



Community Wildfire Protection Plan *An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and Conservation of Natural Resources* **CUSSETA-CHATTAHOOCHEE COUNTY**



December 2017

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Chattahoochee County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

Executive Summary

The extreme weather conditions that are conducive to wildfire disasters (usually a combination of extended drought, low humidity and high winds) occur in this area of Georgia every 10-15 years. This is not a regular event, but, the number of homes that have been built in or adjacent to forested or wildland areas, can turn a wildfire under these weather conditions into a major disaster. Wildfires move fast and can quickly overwhelm the resources of even the best equipped fire department. Advance planning can save lives, homes and businesses.

This Community Wildfire Protection Plan includes an evaluation of the wildland fire susceptibility of wildland/urban interface “communities-at-risk”, an analysis of fire service resources and training and an Action Plan to address the increasing threat of wildfire. The CWPP does not obligate the county financially in any way, but instead, lays a foundation for improved emergency response if and when grant funding is available to the County.

The plan is provided at no cost to the County and can be very important for County applications for hazard mitigation grants through the National Fire Plan, FEMA mitigation grants, and others. Under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, communities (counties) that seek grants from the federal government for hazardous fuels reduction work are required to prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The plan will:

- Enhance public safety
- Improve community sustainability
- Protect ecosystem health
- Raise public awareness of wildfire hazards and wildfire risk
- Educate landowners on how to reduce home ignitability
- Build and improve collaboration at multiple levels

The public does not have to fall victim to this type of disaster. Homes (and communities) can be designed, built and maintained to withstand a wildfire even in the absence of fire engines and firefighters on the scene. It takes planning and commitment at the community level BEFORE the wildfire disaster occurs --- and that is what the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is all about.

SIGNATURE PAGE

Gerald Douglas
Chairman of the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County Commission

Date

Johnny Floyd
Cusseta-Chattahoochee County Fire Chief and EMA Director

Date

Justin Brown
GFC Chief Ranger for Chattahoochee County

Date

I. WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE FIRE DISASTERS

Fire influenced and defined the landscape we call the United States, well before the arrival of the first Europeans. Scientists, in fact, think that fires started by lightning or Native Americans occurred over most of the Southeast every 3 to 7 years. These were typically low intensity fires (because of their frequency) which kept the forests open and “park-like” in appearance and prevented heavy accumulations of dense underbrush. When communities became well established across the South, wildfires began to impact public safety and had to be controlled. State forestry agencies became established between 1915 and 1928 and the landscape was generally segregated into communities (or human habitations) and natural or wildland areas.

In the mid 1980’s, following a new wave of development in what was previously forest or wildland areas, agencies across the country became aware of an increasingly common phenomena – wildfires were more and more frequently impacting communities . In 1985, a milestone year, over 1400 homes nationwide were lost to wildfire. The catastrophes became known as wildland/urban interface fires and occur when the fuel feeding the fire changes from natural vegetation (trees, shrubs and grasses) and begins to include manmade structures (homes, outbuildings and vehicles). Wildland/urban interface fires can occur anywhere in the United States and can become major disasters when associated with extremes in weather (extended droughts, high winds and low relative humidity)

The public does not have to fall victim to this type of disaster. Homes (and communities) can be designed, built and maintained to withstand a wildfire even in the absence of fire engines and firefighters on the scene. But, it takes planning and commitment at the community level BEFORE the wildfire disaster occurs.

II. CWPP CORE COMMITTEE & STAKEHOLDERS

The development of this plan was a collaborative effort for the people of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County. The individuals listed below made up the “CWPP Core Committee” and are responsible for much of the plan content.

CWPP Core Committee

County Commissioner Donald Moore
County Manager Janice Mueller
Fire Chief / EMA Director Johnny Floyd
Coroner/ FD Gary Daniel
Battalion Chief / Deputy Director David Bucher
Chief Ranger R.T. Lumpkin
Ranger I Gerard Powell

Georgia Forestry Commission Representatives

Chief Ranger R.T. Lumpkin
Ranger I Gerard Powell
CWPP Program Specialist Jim Harrell
Wildfire Prevention Specialist Beryl Budd (revised 2017)

Meeting Dates

Initial Core Committee Meeting: Friday, August 7, 2009

Follow-Up Meeting #1: Friday, September 18, 2009

Follow-Up Meeting #2: Friday, October 23, 2009

Follow-Up Meeting #3: Friday, December 4, 2009

Follow-Up Meeting #4: Friday, January 8, 2010

The CWPP Core Committee contributed to the CWPP development by:

Initiation	Agreed on the need to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Risk Assessment	Assessed the wildfire hazard of “at risk” communities
Fuels Reduction	Identified and prioritized areas for fuel treatment projects
Structure Ignitability	Identified strategies for reducing the ignitability of structures within the wildland/urban interface
Emergency Response	Updated and improved strategies for coordinated wildland fire response
Education and Outreach	Outlined a public education initiative to increase citizen awareness of residential wildfire protection (Firewise)

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

It is important that a collaborative approach be taken in the development of a successful Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This means providing opportunities for the involvement of interested parties in the Core CWPP Committee that develops the CWPP and providing the opportunity for other stakeholders in the community (county) to review and contribute to the CWPP. Collaboration is a requirement of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

During development of the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County CWPP, opportunities for collaboration were provided by:

- Major stakeholders were invited to participate as members of the CWPP Core Committee.
- A news release was placed in the local papers (*Tri-County Journal* and *Stewart-Webster Journal*) explaining the objectives of the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County CWPP, the planning process and the procedure for obtaining a draft copy for review and/or comment.
- A public meeting was held at the county courthouse at 7:00 p.m. on April 15, 2010 to present the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County Community Wildfire Protection Plan to interested stakeholders and allow for comment or input.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE CWPP

The Wildland/Urban Interface is the presence of structures in locations in which the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) determines that topographical features, vegetation, fuel types, local weather conditions and prevailing winds result in the potential for ignition of the structures within the area from flames and firebrands from a wildland fire (NFPA 1144, 2008 edition).

The objective of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is to improve public safety and reduce structural losses from wildfire in wildland/urban interface areas of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County.

There are three generally accepted types of interface areas:

- 1. “Boundary” wildland/urban interface** areas are characterized by development where groups of homes, subdivisions or other structures create a distinct and easily identified border with public or private wildlands, forests or parks.
- 2. “Intermix” wildland/urban interface** areas are places where parcels of improved property and/or structures are scattered and interspersed within wildlands, forests or parks. Frequently, this is a subdivision that is not yet “built-out” with many undeveloped lots interspersed among occupied homes.
- 3. “Island” wildland/urban interface** (also called “occluded interface”) are typically very small pockets of wildland or natural areas surrounded by development or even situated within an incorporated area. A park or greenspace within a city is an example of an island interface area.

This CWPP will provide Cusseta-Chattahoochee County with an evaluation of the wildland fire susceptibility of wildland/urban interface “communities-at-risk” and can be a valuable guide and action plan to address the increasing threat of wildfire. The plan will:

- Enhance public safety
- Improve community sustainability
- Protect ecosystem health
- Raise public awareness of wildfire hazards and wildfire risk
- Educate landowners on how to reduce home ignitability
- Build and improve collaboration at multiple levels

This Community Wildfire Protection Plan will be very important to County applications for hazard mitigation grants through the National Fire Plan, FEMA mitigation grants, and others. Under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, communities (counties) that seek grants from the federal government for hazardous fuels reduction work are required to prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The minimum requirements for a Community Wildfire Protection Plan as described in the HFRA are:

- Collaboration: A Community Wildfire Protection Plan must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives, in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties.
- Prioritized Fuel Reduction: A Community Wildfire Protection Plan must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
- Treatment of Structural ignitability: A Community Wildfire Protection Plan must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.

This plan should be looked at as a working document (i.e.; a guide) for local, state and federal agencies to reach common wildfire protection goals. The CWPP committee should meet on a continuing basis from year to year to review accomplishments, discuss impediments, revise outdated portions of the CWPP and develop new, meaningful wildfire protection goals for Cusseta-Chattahoochee County.

IV. HISTORY OF CUSSETA-CHATTAHOOCHEE COUNTY

The “Kashitas”, a tribe of Muskogean people were among the first inhabitants of what is now Cusseta-Chattahoochee County. Cusseta town or “Kasihta” (“Peace Town of the Lower Creek Indians”) was a heavily populated town when visited by General James Oglethorpe in 1739. The naturalist William Bartram was at Cusseta (which he spelled “usseta”) in 1776 and 1777. Cusseta was a central market place for fur traders in 1799 and one of two great Muskogee towns of the Lower creek Confederation. The Georgia General Assembly created Chattahoochee County on February 13, 1854 from portions of Muscogee and Marion counties. The county was named for the Chattahoochee River which forms its western boundary. The original courthouse was built in 1854 and is preserved as a tourist attraction in Westville (near Lumpkin).

Approximately 70 percent of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County is occupied by Fort Benning South, a portion of the United States Army’s self-sustaining military installation supporting more than 120,000 active duty soldiers and family members, reserve and civilian personnel. In Georgia, Fort Benning occupies portions of both Muscogee and Chattahoochee counties. The base, built in 1918, is home to the U.S. Army Infantry Center and School, elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 3rd Heavy Brigade combat team, the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), the 14th Combat Support Hospital and many other specialized units.

The 2008 population estimate of the U.S. Census Bureau was 13,754. A total of 2,932 households were recorded during the 2000 census. Total area is 250 square miles – 249 square miles of which is land and 2 square miles is water. In 2000, there were 2,932 households in Cusseta-Chattahoochee County. A majority of the single family dwellings countywide are mobile homes.

In 2003, the County and the City of Cusseta formed a consolidated Cusseta-Chattahoochee County government.

Sources: www.quickfacts.census.gov

V. WILDFIRE HISTORY

The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) is the state agency responsible for providing leadership, service, and education in the protection and conservation of Georgia's forest resources. Commission professionals provide a wide variety of services including fire detection, issuing burn permits, wildfire suppression and prevention services, emergency and incident command system expertise, rural fire department assistance, forest management assistance to landowners and communities, the marketing and utilization of forest resources and nature services, and growing and selling quality tree seedlings for planting.

Forestry is a \$28.7 billion a year industry in the State of Georgia creating 128,000 jobs statewide. Forestry is a valuable commodity to the taxpayers of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County.

Vision: Healthy sustainable forests providing clean air, clean water and abundant products for future generations.

Mission: To provide leadership, service and education in protection and conservation of Georgia's forest resources.

Personnel

The Georgia Forestry Commission office serving Cusseta-Chattahoochee County is located at 324 South Broad Street, Buena Vista (Marion County), Georgia. Personnel assigned to this office include:

Justin Brown, Chief Ranger
Christopher Dunn, Ranger/Forest Tech
Gerard Powell, Ranger I
Nicholas Lucas*, TDL Fire Tower Operator
Debra Barricks*, TDL Fire Tower Operator

Wildland firefighting equipment assigned to this GFC office:

John Deere 550J
John Deere 650K Tractor Plow
John Deere 450G Tractor Plow
Ford F-250 Type 7 Engine

Equipment Needed:

1 Type VI Engine (Brush truck)

*Ms. Barricks and Mr. Lucas are assigned to the fire lookout tower at 123 Fire Tower Road. The fire lookout tower is staffed 7 days a week.

On a year-to-year basis, the leading cause of wildfires in Cusseta-Chattahoochee County is incendiary fire followed by fires resulting from careless debris burning. During Fiscal Year 2017, incendiary fire accounted for 4 wildfires that burned a total of 31.54 acres, there was 2 wildfires caused by vehicle/structure fires burning on 3.80 acres and 2 escaped prescribed fires burned 4.20 acres. There were also 2 wildfires caused from smoking which accounted for 21.32 acres burned.

<u>Cause</u>	<u>FY 2017</u>	<u>5 Year Average</u>
Incendiary	4 / 31.54 acres	1.2 / 6.42 acres
Escaped Prescribed burning	2 / 4.20 acres	1.2 / 9.74 acres
Smoking	2 / 21.32 acres	.4 / .76 acres

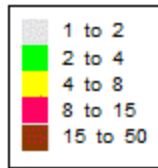
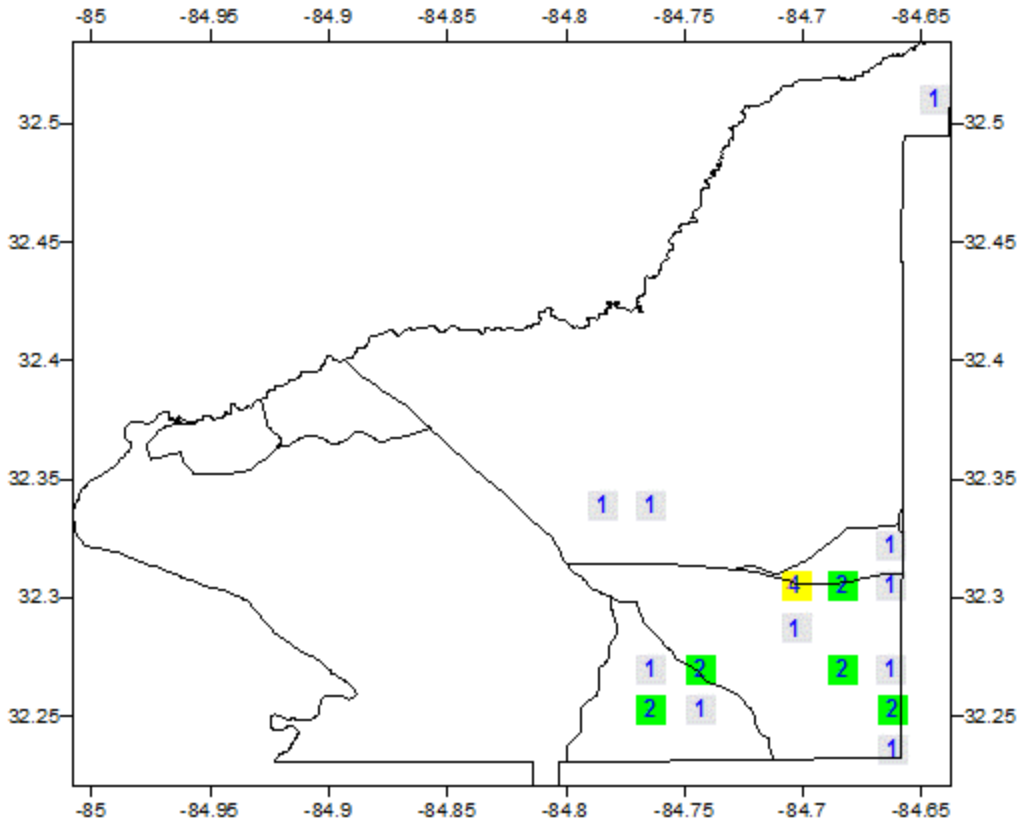
The county is characterized by well to excessively drained soils, steep slopes and deeply eroded gullies. Such terrain can be a significant impediment to wildfire response with engines or crawler tractors. In addition, fires are typically more dangerous on this terrain (wildfire behavior can be erratic and fires move much faster up steep slopes) making suppression more difficult and more dangerous for firefighters.

County = Chattahoochee	Cause	Fires	Acres	Fires 5 Yr Avg	Acres 5 Yr Avg
Campfire	Campfire	0	0.00	0.40	3.32
Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	2	4.20	1.20	9.74
Debris: Household Garbage	Debris: Household Garbage	0	0.00	0.20	0.00
Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	0	0.00	0.20	0.19
Incendiary	Incendiary	4	31.54	1.20	6.42
Miscellaneous: Fireworks/Explosives	Miscellaneous: Fireworks/Explosives	0	0.00	0.20	0.00
Miscellaneous: Other	Miscellaneous: Other	0	0.00	0.20	0.50
Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	0	0.00	0.20	0.22
Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	2	3.80	0.40	0.76
Smoking	Smoking	2	21.32	0.40	4.26
Undetermined	Undetermined	0	0.00	0.80	1.46
Totals for County: Chattahoochee Year: 2017		10	60.86	5.40	26.88

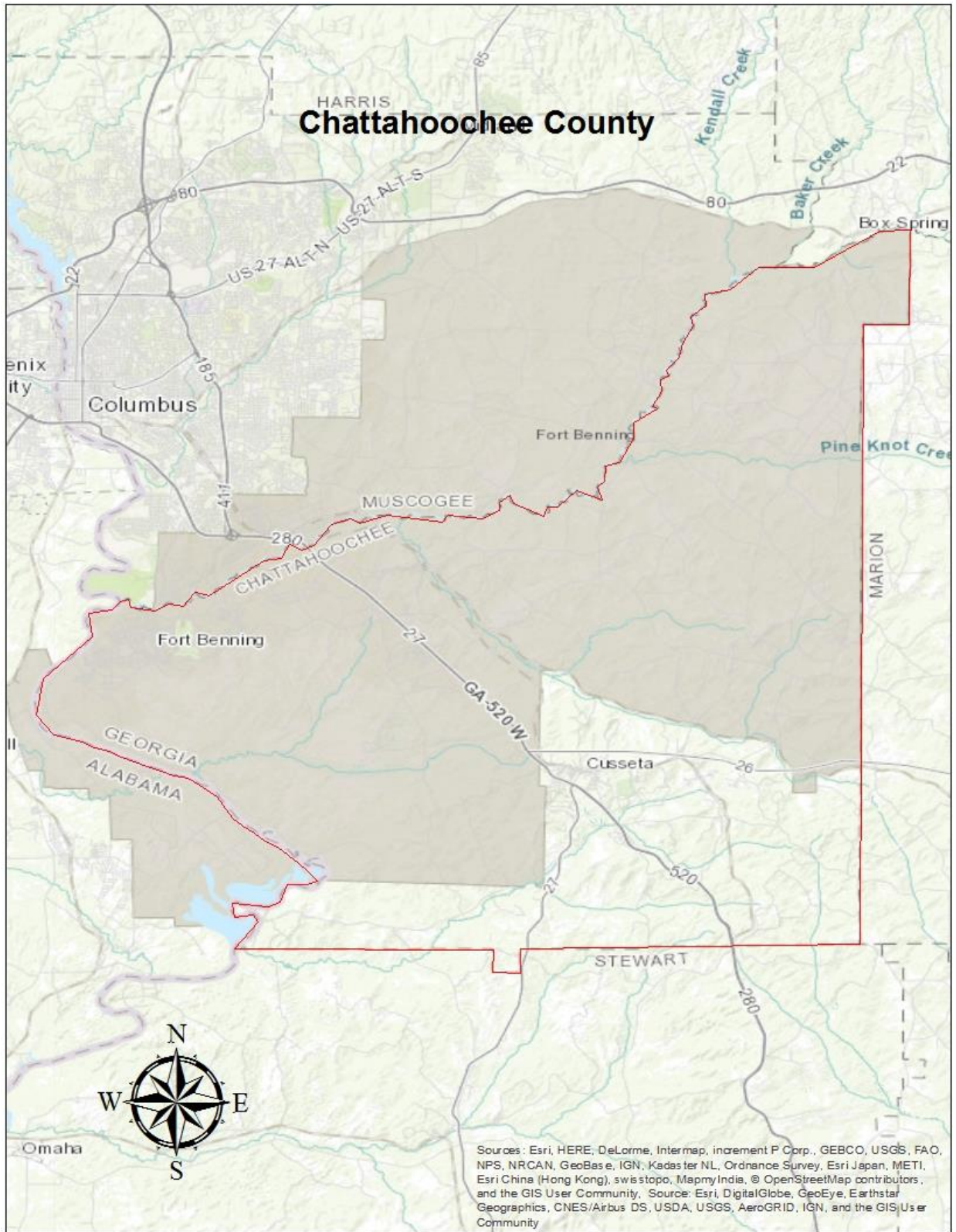
Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Chattahoochee County For FY 2007-2016				
Year	Acreage Burned	Number of Fires	Average Size	Statewide Average Size
2007	110.21	10	11.02	18.64
2008	6.18	7	.88	4.56
2009	28.43	8	3.55	3.90
2010	0.05	3	.17	3.93
2011	207.29	12	17.27	17.56
2012	5.57	8	.70	5.08
2013	43.76	4	10.94	4.53
2014	7.82	3	2.61	5.02
2015	8.08	5	1.62	4.42
2016	13.90	5	2.78	6.29

Acreage Burned /Number of Fires by Fire Cause For Chattahoochee County For FY 2007-2016		
Fire Cause	Acreage Burned	Number of Fires
Campfire	16.60	2
Children	1.77	4
Debris Burning	223.40	24
Incendiary	163.40	14
Lightning	0.12	2
MachineUse	9.46	7
Miscellaneous	9.22	8
Railroad	0.00	0
Smoking	0.00	0
Undetermined	7.32	4
Total	431.29	65

Fire Occurrence Map for Chattahoochee County for Fiscal Year 2012-2016



VI. COUNTY BASE MAPS

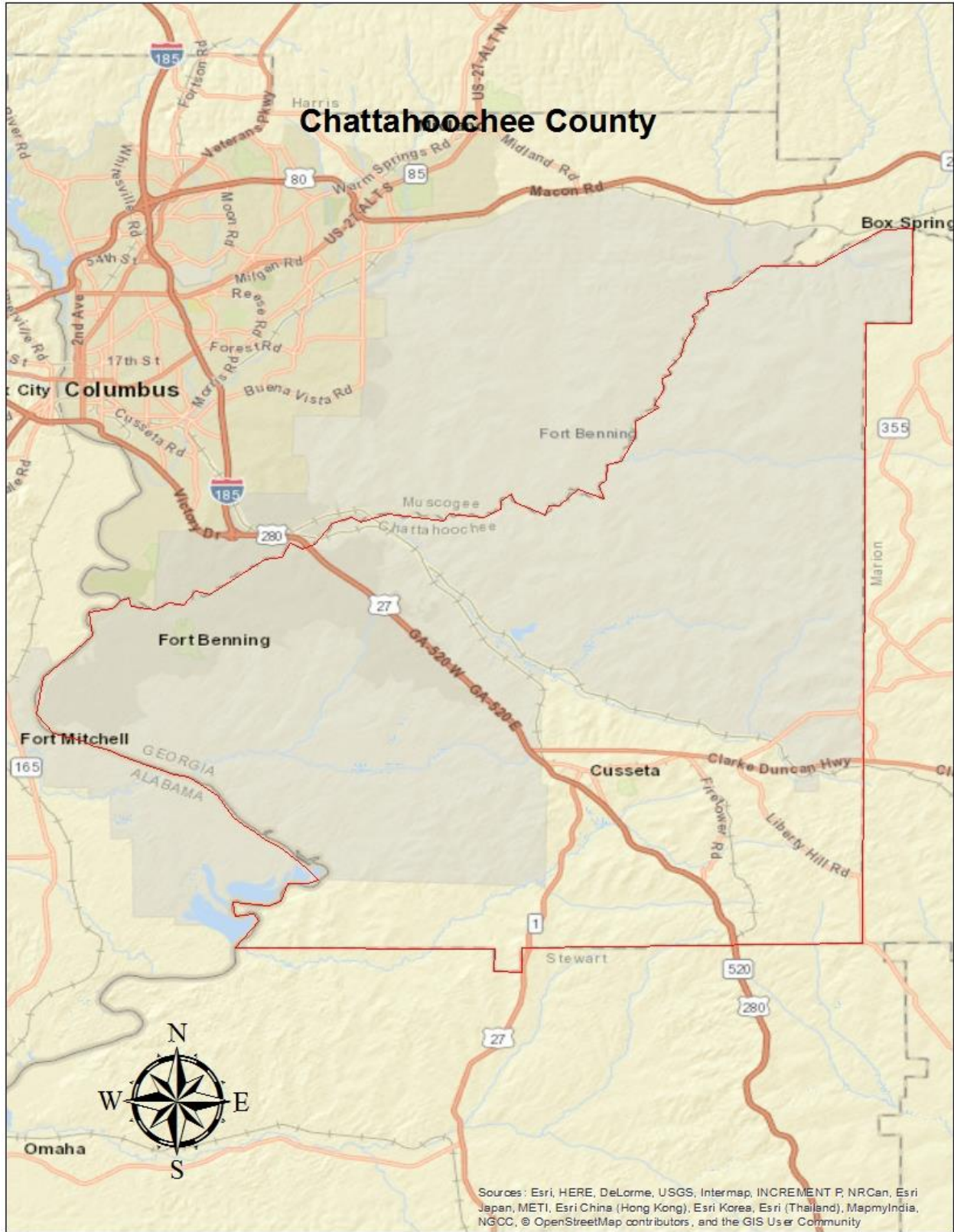




Chattahoochee County



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



VII. COMMUNITIES AT RISK

HAZARD RATINGS FOR COMMUNITIES AT RISK

Community	Score	Hazard Rating
Old Louvale	139	High
The Ranch & The Farm	101	Moderate
Windy Hills	99	Moderate
Steeple Chase	119	Moderate
Indian Hills/Red Canyon	113	Moderate
Cypress Meadows	117	Moderate

These hazard ratings were completed by R.T. Lumpkin, Chief Ranger for Chattahoochee County and Gary Daniel, during the months of September and October, 2009. The Georgia Forestry Commission's Woodland Community Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet was used. This document evaluates communities (groups of homes) based upon four criteria: subdivision design (infrastructure), site hazard, building construction and additional factors. The quantitative wildfire hazard ratings range from a low rating of 0 to 75 points to an extreme rating with over 140 points.

Old Louvale – A mixed pine hardwood forest is present on three sides of this community with moderate slopes and step gullies. Dead end secondary access roads exist and are between 100 and 200 feet in length. Trees, shrubs and grass dominate the area of defensible space within 30 feet of the homes. Unmanaged timber is present within 100 feet of a majority of the homes. Home addresses were not clearly visible in front of most homes. Branches on conifers (pines and cedars) are close to the ground and could carry a fire into the treetops. Pressurized fire hydrants exist. Old Louvale is about 75% mobile homes and 25% “Stick-Built” homes.

The Ranch & The Farm - 150 lots (100 existing houses and mobile homes). A system of pressurized fire hydrants is present. Dominant vegetation is mixed pine & hardwood with substantial slopes (6-20 percent) and intermittent gullies. The majority of homes have trees and/or shrubs (within 100 feet of the home) that constitute a fire hazard. An extensive forested area adjoins the community on three sides. The Ranch is a mixture of mobile homes and wood frame structures. The Farm is composed of all “Stick-Built” homes. Approximately 1/2 of the mobile homes in The Ranch are skirted to prevent the accumulation of flammable debris beneath the home.

Windy Hills – This is a community of 60 lots, 22 of which are vacant. There is one way in and out (entrance & exit is the same). A mixed pine hardwood forest is present on three sides of this community with moderate slopes and step gullies. Trees and shrubs are present within the area of defensible space (within 30 feet of structures), but are generally widely spaced. Dead end secondary access roads exist and are in excess of 200 feet in length. About half of the mobile homes are skirted to prevent the accumulation of leaf litter and other flammable debris under the home. The majority of the dwellings are mobile homes (about 60%).

Steeple Chase – This is a community of 60 lots, 24 of which are vacant. A mixed pine hardwood forest is present on three sides of this community (probably a little more pine than hardwood) with moderate slopes and step gullies. A majority of the homes do not have fire resistant exterior siding or soffits. Dead end secondary access roads exist and are in excess of 200 feet in length. Approximately one-half of the dwellings in Steeple Chase are mobile homes.

Indian Hills/Red Canyon – This is a community of 30 lots, 11 of which are vacant. There is one way in and out (entrance & exit is the same). Secondary roads dead end and are in excess of 200 feet in length. A mixed pine hardwood forest is present (probably a little more pine than hardwood) on three sides of this community with moderate slopes and step gullies. Trees and shrubs are present within the area of defensible space (within 30 feet of structures), but are generally widely spaced. A majority of the homes do not have fire resistant exterior siding or soffits. Sixty percent of the dwellings in these communities are mobile homes.

Cypress Meadows – This community has one way in and out (entrance & exit is the same) and secondary roads that dead end and are in excess of 200 feet in length. A mixed pine hardwood forest is present (probably a little more pine than hardwood) on three sides of this community with moderate slopes and step gullies. A majority of the homes do not have fire resistant exterior siding or soffits. A majority (90 percent) of the dwellings in Cypress Meadows are mobile homes.

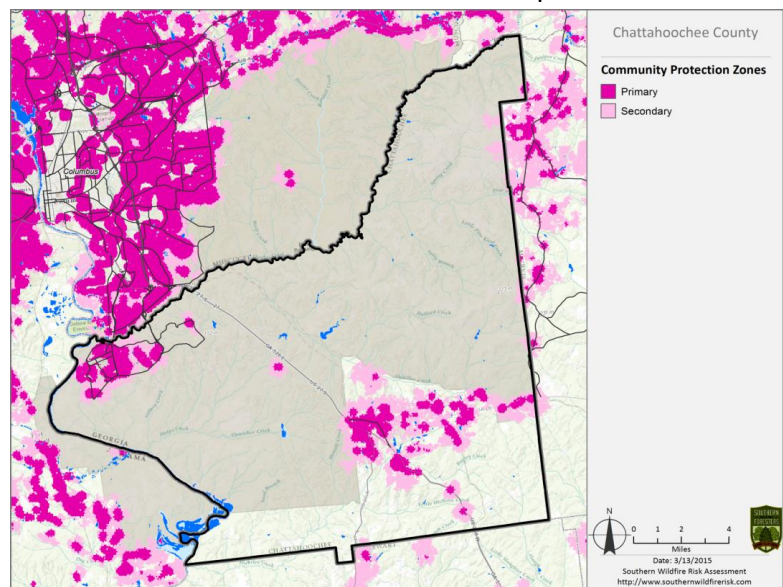


Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is described as the area where structures and other human improvements meet and intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

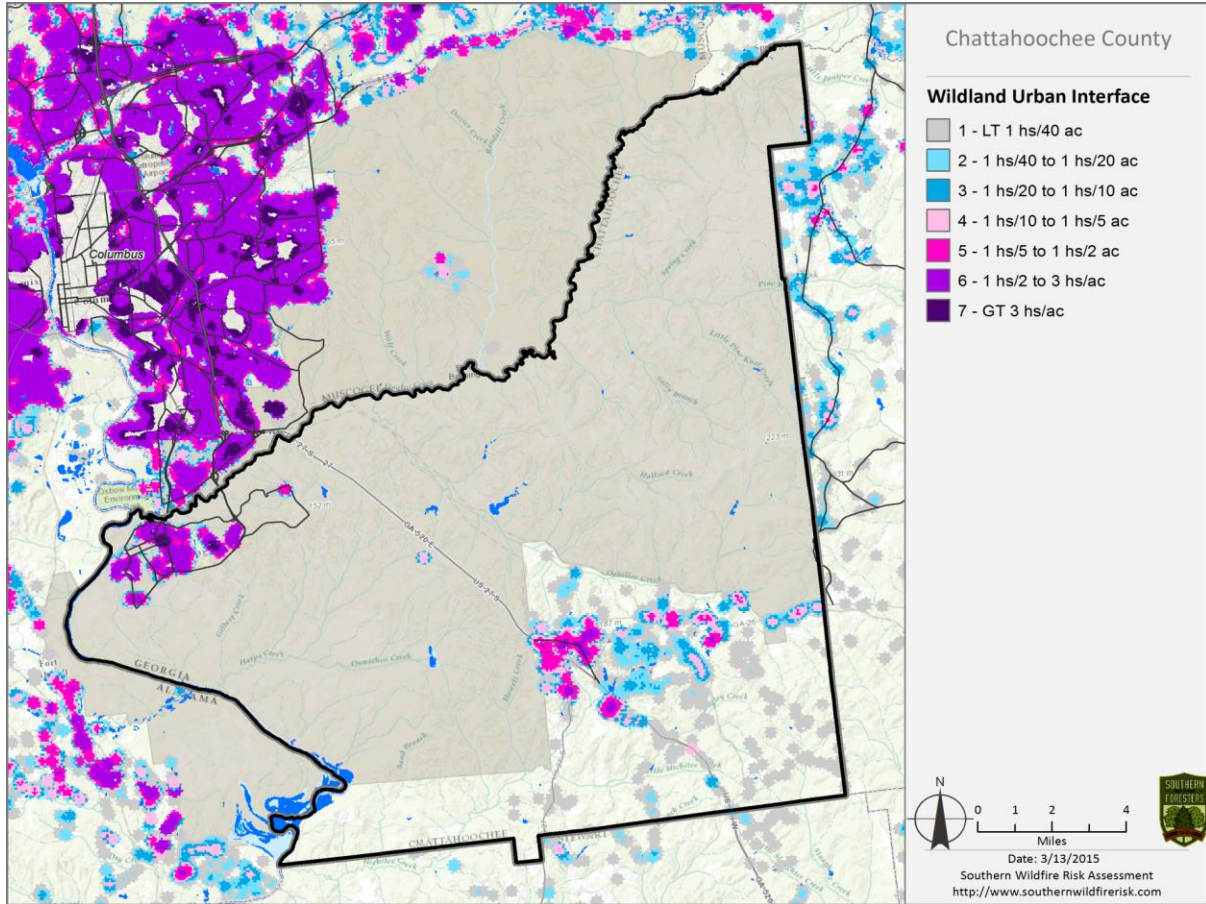
VIII. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment tool, developed by the Southern Group of State Foresters, was released to the public in July 2014. This tool allows users of the Professional Viewer application of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA) web Portal (SouthWRAP) to define a specific project area and summarize wildfire related information for this area. A detailed risk summary report is generated using a set of predefined map products developed by the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment project which have been summarized explicitly for the user defined project area. A risk assessment summary was generated for Chattahoochee County. The SouthWRAP (SWRA) products included in this report are designed to provide the information needed to support the following key priorities:

- Identify areas that are most prone to wildfire
- Identify areas that may require additional tactical planning, specifically related to mitigation projects and Community Wildfire Protection Planning
- Provide the information necessary to justify resource, budget and funding requests
- Allow agencies to work together to better define priorities and improve emergency response, particularly across jurisdictional boundaries
- Define wildland communities and identify the risk to those communities
- Increase communication and outreach with local residents and the public to create awareness and address community priorities and needs
- Plan for response and suppression resource needs
- Plan and prioritize hazardous fuel treatment programs

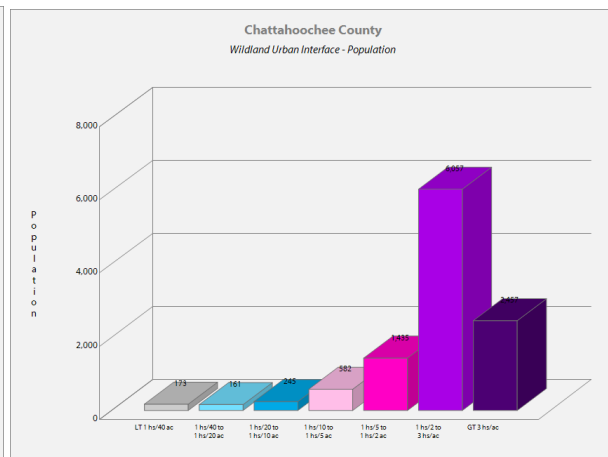
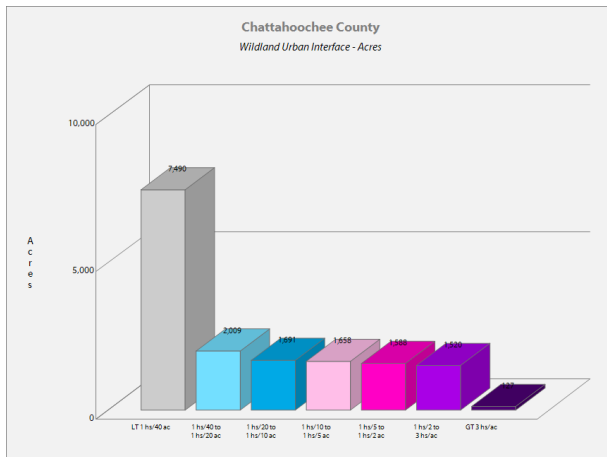


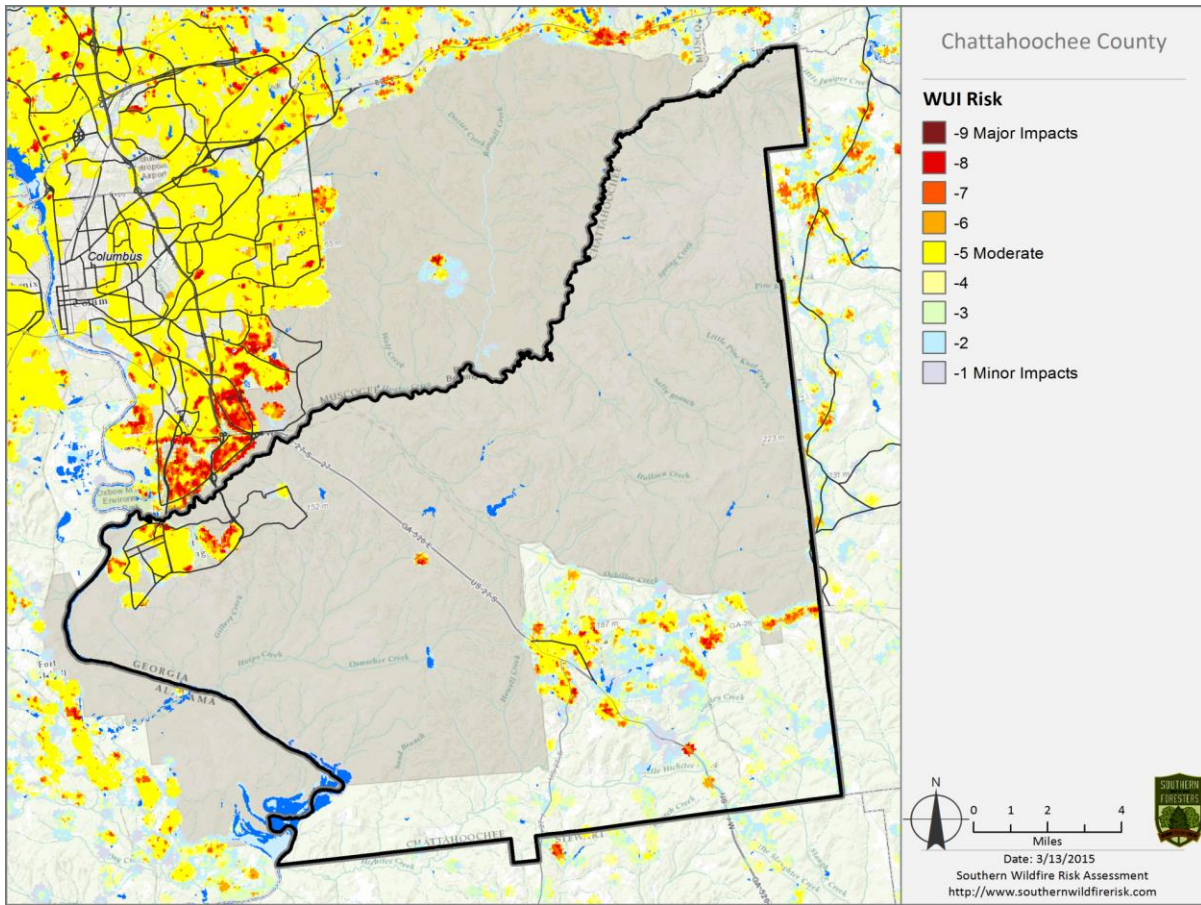
Community Protection Zones map from the Chattahoochee County SWRA



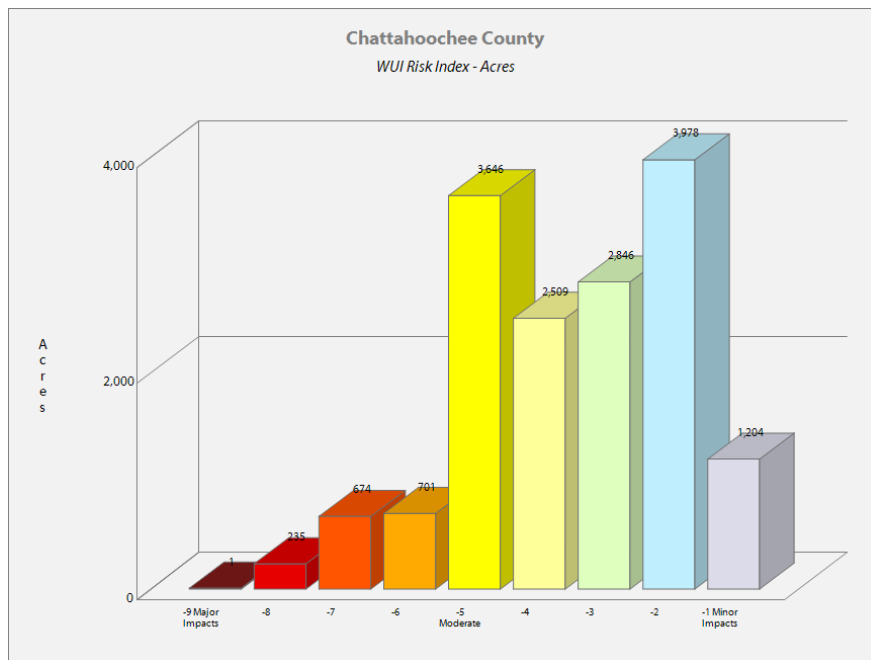
Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map (above)

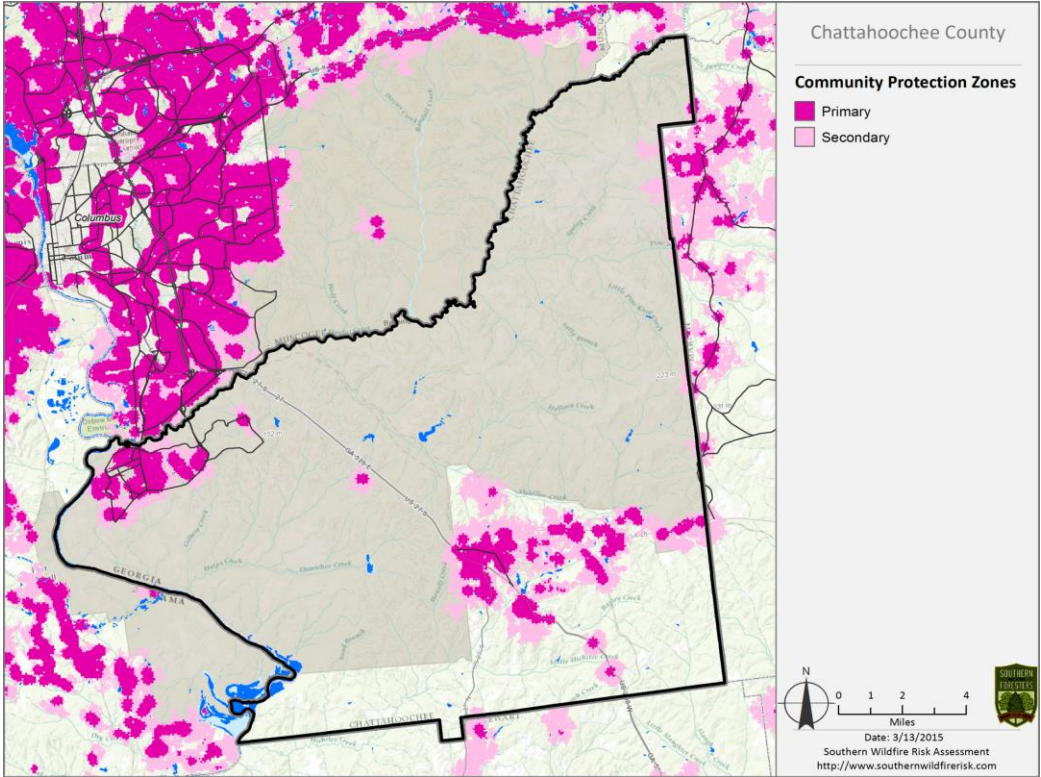
WUI Acres and WUI population graphs (below)



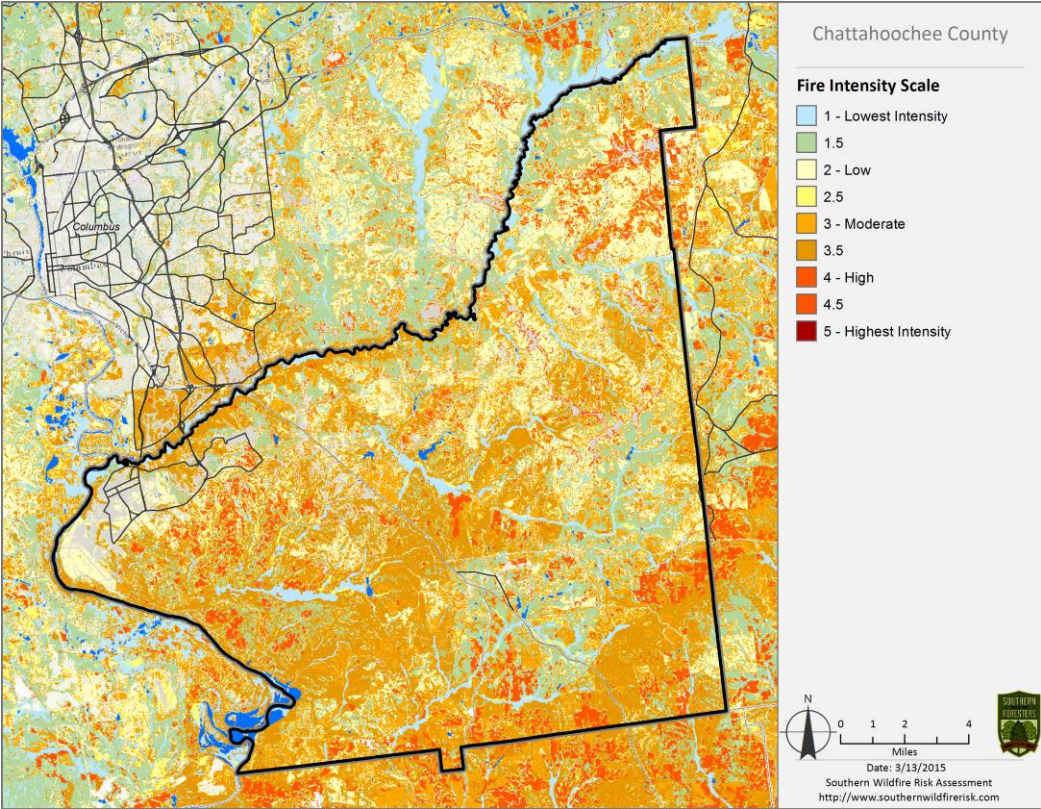


Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk map (above) and WUI Risk Acres Index-Acres graph (below)





Community Protection Zones map (above) and Fire Intensity Scale map (below)



IX. MITIGATION & ACTION PLAN

Critical Facilities

Critical facilities are unique structures which require special consideration in the event of an emergency such as a wildland/urban interface fire. Every county will have some critical facilities and some more urbanized counties will have many. Critical facilities include: a nursing home that may need special consideration because the smoke accompanying a wildfire may be hazardous to the health of elderly residents, a law enforcement dispatch center is a critical facility that will need special consideration to insure there is no disruption of emergency communications in the event of a disastrous wildfire. Other examples of critical facilities are ethanol plants, auto salvage yards and facilities that produce chemicals that could be hazardous to the local population if released into the atmosphere.

Owner/operators of critical facilities need to be aware of the hazards that an approaching wildfire could present. There may be immediate action that could be taken by owner/operators to lessen the impact of a wildfire in the immediate area (such as the elimination of encroaching wildland vegetation in and around the critical facility).

List of Critical Facilities:

National Security Administration facility (936 Riverbend Road)

Ferrell Gas (propane) at Highway 137 & Miller Road

Laundrymat with 30,000 gallons of LPG (Highway 26 & Industrial Park Road)

Fire Station #2 on Fire Tower Road

County Water System Wells

Cellphone towers

Two auto salvage yards (Highway 26 & King Street and Old Louvale Road & Highway 520)

Thornton Medical Building at 213 McNaughton Street (EOC, Health Department, DFAC)

Chattahoochee County Middle/High School (362 Highway 26)

Chattahoochee County Education Center (elementary school) at 146 Merrill Street

Sewage Treatment Plant at River Bend Road and Highway 27 (planned for the future)

RECOMMENDATION:

Contact owner/operators of Critical Facilities in person or by letter to provide an evaluation of any hazards and suggest what owner/operators might do to mitigate the hazards and improve wildfire protection.

Public Education Needs

“Firewise” structures are homes and other buildings in the wildland/urban interface that have been built, designed or maintained to survive a wildfire event even in the absence of firefighters on the scene. Over the past fifty years, many Georgia residents have left the city or the suburbs to build homes in or adjacent to forested areas with a desire to be “close to nature”. Unfortunately, this has resulted in neighborhoods or single-family dwellings with one way in and out, with long narrow driveways, no pressurized hydrants or draft source for water and so close to wildland fuel that even the best equipped fire department could not be successful in a severe wildfire event. Most of these homeowners don’t understand the risk associated with living in the wildland/urban interface and expect to be rescued by the fire department in the event of a wildfire emergency.

The key to the reduction of structural losses in the wildland/urban interface cannot rest solely with improved response by the local fire services. There will never be enough fire trucks and firefighters to adequately protect homes in the wildland/urban interface. A major part of the solution to this problem lies with the homeowner – homeowners in the wildland/urban interface must become “partners” with the fire services and assume some responsibility for maintaining their home (structure) and landscape (yard) so that ignitions in and around the home are less likely should a wildfire occur in the immediate area. This means a home with no debris on the roof and in the gutters, wood decks that are skirted underneath, chunky bark or lava rock mulch near the house instead of pine straw or cypress mulch and a “lean, clean and green” landscape of less-flammable plants within 30 feet of the structure.

RECOMMENDATION:

Initiate a Wildland Fire Protection public education campaign for Cusseta-Chattahoochee County residents using as a reference: NFPA 1144 *Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire*, 2008 Edition.

- Host a Firewise Workshop at a centrally-located facility with a meal and refreshments for those who attend.
- Make Firewise Communities brochures available to the public at central locations such as: Farm Services Agency, Chamber of Commerce, River Bend State Park and the County Courthouse.
- Encourage neighborhoods/communities that qualify to apply for recognition as a Firewise Community/ USA.

Reduction of Hazardous Fuels

Because approximately 90 percent of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County is forested, the accumulation of brush and other (mostly ground) vegetation can create conditions over extensive areas that could fuel a disastrous wildfire. Treatment of forested areas with prescribed fire can significantly reduce this hazard while improving pulpwood and sawtimber production and enhancing wildlife habitat. Prescribed burning, however, must be conducted by experienced personnel when weather conditions are conducive to a safe burn and when an authorization has been obtained from the local office of the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Other ways to reduce wildland fuel (vegetation) include:

- Mechanical treatment
- Chemical treatment (herbicides)
- Livestock grazing

The above alternatives to prescribed burning are more intensive and hence, more costly and generally suitable only for smaller acreages.

The goal for structural protection should be a “Firewise” landscape. A Firewise landscape is characterized by trees, shrubs and grasses that are carefully managed within 100 feet of structures - an area called the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ). Most critical is the space within 30 feet of a structure which is usually referred to as the area of Defensible Space. The Defensible Space should include a landscape of less flammable plants, coarse bark or lava rock as mulch adjacent the structure, tree limbs trimmed away from the structure and any decks skirted so leaves and other debris cannot accumulate

underneath. The idea is to create a landscape that will prevent flames or fire brands (aerial borne embers) from igniting the structure.

Smoke on highway (from prescribed burning or wildfires) is a public safety issue in Cusseta-Chattahoochee County. This is of special concern in that portion of the county bordering Ft. Benning where a significant amount of prescribed burning takes place and where wildfires occur as a result of lightning or military training exercises.

RECOMMENDATION:

Promote prescribed burning in Cusseta-Chattahoochee County.

- Help landowners understand how to prescribe burn legally and safely.
- Work with Department of Defense personnel and local law enforcement to improve public safety when smoke on the highway is anticipated from prescribed burning or wildfires on Ft. Benning.
- Educate the general public on the benefits of prescribed burning.

Site Plan Review

Growth pressure from the Columbus metropolitan area is expected to increase new home starts in Cusseta-Chattahoochee County over the next 20 years. The County Planning and Zoning Board will have an opportunity to significantly influence the wildland fire safety of new developments. It is important that new development be planned and constructed to provide for public safety in the event of a wildland fire emergency.

Over the past 20 years, much has been learned about how and why homes burn during wildland fire emergencies. Perhaps most importantly, case histories and research have shown that even in the most severe circumstances, wildland fire disasters can be avoided. Homes can be designed, built and maintained to withstand a wildfire even in the absence of fire services on the scene. The national Firewise Communities program is a national awareness initiative to help people understand that they don't have to be victims in a wildfire emergency. The National Fire Protection Association has produced two standards for reference: NFPA 1144 Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire. 2008 Edition and NFPA 1141 Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Suburban and Rural Areas.

In 2013 Georgia adopted the International Wildland Urban Interface Code (IWUIC). This code was established in 2012 by the International Code Council. The Code is used by communities to help establish local guidelines for new development in areas at higher risk for wildfire. When new multi-unit subdivisions are built in rural areas (sometimes referred to as the Wildland/Urban Interface), a number of public safety challenges may be created for the local fire services: (1) the water supply in the immediate areas may be inadequate for fire protection; (2) if the Development is in an outlying area, there may be a longer response time for emergency services; (3) in a wildfire emergency, the access road[s] may need to simultaneously support evacuation of residents and the arrival of emergency vehicles; and (4) when wildland fire disasters occur, many structures may be involved simultaneously, quickly exceeding the capability of even the best equipped fire departments,

RECOMMENDATION:

Strengthen the site plan review process for multi-unit residential development in rural areas subject to wildfires.

- Evaluate (assess) the wildfire hazard of proposed new development in rural areas as part of the site plan review process. Use GFC “Woodland Community Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet”.
- Utilize the International Wildland Urban Interface Code guidelines in areas at high risk for wildfires.
- Consider the “adoption by reference” of NFPA 1144 Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire. 2008 Edition and NFPA 1141 Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Suburban and Rural Areas.

FIRE SERVICES CAPABILITY

Structural fire protection in the County is provided by the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County Volunteer Fire Department. There are 40 volunteer firefighters who operate out of two stations (one of which received substantial damage during a 2009 tornado). A third station is planned for the River Bend area at Highway 27. Current firefighting equipment includes:

3 engines (two E-One International engines and one Ward LeFrance engine)
 1 quick response Type VI Engine (brush truck)
 2 tankers (Fire Knockers)

RECOMMENDATION:

Improve the ability of the Cusseta-Chattahoochee County Volunteer Fire Department to safely and effectively protect rural homes from wildfires.

- Equipment and Training Needed
 3,500 gallon mobile supply water tender
 1 additional Type VI Engine/brush truck
 Wildland firefighting tools and wildland personal protective equipment
 Wildland fire training for volunteer firefighters (S-130 & S-190)
 Ready Set Go training
 Repeater (communications)
 Specialized equipment (saws) for removing limbs/brush impeding equipment access
- Dry Hydrants
 Pressurized hydrants are currently in place throughout Cusseta-Chattahoochee County, however, there are two locations where dry hydrants are needed:
 (1) Chattahoochee River at Riverbend Park
 (2) Manta Road and State Road 520

ACTION PLAN

Community/Area at Risk	Project	Agency	Funding Needs	Timetable (Priority)	Community Recommendation
Old Louvale	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(H)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes.
The Ranch	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(M)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes
Windy Hills	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(M)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes
Steeple Chase	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(M)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes
Indian Hills/Red Canyon	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(M)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes
Cypress Meadows	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/ County	\$10,000	(M)	Organize Community "Firewise" Day. Rent equipment for clean-up/removal of hazardous brush & trees around homes
Countywide	Firefighter Training	County VFD /GFC	\$15,000	(H)	Standards for Survival and Wildland Fire Behavior (Courses: S-130 & S-190)
Countywide	Firefighter PPE & Tools	County VFD	\$20,000 PPE \$5,000 Tools	(H)	Personal protective equipment & fire shelters
Countywide	3,500 Gallon Water Tender	County VFD	\$300,000	(H)	Mobile water supply tanker for wildland/urban interface areas
Countywide	Type VI Engine (Brush Truck)	County VFD	\$180,000	(H)	Improve County's off-road firefighting capability
Countywide	Dry Hydrants	County VFD	\$3,000	(M)	Install dry hydrants at 2 locations in SW County
Countywide	Repeater	County VFD	\$10,000	(M)	Improve countywide VFD communications
Countywide	Tree Trimming Equipment	County VFD	\$5,000	(M)	3 sets of chain saws with extensions to improve VFD access
Countywide	Educational Initiative	GFC/County	\$1,500	(M)	"Firewise" workshop for public education

NOTE: The Action Plan summarizes a recommended course of action for implementation of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Some projects can be implemented at little or no added cost, however, the County or assigned agency will be able to implement most projects only if grant funding is available.

ASSESSMENT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To accurately assess progress and effectiveness of the action plan, Cusseta-Chattahoochee County will implement the following:

- An annual wildfire risk assessment (of “communities-at-risk”) will be conducted to reassess wildfire hazards and prioritize needed actions.
- Mitigation efforts that are recurring (such as mowing, burning or clearing of defensible space) will be incorporated into a renewal of the original CWPP action plan.
- Mitigation efforts that could not be funded in the requested year will be incorporated into the annual renewal of the original CWPP action plan.
- Continuing education and outreach programs will be conducted and assessed for effectiveness. Workshops will be evaluated based upon attendance and post surveys that are distributed by mail following the workshops.
- The CWPP Core Committee will continue a year-to-year focus on the wildland/urban interface fire challenges in the County. The Committee will annually update the CWPP, summarizing mitigation projects initiated and completed, progress for ongoing actions, funds received, funds expended and in-kind services utilized. Recommendations will be incorporated into the CWPP Action Plan.
- An evaluation of individual mitigation efforts by county residents on their own property (e.g., defensible space).



Prescribed burning of woodlands is the best management practice to reduce hazardous fuel accumulation. The Georgia Forestry Commission can provide a prescribed burning plan, establish fire breaks, and can also provide equipment standby and assist with burning when personnel are available.

X. GRANT FUNDING AND MITIGATION ASSISTANCE

Community Protection Grant: US Forest Service sponsored prescribed fire program. Communities with “at-risk” properties that lie within ten miles of a National Forest, National Park Service or Bureau of Land Management tracts may apply with the Georgia Forestry Commission to have their land prescribe burned free-of-charge. Forest mastication, where it is practical with Georgia Forestry Commission equipment, is also available under this grant program.

FEMA Mitigation Policy MRR-2-08-01: through GEMA – Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program (PDM).

1. To provide technical and financial assistance to local governments to assist in the implementation of long term, cost effective hazard mitigation accomplishments.
2. This policy addresses wildfire mitigation for the purpose of reducing the threat to all-risk structures through creating defensible space, structural protection through the application of ignition resistant construction and limited hazardous fuel reduction to protect life and property.
3. With a completed registered plan (addendum to the State Plan) counties can apply for pre-mitigation funding. They will also be eligible for HMGP funding if the county is declared under a wildfire disaster.

Georgia Forestry Commission: Plowing and prescribed burning assistance, as well as forest mastication, can be obtained from the GFC as a low-cost option for mitigation efforts.

The Georgia Forestry Commission Firewise Community Mitigation Assistance Grants – Nationally recognized Firewise Communities can receive up to \$5000 grants to help address potential wildfire risk reduction projects. Grant submission can be made through local Georgia Forestry Commission offices or your Regional Wildfire Prevention Specialist.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and American International Group, Inc. (AIG) offer grants to assist local fire departments in establishing or enhancing their community fuels mitigation programs while educating members of the community about community wildfire readiness and encouraging personal action.

XI. GLOSSARY

Community-At-Risk – A group of two or more structures whose proximity to forested or wildland areas places homes and residents at some degree of risk.

Critical Facilities – Buildings, structures or other parts of the community infrastructure that require special protection from an approaching wildfire.

CWPP – The Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Defensible Space – The immediate landscaped area around a structure (usually a minimum of 30 ft.) kept “lean, clean and green” to prevent an approaching wildfire from igniting the structure.

Dry Hydrant - A non-pressurized pipe system permanently installed in existing lakes, ponds and streams that provides a suction supply of water to a fire department tank truck.

FEMA – The Federal Emergency Management Agency whose mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

Fire Adapted Community – A community fully prepared for its wildfire risk by taking actions to address safety, homes, neighborhoods, businesses and infrastructure, forest, parks, open spaces, and other community assets.

Firewise Program – A national initiative with a purpose to reduce structural losses from wildland fires.

Firewise Community/USA – A national recognition program for communities that take action to protect themselves from wildland fire. To qualify a community must have a wildfire risk assessment by the Georgia Forestry Commission, develop a mitigation action plan, have an annual firewise mitigation/education event, have dedicated firewise leadership, and complete the certification application.

Fuels – All combustible materials within the wildland/urban interface or intermix including, but not limited to, vegetation and structures.

Fuel Modification – Any manipulation or removal of fuels to reduce the likelihood of ignition or the resistance to fire control.

Hazard & Wildfire Risk Assessment – An evaluation to determine an area’s (community’s) potential to be impacted by an approaching wildland fire.

Healthy Forests Initiative - *Launched in August 2002 by President Bush (following passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act by Congress) with the intent to reduce the risks severe wildfires pose to people, communities, and the environment.*

Home Ignition Zone (Structure Ignition Zone) - *Treatment area for wildfire protection. The “zone” includes the structure(s) and their immediate surroundings from 0-200 ft.*

Mitigation – *An action that moderates the severity of a fire hazard or risk.*

National Fire Plan – *National initiative, passed by Congress in the year 2000, following a landmark wildland fire season, with the intent of actively responding to severe wildland fires and their impacts to communities while ensuring sufficient firefighting capacity for the future.*

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) - *An international nonprofit organization established in 1896, whose mission is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training, and education.*

National Wildfire Preparedness Day – *Started in 2014 by the National Fire Protection Association as a day for communities to work together to prepare for the approaching wildfire season. It is held annually on the first Saturday in May.*

Prescribed Burning (prescribed fire) –*The use of planned fire that is deliberately set under specific fuel and weather condition to accomplish a variety of management objectives and is under control until it burns out or is extinguished.*

Ready, Set, Go - *A program fire services use to help homeowners understand wildfire preparedness, awareness, and planning procedures for evacuation.*

Southern Group of State Foresters – *Organization whose members are the agency heads of the forestry agencies of the 13 southern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.*

Stakeholders– *Individuals, groups, organizations, businesses or others who have an interest in wildland fire protection and may wish to review and/or contribute to the CWPP content.*

Wildfire or Wildland Fire – *An unplanned and uncontrolled fire spreading through vegetative fuels.*

Wildland/Urban Interface - *The presence of structures in locations in which the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) determines that topographical features, vegetation, fuel types, local weather conditions and prevailing winds result in the potential for ignition of the structures within the area from flames and firebrands from a wildland fire (NFPA 1144, 2008)*

XII. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Publications/Brochures/Websites:

- FIREWISE materials can be ordered at www.firewise.org
- Georgia Forestry Commission www.georgiafirewise.org
- Examples of successful wildfire mitigation programs can be viewed at the website for National Database of State and Local wildfire Hazard Mitigation Programs sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service and the Southern Group of State Foresters www.wildfireprograms.com
- Information about a variety of interface issues (including wildfire) can be found at the USFS website for Interface South: www.interfacesouth.org
- Information on codes and standards for emergency services including wildfire can be found at www.nfpa.org
- Information on FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) can be found at www.firegrantsupport.com
- Information on National Fire Plan grants can be found at <http://www.federalgrantswire.com/national-fire-plan--rural-fire-assistance.html>
- Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment website SouthWRAP www.SouthernWildfireRisk.com
- Fire Adapted Communities www.fireadapted.org
- Ready, Set, Go www.wildlandfirersg.org
- National Wildfire Preparedness Day www.wildfireprepdays.org

Appended Documents:

Chattahoochee County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

All files that make up this plan are available in an electronic format from the Georgia Forestry Commission.



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