



**Community Wildfire Protection Plan**  
***An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and***  
***Conservation of Natural Resources***  
**Cook County, Georgia**



**February 2018**

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Cook County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report

## 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**

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Honorable Dwight Purvis, Chairman  
Cook County Board of County Commissioners

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Date

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Jody L. Meeler, Fire Coordinator  
Cook County

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Date

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Kenneth Lee Weaver  
Chief Ranger/Forester Technician  
Georgia Forestry Commission

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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 herbs) 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 a wildfire emergency occurs.

### CWPP PLAN PARTICIPANTS

#### CWPP Core Committee

Jody L. Meeler, County Fire Coor.	Joe Perry, Chief, Lenox VFD	Joe Dent, Chief, Sparks VFD
Timmy Guthrie, Chief, Pine Valley VFD	Doyle L. Tatem, Chief, Cecil.	Ken Lewis, Chief S.E. Cook VFD
Jake Weeks, Chief, Chaserville VFD,	Denny Folsom, Cook Co. EMA/911	
Jeff Lane, Chairman, Cook County BCC	Brett Kelly, Vice-Chairman, Cook County BCC	

#### GFC Representatives

GFC Chief Ranger Kenneth Lee Weaver  
CWPP Program Specialist Jim Harrell (Initial CWPP)  
Wildfire Prevention Specialist Beryl Budd (*Revised 2018*)

#### Meeting Dates

*Initial Core Committee Meeting: May 26, 2011*  
*Follow-Up Meeting #1: June 23, 2011*  
*Follow-Up Meeting #2: July 7, 2011*

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE CWPP

There are several great reasons to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). First and foremost, a successful Community Wildfire Protection Plan provides a community with a set of objectives and actions specifically designed to address the threat of wildfire. These objectives and actions can help:

- 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

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan is a critical tool required to obtain hazard mitigation grants through the National Fire Plan, FEMA mitigation grants, and others. Under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, communities 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.

\* Federal agencies are involved in the CWPP process if U.S. Forest Service or BLM lands exist in the county.

### OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

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

During development of the Cook County CWPP, opportunities for collaboration major stakeholders were invited to participate as members of the CWPP Core Committee.

### III. HISTORY OF COOK COUNTY & WILDFIRE HISTORY



Cook County, forty miles north of the Florida border in south central Georgia, is the state's 155th county. The 229-square-mile county was created from Berrien County in 1918. One of only twenty-five Georgia counties that still have their original boundaries, it was named for Philip Cook, a general in the Seminole Wars and the Civil War (1861-65), a U.S. congressman from 1873 to 1882, and Georgia's secretary of state from 1890 through 1894.

Adel, the county seat, was incorporated in 1889, and the county courthouse was built there in 1939. Located at a railroad junction, Adel was first called "Puddleville" for the effect rain had on its then-unpaved streets.



Cook County Courthouse

The name was changed in 1873. According to one story, local residents saw the name "Philadelphia" either in a gazetteer or on a crocus sack, and needing a unique name for their town, they chose the central portion of the word.

The other incorporated cities in the county, Cecil, Lenox, and Sparks, were founded around the turn of the twentieth century as stops on the Georgia Southern railroad, Laconte, a community just south of Sparks on current maps, was established in 1853 but is not incorporated.

Cook County Workforce Development Center, located between Adel and Sparks, is operated by Wiregrass Georgia Technical College and provides educational opportunities and employment training to area residents.

Recreational facilities in the county include half of Reed Bingham State Park, a 1,613-acre park surrounding a 375-acre lake. (The other half is located in neighboring Colquitt County.) In addition to water sports and fishing, the park features nature trails and is home to a variety of wildlife, most notably thousands of black vultures and turkey vultures that spend the winter there. Volunteers assist park personnel with an active gopher tortoise preservation project. The South Georgia



Black Vultures

Motorsports Park, built in 2004 in Cecil, is a National Hot Rod Association-sanctioned arena with a half-mile oval track and motocross track.

According to the 2010 U.S. census, the county population is 17,212, an increase from the 2000 population of 15,771.

Gene Patterson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the former editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, was born on a farm near Adel.

Total area of Cook County is 233.2 square miles (149,248 acres), of which 229 square miles (146,560 acres) is land and 4.2 square miles (2,688 acres) is water. Forested area is 73,928 acres or 50.43 percent of the county land area.

**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 part of the Cook County economy.

*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.*

Local GFC Office

The Georgia Forestry Commission office serving Cook County is located at: 260 M.J. Taylor Road, Adel, Georgia, 31620. Telephone Number is: 229-896-2925.

Personnel

Weaver Kenneth Lee	Chief Ranger, Forester Technician	Office: 229-896-2925	
Barnes, Gregg J.	Ranger	Office: 229-263-4611	<a href="#">Profile</a>
Chafin, Brandon E	Ranger	Office: 229-896-2925	<a href="#">Profile</a>
Rogers, Robert Clinton	Ranger	Office: 229-263-4611	<a href="#">Profile</a>
Sirmans, James Walter	Ranger-District Reforestation Equipment Coordinator (Lead Worker)	Office: 229-896-2925	<a href="#">Profile</a>

Wildland firefighting equipment

- 2 Tractor/Transports with John Deere 650G
- 1 Tractor/Transport with D5N
- 1 Type VII Engine

On a year-to-year basis, the leading cause (#1) of wildfires in Cook County is escaped debris fires (all types), followed by (#2) wildfires caused by machine use (example: combine in a wheatfield) and then (#3) children playing (#4) incendiary (arson). Other major causes include lightning, campfires, and other miscellaneous causes.



County = Cook	Cause	Fires	Acres	Fires 5 Yr Avg	Acres 5 Yr Avg
<a href="#">Campfire</a>	Campfire	1	0.25	0.60	1.13
<a href="#">Children</a>	Children	0	0.00	0.40	0.12
<a href="#">Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc</a>	Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc	0	0.00	0.60	0.34
<a href="#">Debris: Construction Land Clearing</a>	Debris: Construction Land Clearing	1	4.10	1.00	3.80
<a href="#">Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn</a>	Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	9	74.33	6.20	54.18
<a href="#">Debris: Household Garbage</a>	Debris: Household Garbage	0	0.00	0.80	2.63
<a href="#">Debris: Other</a>	Debris: Other	0	0.00	0.60	2.31
<a href="#">Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc</a>	Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	6	13.68	3.60	6.04
<a href="#">Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related</a>	Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related	2	1.10	0.60	0.78
<a href="#">Incendiary</a>	Incendiary	2	0.62	1.00	0.78
<a href="#">Lightning</a>	Lightning	4	25.74	0.80	5.15
<a href="#">Machine Use</a>	Machine Use	5	7.09	3.80	16.83
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences</a>	Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	2	0.30	0.60	0.28
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion</a>	Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion	1	1.70	0.20	0.34
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires</a>	Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	1	0.40	0.40	0.10
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes</a>	Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes	0	0.00	0.20	0.13
<a href="#">Undetermined</a>	Undetermined	1	0.50	1.00	0.55
<b>Totals for County: Cook Year: 2017</b>		35	129.81	22.40	95.48

The table above indicates wildfire activity in Cook County during the fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 thru June 30 2017). The table on the following page shows wildfire activity over the previous 10 fiscal years 2007-2016. The average number of fires and average size is compared to the statewide average size.

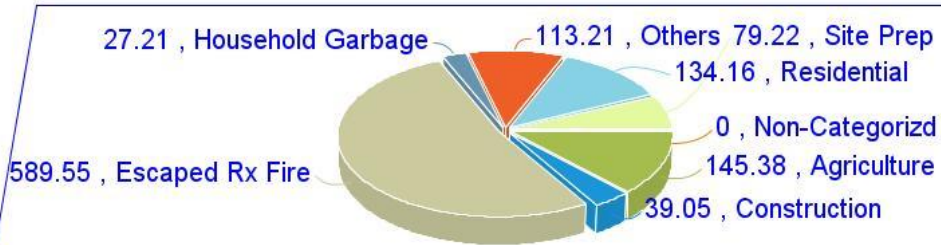
<b>Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Cook County For FY 2007-2016</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Acreage Burned</b>	<b>Number of Fires</b>	<b>Average Size</b>	<b>Statewide Average Size</b>
2007	316.45	63	5.02	18.64
2008	97.18	35	2.78	4.56
2009	140.25	58	2.42	3.90
2010	51.04	26	1.96	3.93
2011	332.04	74	4.49	17.56
2012	128.09	52	2.46	5.08
2013	56.97	29	1.96	4.53
2014	60.57	17	3.56	5.02
2015	44.62	18	2.48	4.42
2016	185.45	13	14.27	6.29

<b>Acreage Burned /Number of Fires by Fire Cause For Cook County For FY 2007-2016</b>		
<b>Fire Cause</b>	<b>Acreage Burned</b>	<b>Number of Fires</b>
Campfire	33.47	8
Children	8.94	13
Debris Burning	1,127.78	236
Incendiary	18.78	11
Lightning	33.69	13
MachineUse	155.28	80
Miscellaneous	8.62	12
Railroad	0.00	0
Smoking	0.39	2
Undetermined	2.24	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,389.19</b>	<b>379</b>

### Number of Fires by Cause for Cook County for FY 2007 to 2016

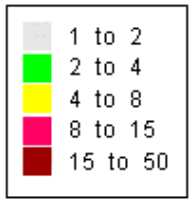
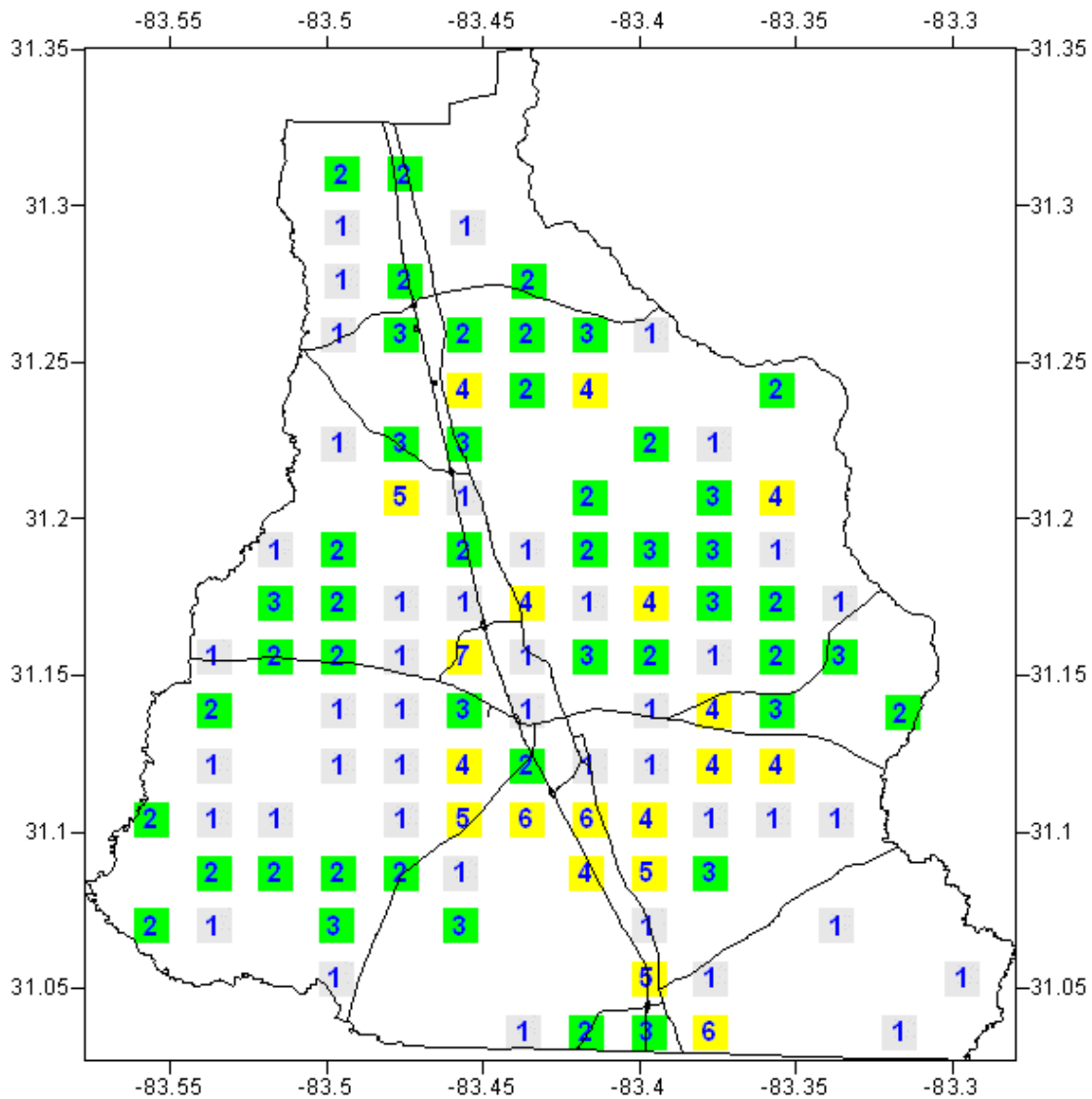
Year	Campfire	Children	Debris Burning	Incendiary	Lightning	Machine Use	Misc.	Railroad	Smoking
2007	1	3	37	2	5	10	1	2	2
2008	1	1	23	0	2	7	1	0	0
2009	1	2	37	1	0	15	2	0	0
2010	0	0	15	0	0	11	0	0	0
2011	3	2	48	3	5	10	3	0	0
2012	0	3	27	2	1	13	2	4	0
2013	1	0	18	3	0	5	2	0	0
2014	1	1	11	0	0	2	2	0	0
2015	0	1	10	0	0	5	2	0	0
2016	0	0	10	0	0	2	1	0	0

Acreage Burned By Debris Burning Sub Cause For Cook County For FY 2007-2016

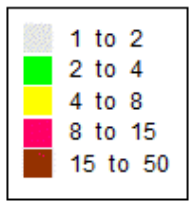
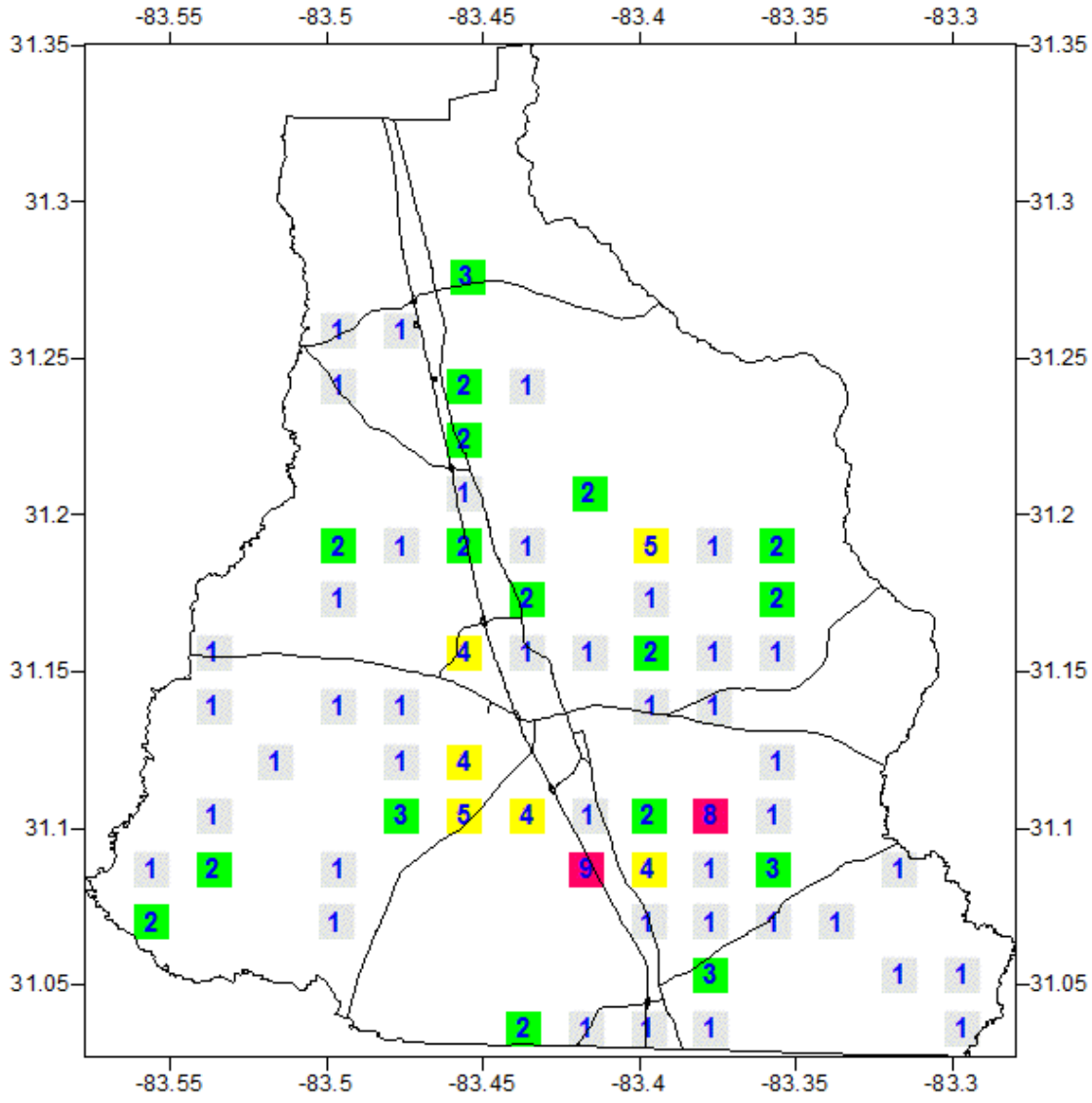


Fire Cause

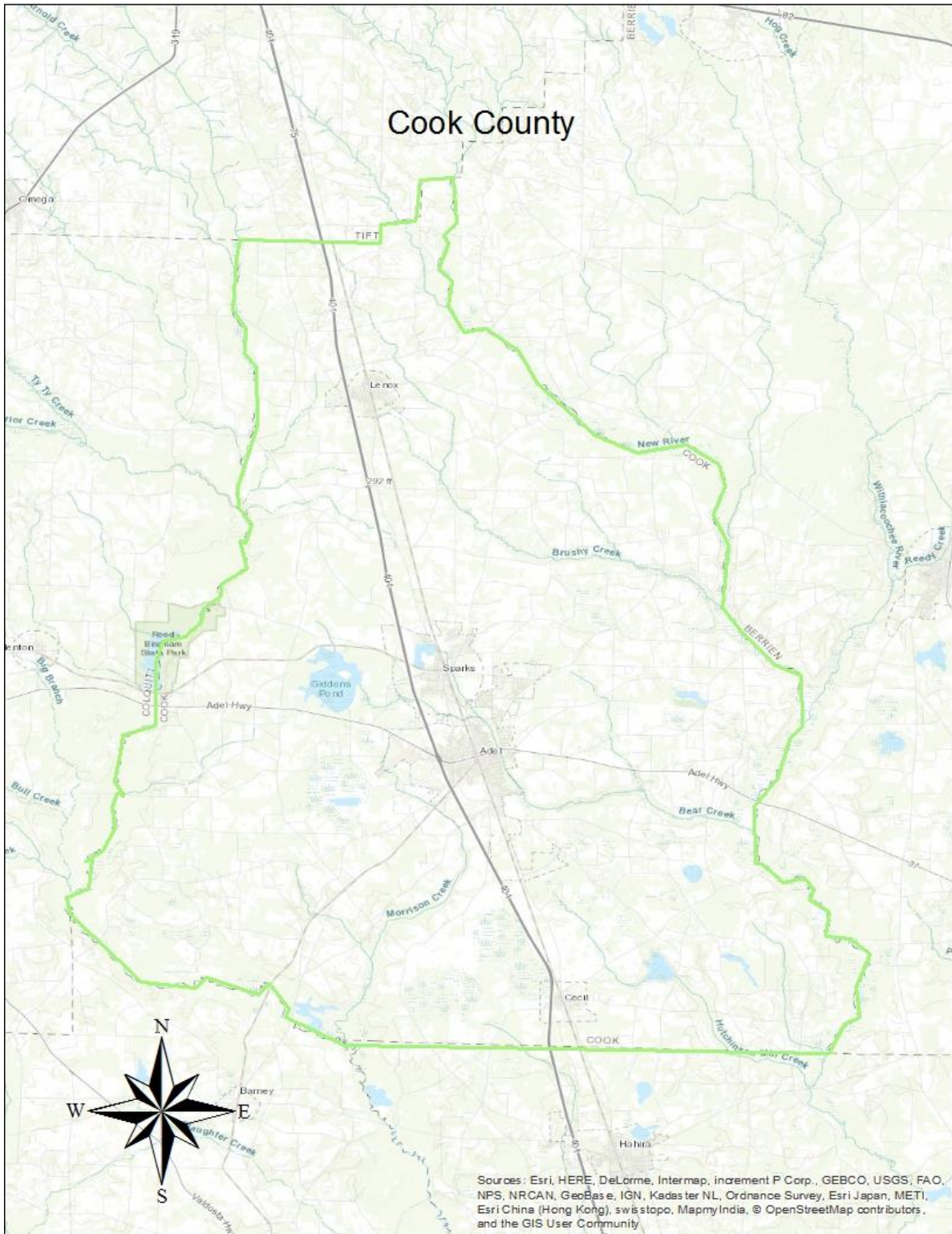
# Fire Occurrence Map for Cook County for Fiscal Year 2007-2011

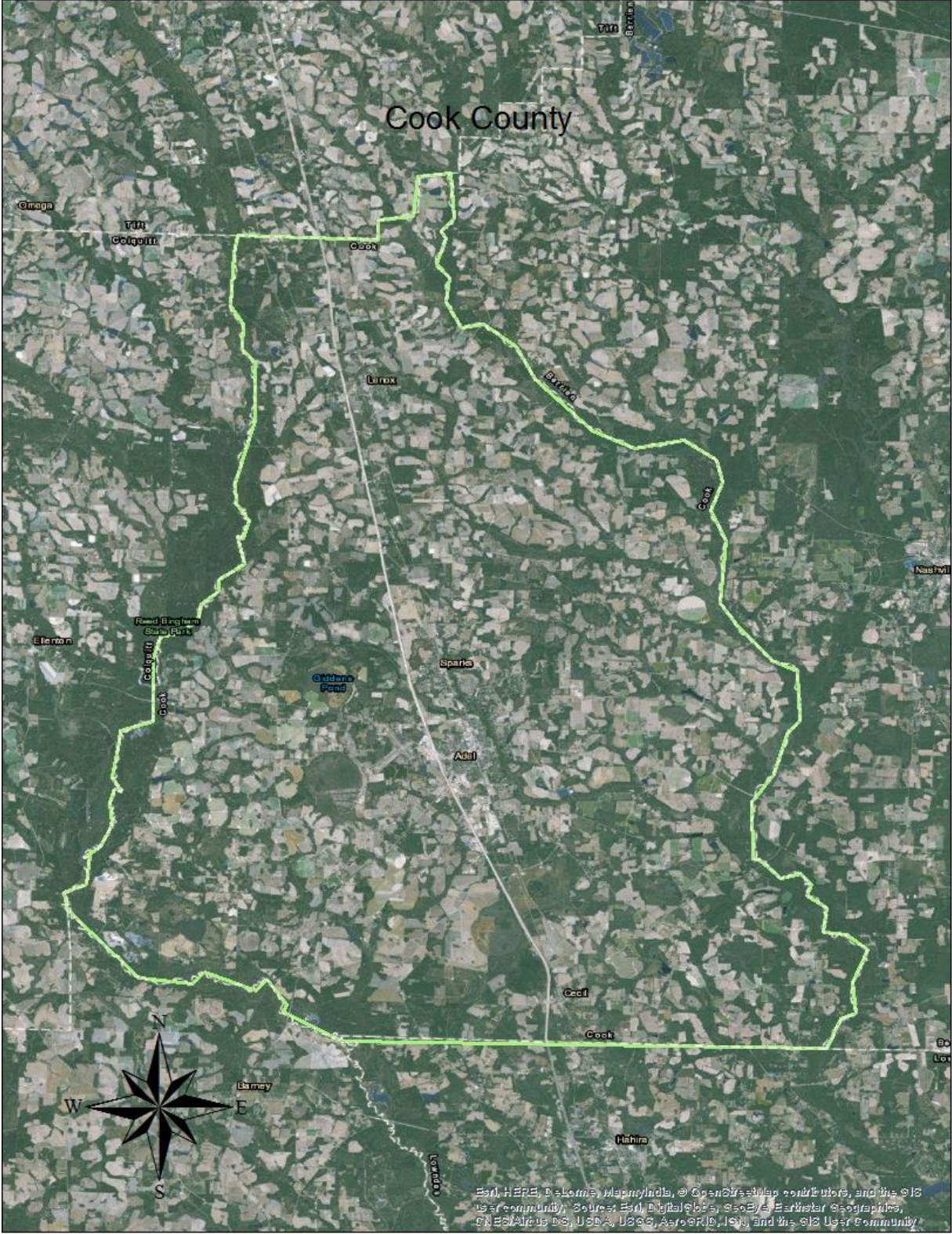


# Fire Occurrence Map for Cook County for Fiscal Year 2012-2016



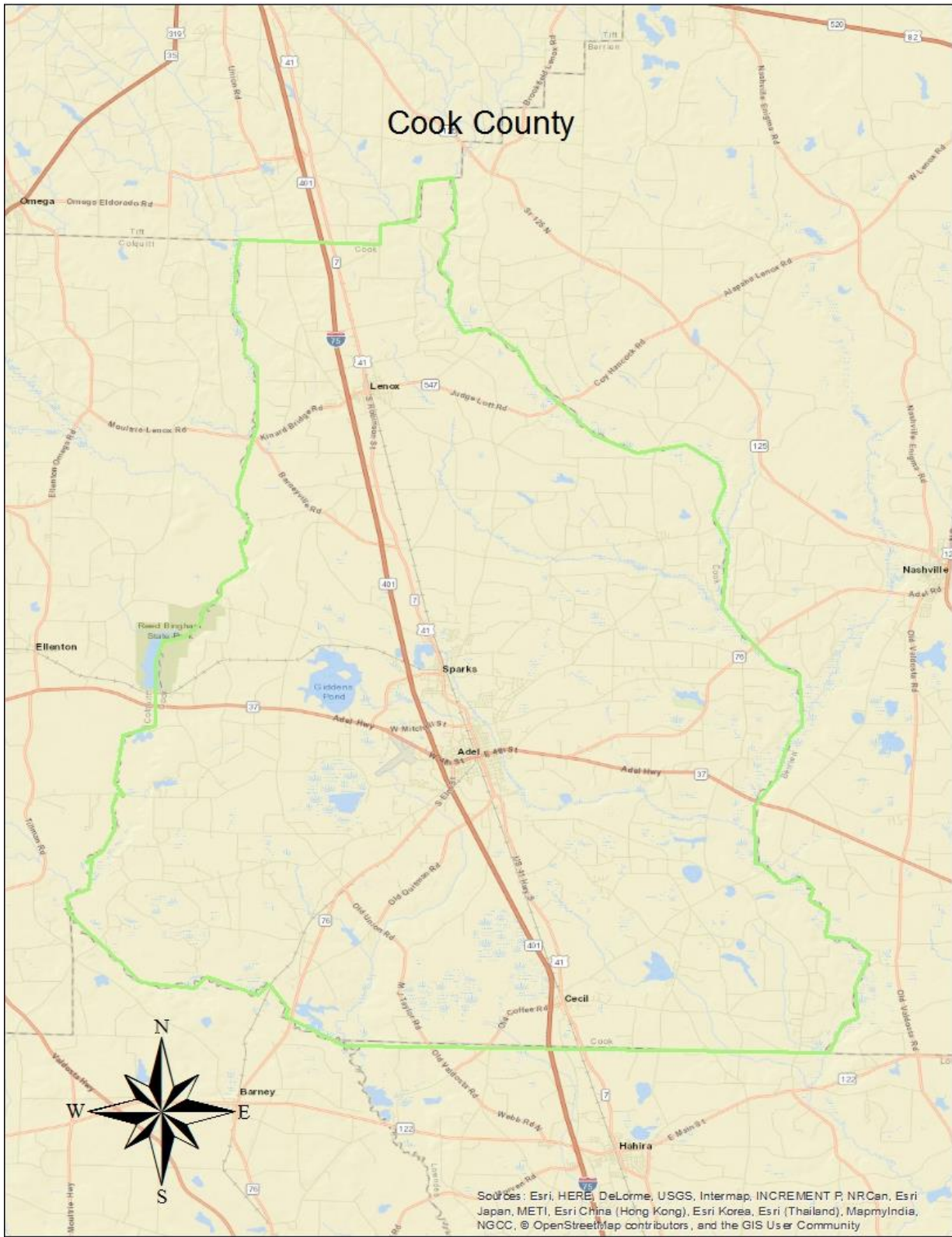
## IV. COUNTY BASE MAPS





# Cook County

Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community





## V. WHAT ARE “COMMUNITIES-AT-RISK”?

Communities-at-risk are locations where a group of two or more structures in close proximity to a forested or wildland area places homes and residents at some degree of risk from wildfire. Other characteristics of the “community” such as the closeness of structures, building materials, accumulated debris near the structures, access in and out and the distance from the nearest fire station or a permanent water source such as a pond or dry hydrant may contribute to the risk.

While there may be relatively few groups of homes that fit the above description in Cook County, that does not mean there is not a significant risk of structural damage during the severe weather conditions are conducive to a disastrous wildfire (severe drought, low relative humidity and high winds).

In Cook County, there are many individual (isolated) homes and outbuildings on farms and small properties that could be damaged or destroyed in the event of a disastrous wildfire. On these properties, the owners must assume a greater responsibility for wildfire protection - - - by making improvements to the landscape and structures that will provide some degree of wildfire protection until the fire department can arrive. This can only be accomplished if rural residents know how to make their homes and properties “Firewise”.

Improvements to the community infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.) may be beyond the capabilities of the homeowners. However, if access by emergency vehicles can be enhanced by widening the entrance right-of-way(s), creating “hammerhead-T’s” or other ways for fire trucks to turn around and operate safely and identifying residences with reflective “911 addresses” wildfire protection can be greatly improved.

More extensive modifications in and around individual residences may need to be budgeted by the residents over time (for example, making a roof more fire resistant may have to wait until it is time to replace the current roof covering). Moving firewood away from the home, skirting raised decks and keeping roofs free of accumulated flammable debris are improvements that can be accomplished in the short-run.

In most instances, communities-at-risk will benefit from (vegetative) fuel reduction within 100 feet of homes and outbuildings through prescribed burning or by mechanical means. Fuel management within the home ignition zone (within 100 feet of the home) either by removing highly flammable vegetation or by replacing the vegetation with fire resistant plant species will significantly improve wildfire safety.

**COOK COUNTY COMMUNITIES AT RISK**

<b>FIRE DEPT and Community</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Hazard Rating</b>
1. LENOX Trailer Park / Old Union Road	45	Low Hazard
2. SE Wilkes Road	75	High Hazard
3. LENOX 605/603/1007 Kinardbridge Road	94	High Hazard
4. SE Smokey Wood Lane	95	High Hazard
5. SE Shady Grove/Roberts Road	97	High Hazard
6. LENOX 1150-1360 Kinardbridge Road	98	High Hazard
7. SE Giddens Road	98	High Hazard
8. LENOX Colonial Park Apartments	99	High Hazard
9. SE Gallie Lizzimore	100	Very High Hazard
10. SE Browning Road	101	Very High Hazard
11. CV Sunshine Acres Trailer Park	116	Very High Hazard
12. SPARKS Branch Trailer Park/Lauren Drive	118	Very High Hazard
13. CV Chaserville Mall	127	Extreme Hazard
14. PV Felts Trailer Park	129	Extreme Hazard
15. SPARKS Gay Avenue	129	Extreme Hazard
16. SPARKS Fox Run	131	Extreme Hazard
17. SPARKS Fox Run	131	Extreme Hazard
18. SPARKS MLK / Rhome Street	132	Extreme Hazard
19. SPARKS Gandy / Spires Lane	133	Extreme Hazard
20. CV Valdel Rd / Lydia Rd / Green St Trailer Park	133	Extreme Hazard
21. PV Stripling Lane	137	Extreme Hazard



**COOK COUNTY COMMUNITIES AT RISK (Continued)**

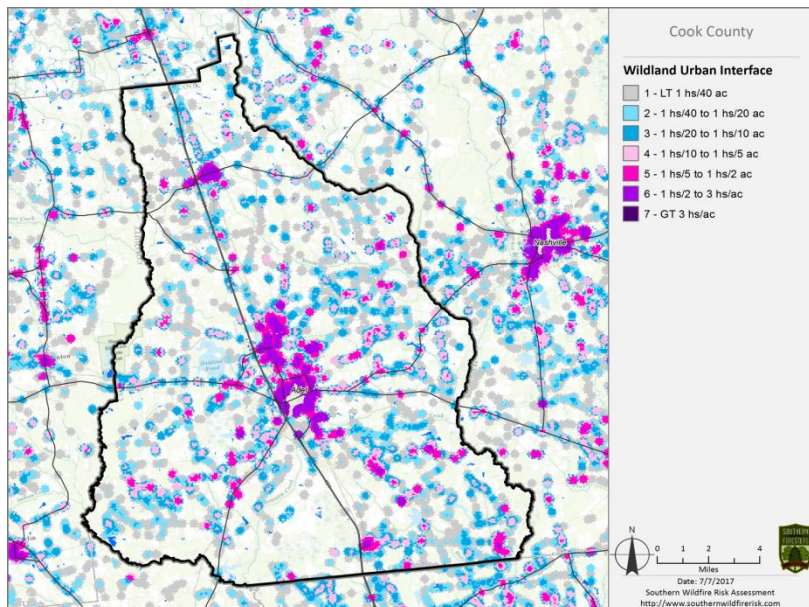
<b>FIRE DEPT and Community</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Hazard Rating</b>
<b>22. PV Reed Bingham State Park</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>23. SPARKS Wood Subdivision</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>24. CV Tulp Lane</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>25. CV County Line Road</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>26. PV Harrell Lane</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>27. PV Elk Lane / Guthrie Trailer Park</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>28. PV Hemspring Circle</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>29. SPARKS Willis Lane</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>
<b>30. CV Gallie Lissimore / Hundley Goldbrick Circle</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>Extreme Hazard</b>

These hazard ratings were completed by Cook County Volunteer Fire Department personnel and Georgia Forestry Commission Rangers during the months of May and June, 2011. The Georgia Forestry Commission Hazard and Wildfire Risk Assessment Scoresheet was used. This document evaluates communities (groups of homes) based upon six criteria: community access, surrounding vegetation, building construction, fire protection, utilities and additional rating factors. The cumulative wildfire hazard rating scores range from a low rating of 0 to 50 points to an extreme hazard rating with over 120 points. The cumulative wildfire hazard rating scores help establish priorities for mitigation activities in the CWPP Mitigation & Action Plan.

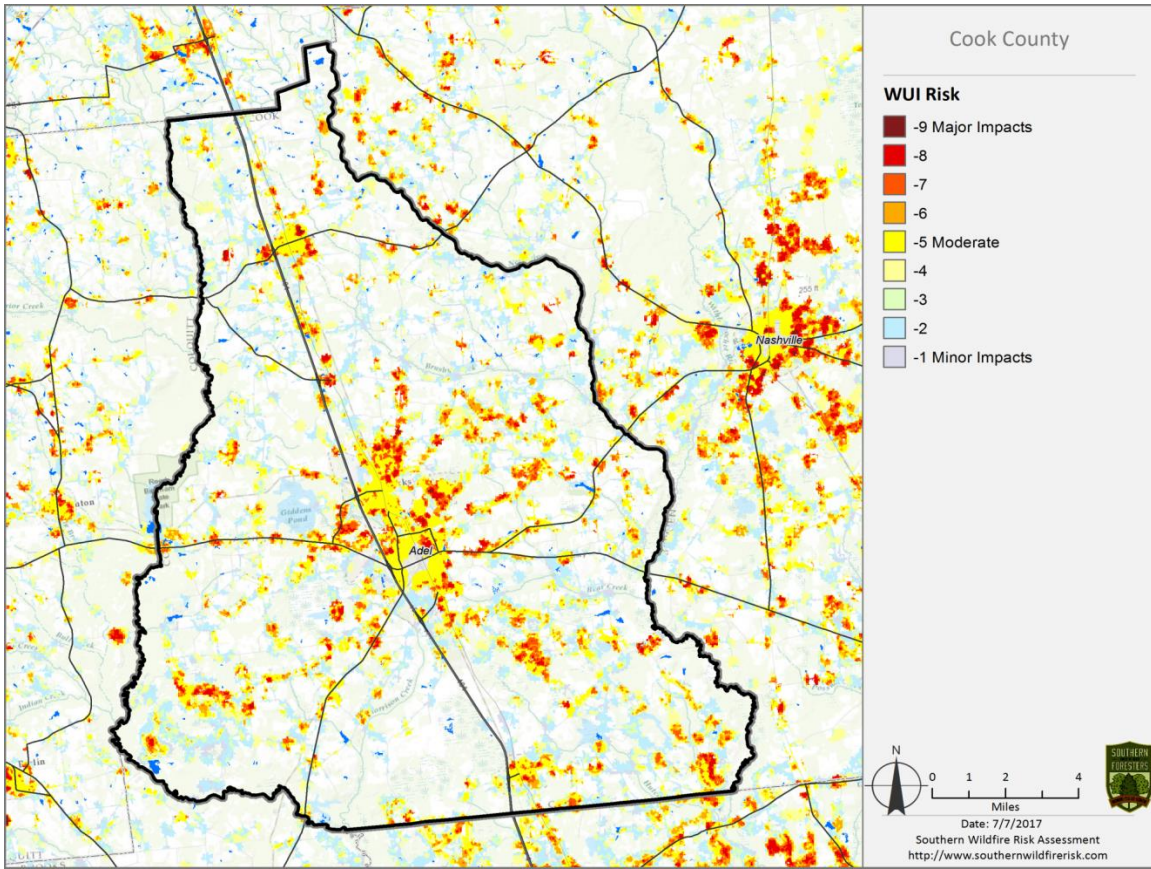
## VI. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

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 Cook County. The SouthWRAP (SWRA) products included in this report are designed to provide the information needed to support the following key priorities:

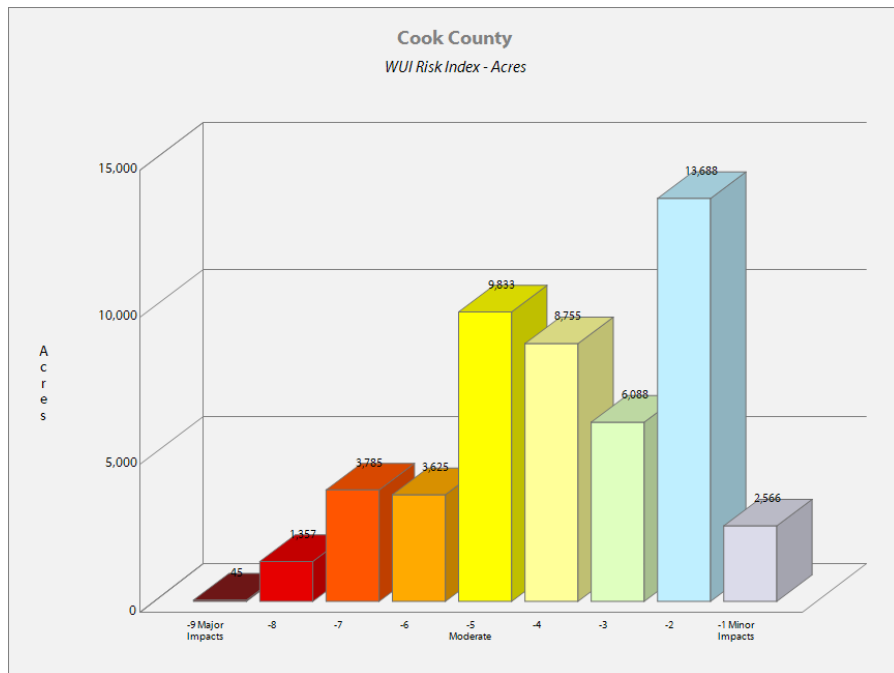
- Identify areas that are most prone to wildfire
- Identify areas that may require additional tactical planning, specifically related to mitigation projects and Community Wildfire Protection Planning
- Provide the information necessary to justify resource, budget and funding requests
- Allow agencies 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

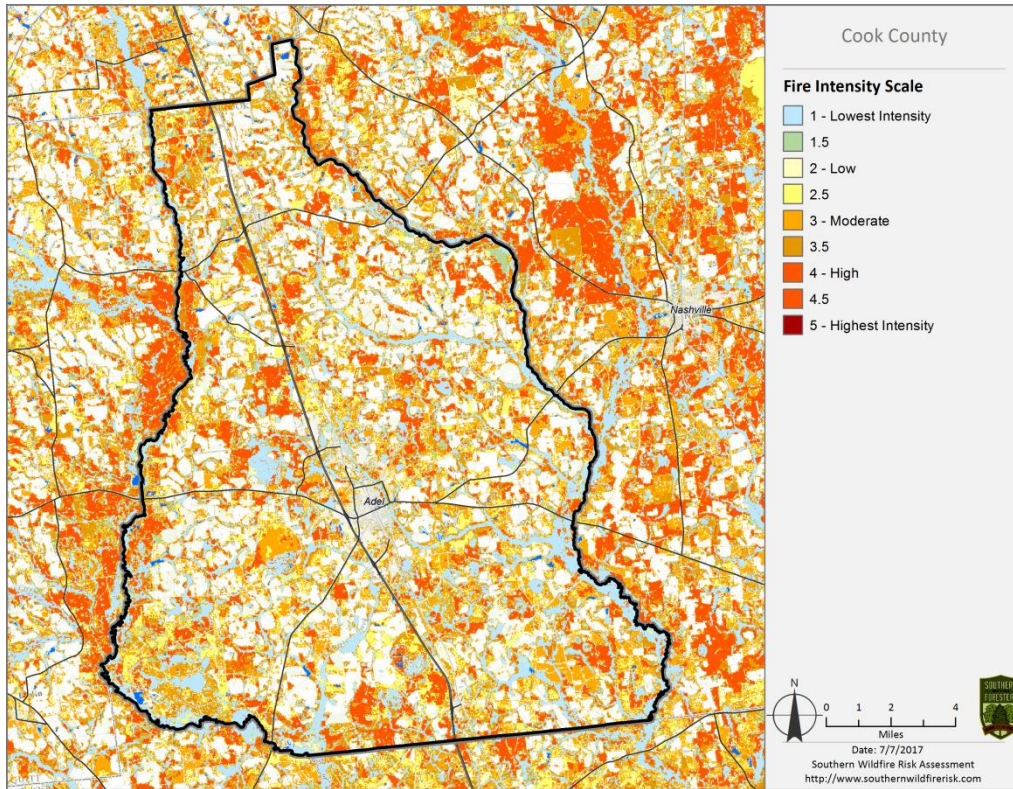


Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map from the Cook County SWRA

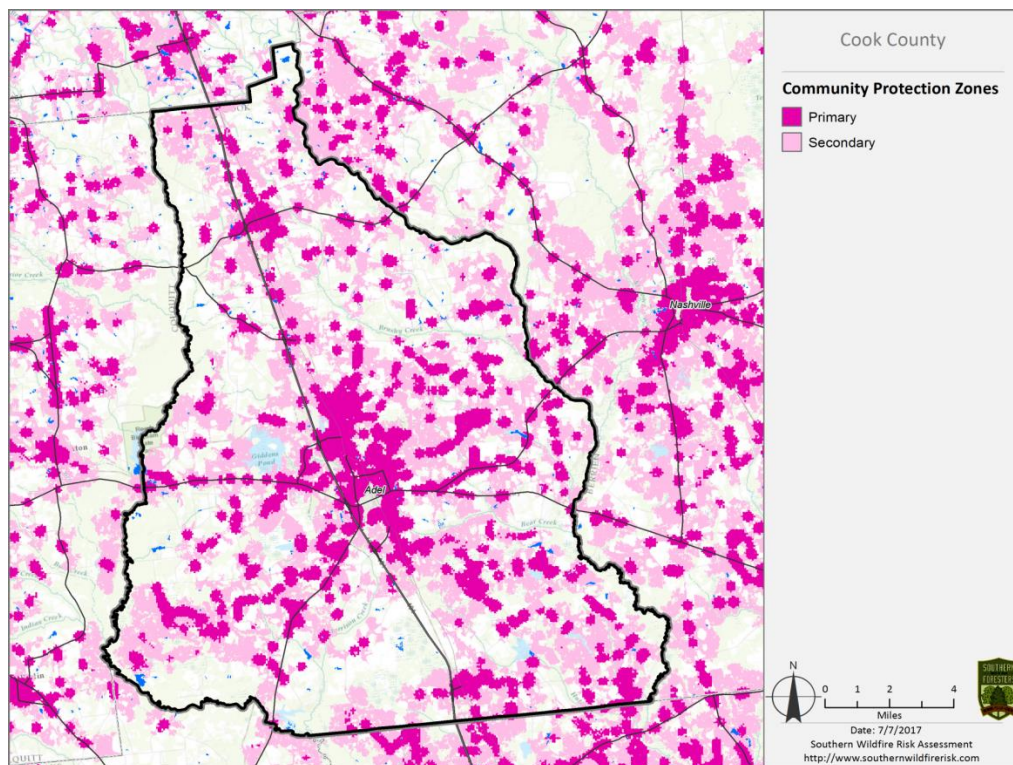


Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk map Below: WUI Risk Index – Acres graph





Above: Fire Intensity Scale map    Below: Community Protection Zones map



## VII. MITIGATION & ACTION PLAN

### PROTECTING EXISTING STRUCTURES

#### Critical Facilities

Critical facilities are unique structures which may 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 junkyards 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).

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Meet with owner/operators of Critical Facilities to evaluate any wildfire hazard and suggest what owner/operators might do to mitigate any observed 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.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Initiate a community public education program for Cook County residents
- Make Firewise Communities brochures available to the public at central locations such as: Farm Services Agency, Chamber of Commerce and the County Courthouse.
- Encourage communities (neighborhoods) that qualify to apply for recognition as a Firewise Community/USA.

### Reduction of Hazardous Fuels

Because over 50 percent of Cook 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, such as forest mastication; chemical treatment (herbicides); and livestock grazing.



**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.**

**Pictured here is a GFC masticator mowing understory vegetation in a pine stand. This practice works well on some sites where prescribed burning may not be practical. This service is available from GFC for a hourly fee. Private contractors can also provide this service.**





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 the highway from prescribed burning or wildfires can create hazardous conditions on roadways when certain weather conditions exist. It is important that motorists be warned when visibility deteriorates due to smoke.

**RECOMMENDATION: Promote prescribed burning in Cook County.**

- Help landowners understand how to prescribe burn legally and safely.
- Educate the general public on the benefits of prescribed burning.
- Work with the Georgia State Patrol and local law enforcement to ensure motorists are alerted to smoke hazards on local roadways.

**NEW DEVELOPMENT**

Site Plan Review

Growth pressure is expected to increase new home starts in Cook County over the next 20 years. If farm and ranch land is conserved as a mainstay of the County’s rural economy, new development will, by necessity, occur more frequently on forest and wildland areas. 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.

Additionally the International Code Council created the International Wildland –Urban Interface Code (IWUIC) in 2012. This Code is endorsed by NFPA and the State of Georgia Legislature adopted the Code in 2014 for use in Georgia. Counties can adopt from this code as may be needed to reduce risk to communities and can be used to strengthen development and building codes.

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 suppression; (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 strike, 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 the wildfire hazard of proposed new development in rural areas as part of the site plan review process (GFC Hazard & Wildfire Risk Assessment Scoresheet).
- 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.
- Adopt the International Wildland Urban Interface Code (IWUIC) for new development and building codes in high risk areas.

**FIRE SERVICES CAPABILITY**

Cook County has six Volunteer Fire Departments with 9 stations that are strategically located throughout the county. While the primary responsibility of these firefighters is structural protection, the firefighters regularly provide support to the Georgia Forestry Commission or find themselves the first units on the scene fighting brush fires (wildfires) that threaten homes and businesses.

<u>VFD</u>	<u># Engines</u>	<u># Water Tenders</u>	<u># Brush Trucks</u>	<u># Firefighters</u>
Cecil	1	0	1	3
Pine Valley	2	1 (2,000 gal.)	0	16
Sparks	2	0	1*	15
Chaserville/Massee	1	1 (1,500 gal.)	0	11
SE Cook	2	1 (2,000 gal.)	1	14
Lenox	2	2 (2,000 gal.)	1	11

Wildland Fire Training

All volunteer firefighters have completed the National Incident Management System (NIIMS) training courses, I-100, I-400, I-700 & I-800. None of the firefighters have completed NWCG (National Wildfire Coordinating Group) basic wildfire training courses (S-130: Standards for Survival and S-190: Basic Wildfire Behavior). Ready Set Go training is recommended for firefighters and the public.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Countywide there is no wildland personal protective equipment for use by volunteer firefighters when fighting brush fires and no fire shelters. Most engines are equipped with basic wildland fire hand tools (shovels, fire flaps and council rakes).

### Hydrants

Pressurized hydrants exist in a number of developed areas of Cook County (Lenox, Sparks, Adel and Cecil). There are in addition an estimated 22 dry hydrants in unincorporated areas.

### **COOK COUNTY ACTION PLAN**

<b>Community/Area</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Community Recommendation</b>
Countywide	Firefighter PPE & Tools	County	\$20,000 PPE	H	Personal protective equipment & fire shelters
Countywide	Firefighter Training	County	\$15,000	H	Standards for Survival & Wildland Fire Behavior (Courses: S-130 & S-190)
Countywide	3,000 Gallon Water Tenders	County	Two at \$225,000 each	H	Mobile water supply for W/UI areas
Countywide	Water Storage Tanks (2,500-3,000 gallon capacity)	County	\$25,000 (\$5,000 each)	H	5 water storage tanks to be located in strategic areas of the county
Countywide	Drafting Equipment "Turbo draft"	County	Six at \$2,500 each	H	Enhanced water delivery
Countywide	Brush Trucks	County	\$90,000 each	H	Improve emergency access in remote areas and off-road firefighting capability.
Countywide	Wildland Fire Hose	County	\$3,000 (hose) and \$12,000 (nozzles)	M	1 ¼ inch fire hose with nozzles and 15 nozzles
Countywide	Homeowner Education For Communities-at-Risk	GFC/County	-0-	M	Provide Firewise educational materials and interpretative display at local festivals

**This table summarizes a recommended course of action for implementation of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Although some actions could be implemented at little or no added cost, 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, Cook County would implement the following:

- An annual wildfire risk assessment (of “communities-at-risk”) would be conducted by the CWPP Committee to reassess wildfire hazards and prioritize needed actions.
- Mitigation efforts that are recurring (such as mowing, burning or clearing of defensible space) would be incorporated into annual revisions of the original CWPP Action Plan.
- Mitigation efforts that could not be funded in the requested year will be incorporated into the annual revision/update 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-workshop surveys that are distributed by mail.
- The Cook County 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 this 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.



**Pictured here is the logo of the National Firewise Communities program, sponsored by the National Fire protection Association. In Georgia there are 95 certified Firewise Communities in 2018. Towns and communities throughout Georgia participate. Contact the Georgia Forestry Commission for information on how to become a certified Firewise Community.**

## VIII. MITIGATION ASSISTANCE & GRANT FUNDING

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.

## IX. 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).*

## X. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Publications/Brochures/Websites:

- FIREWISE materials can be ordered at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)
- Georgia Forestry Commission [www.georgiafirewise.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.interfacesouth.org)
- Information on codes and standards for emergency services including wildfire can be found at [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)
- Information on FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) can be found at [www.firegrantsupport.com](http://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](http://www.SouthernWildfireRisk.com)
- Fire Adapted Communities [www.fireadapted.org](http://www.fireadapted.org)
- Ready, Set, Go [www.wildlandfirersg.org](http://www.wildlandfirersg.org)
- National Wildfire Preparedness Day [www.wildfireprepdlay.org](http://www.wildfireprepdlay.org)

### Appended Documents:

Cook County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

Cook County Wildfire Assessment scoresheets

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





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