# Local officials educate publi on making homes 'firewise'

**BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL**
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SENECA — The South Carolina Forestry Commission held a "firewise" meeting last week to educate the community about protecting homes from wildfires.

The meeting comes on the heels of the Pinnacle Mountain Fire that burned from Nov. 9 to Dec. 5, when emergency crews fully contained the fire. Officials from the Forestry Commission said the wildfire burned 10,623 acres and inflicted $4.8 million in damage.

Oconee State Park hosted the educational meeting, which is part of the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise program. Piedmont Firewise field director Bill Wiley told The Journal that the program's objective is education.

"Our whole job is educating the public and letting them know what the overall risk is for wildfires but also what the risk is right there around their homes," said Wiley, who led the workshop.

The information session is part of the Fire Learning Network's long-range plan for public awareness of wildfire hazards, according to S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism spokesperson Dawn Dawson-House. The public information campaign is a collaborative effort among land-management organizations that are planning controlled burns in the Upstate this winter — the S.C. Forestry Commision, S.C. DPRT and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

Wiley told community members and local emergency response personnel that wildfires occur in



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**Table Rock-area resid ents Ryan Struve and Kimberly Collett, who attended Thursday's Firewise meeting, talk to S.C. Forestry Commission incident commander Mike Bozzo about ways to reduce fire hazards around their property.**

passed in the last five fiscal years without a wildfi re.

One reason for increased wildfires in the state is populatio n growth. Fires are mo re likely to occur as mor e people move into rur al areas. New or unedu cated residents might mist ake controlled burns for wildfires or express confu sion about why officials co n-duct controlled burns.

"We have a change in population," Wiley sa id. "A lot of people are m ov-ing in from different parts of the country who do n't understand what we' re dealing with here. Th ey don't understand wha t's happened in the past, so they wonder what's go ing on when they see (the Forestry Commission) holding controlled bur ns or ... they think all fir es are bad, especially the ones who have come from

"hazard reduction burn" is set by officials to remove dead fuel, or organic material, from forests.

"Burning like this on a regular basis prevents the fuels from building up," the Forestry Commission said in a fire prevention guide. Hazard reduction burns "prevent a much hotter fire that could burn up into the crowns of the trees, destroying the trees and everything in the path of the fire."

Community members may not know how easy causing a wildfire can be. Wiley told a story about a resident in Rock Hill who dumped ash from her fireplace that she thought was safe behind her property. Her house caught fire not long after she dumped the ash.

"There was still a little bit of ember in there, and the winds got up to a structure behind h house and eventually t her house," Wiley said. "That's an example of how that sort of thing c happen and create a ma fire that could have ver easily been prevented i she stirred or wet down the ashes well enough."

Homeowners can red the risk of wildfires by cleaning debris from gu ters, replacing flammab mulch with less flamma ble material and tradin out flammable vegetatio with less flammable kinds, such as smooth hydrangea shrubs, Tuli poplar trees and periwinkle for groundcover Changing out vegetatio creates what the Forest Commission calls a "de fensible space."

For more information about reducing fire haz-ards, visit firewise.org.