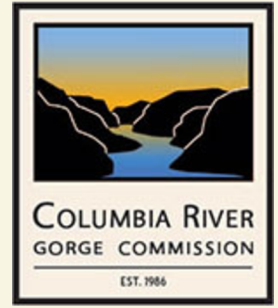


# Defensible Space for Your Home

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area



Fire is a natural part of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area environment. Historically, fires often started from lightning or were intentionally used as a land management tool by Indigenous people. As a result of fire suppression over the past century and changing climate conditions, fires today are often more intense and can have negative impacts on habitats, property, and human health. The National Scenic Area is considered a wildland-urban interface, meaning people live close to forests and wildlands. To protect your home, it is critical to incorporate defensible space practices on your property. Gorge Commission staff and your county's planning department look forward to working with you.

## Can I meet National Scenic Area standards and protect my home from wildfire?

Yes, as a resident of this place, both reducing the risk of wildfire to your home and preserving the natural landscape should be considered in your home design process. Talk with your local planner about specific requirements (contacts below). Depending on where your home is located, defensible space practices may be required for your development and are always encouraged. Having a defensible space assessment done for your property is a great place to start.

## What is a defensible space assessment?

A defensible space assessment identifies ways you can reduce wildfire risk to your home and property. The evaluation focuses on the materials and structural elements of your home as well as how to manage the vegetation and other sources of fuel on your property. If you are interested in a defensible space assessment, contact your local planner to learn more about resources. You can find contacts for planning departments and local organizations below.

## What is defensible space?

Defensible space is a buffer between a building and nearby wildland or open space. Develop and maintain this space so that if vegetation or other materials catch fire, they won't threaten the home from embers, heat, or flames. (FEMA)

## How do I sign up for a defensible space assessment?

For residents in Oregon counties, go to [OregonDefensibleSpace.org](https://OregonDefensibleSpace.org)  
Klickitat and Skamania county residents: [WildfireReady.dnr.wa.gov](https://WildfireReady.dnr.wa.gov) or email [fire@ucdwa.org](mailto:fire@ucdwa.org)  
Clark County residents register for a Home Ignition Zone Assessment at [clarkcd.org/forestry](https://clarkcd.org/forestry)

## **When do I implement defensible space for my home?**

Right from the start. The most important way to protect your home from ignitions is by using fire-resistant materials in your home design. Most homes lost to wildfire ignite from wind-driven embers landing on or around the home. The area within 5 feet of your home is critical to protect your home from ember ignitions. Start with the materials of the house itself and then move to landscaping the area around your home. (See example illustration on the next page.)

## **Can I remove trees and shrubs to create defensible space?**

Yes, selective removal of trees or shrubs may be allowed in many cases. Before removing any vegetation, talk with your local planner about specific requirements for your site. Previously issued land use decisions may require maintenance of screening vegetation. Other land uses such as Special Management Areas, Open Space lands, and development sites near Oregon white oak trees may require specific standards related to vegetation retention.

## **How can I landscape around my home with scenic standards and defensible space in mind?**

In the National Scenic Area, preserving the natural landscape is a priority. The area beyond the first 5 feet of your home should include adequate spacing between vegetation to prevent fire spread. Use fire-adapted and native species whenever possible. Make sure trees and shrubs are trimmed and healthy. Regularly remove dead vegetation and debris on the ground. Keep vegetation out of the 0-5 foot zone to protect your home from ember ignition. Consult with your local planning department to review conditions of approval related to retention of trees and shrubs associated with your permit.

### **National Scenic Area County Planning Departments:**

Columbia River Gorge Commission & Klickitat County NSA Planning: (509) 493-3323

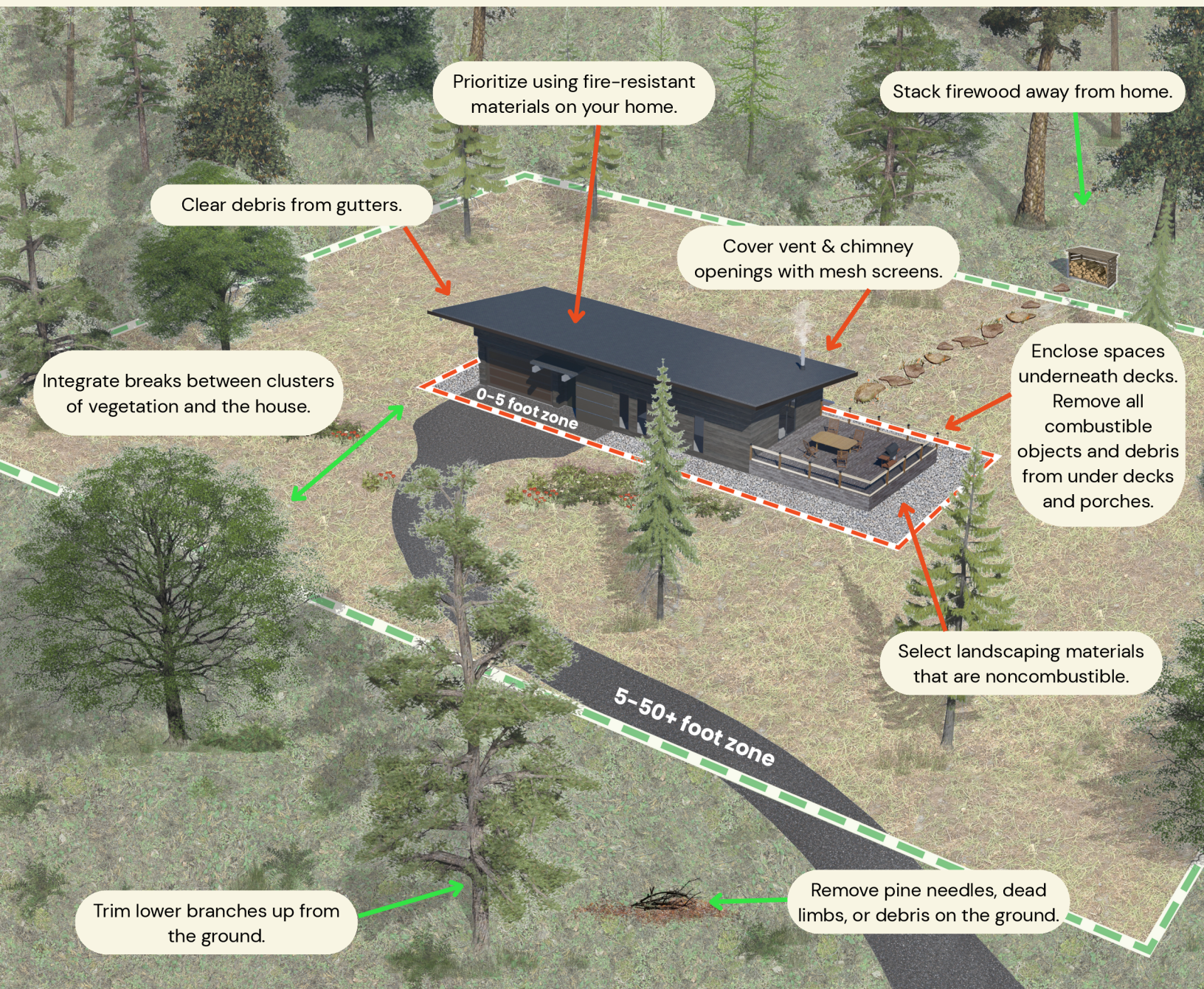
Clark County Community Development: (360) 397-2375 | Hood River County Planning Department: (541) 387-6840

Multnomah County Land Use Planning Department: (503) 988-3043

Skamania County Community Development: (509) 427-3900 | Wasco County Planning & Development: (541) 506-2560

**Always dial 911 for emergencies.**

## Example of Best Practices for Defensible Space in the National Scenic Area



See more information on next page.

## Defensible Space Best Practices

### 0-5 foot zone:

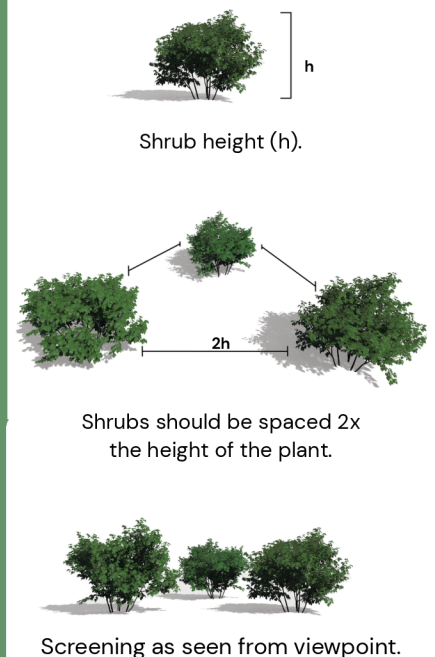
- The most important thing you can do to protect your home is to use fire-resistant materials on your home. Some recommendations include:
  - Use asphalt shingles or metal roofing materials that are non-reflective.
  - Install ½ inch metal mesh screens on vents and chimney openings to keep embers out.
  - Use screens or a noncombustible barrier around the edge of a deck to keep embers out from under the structure.
- Regularly clean out gutters.
- After the house itself, the 0-5 foot zone around your home is the immediate priority and the most vulnerable to ignition. Some recommendations include:
  - Use rock, pavers, or gravel in this zone.
  - Construct decks and patio areas with fire-resistant materials.
  - Remove all combustible objects and debris from under decks and porches.

### 5-50+ foot zone:

- Keep this zone clean. Remove flammables such as wood chips, dead vegetation on the ground, leaves, and pine needles.
- Integrate breaks between clusters of vegetation and the house. Learn more about vegetation and screening in the green sidebar.
- Remove ladder fuels (vegetation and limbs close to the ground) to prevent fire from spreading into the tree canopy.
- Store firewood at least 30 feet from your home.

## Vegetation Spacing & Screening

Screening your home from specific viewpoints called Key Viewing Areas is an important part of the land use review process. Using strategic spacing between trees and shrubs can achieve both scenic standards for your permit and be effective in creating breaks between vegetation for defensible space best practices. See the diagram below as an example.



## What is a Key Viewing Area (KVA)?

Key Viewing Areas are important identified roads, parks, or other vantage points from which the public views National Scenic Area landscapes.