

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE | AUGUST 13, 2020

THE TRAILS FIRE

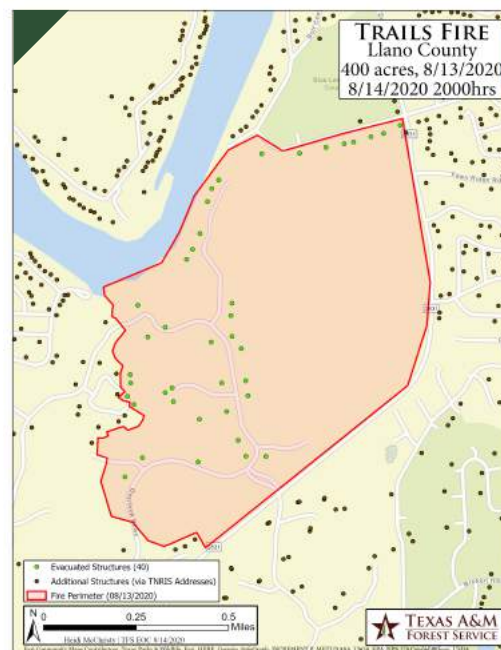
A Firewise USA® Success Story

On August 13, 2020, a wildfire broke out in the residential community of The Trails of Horseshoe Bay in Llano County. The Trails of Horseshoe Bay is one of Texas' two original Firewise USA® sites. The Trails Fire quickly grew—threatening 40 homes—and put the Firewise USA® program to the test.

What is Firewise USA®?

Firewise USA® is a National Fire Protection Association program that is coordinated through the state. It provides the necessary framework to help neighbors get organized and act to better protect their homes and community from wildfires.

By being a Firewise USA® community and taking action to mitigate wildfire damages, The Trails of Horseshoe Bay protected an estimated \$40 million in assessed property value from the Trails Fire.



A Community Prepared

For 17 years, Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) Wildland-Urban Interface Specialists have worked with The Trails of Horseshoe Bay community to identify high risk areas and guide wildfire mitigation efforts.

Homeowners created defensible spaces around their homes, which allows for a safer workspace for firefighters when battling a blaze, and implemented other Firewise USA® recommendations. The community also maintained shaded fuel breaks along a network of hiking trails to improve the trails' dual purpose of serving as fire breaks and improving general ecosystem health.

As a community, the residents invested time and money towards wildfire risk reduction for a lifetime total of \$131,217.85. That investment paid off.





The Trails Fire

On August 13, Texas A&M Forest Service resources responded to a request for assistance on the Trails Fire in Llano County. The fire started around 3:30 p.m. on the western edge of Horseshoe Bay as the result of an accidental roadside start.

Heat had cured the community's vegetation over the summer. In a sea of dry fuels, the fire quickly grew, prompting voluntary evacuations in The Trails of Horseshoe Bay and Blue Lake subdivisions and threatening numerous homes.

Because they felt safe operating around the residents' Firewise USA® landscaping, firefighters saved multiple homes that could have been destroyed. Fire crews contained the fire at 400 acres on August 15—two days after the incident started. Of the 40 homes directly threatened, two were destroyed. Both homes were in the Blue Lake subdivision.

Firefighters recognized that the actions individual homeowners took around their properties helped to slow and stop the fire from spreading to more homes. The network of trails was also successful in slowing the spread of the fire.

Texas' Increasing Risk

As Texas' population increases, more people are moving into areas where undeveloped land mixes with developed land, also known as the "wildland-urban interface." This puts more Texans in the path of wildfires.

TFS fire analysts note that extreme wildfire conditions are also increasing. While Texas used to have a clear fire season, now fires are happening year-round.

Wildfires do not need to be tens of thousands of acres to threaten your community. A wildfire of 100 acres or less can be just as destructive as a large wildfire. The Steiner Ranch Fire (2011) in Travis County was only 125 acres but destroyed 20 homes.

Fortunately, homeowners are not powerless. Residents play a key role in reducing their risks.



Contact your local Texas A&M Forest Service Wildland-Urban Interface Specialist to learn more about implementing wildfire preparedness programs like Firewise USA® in your community.