



City of Phoenix

DESERT PRESERVATION AND FIRE PROTECTION GUIDE



PURPOSE

Several neighborhoods throughout Phoenix are characterized by their proximity to the natural desert. In fact, many of these neighborhoods were specifically designed to integrate with the environment by preserving wash corridors or installing native landscaping in common areas and along the street. Most of the time, the connection between these neighborhoods and the natural desert is very positive; residents and property owners take pride in and responsibility for the undisturbed environs that surround their development.

However, during drought conditions where high winds and dry vegetation provide a fuel and catalyst for wildfires, neighborhoods rightfully become concerned over potential property damage and even their own safety; particularly when the natural desert actually abuts or traverses through the neighborhood.

The Desert Preservation and Fire Protection Guide provides guidance that achieves the dual role of ensuring natural open space preservation and appropriate wild fire protection. This guide was created to assist residents, property owners, and homeowners associations (HOA) who maintain natural open space areas within a residential subdivision, and other property owners for non-single family development. Natural open space serves to protect and preserve significant open space areas for public enjoyment and provide connections among them.

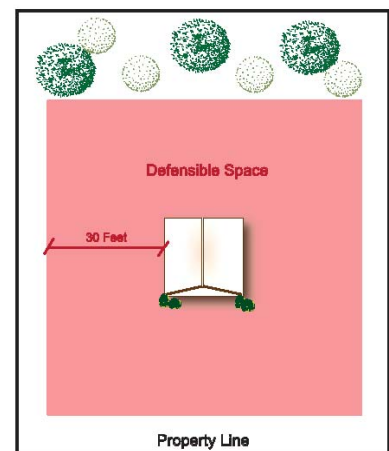


DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Defensible space is an area either natural or man-made, where material capable of allowing a fire to spread unchecked has been treated, cleared or modified to slow the rate and intensity of an advancing wildfire and to create an area for fire suppression operation to occur. Sometimes, a defensible space is simply a homeowner's properly maintained private yard.

Homeowners, property owners, lessees and contractors should create a well-maintained, live vegetation space to prevent damage to structures in case of wildland fires. This "defensible space" acts as a fire break, and should contain only small brush, cacti and trees to prevent a continuous path of flammable materials leading to inhabited structures.

Defensible Space Diagram



Please ensure to check with your Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), Home Owners Association (HOA), and/or obtain property owner permission prior to creating a Defensible Space beyond the lot's boundaries.

TOP TIPS FOR FIRE PREVENTION

- Consistently monitor defensible space for maximum fire prevention within 30 feet of structure.
- Remove flash fuels such as dead grass (Do NOT remove live native plants from natural open space areas).
- Trim trees within the 30-foot defensible space on a residential lot so the canopy is not touching the ground; remove any dead branches or leaves.
- Trim grass and foliage around trees.
- Keep gutters, eaves and roofs clear of leaves and other debris.
- Do not stack wood or other flammable materials within the 30-foot defensible space.
- Keep a rolled up garden hose with a nozzle attached to an outside hose valve connection.
- Do not smoke in natural open space areas.
- Consistently monitor the defensible space for maximum fire prevention.

Be vigilant! Please help prevent wildland fires in your community. Keep your eyes open for signs that indicate the Fire Danger Level throughout the year. Create a defensible space to keep you and your property protected and prepared this fire season.



Vegetation should be maintained and trimmed on private property.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What are natural open space areas?**

For the purposes of this guide, natural open space areas are held in common for all residents as described in the dedication statement of the subdivision. Natural open space is either natural desert that has been undisturbed by development activity or where development has restored the desert terrain and vegetation to its natural condition.

- **Who has jurisdiction over natural open space areas?**

The city of Phoenix, the HOA or the property owner whose development includes a scenic corridor or other naturally designated open space have jurisdiction over the natural open space areas. The city's jurisdiction over the natural open space areas deals with enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and any zoning stipulations that may have been imposed on the property. The HOA or property owner is responsible for regular maintenance of the natural open space areas and enforcement of any Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CCRs).

- **Can/should dead vegetation such as trees and shrubs be removed from the natural open space areas for fire protection?**

No. Natural wash corridors and associated vegetation should be preserved as open space amenities and wildlife habitat corridors. Sonoran Desert wildlife is dependent on the habitat created by the natural environment. Dead trees, fallen saguaros and low growth on trees provide cover for a variety of native wildlife¹. For example, if a small tree dies, it is part of the natural landscape and should remain.

Any natural landscaping on a residential lot within 30 feet of a built structure (such as a home, or shed, but not a view fence or wall) should be pruned and maintained to minimize fire danger².

Hillside or preservation lots should be constructed in accordance with the approved site plan.



Dead vegetation should be retained to preserve the natural ecology.

- **Can new vegetation such as trees and shrubs be planted in these areas?**

Supplemental natural desert vegetation may be provided. Installation techniques should be utilized which have a minimal impact on the preservation of existing resources. Please note the CCR's or other property restrictions may have a list of allowed plant species for the subdivision as well.

¹ Phoenix Zoning Ordinance: Section 507 Tab A.II.A.1.1.2, 507 Tab A.II.A.2.2.8, and 507 Tab A.II.A.3.2.1

² National Fire Protection Association Standard #299

- ***Can areas next to view fences be cleared to allow painters access to repaint fences? If so, how far from the fences can be cleared?***
Natural open space areas should not be cleared pursuant to Design Guideline 507 Tab A.II.A.3.2.1 of the [Phoenix Zoning Ordinance](#). Temporary staking or “pulling back” of vegetation can be used for routine maintenance, such as painting fences.
- ***Can these areas have irrigation?***
New vegetation can utilize supplemental irrigation; however supplemental irrigation lines should be configured to minimize disturbances to the existing natural desert.
- ***Are there maps that show different types of natural open space areas within my community?***
Plat maps represent a tract of land showing the boundaries and location of individual properties, open space tracts and streets. Final recorded plats are available from the Maricopa County Assessor’s Office at maricopa.gov. For more information, please contact the Maricopa County Assessor’s Office at 602-506-3406.
- ***Who is responsible for drainage ways?***
For the purpose of this guide, drainage ways are natural wash corridors that have been dedicated to the public (as identified on the plat maps) for drainage purposes. The Street Transportation Department is responsible for maintaining these drainage ways by ensuring they are kept clear of objects that may impede the flow of storm runoff. When the Street Transportation Department determines that vegetation poses a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of residents, they may cut 10-foot firebreaks between the wash and the property lines of parcels that contain a habitable structure.
- ***Do I need to get a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to remove vegetation from a wash?***
The Corps regulates some types of ground-disturbing activities in the "waters of the U.S.," basically our desert washes. You may remove vegetation and pick up trash without a Corps permit. However, if your activities include other ground disturbance in a wash then you may need a Corps permit.

- **What about the Scenic Corridors?**

A [scenic corridor](#) applies to a street that has or is intended to have a special character. Maintenance of scenic corridors that preserve existing natural areas such as: deserts, hills, or mountains should be handled with special care. A defensible space can be created within 30 feet of a building. For areas in excess of 30 feet of a building, dead vegetation and non-native plants can be removed by hand or hand raked. However, cacti, trees, or native shrubs should be maintained (some may appear dead, but they are actually dormant). Dead trees should be preserved as open space amenities and wildlife habitat corridors. Sonoran Desert wildlife is dependent on the habitat created by the natural environment. Dead trees, fallen saguaros and low growth on trees provide cover for a variety of native wildlife³.

Scenic Corridor



- **What about the officially designated “mitigation corridors”?**

There are a number of washes in the north Phoenix area which have been designated as "mitigation corridors" due to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requirements. Mitigation corridors are located within the [Desert Ridge](#), [Paradise Ridge](#), and [Azara](#) areas. These mitigation corridors are preserved for environmental purposes and most activities besides passive recreation are not allowed. As the surrounding areas are developed, signs will be posted with the following language: *"Please Walk Softly on the Land. The Wash Corridor Behind the Sign is a Perpetual Conservation Easement. Foot Traffic and Passive Recreation are Encouraged. No Vehicular Traffic, Dumping or Wood Cutting is Allowed."* Please check the mitigation corridor restrictive covenant to see if trimming and brush removal and the creation of firebreaks within the defensible space are allowed only in emergency situations or if they can be conducted at any time.

Mitigation Corridor Sign



NOTE: Mitigation corridor signs may not be present in undeveloped areas, please refer to mitigation corridor maps provided above for the Desert Ridge, Paradise Ridge and Azara areas.

³ Phoenix Zoning Ordinance: Section 507 Tab A.II.A.1.1.2, 507 Tab A.II.A.2.2.8, and 507 Tab A.II.A.3.2.1



CONTACT INFORMATION

- **[Fire Department](#)**
The Fire Department fire inspectors respond to a broad range of requests for fire and life safety services, resident concerns regarding possible unsafe conditions or fire code violations and conduct fire inspections of new and existing buildings. For more information, please contact 602-262-6771.
- **[Neighborhood Services Department \(NSD\)](#)**
The Neighborhood Services Department resolves issues pertaining to property maintenance, zoning, and non-permitted construction, on private property and the public right-of-way, through a combination of education, partnership efforts, assistance and code enforcement. For more information, please contact 602-262-7844.
- **[Planning and Development Services Department](#)**
The Planning Division should be contacted when specific questions arise regarding zoning stipulations. For more information, please contact 602-262-7131, Option 6.

The Development Services Division should be contacted when specific questions arise regarding review of approved site plan or subdivision documents. For more information, please contact 602-262-7800.
- **[Parks and Recreation Department](#)**
The Parks and Recreation Department should be contacted regarding what plant material constitutes non-native or procedures for vegetation removal. For more information, please contact 602-262-6862.
- **[Street Transportation Department](#)**
The Street Transportation Department should be contacted regarding drainage ways that are dedicated to the public and scenic corridors. For more information, please contact 602-262-6441.
- **[U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)**
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should be consulted for any ground-disturbing activity within a desert wash. For more information, please contact 602-640-5385.

This document can be requested in alternate formats to accommodate an ADA request. For further information, please call Nici Wade at 602-495-0256 voice or 602-534-5500 TTY Relay. This includes, but is not limited to sign language/oral interpreters, Braille, captioning or large print.