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Crew works in foothills to cut wildfire danger

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Hack, slash, grab and burn.

In the Virginia Foothills today, Kelti Puryear is leading a 11-person crew that's doing just that to reduce the threat of wildfire to homes in the Virginia Foothills.

Reducing heavy brush, such as sage, manzanita and juniper in the Virginia Foothills area is among the projects under way to lessen the wildfire danger to Washoe County open spaces. Other targeted areas are the Rolling Hills subdivision, Galena High School, western Washoe Valley, Galena Forest Estates, Mount Rose Highway corridor and Galena Regional Park.

"Even though we are in the fall season and fire danger may not be at the top of people's minds, it is still a real danger, given the extremely dry weather we've had in recent years," battalion chief Mike Heikka of the Sierra Front Protection District said.

Crews will thin trees, brush and other vegetation and do some burning. Residents in the Mount Rose area will see smoke during the weeks ahead.

For Virginia Foothills residents, it's a little dust and clearing of debris.

"There's just so much vegetation," said Puryear, taking a moment for a cell phone call amid the roar of chain saws and heavy machinery. "We're doing this for the homeowners' safety and protection.

"There is just so much that we need to clear out as much as possible. It's dangerous, and our work will only make it safer for them to live here. I just hope the community knows that we are not doing this to ruin their views."

Puryear crews work throughout the area of Rim Rock and Kenneth drives to clear and clean up brush, grasses and trees that have grown so thick they have become fire hazards along the utility easement areas in the community of about 200 residences.

Puryear's crew will create fuel breaks and better access for firefighters. There's no easy way to cut a path.

"We're talking about them clearing areas that have not been touched in 20 years," said Bobbie Lippincott, a Virginia Foothills resident and member of the Nevada Fire Safe Council that helps homeowners understand the importance of defensible space and learn about funding opportunities.

Homeowners often find reducing the wildfire danger to a home and surrounding areas, can be daunting and costly.

Removing trees can cost \$4,000.

Sierra Front's Heikka said reducing fire danger can cost up to \$2,500 a day for a hand crew and equipment, \$2,000 an acre to do the job to \$800 needed for special thinning machinery.

"You really can't put a dollar figure on a project because it all varies," Heikka said. "We just want to do as much work as possible, because we are so controlled by the weather. Right now, we have a window to work."