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Fire prevention council reaches 100 communities

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A neighborhood in west Reno beside an overgrown creek in danger of exploding into fire became the 100th community to join a grass-roots group guarding against wildfire in Nevada.

And work will begin in October to thin fire-prone vegetation from the Evans Creek drainage near Green Ranch, officials said.

"I don't think anybody thought we'd be where we are today," Andrew List, executive director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, said of his nonprofit organization achieving 100 members throughout Nevada and the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Discussions to create the fire council began in 1999, with the first community chapter, in Virginia City, starting in February 2002.

Council members work with local, state and federal fire agencies to create defensible space around homes, build fire breaks to protect neighborhoods near forested areas, and educate the public how to reduce fire danger.

"It has exceeded all of our original dreams," said Ed Smith of the University of Nevada's Cooperative Extension and author of "Living with Fire," a guide to coping with wildfire danger in Nevada. Smith was involved in the original discussions leading to formation of the fire council.

Green Ranch, west of Bartley Ranch Regional Park, will be among 25 chapters to benefit from \$1 million released this year from the sale of federal land near Las Vegas for the wildfire-fuel reduction.

The money will help finance the clearing of trees, brush and other wildfire fuels growing along Evans Creek.

The area, List said, is a "gnarly piece of ground" where a wildfire could spread rapidly into homes at Green Ranch.

That's what some residents were worried about during last summer's Hawken Fire in the hills to the west, said Paul Richards, leader of the Green Ranch chapter. Richards said Evans Creek is in major need of fire fuel reduction work.

"Nothing has been done in there for years and years and years. You can hardly walk through it," Richards said.

The danger was also made clear just last week, when six north Reno homes were destroyed by a quick-moving brush fire, Richards said.

Reno fire officials cited a lack of sufficient defensible space as a primary reason those homes were lost.

"It's one of those things you think won't happen to you because you live in the middle of a town home development," Richards said. "But if (a fire) got one of them burning, it could get all of them."
