Waterford Pointe gets wise about

BY ANDREW MOORE
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SENECA — The Waterford Pointe community on Lake Keowee knows how to mitigate wildfire risk, and due to community members' volunteer efforts, the area has been designated as a "Firewise" community by the national Firewise Communities program, Keowee Fire Chief Richie Caudill confirmed Monday.

The Firewise program relies on homeowners and community leaders to volunteer their time to promote awareness of wildfire risk, and how fires can be avoided through proper building construction, landscaping and maintenance.

"It's all about community awareness," Caudill said. "We have the same issues here as they do in California due to the terrain here."

Community members volunteered to help clean up excess vegetation and other fire hazards throughout the area.

The Firewise program in South Carolina began in 2001 with the South Carolina Forestry Commission identifying high risk areas and conducting instructional workshops for community leaders and homeowners in those areas to spread the word about the program.

Since then, seven communities in the state, five of which are in Oconee County, have created Firewise Boards, developed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and have held a community Firewise event.

The South Carolina Forestry Commission is involved in the assessment process, in the development of the prevention plans and in the promotion of the program with the community leaders and the homeowners.

"It's a lot of man hours involved, and a lot of stuff to do around the community," Caudill said, adding that the designation allows Waterford Pointe to now apply for grants through the State Forestry Commission for fire-mitigation use, such as funding clean-up days or purchasing equipment to clear vegetation.

Keowee Key, Wynward Pointe, Keowee Harbors and Chickasaw Pointe in Oconee County are all Firewise communities.

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wildfire prevention



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The Waterford Pointe community received its official Firewise designation Saturday. Standing at the community's gates during the plaque presentation, from left, are: Don Chamberlain, Bob Bowles, Richie Caudill, Steve Schwarthoff, Mike Bozzo and Jared Brucke.