Community Wildfire Protection Plan

An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and Conservation of Natural Resources

Mitchell County, Georgia

December 2017

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Mitchell 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

_____ _____

Ben Hayward, Chairman Date
Mitchell County Board of County Commissioners

_____ _____

Clark Harrell, EMA Director Date
Mitchell County

_____ _____

H.W. Smigelski, Chief Date
Mitchell County Volunteer Firefighters Association

_____ _____

Christopher Cross, Chief Ranger Date
Georgia Forestry Commission

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 disaster occurs.

CWPP PLAN PARTICIPANTS

The development of this plan was a collaborative effort. The individuals listed below made up the "CWPP Core Committee" and are responsible for much of the plan's content.

CWPP Core Committee

Jamie Sullivan, Chief, Camilla Fire Department
Lamar Jones, Chief, Greenough VFD
H.W. Smigelski, Chief, Sale City VFD
Terry Curles, Chief, Cotton VFD
Dennis Deal, Chief, Baconton VFD
Paul Knajdek, Chief, Pleasant Grove VFD
Mike Jones, Chief, Autry State Prison
Clark Harrell, EMA Director, Mitchell County

Georgia Forestry Commission Representatives
Christopher Cross, Chief Ranger, Baker-Mitchell Forestry Unit
Trent Ingram, District Manager, Flint District
Darren Martin, Assistant District Manager, South Flint District
Will Fell, CWPP Program Specialist
Jim Harrell, CWPP Program Specialist
Beryl Budd, Wildfire Prevention Specialist (revised 2017)

Meeting Dates
Initial Core Committee Meeting: July, 7, 2009
Follow-Up Meeting: August 4, 2009

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 "communities-at-risk"
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 Communities Program*))

OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

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 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 contribute to the CWPP. Collaboration is a requirement of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

During development of the Mitchell 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 paper (*Camilla Enterprise*) on (June 30, 2010) explaining the objectives of the Mitchell County CWPP, the planning process and the procedure for obtaining a draft copy for review and/or comment.

II. 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 is to improve public safety and reduce structural losses (both "communities-at-risk" and individual structures) from wildfire in wildland/urban interface areas of Mitchell 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 Mitchell 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 efforts to seek hazard mitigation grant funding 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. A 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 Mitchell County.

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

III. HISTORY OF MITCHELL COUNTY

Formed from part of Baker County, Mitchell County was created on December 21, 1857, by an act of the Georgia legislature and is the state's 123rd county. It was named either for Henry Mitchell, a general in the Revolutionary War (1775-83), or for David B. Mitchell, who served twice as Georgia's governor in the early 1800s; historical sources differ. Camilla, the county seat, was incorporated on December 14, 1858.

Three other incorporated cities lie within Mitchell County's 512 square miles: Baconton, Pelham, and Sale City.

County government consists of a commission with an administrator. According to the 2010 U.S. census, the county had a population of 23,498, a slight decrease from the 2000 population of 29,932.

Agricultural output consists primarily of cotton, peanuts, pecans, sweet corn, and soybeans. In addition to the 134-acre Camilla Industrial Park South, the county seat has a public airport with a 4,000-foot lighted asphalt runway, aircraft tie-down, and an airframe and power plant repair facility.

Southwest Georgia Technical College (later Southern Regional Technical College) maintains a satellite campus in Camilla.

Pecan Grove

Local attractions include the restored railroad depots in Camilla and Pelham and the Hand Trading Company building in Pelham. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places are the Bacon Family Homestead; the James Price McRee House, a Classical Revival–style house built at the turn of the twentieth century; and the Mount Enon Church and Cemetery, built in the mid-1800s and no longer in use. Other nationally recognized sites include historic districts in Baconton, Camilla, and Pelham, as well as the South Railroad and the Walton Street–Church Street historic districts, both in Baconton.

Mitchell County Courthouse

In addition to historic landmarks, Mitchell County was the site of the Camilla Massacre. On September 19, 1868, during Reconstruction, a Republican political rally brought a large group of African Americans to Camilla, where local whites opened fire on them, killing about a dozen men and wounding some thirty more. Mitchell County hosts a Christmas parade, the Gnat Days Festival in May, and the Camilla Pro Invitational Tennis Tournament, which has attracted dozens of touring tennis professionals each June since 1970.

IV. 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 agri-business for the residents of Mitchell 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.*

The Georgia Forestry Commission's Baker-Mitchell County Forestry Unit is located at 9116 Highway 37, Camilla, GA, 31730.

Personnel
Christopher Cross, Chief Ranger
Forrest Benson, Ranger
Harold Jackson, Ranger
William C. Singleton, Ranger (Lead)
Charles Watson, Ranger

Wildland Firefighting Equipment at the Mitchell County Unit
4 Truck/tractor transports with JD 650 crawler tractor
1 Type VI engine
1 Type VII engine

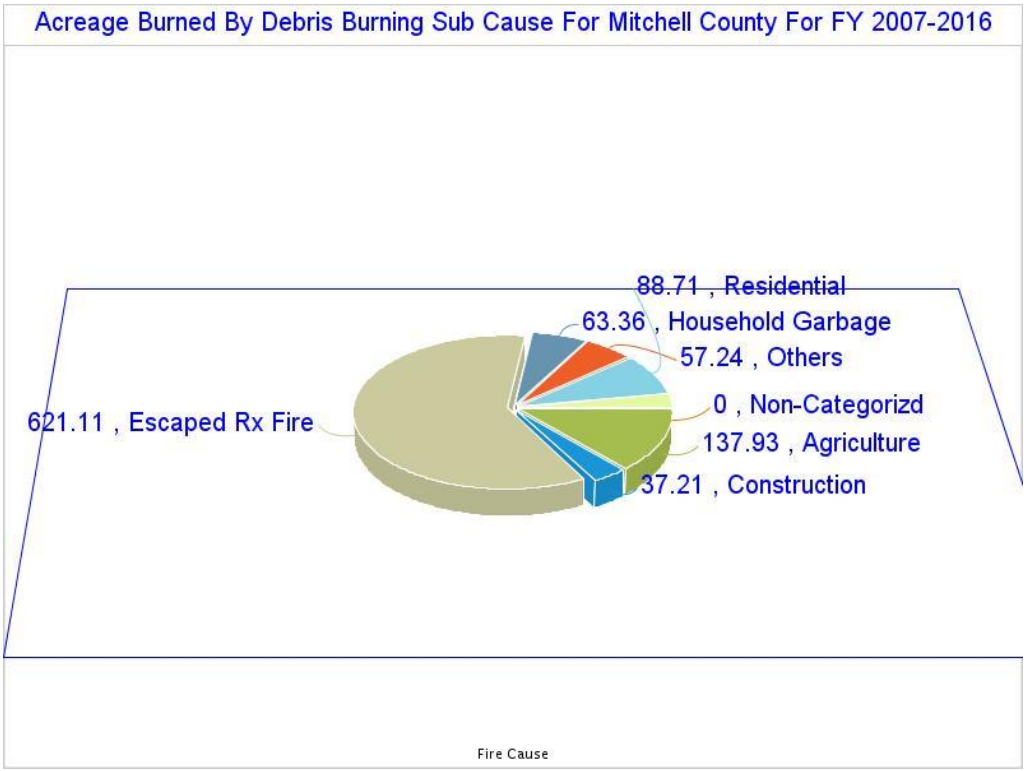
Major Causes of Wildfires
On a year-to-year basis, the leading cause of wildfire in Mitchell County has been escaped prescribed burns, Machine Use and residential burning. The major causes in FY 2017 are listed below.

Wildfire Cause	FY 2017	5 Year Annual Average
Escaped Prescribed Burns	18 / 163.9 acres	7.80 / 53.82 acres
Equipment/Machine Use	16 / 25.66 acres	4.40 / 8.19 acres
Residential Debris (leaf piles)	14 / 17.88 acres	4.00 / 7.93 acres

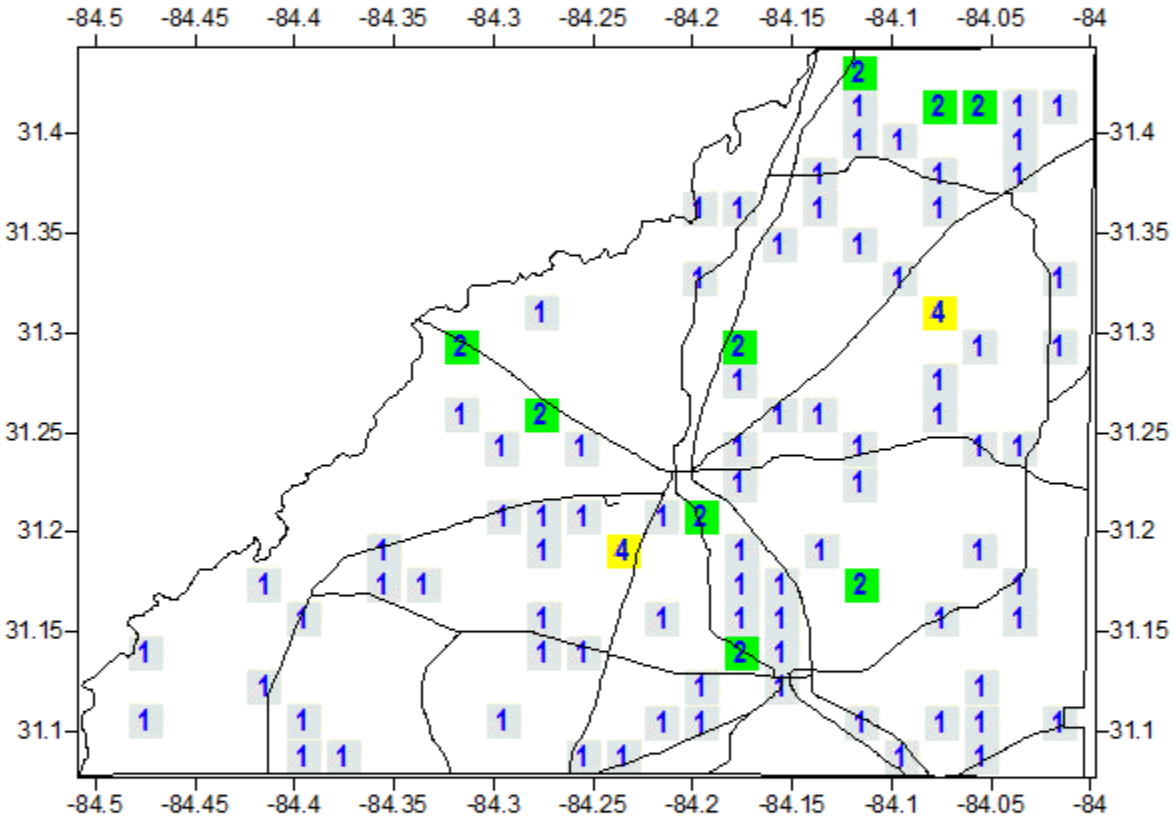
County = Mitchell	Cause	Fires		Acres	Fires 5 Yr Avg	Acres 5 Yr Avg
Campfire	Campfire	4		1.31	1.80	1.81
Children	Children	0		0.00	0.40	0.21
Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc	Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc	2		27.65	1.40	16.25
Debris: Construction Land Clearing	Debris: Construction Land Clearing	0		0.00	0.20	0.44
Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	18		163.90	7.80	53.42
Debris: Household Garbage	Debris: Household Garbage	1		0.01	0.40	0.30
Debris: Other	Debris: Other	0		0.00	0.60	0.45
Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	14		17.88	4.00	7.93
Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related	Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related	2		25.61	0.60	5.38
Incendiary	Incendiary	7		77.38	2.20	30.01
Lightning	Lightning	1		0.25	1.00	6.86
Machine Use	Machine Use	16		25.66	4.40	8.19
Miscellaneous: Firearms/Ammunition	Miscellaneous: Firearms/Ammunition	1		0.10	0.20	0.02
Miscellaneous: Other	Miscellaneous: Other	0		0.00	0.20	0.14
Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	5		36.38	1.80	19.81
Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion	Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion	1		0.20	0.40	0.06
Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	1		1.50	0.40	0.38
Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes	Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes	1		0.38	0.40	0.15
Railroad	Railroad	0		0.00	0.40	0.95
Smoking	Smoking	1		0.50	0.20	0.10
Undetermined	Undetermined	7		141.50	2.40	31.33
Totals for County: Mitchell Year: 2017		82		520.21	31.20	184.18

The table below indicates wildfire activity during the last 10 years, average annual size is compared to the Statewide annual size.

Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Mitchell County For FY 2007-2016				
Year	**Acreage Burned**	**Number of Fires**	**Average Size**	**Statewide Average Size**
2007	210.97	71	2.97	18.64
2008	239.67	69	3.47	4.56
2009	158.40	44	3.60	3.90
2010	64.61	21	3.08	3.93
2011	646.00	115	5.70	17.56
2012	204.56	37	5.53	5.08
2013	83.07	18	4.62	4.53
2014	65.17	11	5.92	5.02
2015	158.78	26	6.11	4.42
2016	93.68	19	4.93	6.29



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



FIRE SERVICES CAPABILITY

Structural fire protection in Mitchell County is provided by two staffed fire departments (Camilla Fire Department and Pelham Fire Department), seven volunteer fire departments and the Autry State Prison Fire Department. There are currently 82 volunteer firefighters. Camilla Fire Department has 9 full-time and 9 part-time personnel, the Pelham Fire Department has 9 full-time and 9 part-time personnel and the Autry State Prison has 10 firefighters. Each station in Mitchell County has 2 engines.

Volunteer Fire Departments
Greenough VFD
Sale City VFD
Cotton VFD
Baconton VFD
Hopeful VFD
County Line VFD
Pleasant Grove VFD

Status of Equipment and Training
Several of the fire departments have wildland hand tools and (wildland fire) personal protective equipment. None of the fire departments are equipped with fire shelters.

Most of the county's firefighters have completed the NIIMS Training Courses: I-100 and I-700, however, none (or very few) have had the basic wildfire training courses (S-130, Standards for Survival and S-190, Basic Wildfire Behavior).

All of the fire departments have a water supply truck of some type to deliver water in rural areas of the county. The Pelham Fire Department has a 6,000 gallon water tanker. Four semi tankers are staged across the county at Fire Departments for County wide use.

Pressurized fire hydrants exist within the incorporated areas of Camilla, Pelham, Sale City and Baconton. There is an extensive network of dry hydrants throughout the county.

Recommendations for Improved Emergency Response

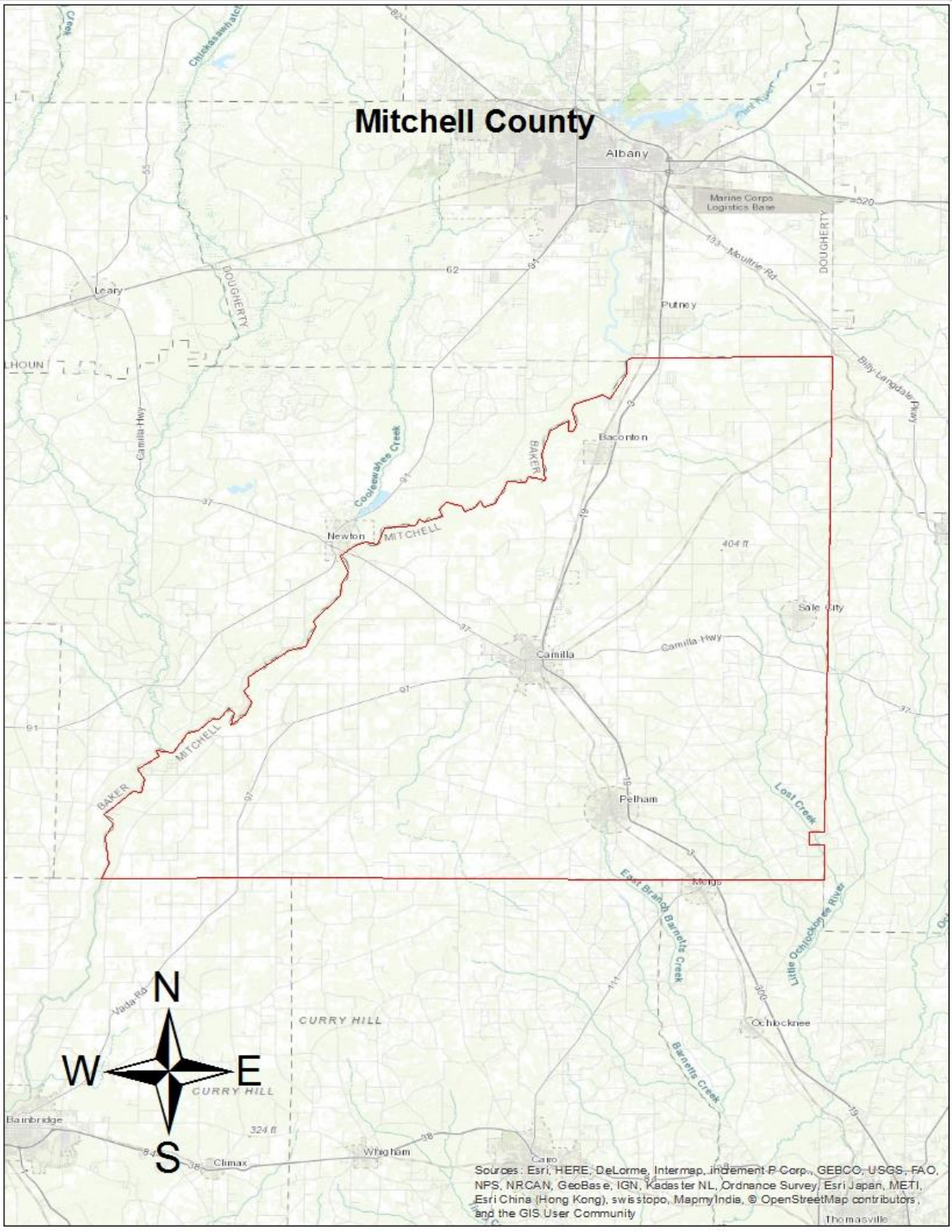
1. Fire Services response would be improved if firefighters of all fire departments completed basic wildland fire training (NWCG Courses: S-130, Standards for survival and S-190, Basic Wildland Fire Behavior).

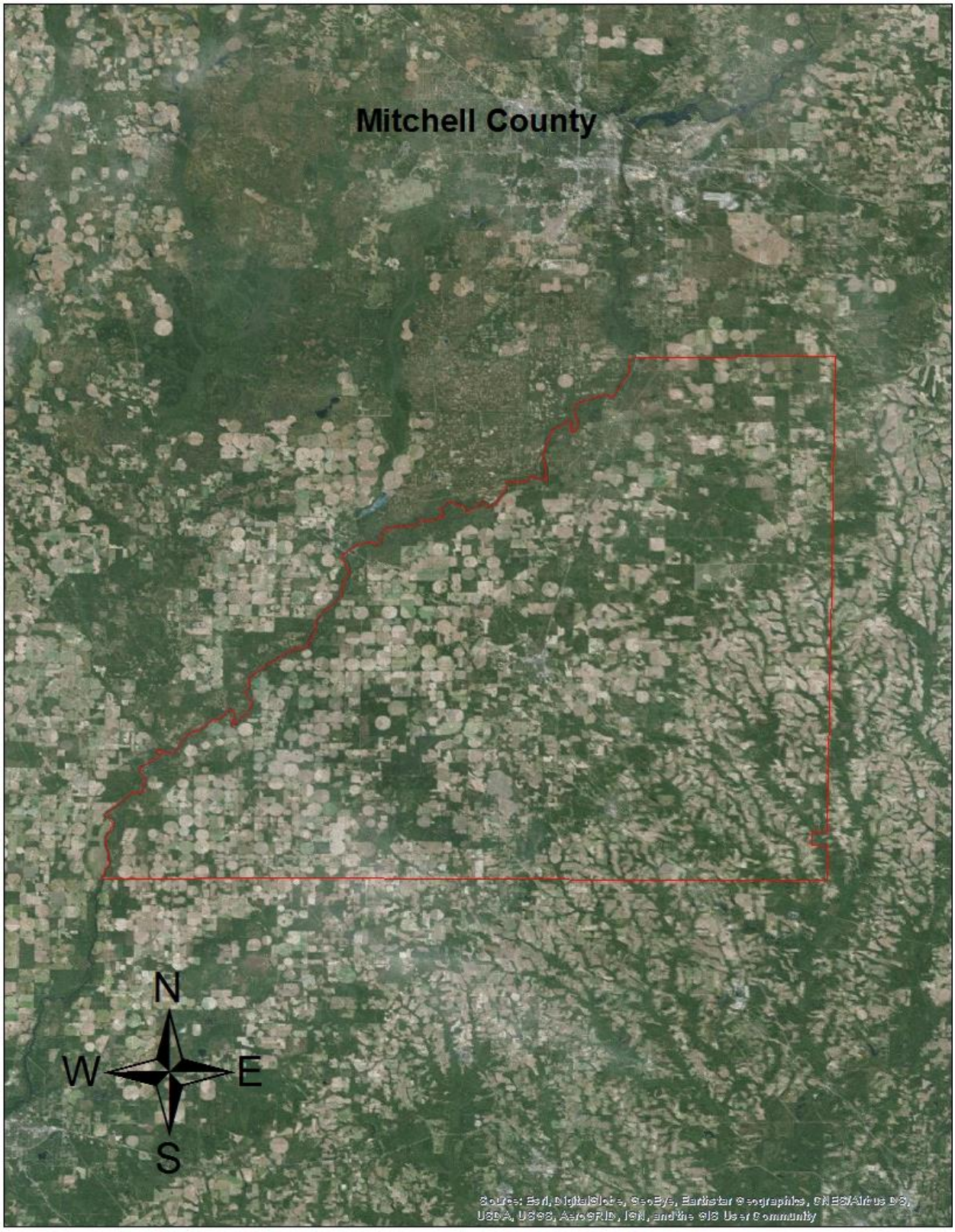
2. Firefighter safety would be improved if wildland fire personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand tools were available for those fire departments not so equipped, as well as fire shelters.

3. Brush trucks (Type VI engines) are needed for 3 volunteer fire departments (Greenough, County Line and Sale City) and the Camilla Fire Department.

4. Homeowners in rural areas need to be aware of and implement basic "Firewise" principles to protect their homes from an approaching wildfire until the fire department can arrive n the scene

V. COUNTY BASE MAPS




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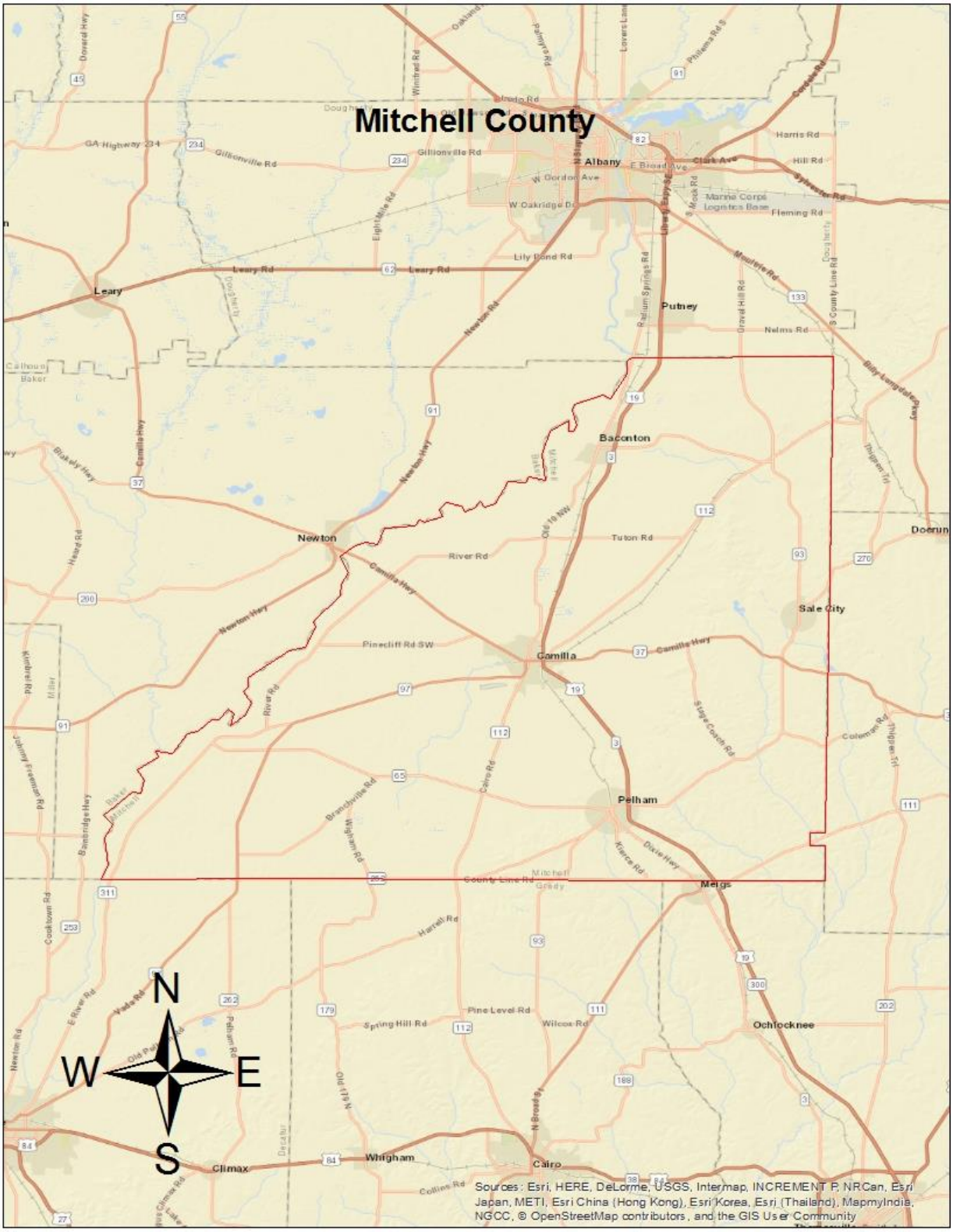
Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



VI. 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 (pond or dry hydrant) may contribute to the risk.

Improvements to the community infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.) may be beyond the capability 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 operate safely and identifying residences with reflective "911 addresses" wildfire protection can be greatly improved.

In addition, 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 are within most family budgets.

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 with the home ignition zone (within 100 feet of the home) either by removing highly flammable vegetation or by replacing the vegetation with fire resistant plan species will significantly improve wildfire safety.

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

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

Location of Communities-At-Risk

1. Sale City 2. Pleasant Grove 3. Greenough 4. Cotton 5. Autry

COMMUNITIES AT RISK HAZARD ASSESSMENT SCORES

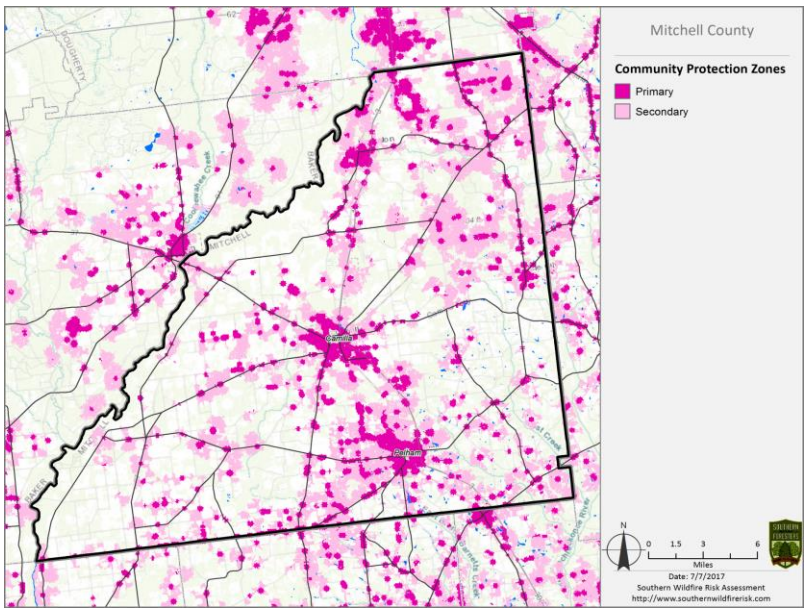
Community	Score	Hazard Rating
Sale City	94	High
Pleasant Grove	87	High
Greenough	84	High
Cotton	78	Moderate
Autry	66	Moderate

These assessments were conducted by Chief Ranger Chris Cross and the county's volunteer fire departments during the months of September and October, 2009. The Georgia Forestry Commission's Hazard and Wildfire Risk 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 50 points to an extreme rating with over 120 points.

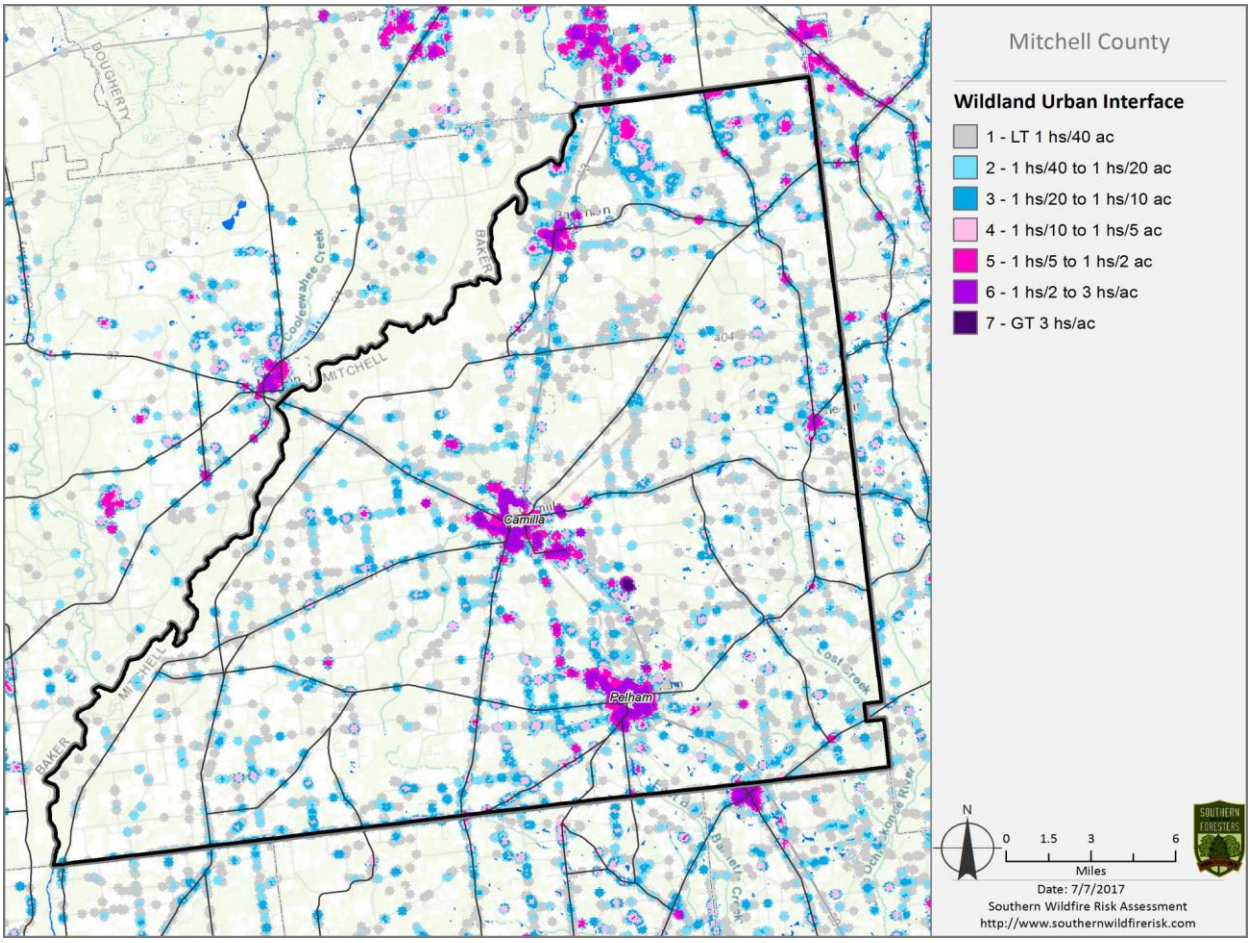
VII. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

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 Mitchell 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

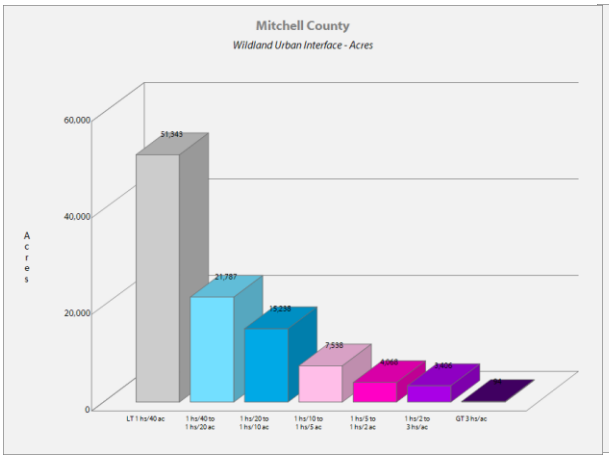


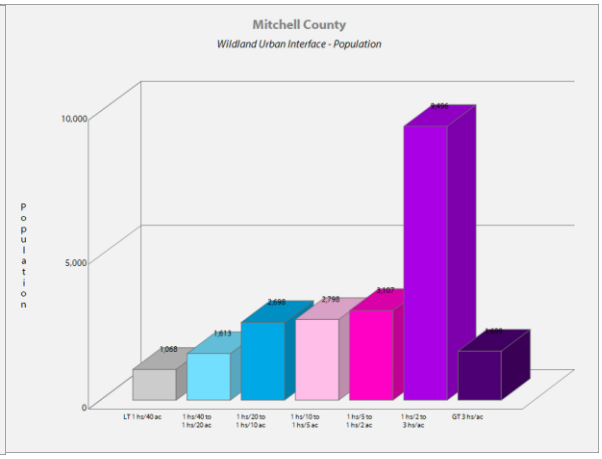
Community Protection Zones map from the Mitchell County SWRA

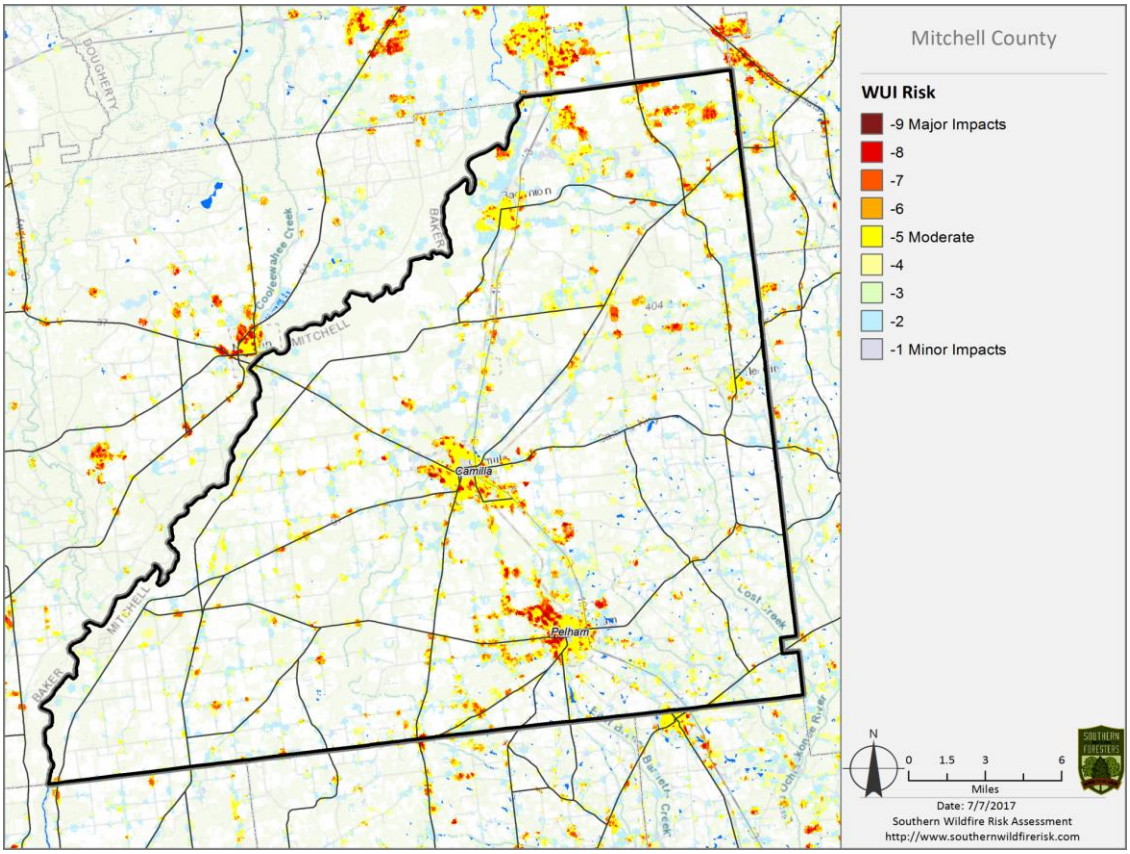


Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map

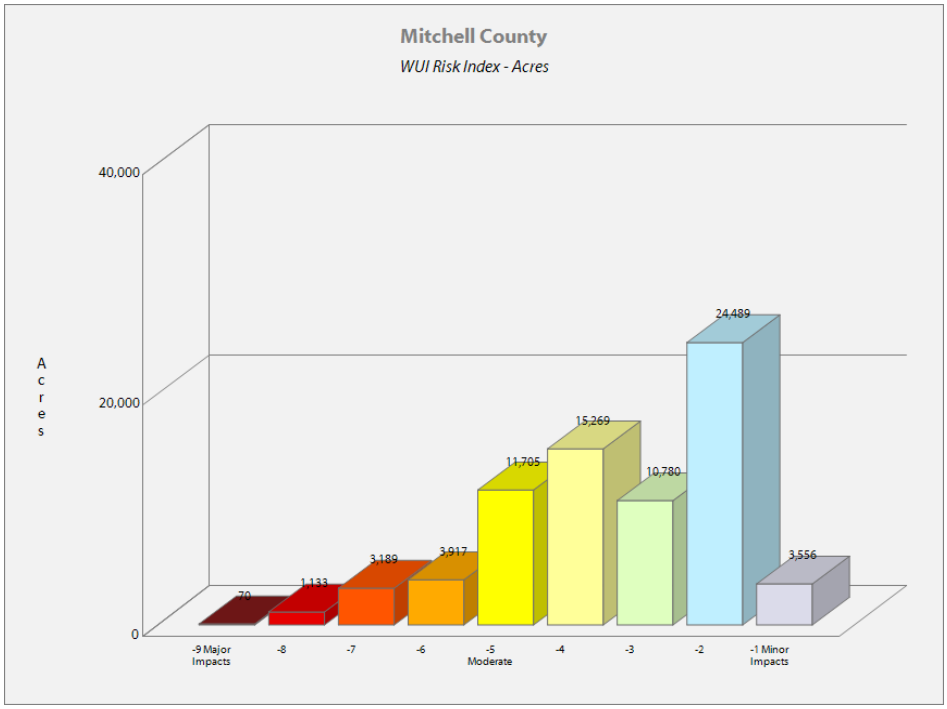
GRAPHS - WUI acres (left) and population (right)

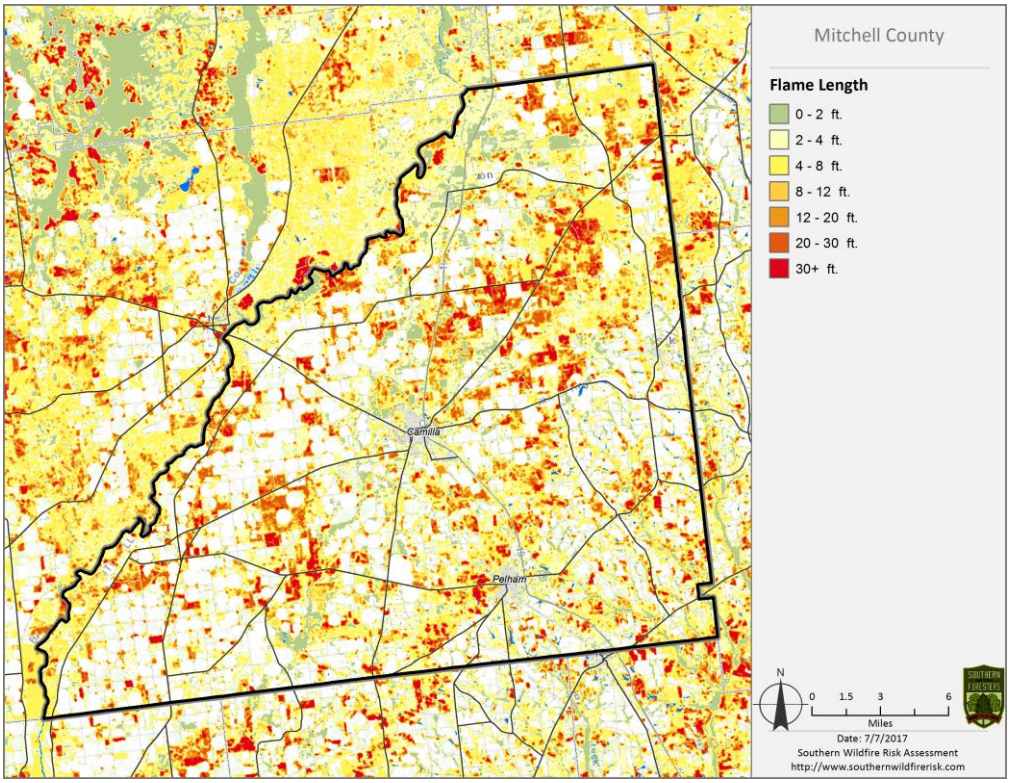




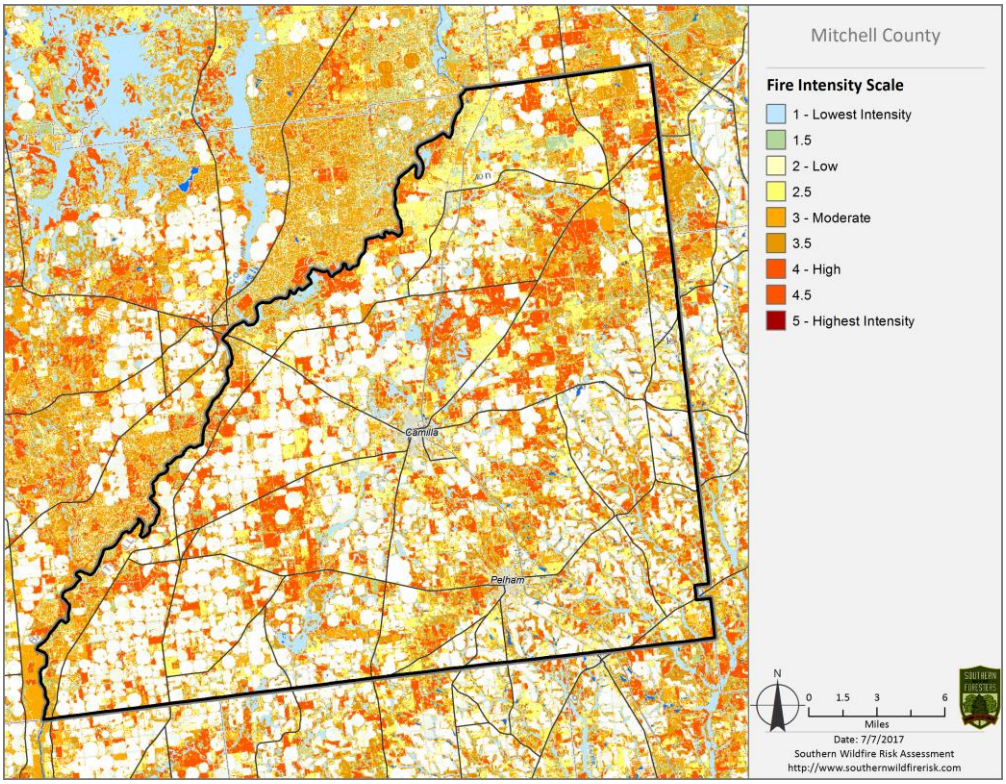


Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk map (above) and WUI Risk Acres graph (below)





Potential Flame Length map (above) and Fire Intensity Scale map (below)



VIII. MITIGATION & ACTION PLAN

PROTECTING EXISTING STRUCTURES

Critical Facilities

Critical facilities are 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 action that owner/operators can take now 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:
First United Ethanol, LLC
C&S Fertilizer (north of Sale City)
Autry State Prison

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 Mitchell County residents using as a reference: NFPA 1144 *Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire,* 2008 Edition.

- Make Firewise Communities brochures available to the public at central locations such as: Farm Services Agency, Chamber of Commerce, Extension Service, and the County Courthouse.
- Encourage neighborhoods/communities that qualify to apply for recognition as a Firewise Community/ USA.

Reduction of Hazardous Wildland Fuel

Because approximately 40 percent of Mitchell 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.

Poor visibility from smoke on the highway (from prescribed burning or wildfires) could be a significant public safety issue in Mitchell County along the U.S. Highway 19 corridor. This is a major north-south transportation route bordered by extensive areas of forest.

RECOMMENDATION:
Promote prescribed burning in Mitchell 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 IN THE COUNTY

Site Plan Review

If agriculture is to be 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 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.

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.

The International Wildland Urban Interface Code was established by the International Code Family in 2012. In 2013 this code was adopted by Georgia Legislature and is available for Georgia Counties to utilize within their jurisdictions to strengthen building codes to reduce risk in hazardous areas.

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 "Hazard and 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 or sections of the code to reduce risk.

ACTION PLAN

Community/ Area at Risk	Project	Agency	Funding Needs	Priority	Community Recommendation
Communities-at-risk	Wildfire Mitigation	GFC/County	$12,500	Medium	Implement community fuel reduction and improve emergency access
Countywide	Wildland Fire Tools, PPE & Fire Shelters	County	$5,000 Tools $20,000 PPE	High	Wildland fire tools, personal protective equipment and fire shelters
Countywide	Firefighter Training	GFC/County	$15,000	High	Standards for Survival (S-130) & Wildland Fire Behavior (S-190)
Countywide	Wildfire Prevention Education	GFC/County	$1,500	Medium	Wildfire prevention/Firewise materials for public education
Greenough County Line Sale City	(3) Brush Trucks	County	$270,000	Medium	Improve off-road firefighting capability.

The above table summarizes a recommended course of action for implementation of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Although a few 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.

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 availab

IX. 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 a*ction 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 fire 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 edition)

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.wildfireprepday.org

Attachments:

Mitchell County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SouthWRAP)

County Wildfire Risk Assessments:

1. Sale City Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet
2. Pleasant Grove Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet
3. Greenough Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet
4. Cotton Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet
5. Autry Cotton Wildfire Hazard Assessment Scoresheet

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The Georgia Forestry Commission provides leadership, service, and education in the protection and conservation of Georgia's forest resources.

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