



INVITATION TO FIRESAFE COUNCIL AFFILIATION

BACKGROUND

FireSafe Montana (FSM) evolved from a widespread and growing recognition that the threat of wildfire to human life and property has been escalating rapidly. To address this issue, a Montana Communities & Wildfire Conference was held in Helena, MT in 2006. The conference attracted over 250 registrants representing a diverse group of interests and was a collaborative process in itself. People were drawn to the concept of creating a non-governmental organization that could offer the citizens of Montana a service currently lacking -- statewide coordination from a multitude of efforts supporting fire safe activities. Following intense discussions, a resolution was adopted calling for "the establishment of a statewide fire safe council to provide support throughout Montana to help make homes, neighborhoods, and communities' fire safe." Following the conference an organizing committee was convened, and in 2007, FireSafe Montana was approved as a 501 (c) (3), non-profit corporation.

Currently FireSafe Montana's policy and decision making Board of Directors is comprised of eleven members nominated and elected at an annual meeting held in the spring of each year. Elected members serve one to three-year staggered terms. Officers elected by board members include president, vice president, and secretary/treasurer. The board has one paid staff that provides Executive Directorship duties.

FireSafe Montana is a membership corporation. As such, its primary mission is to foster the organization of local community FireSafe Councils that will accomplish pre-fire activities necessary to increase the survivability of their communities. FSM invites any group that supports its purpose and principles to become a formally affiliated council.

PRINCIPLES

Principles of Organization:

1. Membership is open to all individuals who subscribe to and support the purpose and principles of FSM.
2. FireSafe Montana members and non-members will have the right to organize local FireSafe Councils of FSM in any democratic manner, in any area, and address any issue or activity that is relevant to and consistent with the purpose and principles.
3. Decisions will be made at the most local level that includes all relevant and affected parties.
4. All participants will have an equitable opportunity and responsibility to participate in discussions, deliberations, and the decision-making process.
5. Decisions will be made by methods and bodies representing a full diversity of views and interests and not controlled by any single view or interest.
6. Deliberations and decisions will incorporate the best knowledge and experience presently available.
7. The Board of Directors and FireSafe Council's organizations will maintain the highest standards of credibility and ethical conduct, and disseminate full and accurate accountings of their business affairs.

Principles of Practice:

1. Every FireSafe Council will seek the collaboration and contributions of diverse professions, experience, knowledge, viewpoints, and resources to build trust and gain support for completion of needed activities to accomplish the purpose.
2. Every FireSafe Council will encourage those activities and practices that ensure the sustainable productivity of the ecosystem.
3. Every FireSafe Council will engage in mutual learning to deepen respect for and trust in one another, to improve understanding and appreciation of the natural system in which they choose to reside.
4. Every FireSafe Council will commit to resolving conflicts constructively without resorting to social, psychological or physical intimidation or violence.
5. Every FireSafe Council will support collective actions required to increase community survivability and accept personal responsibility for mitigating those risks and hazards on their property that result from individual actions and choices.

MEMBERSHIP

Individuals may join FSM in one of three ways:

1. General Membership: For all individuals who support the purpose of the FSM (voting-member).
2. Associate Membership: For people and organizations that desire membership and representative participation (non-voting member).
3. Sponsoring Membership: For business/organizations that desire representation on a sponsoring level (voting-member).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Any group is eligible for FireSafe Council affiliation providing:

1. They fully subscribe to the purpose and principles.
2. They have procedures for decision-making and governance that conform to the principles.
3. They have clearly defined boundaries that delineate the geographic area(s) in which they will conduct their activities.
4. They have identified a primary and backup contact person.
5. They have established goals and committed to increase awareness, motivate the community, and seek the expertise and resources required to accomplish the necessary tasks.

APPLICATION

Any group seeking FireSafe Council affiliation shall complete an application describing how they are meeting the eligibility criteria. The FSM Board of Directors will review and act on all applications. The board will first determine if the criteria have been satisfied. If the board finds that the criteria have been met, a majority vote will approve the firesafe council status for the applicant group.

Approval of formal FireSafe Council status confers both powers and obligations on both the FSM and the FireSafe Council.

POWERS OF FIRESAFE MONTANA

The FireSafe Montana reserves the power to:

1. Review any FireSafe Council application for funding or contract that in any way conveys legal obligations and/or liabilities to FireSafe Montana.
2. Request records reports or other disclosures regarding the business affairs of any FireSafe Council.
3. Review any plans or project proposals prepared or submitted by a FireSafe Council in furtherance of the purpose.
4. Intercede where internal FireSafe Council conflicts and disagreements jeopardize accomplishment of the purpose or pose potential threats to FSM's reputation and/or credibility.
5. Utilize photographs, reports, interviews, or other materials and information regarding FireSafe Council accomplishments to promote and advance the public image and awareness of FSM.
6. Review any and all FireSafe Council activities to ensure continued compliance with the eligibility requirements and adherence to the purpose and principles.
7. Negotiate reasonable fees to recover costs associated with providing services requested by a FireSafe Council.
8. Revoke FireSafe Council status when it is determined that a group is in substantial violation of the purpose, principles, corporate bylaws or other operating procedures.

OBLIGATIONS OF FIRESAFE MONTANA

In support of FireSafe Council plans and activities, FSM will:

1. Allow FireSafe Councils to utilize the non-profit corporate status of FSM when such use is in conformance with legal requirements and clearly advances the purpose.
2. Inform FireSafe Councils of funding opportunities and provide assistance in the preparation and submission of requests and applications.
3. Seek media coverage and other avenues to promote and increase public awareness of FireSafe Council accomplishments.
4. Assist in the identification and linkage with needed expertise and sources of professional assistance.
5. Assist and support FireSafe Councils efforts to contact, address, and influence government policy and plans where such involvement is directly related to the accomplishment of the purpose.
6. Provided educational experiences to enhance member understanding and increase FireSafe Council effectiveness.
7. Provide financial management services to ensure that the expenditure of FireSafe Council funds complies with reporting and accounting requirements.

FIRESAFE COUNCIL POWERS

FireSafe Councils of FireSafe Montana are authorized to:

1. Organize in any democratic manner and in any area for the purpose of addressing any issue or activity that is relevant to and consistent with FSM's purpose and principles.
2. Adopt statements of purpose, develop operating procedures, and institute systems of governance consistent with the purpose, principles, and corporate bylaws.
3. Pursue sources of funding and engage in any and all project activities that contribute to the accomplishment of the purpose.
4. Join with other FireSafe Councils and/or enter into cooperative arrangements with any organization where such collaboration is consistent with the purpose and principles.
5. Identify the primary and backup contacts that will serve as liaison to the FSM Board of Directors.
6. Levy membership dues or other fees to recover the costs associated with services rendered. While this authorization is extended to the local FireSafe Councils, there is no requirement that they do so. The decision to levy dues or fees must be made in accordance with the decision making process agreed to in the firesafe council's structure for governance.
7. Use the name "FireSafe Montana" and related names, logos, and images so long as the use is consistent with the purpose, principles, and corporate bylaws.
8. Attend meetings of the FSM Board of Directors and submit agenda items, proposals, and other requests for the board's consideration.
9. Publicize and promote FireSafe Council Activities and accomplishments providing all participants and contributors are given equitable credit and recognition.

COUNCIL OBLIGATIONS

In support of FSM, councils shall:

1. Take all actions necessary to ensure that the collective organization, as well as individual members, conducts all activities and functions in accord with the FSM purpose and principles.
2. Diligently employ all best efforts to achieve the purpose consistent with the principles.
3. Develop and implement a system of governance and decision making in accord with the principles.
4. Indemnify and hold FSM, its employees, agents, and representatives harmless from any costs, attorney's fees, damages or liabilities arising out of or in any way caused by the FireSafe Council's breach of operating procedures, corporate bylaws, or negligence.
5. Identify primary and backup contacts to serve as the communication link and liaison to the FSM Board of Directors.
6. Actively participate in deliberations and decisions where such involvement benefits the entire organization or is of particular relevance to the FireSafe Council's activities.
7. Adhere to the bylaws and operating procedures as they evolve through the growth and development of FSM.
8. Keep accurate and up-to-date records of membership, financial transactions, plans, accomplishments, decisions, deliberations, and other activities.
9. Openly communicate and share best practices, lessons learned, successes, stories, and highlights of activities with other FireSafe Councils and FSM.
10. Give full cooperation in responding to requests from FSM for information, reports, or other materials.