

2026 Wildfire Mitigation Awards

Criteria and Guidelines

OVERVIEW

The Wildfire Mitigation Awards are the highest national honor one can receive for outstanding work and significant program impact in community wildfire mitigation.

Supported by:

The National Association of State Foresters
The International Association of Fire Chiefs
The National Fire Protection Association
The USDA Forest Service



Guidelines and Criteria



Only applications submitted through the electronic
2026 Wildfire Mitigation Awards Nomination Form will be accepted.

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GUIDELINES

The 2026 Wildfire Mitigation Awards nomination deadline is Wednesday, January 7, 2026. Awards will be presented in Reno, Nevada at the Wildland Urban-Interface Conference in March 2026.

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF), the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and the USDA Forest Service are pleased to invite nominations for the 2026 Wildfire Mitigation Awards. The national Wildfire Mitigation Awards recognize outstanding service in wildfire mitigation efforts to increase community wildfire risk reduction on the ground.

Selection Process

Members of the Wildfire Mitigation Awards committee determine award winners. Standing members include three representatives of NASF, one each from IAFC, NFPA, and the USDA Forest Service (WUI Program Manager), and one at-large member appointed, by the committee.

Eligibility

* Nominators should verify that the nominee is eligible to receive a Wildfire Mitigation Award. *

Individuals, agencies (federal, state, or local), or organizations that have made outstanding contributions with significant program impact in mitigation of wildfire risk to communities are eligible for nomination.

Posthumous awards may be given if the work nominated occurred within the last three years or still has significant influence or long-term measurable impact. Awards are intended to recognize community-level or larger fire adaptation efforts; individual single-property projects are not eligible. This award is not intended as a retirement or departure recognition award. Applications will not be considered for prevention projects covered by the National Smokey Bear Awards.

Award Designations

There are three wildfire mitigation awards offered, the National Wildfire Mitigation Award, the National Wildfire Mitigation Hero Award, and the National Wildfire Mitigation Legacy Award. The committee is not obligated to give awards in any category if nominations are not high enough quality to meet requirements. The award descriptions are listed below.

National Wildfire Mitigation Award – Sustained community fire adaptation doesn't happen by accident. Community wildfire adaptation starts with empowered residents, informed and active elected officials, engaged land managers, forestry agencies, and proactive fire departments. The National Wildfire Mitigation Award recognizes the efforts of organizations and individuals who have implemented successful and sustainable wildfire mitigation projects on the ground in their communities. Because of their leadership and vision, their community has embraced the philosophy of community fire adaptation and is actively engaged in sustained risk reduction projects. **Please indicate if you are nominating an organization or an individual.**

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To be eligible a nominee must meet the following qualifications:

- Plays an active role in community wildfire risk reduction/fire adaptation projects on the ground.
- Is dedicated to and can show quantitative evidence of leading and implementing **at least two sustained mitigation/fire adaptation actions** in their community with a **minimum duration of 24 months**; Examples include but are not limited to: community level defensible space and home hardening, hazardous fuel reduction projects, local coalition building, development and implementation of community wildfire protection plans or equivalent use of codes/ordinances that resulted in impactful mitigation, and fire department engagement in mitigation implementation. **Priority will be given to candidates doing active mitigation work on the ground over those doing messaging only.**
- Nominations of state forestry agency employees must show endorsement of the State Forester, either by signature or letter of support (e-mail message is sufficient). All federal agency nominations **must** submit a letter of recommendation from their partners or state agency.
 - Category 1: For communities, career or volunteer fire departments, government agencies, or non-profits in communities larger than 30,000 population.
 - Category 2: For communities, career or volunteer fire departments, government agencies, non-profits, or individuals in communities less than 30,000 population.
 - Category 3: For individuals who lead or enable mitigation actions on the ground.

National Mitigation Hero Award (one award per year at the discretion of the committee; can be nominated with or without WMA application): Individuals and organizations involved in mitigation are seldom, if ever, singled out as heroes, but the work they do often saves communities, homes, and lives. The effectiveness or value of a community fire risk reduction project is not fully appreciated until the community and the mitigation work is tested by wildfire. This award recognizes an individual or organization whose community-wide mitigation project reduced damage and risk to a community when a wildfire impacted the community.

Qualifications:

- The individual or organization was responsible for the community-level mitigation project that protected or reduced damage from a wildfire.
- There is clear documentation regarding:
 - Where and how the mitigation was done.
 - When and how the incident (name incident) impacted the community.
 - How the mitigation project reduced the damaging impact of the wildfire (testimonials, eyewitnesses, before and after photos, maps, documentation of the mitigation work).

Wildfire Mitigation Legacy Award (given at the discretion of the committee): This award is designed to recognize an individual's outstanding contribution to the larger world of mitigation. It is meant to acknowledge those who have flown the mitigation banner over a long period of time, persisted in vocalizing the mitigation message, spoken truth to power, and helped create the tools and best practices that make up fire adaptation today. **This is not a retirement award but recognition of a major investment and impact on mitigation through long-term achievement.**

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The Wildfire Mitigation Legacy Award nominee is generated by the WUI Mitigation Awards Committee, no nominations will be accepted. Criteria include:

- Must be a wildfire mitigation professional.
- Must have a career history of dedication to the importance of community wildfire risk reduction.
- Must have made a major contribution to the development of impactful mitigation tools, methods and implementation at the local, state, or national level in a sustained and successful way.
- Must be able to demonstrate the level of contribution to the field with examples, testimonials, and documentation.

Required Elements of the Nomination Package

Nomination packages will stand on their own merit. Please make sure they are complete. Nomination packages must include:

- A complete nomination form.
- A narrative description, including impact, of the outstanding mitigation effort(s) or project(s) being nominated that answers each element of the award criteria (see below).
- A quantitative description of mitigation actions on the ground (e.g., number of structures hardened, number of properties with defensible space, number of acres treated, amount of brush removed from a site or neighborhood, etc.)
- Supporting documentation (e.g., photos, news articles, project materials, and letters of support).
- Nominations of state forestry agency employees must show endorsement of the State Forester, either by signature or letter of support (an e-mail message is sufficient). All federal agency nominations must submit a letter of recommendation from their partners or state agency.

Award Criteria

The following award criteria are used to evaluate each nomination. The nominator must submit the nomination through the 2026 Wildfire Mitigation Awards online form found at <https://www.stateforesters.org/wildfire-mitigation/>. Submissions will be judged on merit with no further request for documentation, and incomplete submissions are not eligible for consideration.

Within each criterion, address only those points that most appropriately apply to your nomination; not all points are appropriate for every nomination.

1. Basic Requirements: Scope and Impact

- Easily recognized as a wildfire mitigation effort: Describe tools or methods used, long-term outcomes of the service or project, what objectives were met or exceeded, how many people or communities it impacted, the specific impact the work will make on a community in the event of a wildfire. There must be at least two sustained mitigation/fire adaptation actions.
- Effort covers at least a 24-month period.
- Nomination includes appropriate supporting documentation.
- Mitigation activity is replicable and could be applied beyond its geographic area or audience.
- Efforts must be quantifiable through cubic yards or truckloads collected, number of homes hardened, properties with defensible space, acres treated, or other measurable means.

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2. Qualities

- If wildfire mitigation is a part of the nominee's job description, explain how the nominee distinguished themselves above and beyond normal job responsibilities or expected mitigation activities.
- Describe leadership, creativity, or innovation that was exhibited.
- Describe how the project/service targets or complements national audiences, themes, messages, and goals.

3. Partnerships

- Describe how the project or activity engaged groups, organizations, or agencies, and whether these participants were new to this activity.

4. Other Factors

- Include any documentation that mitigation efforts reduced damage caused by wildfires.
- Describe any local, regional, or national recognition that was received for the project or activity.
- Explain how the project was funded, including approximate percentages of local, county, state, and federal funds that made up the budget.