



Residents preventing wildfires

Story and photo by Barbara Lemos

As a Firewise USA Community, St. James has raised awareness of the risks of living in an area prone to wildfires. The Town of St. James was developed from a former tree plantation. Today, our pine forests and flammable undergrowth can provide fuel for rapid burning. Many of us live on wooded lots that provide aesthetic appeal and a habitat for birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. While beautiful, our natural areas also pose risks if a large wildfire approaches.

North Carolina experiences approximately 4,500 wildfires per year. Brunswick County has seen its share, including a large burn last year near Route 211 and Midway Road. Some are ignited by lightning; others arise from burning debris that's not adequately monitored. Our St. James Fire Department is trained and equipped to handle such fires should they encroach on St. James.

St. James is one of three Firewise Communities in Brunswick County, along with River Run and Winding River. Firewise Committee members have met with their counterparts in these communities to share best practices and experiences. Based on these meetings, we will pursue new approaches to helping you stay safe and protect your property. We will also explore partnerships with outside organizations interested in conducting community projects to help advance Firewise objectives.

Responsibility for proactively protecting individual properties rests with each of us. Many of you have already implemented practical measures to safeguard your property against wildfires. To support property owners, the St. James Firewise Committee conducts educational outreach, including *Cat-Tales* articles and dissemination of literature at Town events.

In 2018, our focus shifts from raising awareness to measuring tangible impact. Many things that you might take for granted — cleaning up yard waste, trimming dead tree limbs, replacing pine straw with bark mulch or other materials around your home — all count towards risk reduction. In the coming months, we'll develop systems to record what we've achieved.

We're working closely with Firewise USA program managers at the North Carolina Forest Service. They will be updating our St. James Firewise Risk Assessment to reflect progress made since we joined the Firewise program in 2003. With your help, we look forward to continuing to be at the forefront of wildfire safety efforts.

Editor's Note: *Barbara Lemos is a member of the St. James Firewise Committee.*



Hannah Thompson-Welch, wildfire mitigation specialist with the North Carolina Forest Service, spoke with residents from Winding River and River Run as part of an educational program on wildfires.

