

# Ask an Expert - Prepare Now: May is National Wildfire Awareness Month

J. Bradley Washa

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Parleys Canyon

Fire – Photo courteous of Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune

May is designated as National Wildfire Awareness Month by organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Western Fire Chiefs Association. The month is intended to promote prevention and preparedness efforts among communities and areas prone to wildfires.

As the weather warms, wildland vegetation, or fuel, starts to grow and later dries out, increasing the risk of wildfires. Because of this, spring is the best time to prepare for wildfires.

Much of Utah exists within a fire-dependent ecosystem, and many Utahns live in the area called the wildland/urban interface or WUI. Simply put, the WUI is where the “eves meet the leaves.”

Those who choose to live in the wildland/urban interface should accept a shared responsibility to examine and implement fire-wise concepts around their homes and properties. Without mitigation measures, wildfire remains the most likely, potentially most dangerous natural disaster faced by many communities in Utah. It could result in the loss of life and property and have significant economic impact.



Brad Washa, Utah State

University Extension assistant professor of wildland fire science, on fire assignment.

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, a national, collaborative, all-lands approach to wildland fire management, is applicable to Utah. The approach aims to reduce wildfire risks and enhance resilience by focusing on three areas:

1. Fire-adapted communities,
2. Fire-resilient landscapes, and
3. Safe and effective wildfire suppression response.

The strategy involves stakeholder collaboration, risk sharing, and outcome-based investment across jurisdictions.

Consider these resources to help keep your home safe from wildfires.

- Evaluate wildfire risk to your property and community through an online analysis such as the [Utah Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal](#) or the [Wildfire Risk to Communities tool](#).
- Request a structure assessment from your local fire department, county fire warden, or the [Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands](#).
- Learn from the National Fire Protection Association's [Home Ignition Zone](#) information about clearing and managing materials and vegetation around your home.
- Review [USU Extension's Utah Firewise Landscaping](#) publication for recommendations on suitable plants to have around your home when living in the WUI.
- Check out the [Ready, Set, Go](#) website for instructions on creating an action plan and making an emergency preparedness kit in case evacuation becomes necessary.

With good winter precipitation and snowpack across Utah going into a relatively mild and wet spring, forecasts do not show substantial wildfire activity early this summer. However, as summer continues, areas with high grass growth could experience above-normal, significant wildfire activity as fuels dry out. The northeast part of Utah is

highlighted for such potential in July and August on the [National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook](#).

As we observe National Wildfire Awareness Month, now is the time to prepare for future wildfire events, not when smoke is on the horizon. As we enter the wildfire season, take to heart the cohesive strategy vision – to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire only where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, learn to live with wildland fire.

## Contact

**J. Bradley Washa**  
[brad.washa@usu.edu](mailto:brad.washa@usu.edu)

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