

GEORGIA FORESTRY
COMMISSION



Community Wildfire Protection Plan

An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and Conservation of Natural Resources

Oconee County, Georgia

A Program of the Georgia Forestry Commission
with support from the U.S. Forest Service



MAY 2019

SIGNATURE PAGE

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The following report is a collaborative effort among various entities; the representatives listed below comprise the core decision-making team responsible for this report and mutually agree on the plan's contents:

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Appended Documents:

Oconee County Wildfire Pre-suppression Plan

Georgia Forestry Commission Woodland Community Wildfire Hazard Assessment Form

NFPA 1141 Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Suburban and Rural Areas.

I. OBJECTIVES

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) provides a community with a road map to reduce its risk from wildfire. A CWPP is designed through collaboration between state and local fire agencies, homeowners and landowners, and other interested parties such as city councils, utilities, homeowners associations, environmental organizations, and other local stakeholders. The plan identifies strategic sites and methods for risk reduction and structural protection projects across jurisdictional boundaries.

Comprehensive plans provide long-term guidance for growth, reflecting a community's values and future expectations. The plan implements the community's values and serves to protect natural and community resources and public safety. Planning also enables communities to address their development patterns in the Wildland Urban Interface and determine how they can reduce their risk through alternative development patterns. The formal legal standing of the plan and its central role in local government decision making underscores the opportunity to use this planning process as an effective means for reducing wildfire risk.

The mission of the following plan is to set clear priorities for the implementation of wildfire mitigation in Oconee County. The plan includes prioritized recommendations for the appropriate types and methods of fuel reduction and structure ignitability reduction that will protect this community and its essential infrastructure. It also includes a plan for wildfire suppression. Specifically, the plan includes community-centered actions that will:

- Educate citizens on wildfire, its risks, and ways to protect lives and properties,
- Support fire rescue and suppression entities,
- Focus on collaborative decision-making and citizen participation,
- Develop and implement effective mitigation strategies, and
- Develop and implement effective community ordinances and codes.

II. COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Wildfire risk reduction strategies are most effective when approached collaboratively – involving groups of residents, elected officials, community decision makers, emergency managers, and natural resource managers –and when combined with effective outreach approaches. Collaborative approaches make sense as the initial focus of any community attempting to work toward wildfire risk reduction. In all Community Wildfire Protection Plan collaborations, the goal is to cooperatively identify problems and reach a consensus for mutual action. In the case of wildfire mitigation, a reduction in the wildfire risk to the community's lives, houses, and property is the desired outcome.

The collaborative core team convened in the spring of 2011 to assess risks and develop the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The group is comprised of representatives from local county government, local fire authorities, the US Forest Service and the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Below are the groups included in the task force:

Oconee County Government
County Fire Department
Emergency Management
Board of County Commissioners
Georgia Forestry Commission
US Forest Service, Oconee National Forest

It was decided to conduct community assessments on the basis of the high risk communities based on the Where People Live data. The Deputy Chief of the Oconee County Fire Department and the representative of the local Georgia Forestry Commission office reconvened in late October for the purpose of completing the following:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Risk Assessment | Assessed wildfire hazard risks and prioritized mitigation actions. The wildfire risk assessment will help homeowners, builders, developers, and emergency personnel whether the area needs attention and will help direct wildfire risk reduction practices to the areas at highest risk. |
| Fuels Reduction | Identified strategies for coordinating fuels treatment projects. |
| Structure Ignitability | Identified strategies for reducing the ignitability of structures within the Wildland interface. |
| Emergency Management | Forged relationships among local government and fire districts and developed/refined a pre-suppression plan. |
| Education and Outreach | Developed strategies for increasing citizen awareness and action and to conduct homeowner and community leader workshops. Outreach and education programs are designed to raise awareness and improve audience knowledge of wildfire risk reduction needs and practices. In the best cases, education and outreach programs will influence attitudes and opinions and result in effective action. |

III. COMMUNITY BACKGROUND AND WILDFIRE HISTORY

Oconee County



Oconee County comprises 186 square miles in northeast Georgia. The state's 137th county, it was created from part of western Clarke County in 1875 by the Georgia General Assembly. Oconee County was named for the river flowing along part of its eastern border, whose name in turn comes from a Native American word meaning "spring of the hills." The new county was created to satisfy western Clarke County residents' demand for their own county after the county seat moved from the less populous Watkinsville to the thriving university town of Athens in 1872.

The newly formed Oconee County retained Watkinsville as its seat. The current courthouse (a New Deal project of U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration) was built in 1939 to replace a courthouse built in 1875. It has been modified twice. The second modification in 1998 more than doubled its size.

In addition to Watkinsville, Oconee County's incorporated communities are Bishop, Bogart, and North High Shoals. Bogart, on the county's northern border, was founded in 1869 and was originally named for Osceola, a Creek-Seminole Indian. The town was renamed Bogart for a railroad agent in 1892. Bishop, originally known as Greenwood Crossing, was named for local resident W. H. Bishop (one of the county's original councilmen). Bishop was incorporated in 1890. North High Shoals, on the western border, was named for a rapid in the nearby Apalachee River. It was incorporated in 1933.



Oconee County Courthouse

Today Oconee County is often characterized as a transitional community, moving away from its longtime rural foundations to become a bedroom community for Athens and even for Atlanta. Pine forests and cattle ranches have given way to residential subdivisions, shopping centers, and numerous art galleries. Boosted by the building of Georgia Highway 316 from west of Athens through Oconee County, the county's transformation has brought with it rising traffic, hundreds of shoppers, increasing sales tax revenues, and escalating property prices.

Points of interest include Eagle Tavern, located on North Main Street in Watkinsville. Built before 1801, possibly as a stronghold called Fort Edwards, the building was renovated by 1820 to serve as a stagecoach inn for Athens-bound travelers. The tavern was placed on the National Register of Historic



Elder Mill Covered Bridge

Places in 1970. Elder Mill Covered Bridge, built in 1897 and moved to its current location just south of Watkinsville off State Road 15 in the 1920s, was restored during Jimmy Carter's term as governor. One of the few covered bridges left in Georgia, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

Notable Oconee County residents have included Lottie Moon, who worked as a governess in Farmington before becoming a Southern Baptist missionary to China. The founder of an annual fund drive to support international missions, Moon promoted the mission cause through her writing and establishing of churches and schools in China. Jeannette Rankin, who bought land in Bogart in the 1920s and in Watkinsville in the 1930s, was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. A pacifist and champion of women's rights, she left her Watkinsville property, Shady Grove, for the foundation of a charitable trust to fund women's education. The Jeannette Rankin Foundation, based in Athens, remains active.

Gainesville State College, a two-year University System of Georgia institution, has an Oconee campus that houses academic computing, a tutoring and testing center, and a library. This campus was formerly a satellite campus for Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland.

According to the 2010 U.S. census, the county population was 32,808, an increase from the 2000 population of 26,225.

Wildfire History

Recent data show that a majority of the fastest growing areas in the U.S. are in wildfire-prone environments. It is not a surprise that some of these fastest growing areas are in Georgia. In last decade of the 20th Century, Georgia's population increased substantially. Homeowners in Georgia must contend with natural hazards including wildfire, tornados, and flooding. This combination of factors – burgeoning population, abundant natural areas, development pressures, and lack of public awareness makes Georgia a perfect state for creating solutions to various hazards. Georgia is looked to throughout the southern region as a leader in comprehensive and hazard mitigation planning.

Many of Georgia's existing and new residents living in the urban interface are unaware of the vital role fire plays in our landscape and that their homes are extremely vulnerable to wildfire damage. Balancing development pressures with wildfire risk reduction and education creates a unique challenge for local governments, emergency managers, and wildfire management agencies such as the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Over the past ten years, 2008-2017, Oconee County has averaged 6 reported wildfires per year. The occurrence of these fires is fairly uniform throughout the year with a slight peak in the months of February and March and a slight decrease during the fall months. These fires have burned an average of 14 acres annually. While the numbers of fires remain fairly similar every month, there is a marked difference in the monthly acreage lost. The monthly acres lost during the late winter through summer period show a tenfold increase over the acres lost during the fall and early winter. Additionally while the annual numbers of fires have not increased noticeably during the 10 year period that records are available, the annual acreage lost appears to have decreased in later years. This perhaps a result of the

increase in the practice of prescribed burning. The local Georgia Forestry Commission office and the US Forest Service need to be commended for their valiant work increasing their very impressive prescribed burning regiment. Despite their work, more homes are being built outside of traditional communities into the wildland urban interface. With this migration of people to the wildland urban interface the potential for a wildfire disaster continues to increase for Oconee County.

The leading causes of these fires in Oconee County were machine use and careless debris burning which came to almost 60 percent of all fires reported. Though these causes are a bit disturbing, local efforts of outreach and education can easily curb this problem.

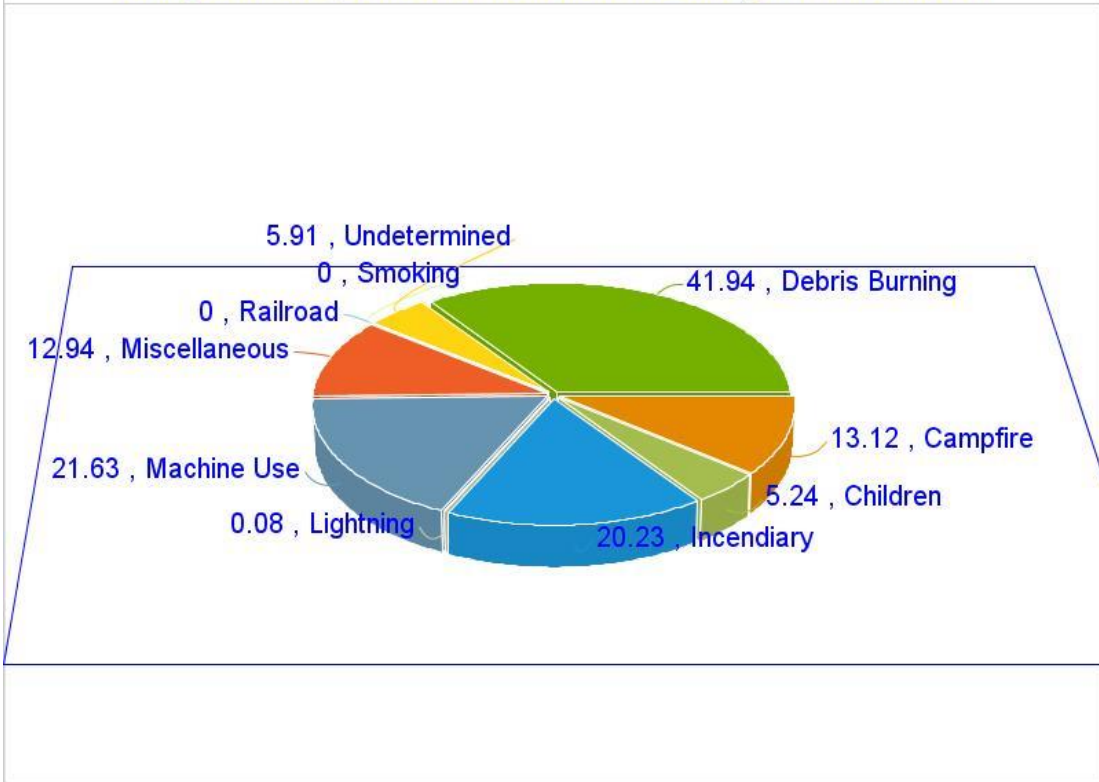
Wildfire data chart for Oconee County during the last complete fiscal year, July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019.

County = Oconee	Cause	Fires	Acres	Fires 5 Yr Avg	Acres 5 Yr Avg
Children	Children	0	0.00	0.20	0.01
Debris: Construction Land Clearing	Debris: Construction Land Clearing	0	0.00	0.60	0.24
Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	0	0.00	0.20	0.34
Debris: Other	Debris: Other	0	0.00	0.20	0.06
Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	2	10.60	1.40	3.08
Machine Use	Machine Use	0	0.00	0.20	0.09
Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	0	0.00	0.20	0.76
Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion	Miscellaneous: Spontaneous Heating/Combustion	0	0.00	0.40	0.71
Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	0	0.00	0.40	0.14
Undetermined	Undetermined	0	0.00	1.20	1.18
Totals for County: Oconee Year: 2018		2	10.60	5.00	6.61

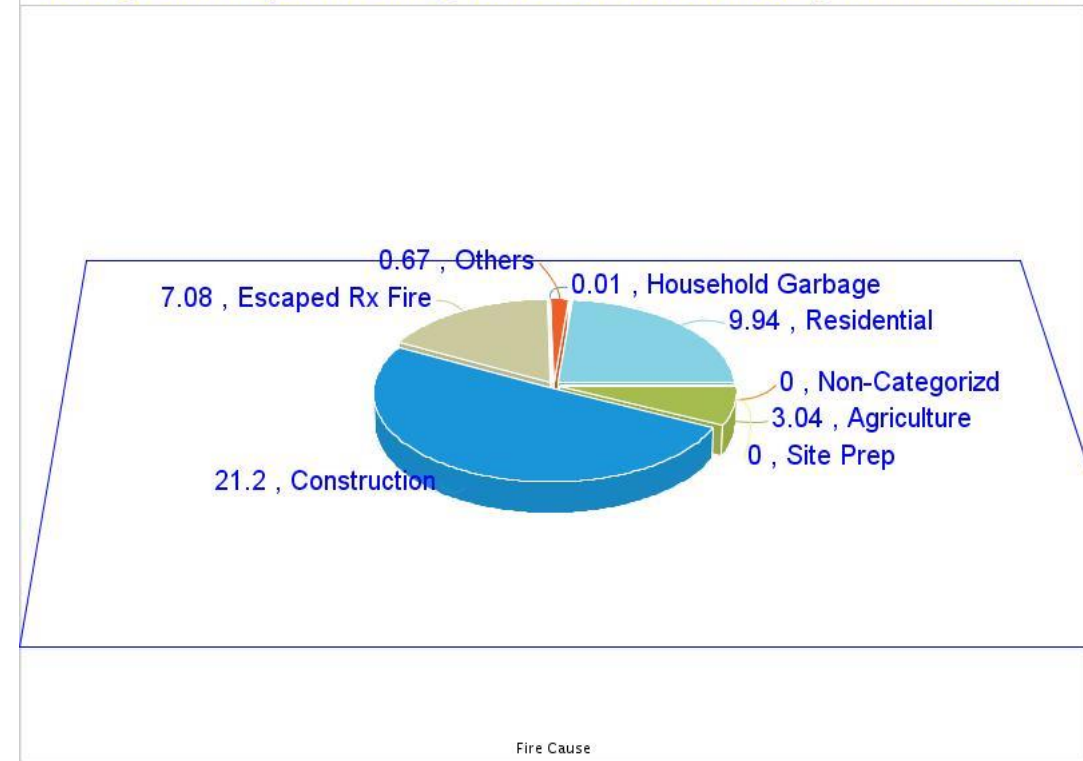
Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Oconee County For FY 2008-2017				
Year	Acreage Burned	Number of Fires	Average Size	Statewide Average Size
2008	38.59	12	14.56	4.56
2009	44.89	9	4.41	3.90
2010	13.49	6	4.19	3.93
2011	10.61	12	21.42	17.56
2012	9.07	4	5.29	5.08
2013	0.35	1	10.12	4.53
2014	6.53	7	1.99	5.02
2015	3.74	3	9.39	4.42
2016	1.34	3	4.16	6.29
2017	10.85	10	11.14	11.60

Acreage Burned /Number of Fires by Fire Cause For Oconee County For FY 2008-2017		
Fire Cause	Acreage Burned	Number of Fires
Campfire	13.12	3
Children	5.24	5
Debris Burning	41.94	20
Incendiary	20.23	6
Lightning	0.08	1
MachineUse	21.63	13
Miscellaneous	12.94	12
Railroad	0.00	0
Smoking	0.00	0
Undetermined	5.91	6
Total	121.09	66

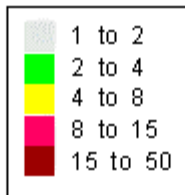
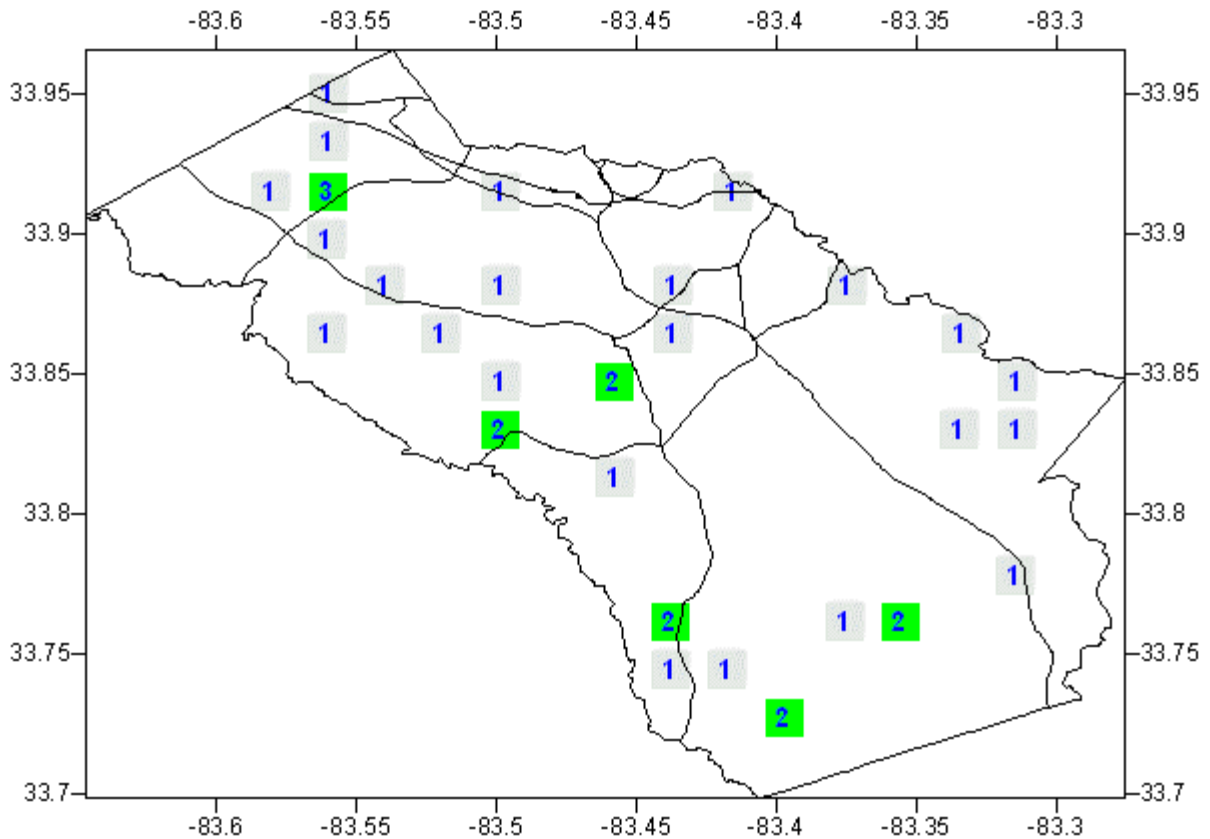
Acreage Burned by Cause of Fire For Oconee County For FY 2008-2017



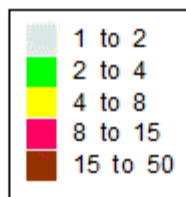
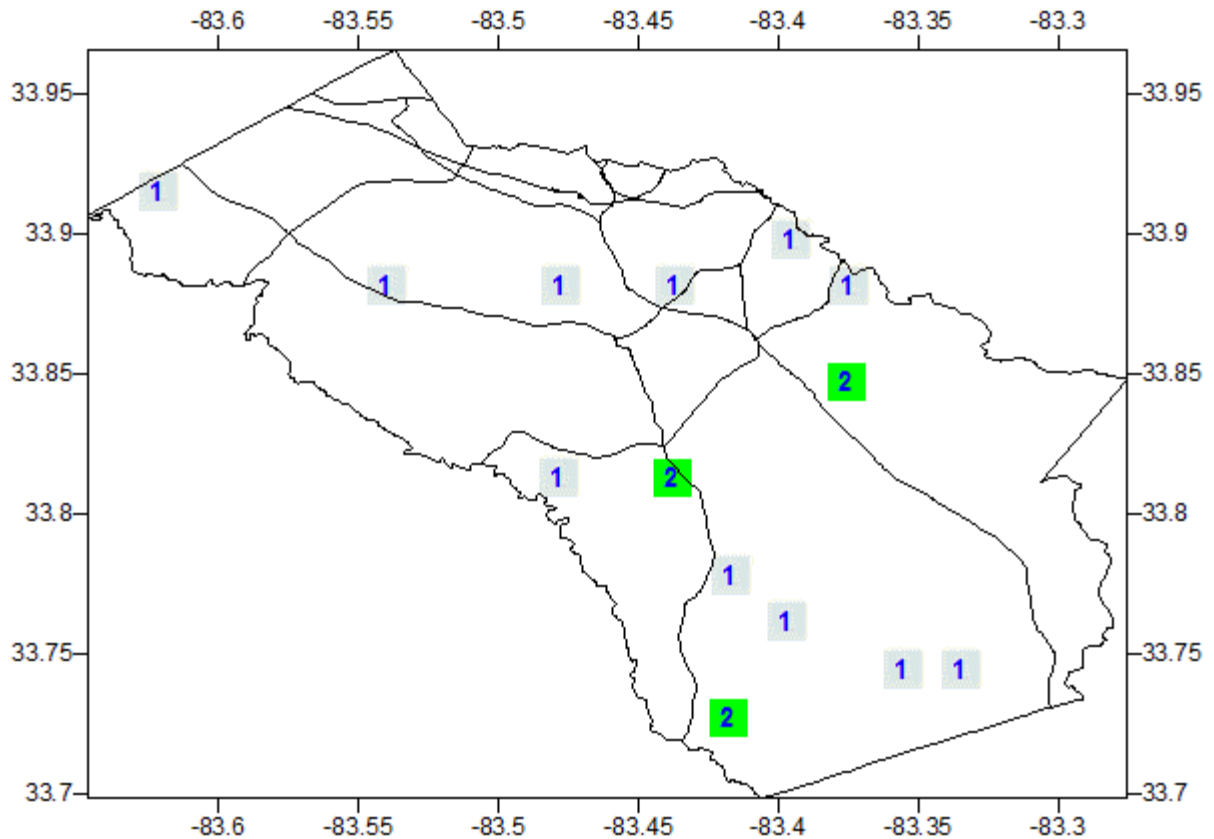
Acreage Burned By Debris Burning Sub Cause For Oconee County For FY 2008-2017



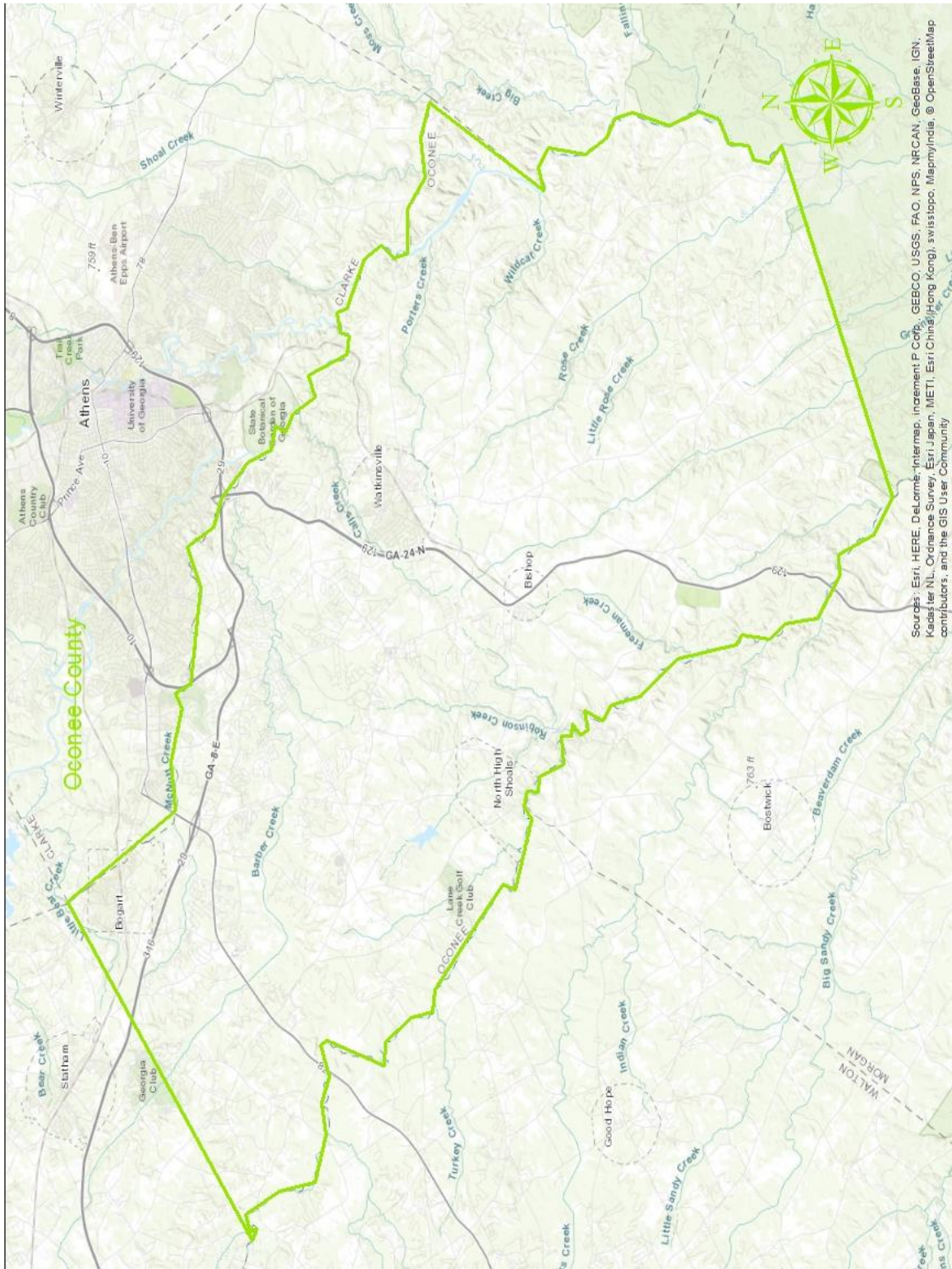
Fire Occurrence Map for Oconee County for Fiscal Year 2007-2011

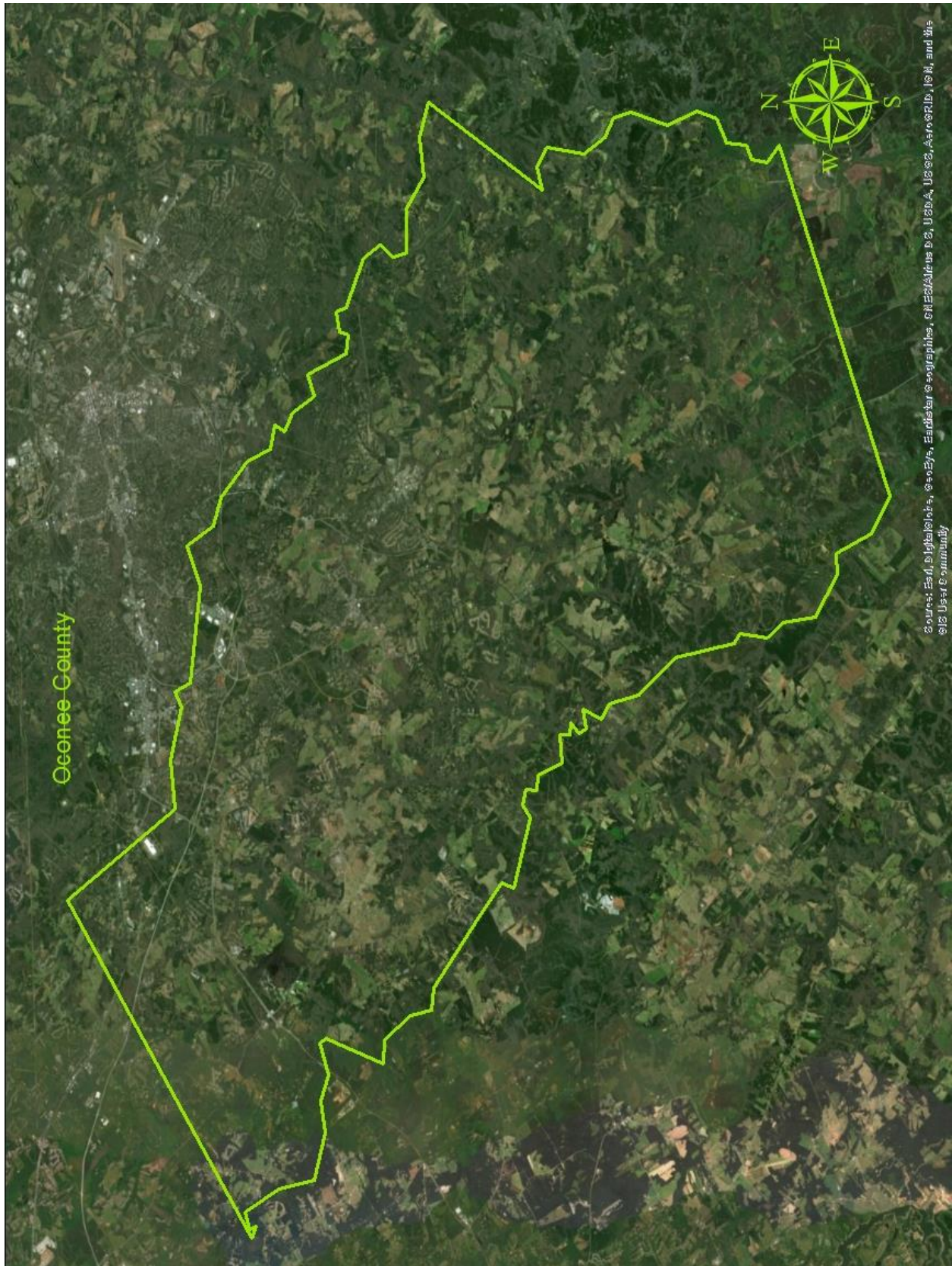


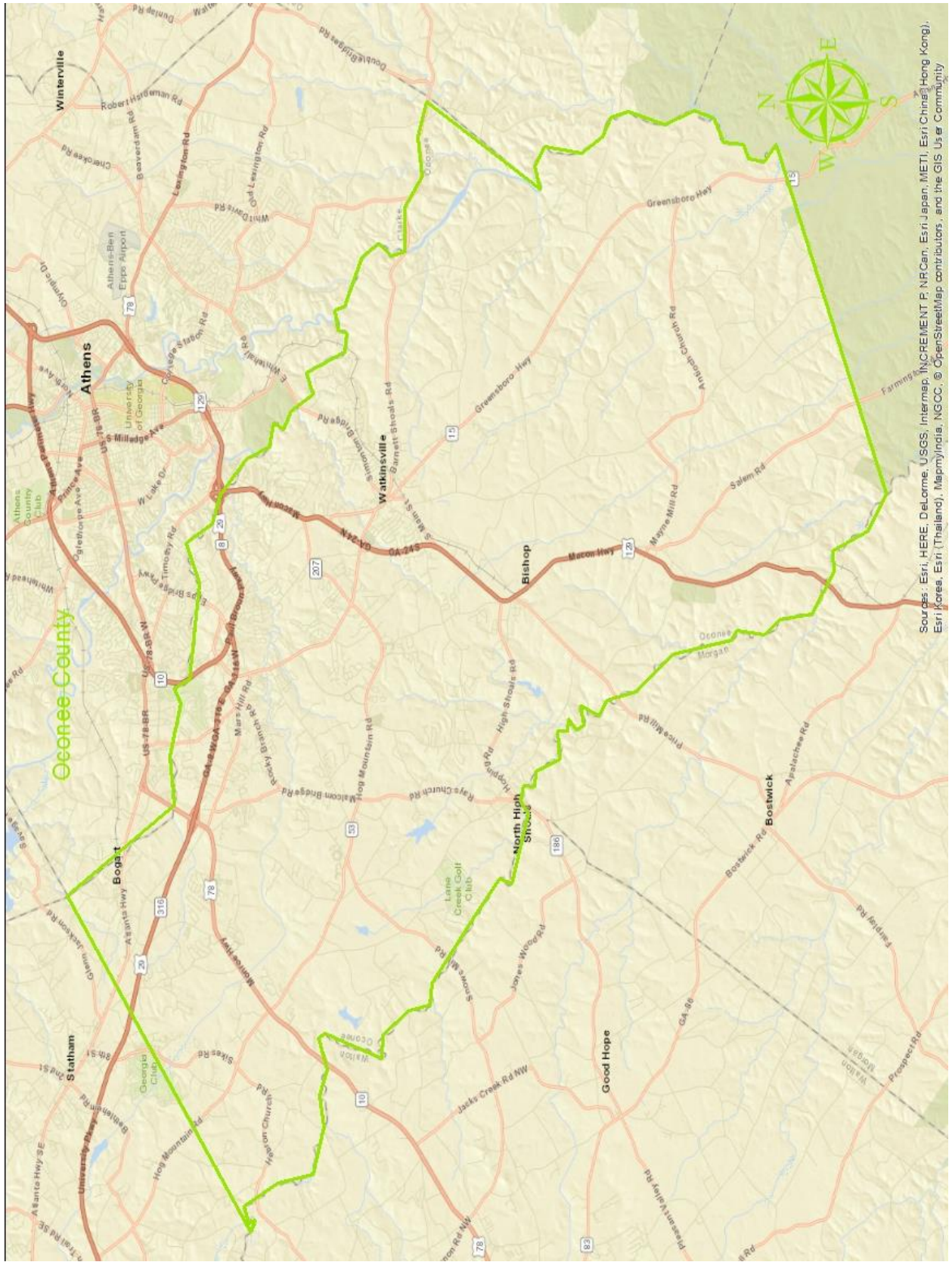
Fire Occurrence Map for Oconee County for Fiscal Year 2012-2016



IV. COUNTY BASE MAPS







Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), MapmyIndia, NGCC, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

V. COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT

The Wildland-Urban Interface

There are many definitions of the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), however from a fire management perspective it is commonly defined as an area where structures and other human development meet or intermingles with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. As fire is dependent on a certain set of conditions, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group has defined the wildland-urban interface as a set of conditions that exists in or near areas of wildland fuels, regardless of ownership. This set of conditions includes type of vegetation, building construction, accessibility, lot size, topography and other factors such as weather and humidity. When these conditions are present in certain combinations, they make some communities more vulnerable to wildfire damage than others. This “set of conditions” method is perhaps the best way to define wildland-urban interface areas when planning for wildfire prevention, mitigation, and protection activities.

There are three major categories of wildland-urban interface. Depending on the set of conditions present, any of these areas may be at risk from wildfire. A wildfire risk assessment can determine the level of risk.

1. **“Boundary” wildland-urban interface** is characterized by areas of development where homes, especially new subdivisions, press against public and private wildlands, such as private or commercial forest land or public forests or parks. This is the classic type of wildland-urban interface, with a clearly defined boundary between the suburban fringe and the rural countryside.
2. **“Intermix” wildland-urban interface** areas are places where improved property and/or structures are scattered and interspersed in wildland areas. These may be isolated rural homes or an area that is just beginning to go through the transition from rural to urban land use.
3. **“Island” wildland-urban interface**, also called occluded interface, are areas of wildland within predominately urban or suburban areas. As cities or subdivisions grow, islands of undeveloped land may remain, creating remnant forests. Sometimes these remnants exist as parks, or as land that cannot be developed due to site limitations, such as wetlands.



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

Wildland Urban Interface Hazards

Firefighters in the wildland urban interface may encounter hazards other than the fire itself, such as hazardous materials, utility lines and poor access.

- **Hazardous Materials** - Common chemicals used around the home may be a direct hazard to firefighters from flammability, explosion potential and/or vapors or off-gassing. Such chemicals include paint, varnish and other flammable liquids; fertilizer; pesticides; cleansers; aerosol cans, fireworks, batteries and ammunition. In addition, some common household products such as plastics may give off very toxic fumes when they burn. Stay OUT of the smoke from burning structures and any unknown sources such as trash piles.
- **Illicit Activities** - Marijuana plantations or drug production labs may be found in wildland urban interface areas. Extremely hazardous materials such as propane tanks and flammable/toxic chemicals may be encountered, as well as booby traps.
- **Propane tanks** - Both large (household size) and small (gas grill size) liquefied propane gas (LPG) tanks can present hazards to firefighters, including explosion. See the "LPG Tank Hazards" discussion for details.
- **Utility lines** -Utility lines may be located above and below ground and may be cut or damaged by tools or equipment. Don't spray water on utility lines or boxes.
- **Septic tanks and fields** - Below-ground structures may not be readily apparent and may not support the weight of engines or other apparatus.
- **New construction materials** - Many new construction materials have comparatively low melting points and may "off-gas" extremely hazardous vapors. Plastic decking materials that resemble wood are becoming more common and may begin softening and losing structural strength at 180° F, though they normally do not sustain combustion once direct flame is removed. However, if they continue to burn they exhibit the characteristics of flammable liquids.
- **Pets and livestock** -Pets and livestock may be left when residents evacuate and will likely be highly stressed, making them more inclined to bite and kick. Firefighters should not put themselves at risk to rescue pets or livestock.
- **Evacuation occurring** - Firefighters may be taking structural protection actions while evacuations of residents are occurring. Be very cautious of people driving erratically. Distraught residents may refuse to leave their property, and firefighters may need to disengage from fighting fire to contact law enforcement officers for assistance. In most jurisdictions firefighters do not have the authority to force evacuations. Firefighters should not put themselves at risk trying to protect someone who will not evacuate!
- **Limited access** - Narrow one-lane roads with no turn-around room, inadequate or poorly maintained bridges and culverts are frequently found in wildland urban interface areas. Access should be sized-up and an evacuation plan for all emergency personnel should be developed.

The wildland fire risk assessments conducted in 2011 by the Oconee County Fire Department and the Georgia Forestry Commission returned an average score of 98, placing Oconee County in the “moderate risk” hazard range. The risk assessment instrument used to evaluate wildfire hazards to Oconee County’s WUI was the Hazard and Wildfire Risk Assessment Checklist. The instrument takes into consideration accessibility, vegetation (based on fuel models), roofing assembly, building construction, and availability of fire protection resources, placement of gas and electric utilities, and additional rating factors. The following factors contributed to the wildfire hazard score for Oconee County:

- Dead end roads with inadequate turn arounds
- Narrow roads without drivable shoulders
- Long, narrow, and poorly labeled driveways
- Limited street signs and homes not clearly addressed
- Thick, highly flammable vegetation surrounding many homes
- Minimal defensible space around structures
- Homes with wooden siding and roofs with heavy accumulations of vegetative debris
- No pressurized or non-pressurized water systems available
- Above ground utilities
- Large, adjacent areas of forest or wildlands
- Heavy fuel buildups in adjacent wildlands
- Undeveloped lots comprising half the total lots in many rural communities.
- High occurrence of wildfires in the several locations
- Distance from fire stations
- Lack of homeowner or community organizations

The Communities-at-Risk within Oconee County that led to its **Moderate** risk rating are:

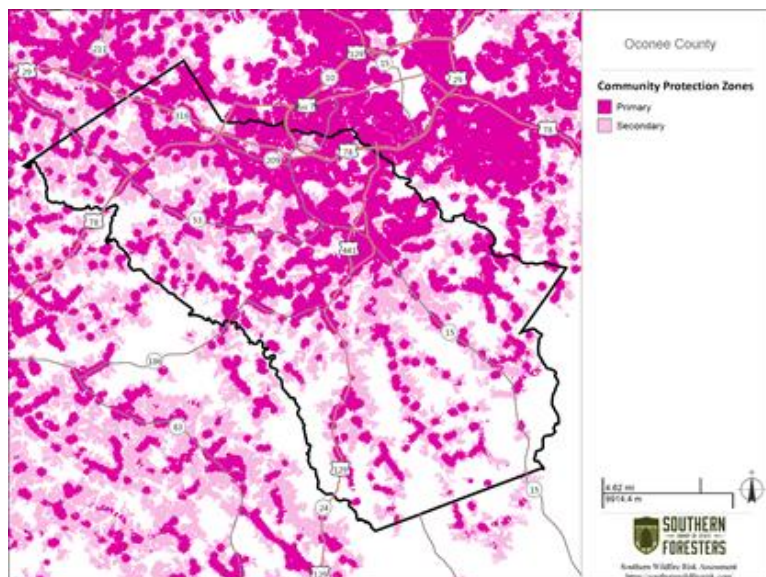
1. Flat Rock (Score 101 - Moderate)
2. Elder Mill Road (Score 129 - Moderate)
3. North Colham Road (Score 74 – Low Risk)
4. Oconee Forest (Score 89 – Moderate Risk)
5. Dowdy Road / Smithville (Score 88 – Moderate Risk)
6. 441 North (Score 90 – Moderate Risk)
7. South Whitehall Road Area (Score 102 – Moderate Risk)
8. Kennedy Road (Score 95 – Moderate Risk)
9. East Barnett Shoals Road Area (Score 104 – Moderate Risk)
10. City of Watkinsville (Score 34 – Low Risk)
11. West Barnett Shoals Area (Score 86 – Moderate Risk)
12. McRee Mill Road (Score 110 – Moderate Risk)
13. Farmington Community (Score 130 – High Risk)
14. High Shoals Community. (Score – 129 – Moderate Risk)
15. City of Bishop (Score – 120 Moderate Risk)

VI. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

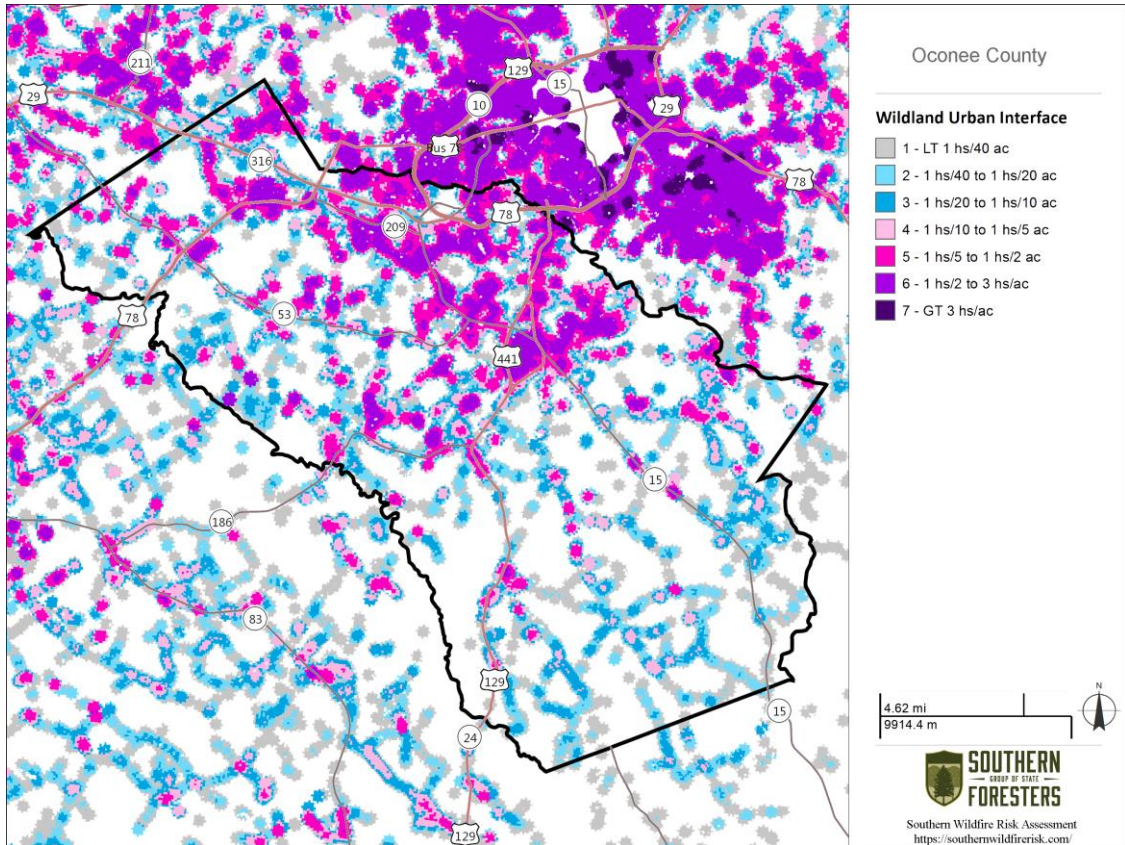
The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment tool, developed by the Southern Group of State Foresters, was released to the public in July 2014. This tool allows users of the Professional Viewer application of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA) web Portal (SouthWRAP) to define a specific project area 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 Oconee 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.

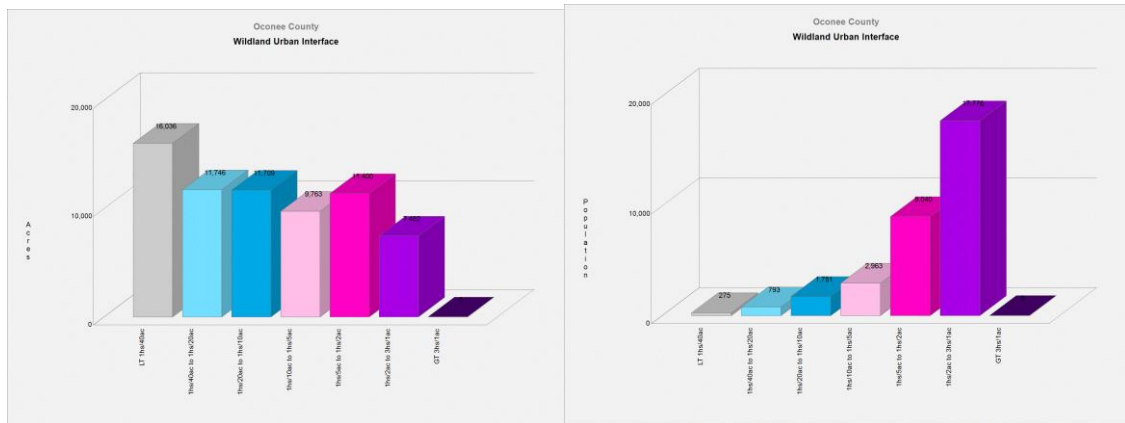
- Identify areas that may require additional tactical planning, specifically related to mitigation projects and Community Wildfire Protection Planning.
- Provide the information necessary to justify resource, budget and funding requests.
- Allow agencies to work together to better define priorities and 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.

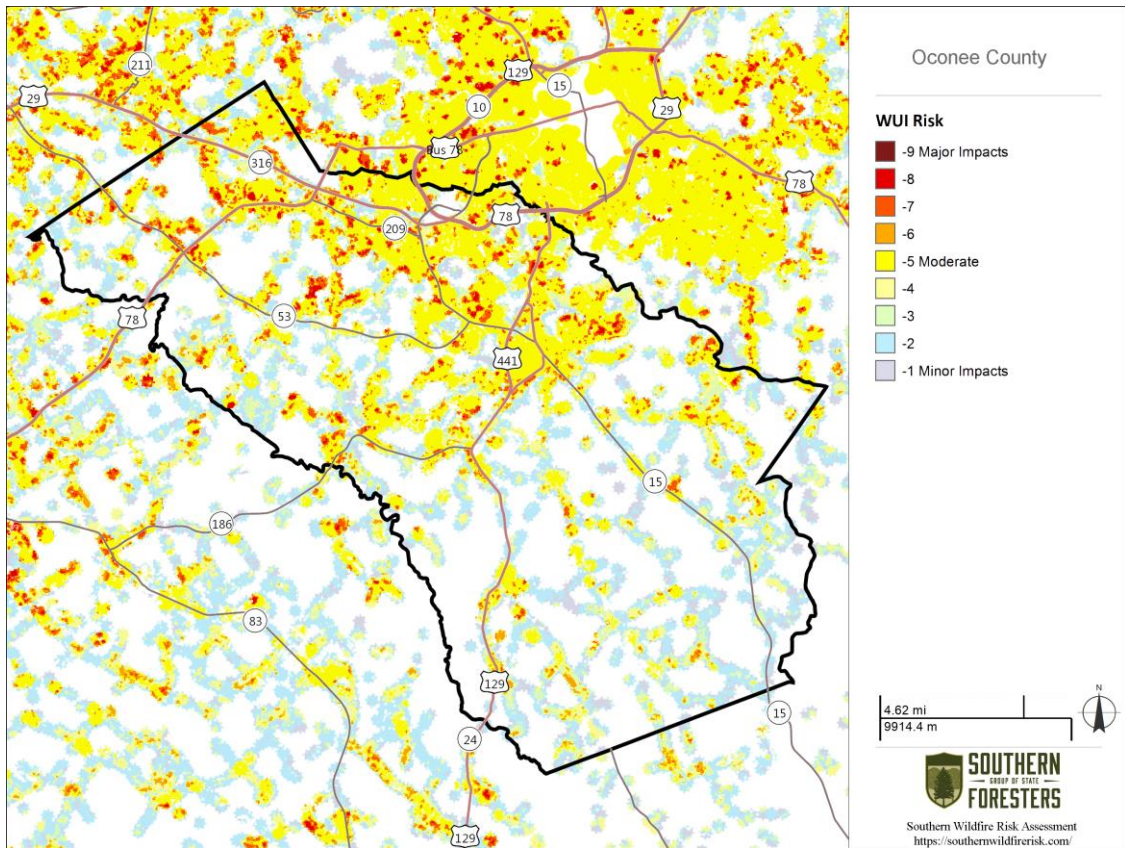


Community Protection Zones map from the Oconee County SWRA

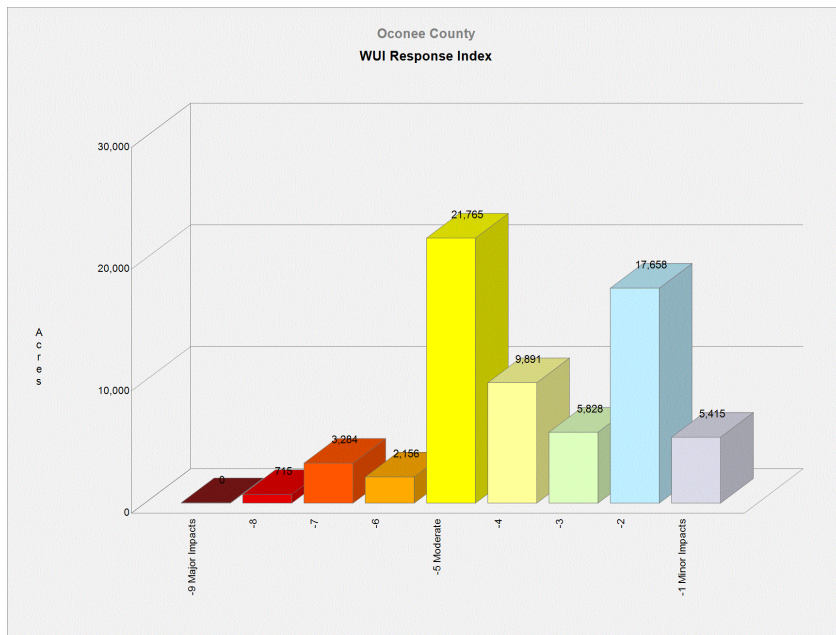


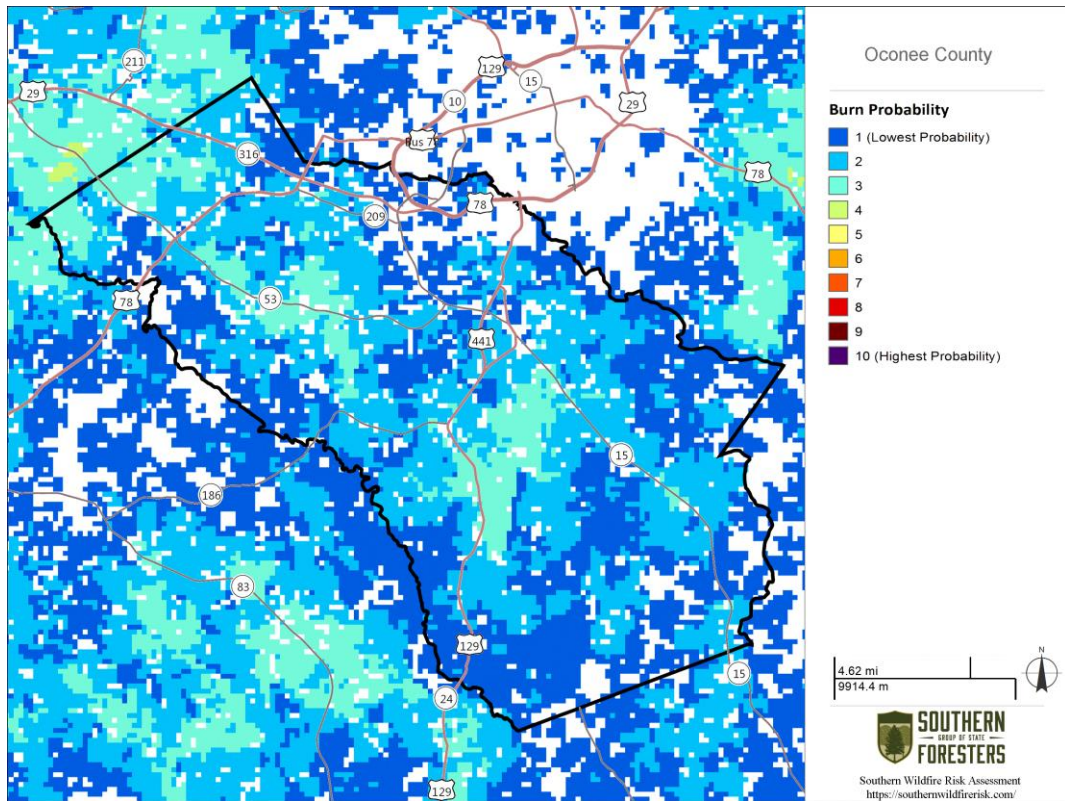
Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map Below: WUI Acres (left) WUI Population (right)



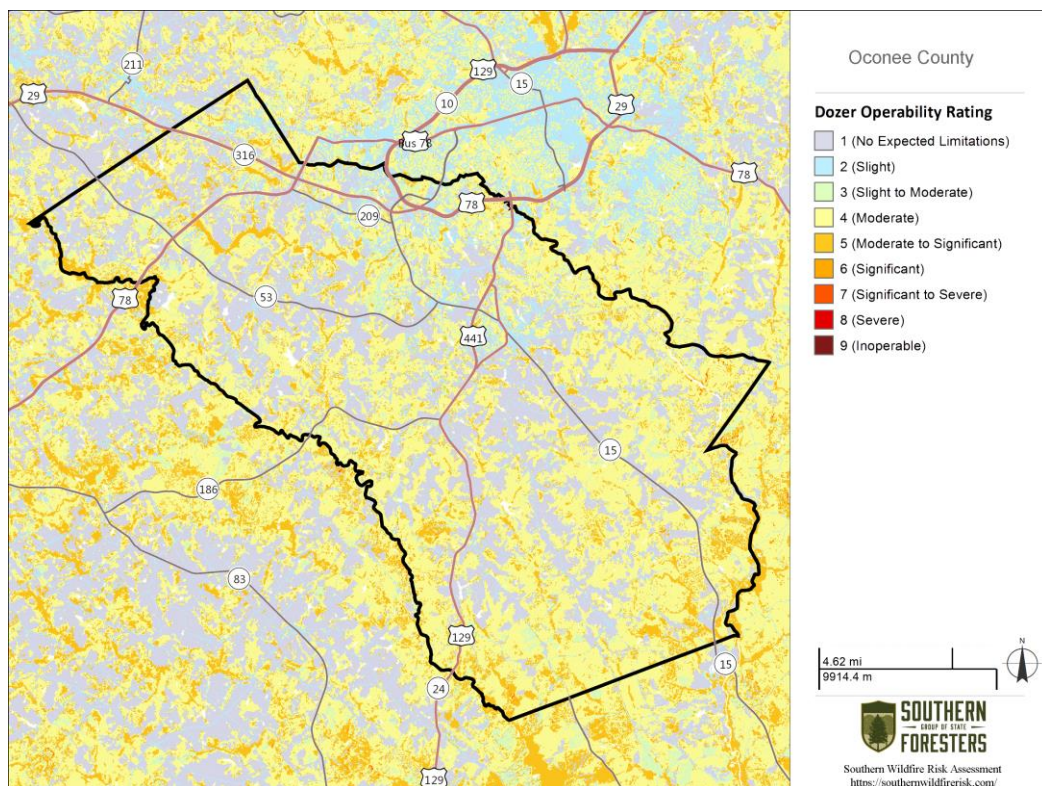


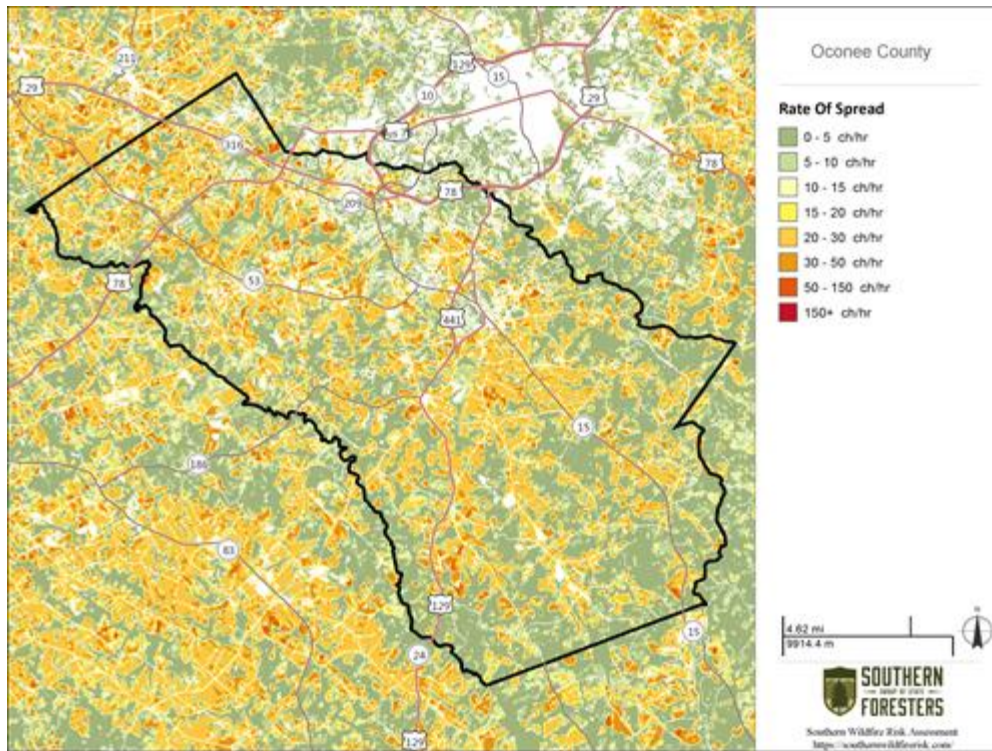
Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk map Below: WUI Risk Acres



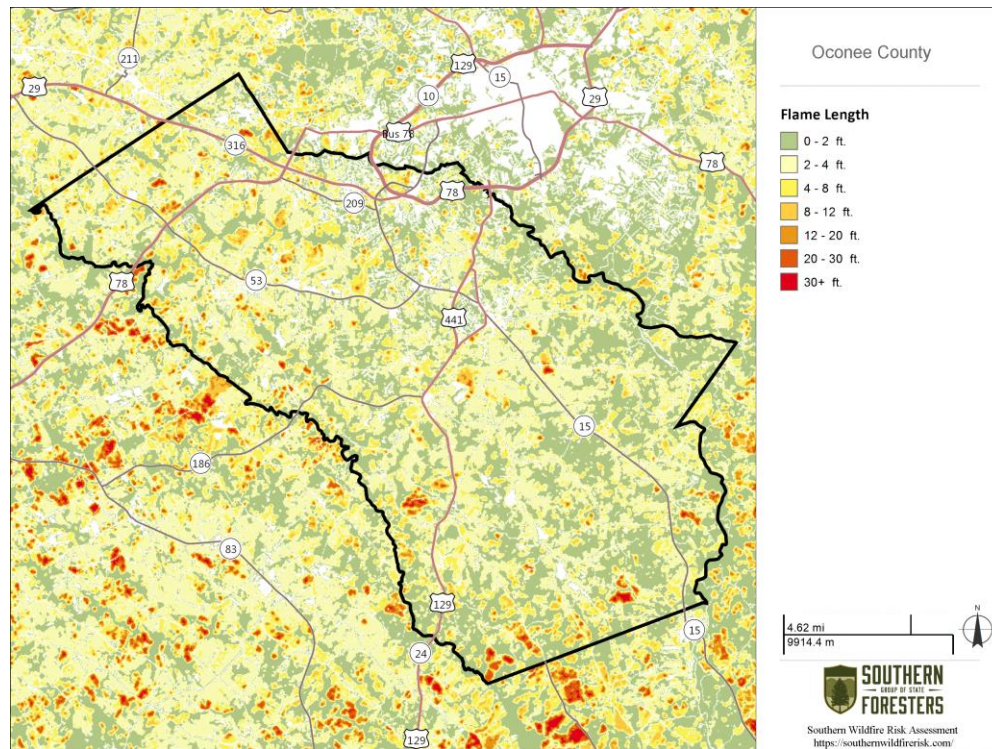


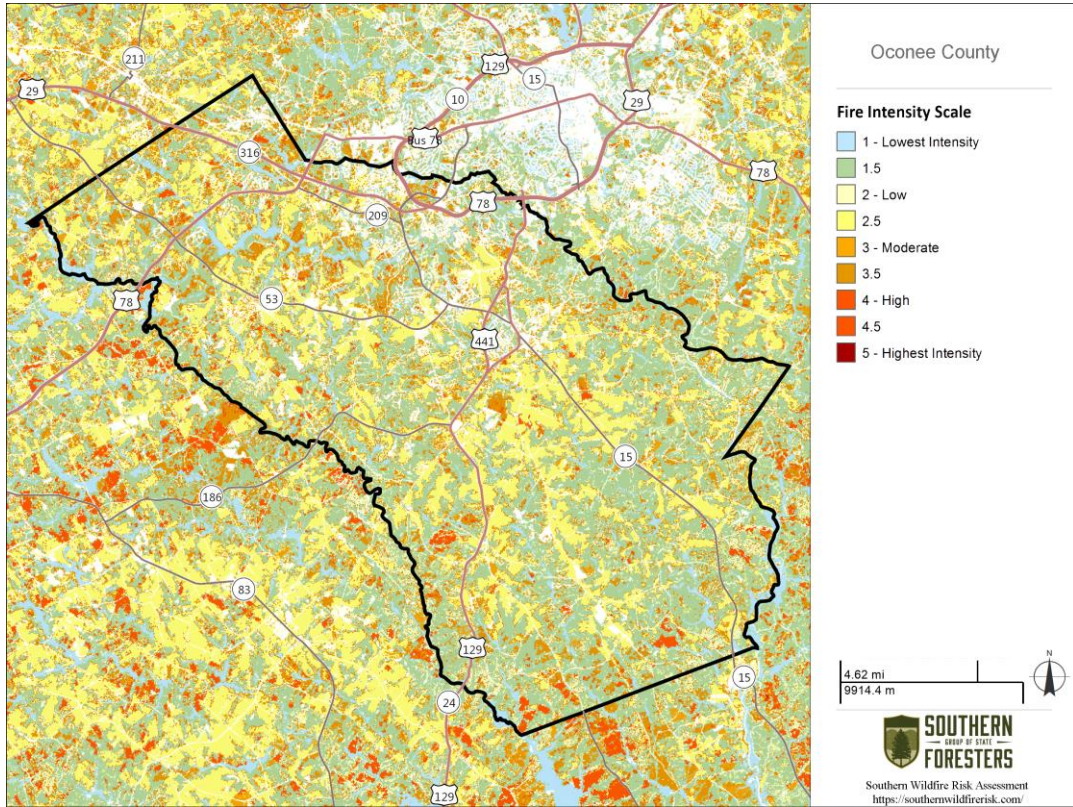
Above: Burn Probability map Below: Dozer Operability Rating map



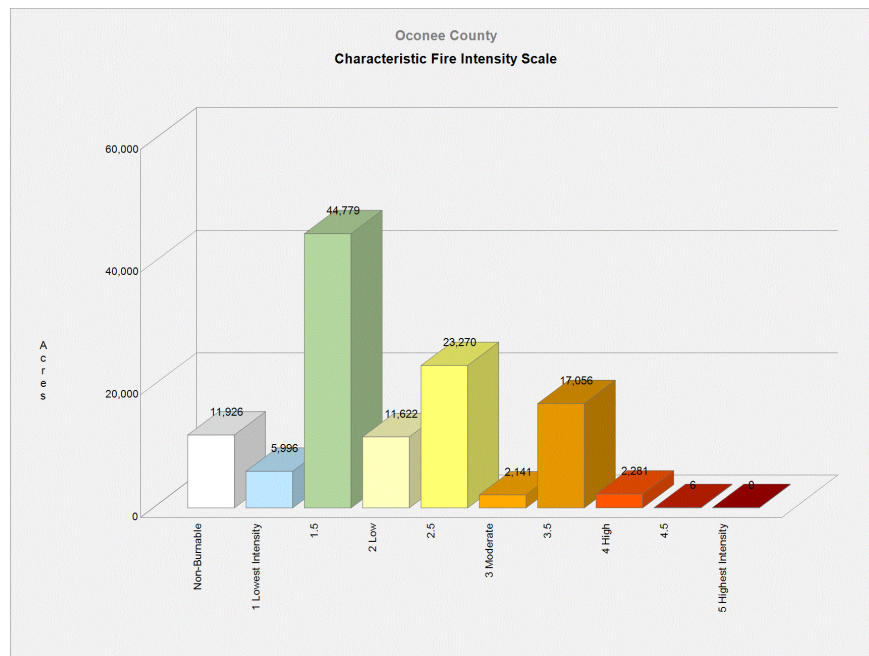


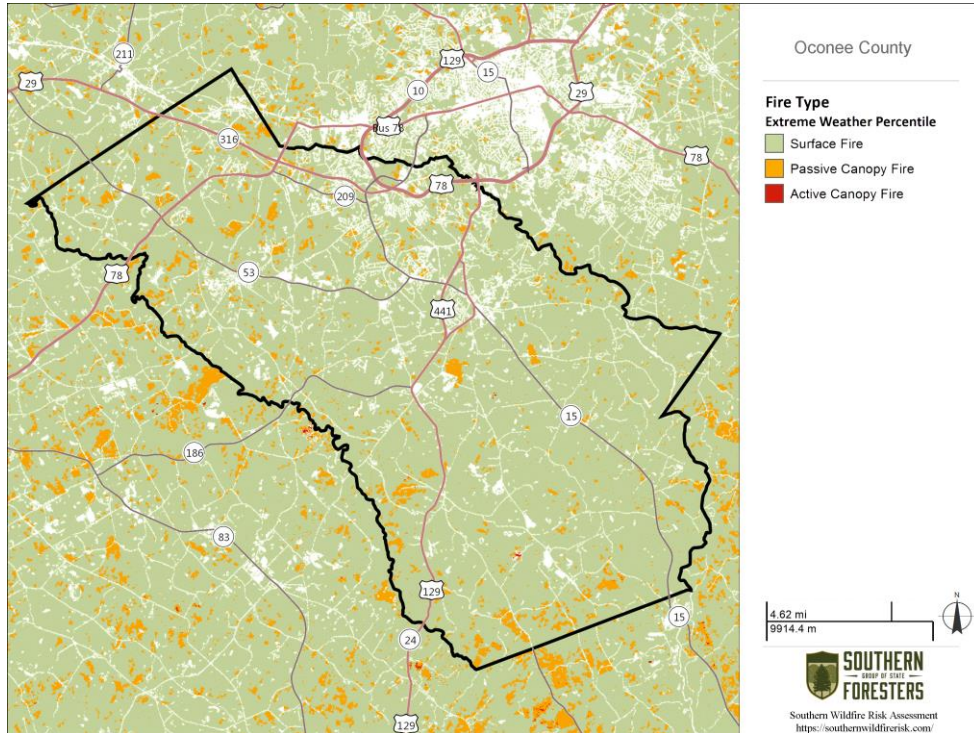
Above: Rate of Spread map Below: Flame Length map





Above: Fire Intensity Scale map Below: Fire Intensity Scale Acres





Above: Fire Type Map

Description

There are two primary fire types – surface fire and canopy fire. Canopy fire can be further subdivided into passive canopy fire and active canopy fire. A short description of each of these is provided below.

Surface Fire

A fire that spreads through surface fuel without consuming any overlying canopy fuel. Surface fuels include grass, timber litter, shrub/brush, slash and other dead or live vegetation within about 6 feet of the ground.



Passive Canopy Fire

A type of crown fire in which the crowns of individual trees or small groups of trees burn, but solid flaming in the canopy cannot be maintained except for short periods (Scott & Reinhardt, 2001).



Active Canopy Fire

A crown fire in which the entire fuel complex (canopy) is involved in flame, but the crowning phase remains dependent on heat released from surface fuel for continued spread (Scott & Reinhardt, 2001).



VII. PRIORITIZED MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Summary

As Central Georgia continues to see increased growth from other areas seeking less crowded and warmer climates, new development will 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 25 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 developments are built in 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.

In 2012 the International Code Council developed the International Wildland Urban Interface Code (IWUIC). This code was adopted by the Georgia Legislature in 2014 for Counties to use when developing building and zoning codes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to help reduce risk and minimize structure loss.

The following recommendations were developed by the Oconee County CWPP Core team as a result of surveying and assessing fuels and structures and by conducting meetings and interviews with county and city officials. A priority order was determined based on which mitigation projects would best reduce the hazard of wildfire in the assessment area.

Proposed Community Hazard and Structural Ignitability Reduction Priorities

Primary Protection for Community and Its Essential Infrastructure		
Treatment Area	Treatment Types	Treatment Method(s)
1. All Structures	Create minimum of 30-foot of defensible space**	Trim shrubs and vines to 30 feet from structures, trim overhanging limbs, replace flammable plants near homes with less flammable varieties, remove vegetation around chimneys.
2. Applicable Structures	Reduce structural ignitability**	Clean flammable vegetative material from roofs and gutters, store firewood appropriately, install skirting around raised structures, store water hoses for ready access, and replace pine straw and mulch around plantings with less flammable landscaping materials.
3. Community Clean-up Day National Wildfire Preparedness Day	Cutting, mowing, pruning**	Cut, prune, and mow vegetation in shared community spaces.
4. Driveway Access	Culvert installation	See that adequate lengths of culverts are installed to allow emergency vehicle access.
5. Road Access	Identify needed road improvements	As roads are upgraded, widen to minimum standards with at least 50 foot diameter cul-de-sacs or turn-arounds.

Proposed Community Wildland Fuel Reduction Priorities

Treatment Area	Treatment Types	Treatment Method(s)
1. Adjacent WUI Lands	Reduce hazardous fuels	Encourage prescribed burning for private landowners and industrial timberlands particularly adjacent to residential areas. Seek grant for WUI mitigation team.
2. Railroad Corridors	Reduce hazardous fuels	Encourage railroads to better maintain their ROW eliminating brush and grass through herbicide and mowing. Maintain firebreaks along ROW adjacent to residential areas.
3. Existing Fire Lines	Reduce hazardous fuels	Clean and re-harrow existing lines.

Proposed Improved Community Wildland Fire Response Priorities		
1. Water Sources	Dry Hydrants	Inspect, maintain and improve access to existing dry hydrants. Add signage along road to mark the hydrants. Locate additional dry hydrants as needed.
2. Fire Stations	Equipment	Wildland hand tools. Lightweight Wildland PPE Gear. Investigate need for “brush” trucks near communities at risk.
3. Water Sources	Drafting equipment	Investigate need for additional drafting pumps.
4. Personnel	Training	Obtain Wildland Fire Suppression training for fire personnel to include S130, S190, and S215. Ready Set Go training.
**Actions to be taken by homeowners and community stakeholders		

Proposed Education and Outreach Priorities

1. Conduct “How to Have a Firewise Home” Workshop for County Residents
<p>Set up and conduct a workshop for homeowners that teach the principles of making homes and properties safe from wildfire. Topics for discussion include defensible space, landscaping, building construction, etc. Workshop will be scheduled for evenings or weekends when most homeowners are available and advertised through local media outlets.</p> <p>Distribute materials promoting Firewise practices and planning through local community and governmental meetings.</p>
2. Conduct “Firewise” Workshop for Community Leaders
<p>Arrange for GFC Firewise Coordinator to work with local community leaders and governmental officials on the importance of “Firewise Planning” in developing ordinances and codes as the county as the need arises. Identified “communities-at-risk” including: City of Bishop and Farmington should be sought after for inclusion in the National Firewise Communities Program.</p>

3. Spring Clean-up Event (National Wildfire Preparedness Day – 1st Saturday in May)

Conduct clean-up event every spring involving the Georgia Forestry Commission, USFS, Oconee County Fire Departments, Farmington Community and local residence of Oconee County. Set up information table with educational materials and refreshments. Initiate the event with a morning briefing by GFC Firewise coordinator and local fire officials detailing plans for the day and safety precautions. Activities to include the following:

- Clean flammable vegetative material from roofs and gutters
- Trim shrubs and vines to 30 feet away from structures
- Trim overhanging limbs
- Clean hazardous or flammable debris from adjacent properties

4. Informational Packets

Develop and distribute informational packets to be distributed by realtors and insurance agents. Included in the packets are the following:

- Be Firewise Around Your Home
- Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction
- Firewise Communities USA brochures
- Fire Adapted Community information
- Ready Set Go materials

5. Wildfire Protection Display

Create and exhibit a display for the general public at the local events. Display can be independent or combined with the Georgia Forestry Commission display.

6. Media

Invite the local and regional news media to community “Firewise” functions for news coverage and regularly submit press releases documenting wildfire risk improvements in Oconee County.

Utilize Radio, TV, Cable access, social media to reach a diverse audience.

VIII. ACTION PLAN

Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities have been developed to implement the action plan:

Role	Responsibility
Hazardous Fuels and Structural Ignitability Reduction	
Oconee County WUI Fire Council	Create this informal team or council comprised of residents, GFC officials, County Fire department officials, a representative from the city and county government and the EMA Director for Oconee County. Meet periodically to review progress towards mitigation goals, appoint and delegate special activities, work with federal, state, and local officials to assess progress and develop future goals and action plans. Work with residents to implement projects and Firewise activities.
Key Messages to focus on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Defensible Space and Firewise Landscaping 2 Debris Burning Safety 3 Firewise information for homeowners 4 Prescribed burning benefits
Communications objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Create public awareness for fire danger and defensible space issues 2 Identify most significant human cause fire issues 3 Enlist public support to help prevent these causes 4 Encourage people to employ fire prevention and defensible spaces in their communities.
Target Audiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Homeowners 2 Forest Landowners and users 3 Civic Groups 4 School Groups
Methods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 News Releases 2 Personal Contacts 3 Key messages and prevention tips 4 Visuals such as signs, brochures and posters 5 Social media

Spring Clean-up Day (National Wildfire Preparedness Day – 1 st Saturday in May annually)	
Event Coordinator	Coordinate day’s events and schedule, catering for cookout, guest attendance, and moderate activities the day of the day of the event.
Event Treasurer	Collect funds from residents to cover food, equipment rentals, and supplies.
Publicity Coordinator	Advertise event through neighborhood newsletter, letters to officials, and public service announcements (PSAs) for local media outlets. Publicize post-event through local paper and radio PSAs.
Work Supervisor	Develop volunteer labor force of community residents; develop labor/advisory force from Georgia Forestry Commission, Oconee County Fire Departments, and Emergency Management. Procure needed equipment and supplies. In cooperation with local city and county officials, develop safety protocol. Supervise work and monitor activities for safety the day of the event.

Funding Needs

The following funding is needed to implement the action plan:

Project	Estimated Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)
1. Create a minimum of 30 feet of defensible space around structures	Varies	Residents will supply labor and fund required work on their own properties.
2. Reduce structural ignitability by cleaning flammable vegetation from roofs and gutters; appropriately storing firewood, installing skirting around raised structures, storing water hoses for ready access, replacing pine needles and mulch around plantings with less flammable material.	Varies	Residents will supply labor and fund required work on their own properties.
3. Amend codes and ordinances to provide better driveway access, increased visibility of house numbers, properly stored firewood, minimum defensible space brush clearance, required Class A roofing materials and skirting around raised structures, planned maintenance of community lots.	No Cost	To be adopted by city and county government. International Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Code IWUIC
4. Spring Cleanup Day (National Wildfire Preparedness Day – 1 st Saturday in May)	Varies	Community Business Donations.
5. Fuel Reduction Activities	\$15 / acre	FEMA & USFS Grants

Assessment Strategy

To accurately assess progress and effectiveness for the action plan, the Oconee County WUI Fire Council will implement the following:

- Annual wildfire risk assessment will be conducted to re-assess wildfire hazards and prioritize needed actions.
- Mitigation efforts that are recurring (such as mowing, burning, and clearing of defensible space) will be incorporated into an annual renewal of the original action plan.
- Mitigation efforts that could not be funded in the requested year will be incorporated into the annual renewal of the original action plan.
- Continuing educational and outreach programs will be conducted and assessed for effectiveness. Workshops will be evaluated based on attendance and post surveys that are distributed by mail 1 month and 6 months following workshop date.
- The Oconee County WUI Council will publish an annual report detailing mitigation projects initiated and completed, progress for ongoing actions, funds received, funds spent, and in-kind services utilized. The report will include a “state of the community” section that critically evaluates mitigation progress and identifies areas for improvement. Recommendations will be incorporated into the annual renewal of the action plan.
- An annual survey will be distributed to residents soliciting information on individual mitigation efforts on their own property (e.g., defensible space). Responses will be tallied and reviewed at the next Oconee WUI Council meeting. Needed actions will be discussed and delegated.

This plan should become a working document that is shared by local, state, and federal agencies that will use it to accomplish common goals. An agreed-upon schedule for meeting to review accomplishments, solve problems, and plan for the future should extend beyond the scope of this plan. Without this follow up this plan will have limited value.

IX. 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 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.

State Farm Insurance Company offers \$500 grant opportunities to communities participating in National Wildfire Preparedness Day events.

X. 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).*

XI. 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.wildfireprepreday.org

Appended Documents:

Oconee County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

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

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