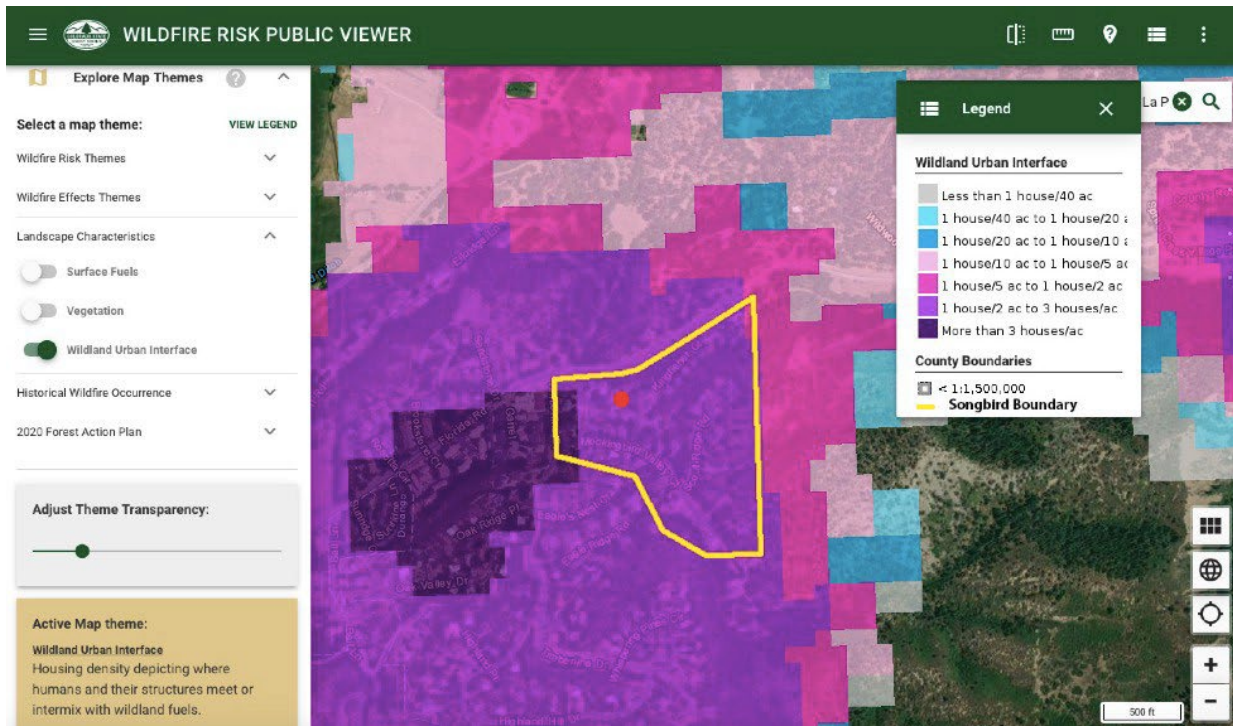
Fire Intensity Scale by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



Wildland Urban Interface Risk by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



Wildland Urban Interface by CSFS Wildfire Risk Public Viewer



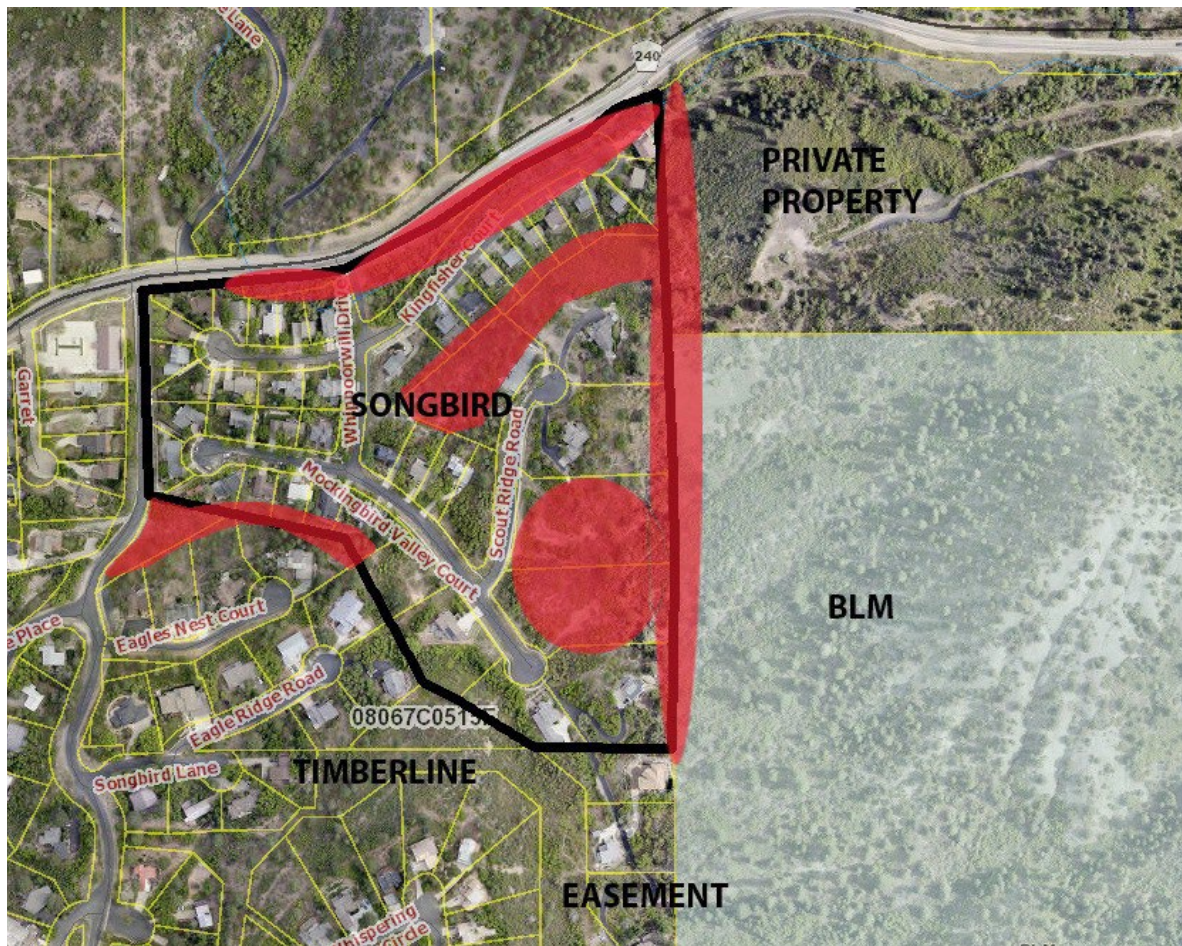
Identified Risks

The CR 240/Florida Road corridor has been identified as an ignition zone due to the traffic that occurs along the road. There are several hundred homes east of Songbird, Vallecito and Lemon Reservoirs, and other outdoor related activities that draw attraction of cars towing campers and boats. One of the tow rigs could have a metal chain that ignites sparks that could run into the grass and up into the community. A cigarette butt could also easily ignite the grass along our community.

The hillsides behind and in between the homes along east Kingfisher Court and Western Mockingbird Valley Court are dense ponderosa pine with Gambel oak understory. These areas are steep and hinder homeowners' abilities to be able to safely remove understory vegetation. These areas are going to be costly to thin.

The whole eastern border has heavy fuel loads with ponderosa pine and Gambel oak, pinion and juniper understory. The HOA is motivated to work with these owners in order to achieve a successful fire mitigation strategy to protect our border along BLM and the interior portions of the community. Without a successful strategy the eastern border between these lots and the BLM will continue to be blurred and will easily allow fire to spread into our community.

There is an empty parcel of land that is directly SW of our community that is controlled by Timberline View Estates. It is an ignition source being along the road and is dense ponderosa pine with Gambel oak understory. Fire could quickly spread into both communities from this area.



Action Plan (TBD)

1. Apply for Firewise USA® status
2. Work with the BLM to have adequate access and reduce fuel loads along our property borders
3. Create a fuel break in between the BLM and private property parcel to the east
4. Work with all properties to reduce fuel loads in identified areas of concern
5. Create an evacuation plan for the community
6. Make sure all community members participate on our website to view CSFS guidelines and sign up for a free home wildfire risk site assessment from Wildfire Adapted Partnership
7. Find better BLM access within the community. Ask the vacant lots to allow for firefighters and BLM access during an emergency and for studies.
8. Work with neighbors to understand timelines of fire mitigation efforts
9. Work with county to understand viability of continuing metal fence along County Road 240 to enhance our protection against this area being an ignition source.
10. Explore using goats on the steep hillsides where the understory Gambel oak is thick and along our eastern border that will be costly to mitigate.

Using and Reviewing this Assessment

This Assessment is to be a tool for sharing general information about the wildfire hazards in the Songbird community. The plan of action is for short-term goals to be pursued with the lead of the community's Wildfire Adapted Partnership Neighborhood Ambassador(s). This plan will be reviewed and updated each year to reflect the actions taken by the community and outline further plans of action. As needed, the fire district and forestry professionals will be invited back to review the work that has been done, and its potential efficacy for addressing the risk it is proposed to reduce. When complete, this Assessment will be used for the purposes of seeking Firewise USA® status from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This assessment is not a substitute for, but may provide a framework for, individual homeowner action.

It is critical for residents to become informed of their specific risks and vulnerabilities to life and property. All residents are encouraged to request a free site visit to conduct a wildfire risk assessment from Wildfire Adapted Partnership. Our Neighborhood Ambassadors are available to provide technical support and encouragement for individual property actions, but will be focusing on their own properties and activities that can reduce the wildfire risks to the community as a whole.

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