



# News Release

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## **LOCAL RESIDENTS HONORED FOR FIRE PREVENTION**

Two northeast Georgia residents have been recognized for their efforts to prevent fire in their rural neighborhood. John Edwards and Don Wells, who live in the Wildcat Community that straddles Dawson and Pickens Counties, received the 2008 Firewise Leadership Award at a special ceremony in Tampa, Florida.

"Mr. Edwards and Mr. Wells were instrumental in leading their community to recognize its vulnerability to wildfire," said Carolyn Sweatman, Georgia Forestry Commission's Dawson/Forsyth Chief Ranger, who nominated the pair. "They implemented specific prevention techniques that earned them designation as a 'Firewise U.S.A. Community,' and this national award is the 'Firewise' organization's highest honor."

Sweatman explained that the Wildcat Community includes eight subdivisions totaling more than 2,000 homes on 10,000 acres. The community stretches across Sassafras Mountain, Monument Falls, and the Big Canoe area, and contains rugged, remote terrain that is not easily accessible for firefighting efforts. In 2004, Edwards and Wells took action to institute proven fire prevention methods that resulted in the neighborhood's official recognition as a 'Firewise U.S.A. Community' in 2007, she said. Those methods included coordination with local county commissioners and fire chiefs, the construction of a large water storage tank and lake, and targeted public communication efforts.

"Mr. Wells' and Mr. Edwards' efforts to help protect their neighbors from the ravages of wildfire are exemplary," said Sweatman. "They are true stewards of the environment and are richly deserving of this honor."

There are 354 Firewise Communities in 37 states, including seven in Georgia. The Georgia Forestry Commission assists with implementation of the program statewide. For more information, contact your local GFC office or visit the Georgia Forestry Commission website at [GaTrees.org](http://GaTrees.org).

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