

## Q&A Tuesday: Fire Safe Council's growth illustrates the need for it

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Andrew List is the executive director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, a nonprofit group that helps fire services and public agencies, and communities, threatened by wildfire.

List was raised in Lovelock. He went to Stanford University and obtained a degree in public policy, with an emphasis on environmental policy. He then went on to earn a law degree from the University of Oregon. He practiced law for a couple of years, but said he didn't find it an enjoyable career choice. List describes his work at the council, however, as "a good intersection of law, policy and action."

He lives in Carson City with his wife, Mary-Margaret Madden, an attorney for the criminal division of the city's District Attorney Office. They have three children: John, age 41½; Roland, 3; and Kathleen, 11½.

How long has the council been around, and why was it formed?

In 1999, there was a statewide summit attended by more than 500 people concerned by the wildfire threat. It became apparent there was a need for a place where grant information and education materials could be gathered and disseminated. The Nevada Fire Safe Council got its nonprofit status in 2001.

Is preparing for wildfire season a seasonal concern?

Residents living in a fire-prone environment should be concerned about wildfires year round, and they can take steps to prepare themselves any time. Even when you can't be doing work outside your home because the weather is bad, you can still think about what you'd need to do if you were told to evacuate, or what needs to be done when the weather is more conducive to go outside and do fuels-reduction work.

Are there any pressing needs now for the organization?

While there are many grants available for fuel-reduction projects, funds for our paid staff of five are hard to come by. Money the council received from the state for the past two years - \$1.6 million - was parlayed into about \$4.4 million by using it as matching funds for other grants and with the help of volunteer efforts. The council is asking the state for about \$1.9 million to spend during the next two years. We're hopeful we'll receive at least part of our request. Without funding, the council could end up scaling back significantly, but we will do everything we can to serve our chapters and mitigate the risk of wildfires.

Do local and state governments save money by helping to finance and promote this group?

Yes. Investment in the council saves money in the long run because fewer federal firefighters are necessary to protect fire-safe communities. In a wildfire, it's very common for federal firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management to protect structures. State and local governments pay for that. If a community has defensible space, fewer firefighters are necessary to protect it so the cost to suppress the fire is much less.

Why is this program so important?

It saves lives and property. Firefighters need defensible space in which to stage suppression efforts. Without enough of it firefighters can lose their lives. Homes will also be lost. Lakeview clearly demonstrated defensible space works because without the fuel break on the southern edge of the community, Lakeview would have been lost during the Waterfall fire. The fire was a big wake-up call to Carson City residents; now the council has six chapters here. And in some parts of the state, especially central Nevada, wildfires can burn so hot that native species can be entirely wiped out. It's very common for cheatgrass and nonnative invasive species to take their place. Native plants and animals are less likely to re-establish themselves in a cheatgrass monoculture.

What do you attribute to the success of the council?

We rely heavily on chapter leaders to recruit others in their neighborhood and encourage neighbors to do defensible space work on their properties. There's a strong correlation between successful chapters and dedicated chapter leaders, and we have very good chapter leaders. They and other members provide thousands of volunteer hours.

Andrew List stands near burned trees on Timberline Drive, where several houses in the area were destroyed by the Waterfall fire, on Friday afternoon. List has been the executive director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council for one year and a member of the group for four years. Kevin Clifford/ Nevada Appeal



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