



Community Wildfire Protection Plan *An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and Conservation of Natural Resources*

Thomas County

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



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Appended Documents:

Thomas County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

Thomas County Wildfire Pre-suppression Plan

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

I. OBJECTIVES

The mission of the following report is to set clear priorities for the implementation of wildfire mitigation in Thomas 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

An initial meeting was held on May 28th 2009 at the Thomas County Forestry Unit attended by the following core planning team;

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Will Fell | GFC CWPP Specialist |
| Trent Ingram | GFC Chief Ranger Thomas County |
| Chris Jones | Fire Chief Thomas County FD/EMA Director |
| Bryan Croft | Fire Chief Thomasville FD |
| Robin Lawson | Deputy Fire Chief Thomas Co FD |
| Louis Rehberg | Thomas County Commissioner |

After an initial discussion of the processes and goals we hope to accomplish with this report, it was decided that we would identify and evaluate selected high risk communities and areas within the wildland urban interface. At the completion of this we would reconvene and discuss and evaluate the completed community wildfire risk assessments. It was further decided that we would provide for mitigation recommendations for the county as a whole. The chiefs of the fire departments in the county assessed WUI communities in their districts and the core team reconvened on July 16th 2009 for the purpose of completing the following:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Risk Assessment | Assessed wildfire hazard risks and prioritized mitigation actions. |
| 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. |

III. COMMUNITY BACKGROUND AND WILDFIRE HISTORY

Background

Thomas County is located deep in south central Georgia's plantation country, along the state's border with Florida. Once home to a fashionable winter resort for northerners, the county remains steeped in history and culture.

In 1825 Thomas County was formed from portions of Irwin and Decatur counties and named for Jett Thomas, a hero of the War of 1812 (1812-15). Originally populated by Native Americans, who used the land for hunting and farming, the area was later dominated by numerous cotton plantations. Though the plantation economy thrived on cotton, other crops, including tobacco, pears, peaches, and for a time, rice, contributed to a healthy and diversified economy. Many of the area plantations are still operational as quail-hunting plantations, museums, or bed-and-breakfast inns, and are owned by the families who originally purchased the land.

After the railroad expanded to Thomas County in 1861, wealthy and elite northerners, seeking a retreat from cold winters and the subsequent threat of illness, began flocking to genteel Thomasville, the county seat. They soon brought their counterparts, who enjoyed the traditional southern pastimes of hunting, fishing, and active socializing. Many of these northern visitors built massive Victorian structures, or "grand winter cottages," more than fifty of which are still standing either as bed-and-breakfasts or private residences. By the early 1900s, Thomasville's popularity as a resort began to wane, but its distinctive architecture and culture remain today.

Thomas County's industrial endeavors have been just as successful as its tourist and agricultural enterprises. The county is home to the second largest farmer's market in the state and several Fortune 500 companies. According to the 2000 U.S. census, the population of Thomas County is 42,737 (59 percent white, 38.9 percent black, and 1.7 percent Hispanic) and is disbursed over the 548 square miles that make up the county.

The county has two school districts. The Thomasville City School District comprises six schools and serves all students who reside within the city limits. The Thomas County School District is composed of seven schools and serves all students who live in the county outside the city limits of Thomasville. Southwest Georgia Technical College is located just inside the city limits of Thomasville and provides an alternate secondary-education option for students seeking vocational certification.

Thomas County comes to life each April with its annual Rose Show and Festival. The city bursts with colorful blooms as passersby enjoy not only the Thomasville Rose Garden but the innumerable rose bushes that line streets and grace the lawns of homes, schools, and businesses alike. Christmas is also a special time in Thomas County. Downtown Thomasville hosts Victorian Christmas on the second Thursday and Friday of each December. Visitors step back in time as they stroll down the cobblestone streets and visit with locals in period costumes from Thomasville's heyday in the 1880s.

Places of interest include the many surviving plantations, particularly Pebble Hill. One of the country's oldest golf courses, the Glen Arven Country Club, was said to be a favorite spot of U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower, who also went quail hunting outside Thomasville. The Big Oak at the corner of Crawford and East Monroe streets in Thomasville is the largest oak tree east of the Mississippi River, with a limb span of 162 feet. The tree is more than 315 years old and has been a member of the National Live Oak Society since 1936. (Courtesy *New Georgia Encyclopedia*)

Wildfire History

About 57% of Thomas County is still in woodland despite a large agricultural presence in the county. Much of this woodland is in large plantations managed for hunting and recreation or as woodlots on farms. These woodlands are routinely burned every few years keeping wildland fuel levels down. Unfortunately much of what doesn't get prescribed burned are wildlands in close proximity of residential areas or small outlying communities. With the exception of a few large blocks of plantation woodland in the southern portion of the county, there are homes scattered throughout the county. Along with several subdivisions and small communities, the risk from wildland urban interface is fairly substantial and general throughout the county.

Over the past 52 years, Thomas County has averaged almost 76 reported wildland fires per year and 55% of these have occurred during the months of January, February, and March. These fires have burned an average of 478 acres annually. Of this annual acreage burned, 67% was lost during the above three months. Since the advent of the outdoor burning permit law about 30 years ago, the numbers of fires have slightly decreased to an average of 65 per year while the average acreage burned has shown a more dramatic decrease to 268 acres annually.

The leading causes of these fires, was debris burning causing 62% of the fires and 61% of the acres burned. More detailed records over the past ten years show that 59% of wildfire causes was from debris burning. The 2nd leading cause was machine use (15%) and the 3rd leading cause was incendiary (13%).



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

The table below indicates wildfire activity during the last complete fiscal year 2017, July 1, 2016 thru June 30, 2017.

| County = Thomas | Cause | Fires | Acres | Fires 5 Yr Avg | Acres 5 Yr Avg |
|--|--|-------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Campfire | Campfire | 3 | 9.96 | 1.00 | 2.13 |
| Children | Children | 1 | 2.00 | 0.80 | 1.02 |
| Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc | Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc | 4 | 4.15 | 1.40 | 2.35 |
| Debris: Construction Land Clearing | Debris: Construction Land Clearing | 1 | 0.66 | 0.40 | 0.16 |
| Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn | Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn | 22 | 80.50 | 8.00 | 50.68 |
| Debris: Other | Debris: Other | 1 | 174.40 | 0.40 | 35.15 |
| Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc | Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc | 7 | 6.15 | 2.20 | 22.09 |
| Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related | Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related | 2 | 5.21 | 2.60 | 24.52 |
| Incendiary | Incendiary | 3 | 5.24 | 3.20 | 7.74 |
| Lightning | Lightning | 0 | 0.00 | 0.20 | 10.44 |
| Machine Use | Machine Use | 3 | 4.72 | 2.20 | 1.65 |
| Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences | Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences | 2 | 1.05 | 1.20 | 1.62 |
| Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires | Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires | 1 | 0.10 | 0.40 | 0.43 |
| Railroad | Railroad | 0 | 0.00 | 1.20 | 4.08 |
| Undetermined | Undetermined | 2 | 28.77 | 1.00 | 6.67 |
| Totals for County: Thomas Year: 2017 | | 52 | 322.91 | 26.20 | 170.72 |

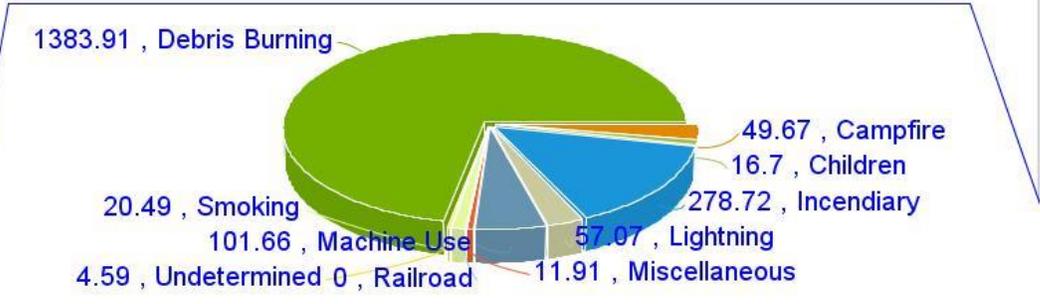
The tables below show Thomas County wildfire activity during the last 10 years (FY 2007 thru FY 2016). The following pages have wildfire data and occurrence maps from the same 10 year period.

| Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Thomas County For FY 2007-2016 | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Year | Acreage Burned | Number of Fires | Average Size | Statewide Average Size |
| 2007 | 237.54 | 103 | 2.31 | 18.64 |
| 2008 | 121.42 | 44 | 2.76 | 4.56 |
| 2009 | 225.34 | 36 | 6.26 | 3.90 |
| 2010 | 89.79 | 20 | 4.49 | 3.93 |
| 2011 | 639.48 | 111 | 5.76 | 17.56 |
| 2012 | 106.22 | 38 | 2.76 | 5.08 |
| 2013 | 36.91 | 20 | 1.85 | 4.53 |
| 2014 | 21.77 | 11 | 1.98 | 5.02 |
| 2015 | 207.09 | 19 | 10.90 | 4.42 |
| 2016 | 264.92 | 29 | 9.14 | 6.29 |

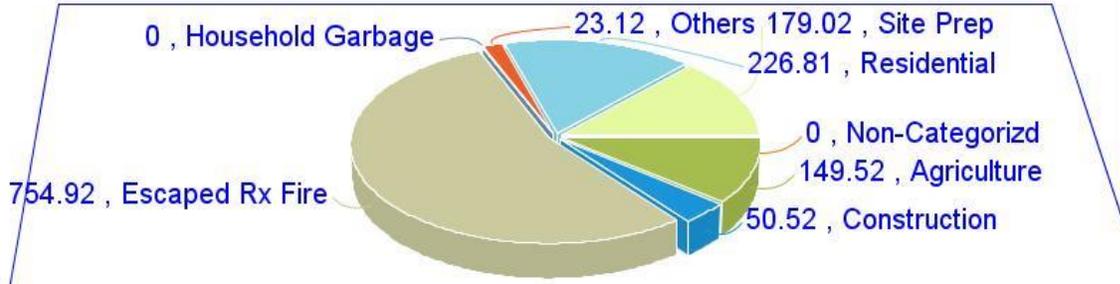
Number of Fires by Cause for Thomas County for FY 2007 to 2016

| Year | Campfire | Children | Debris Burning | Incendiary | Lightning | Machine Use | Misc. | Railroad | Smoking |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 2007 | 1 | 7 | 51 | 10 | 2 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| 2008 | 0 | 0 | 32 | 4 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2009 | 2 | 0 | 25 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2010 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 | 2 | 2 | 74 | 14 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 2012 | 3 | 2 | 19 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 2013 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| 2015 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 2016 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 9 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Acreage Burned by Cause of Fire For Thomas County For FY 2007-2016

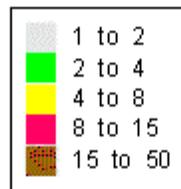
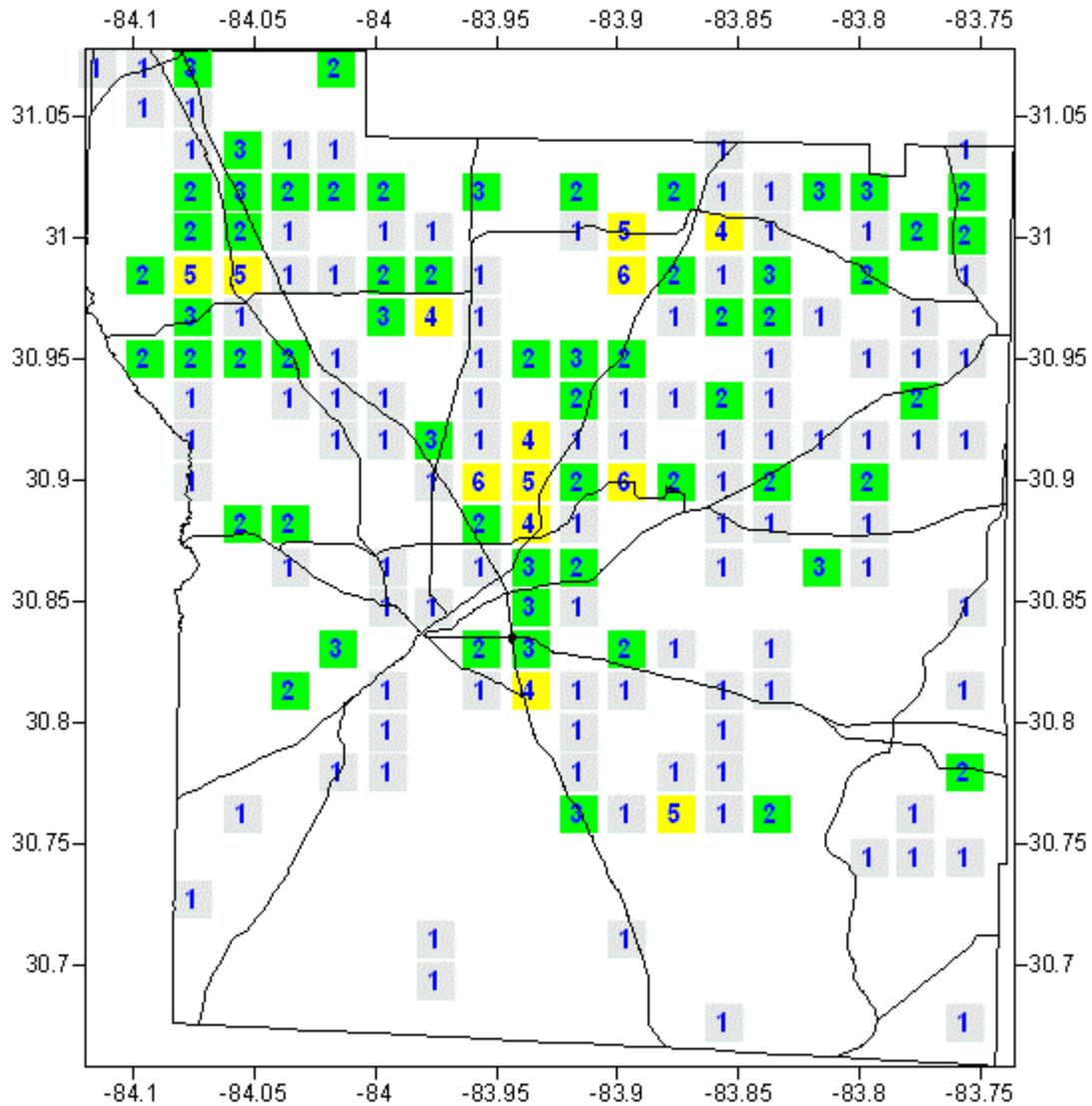


Acreage Burned By Debris Burning Sub Cause For Thomas County For FY 2007-2016

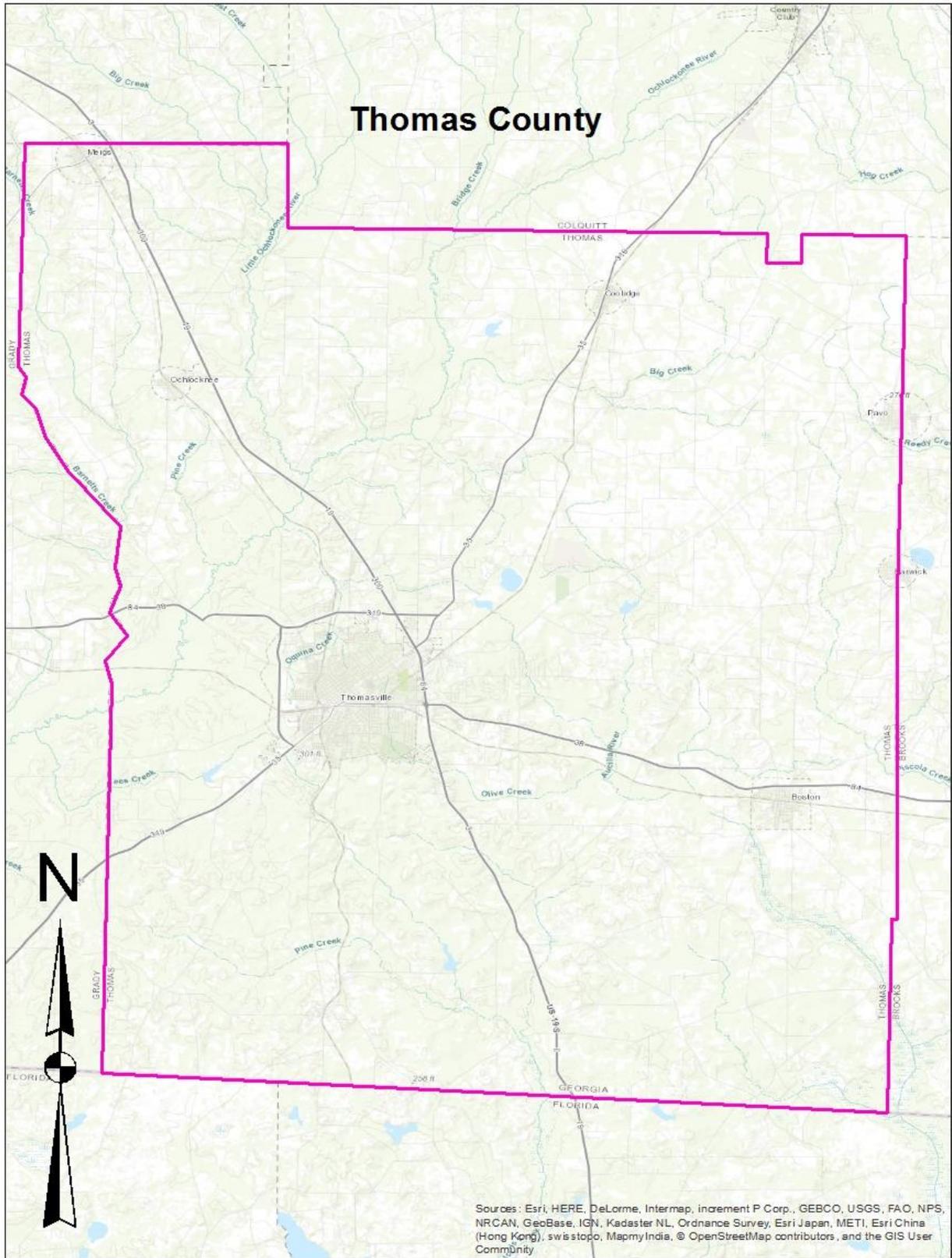


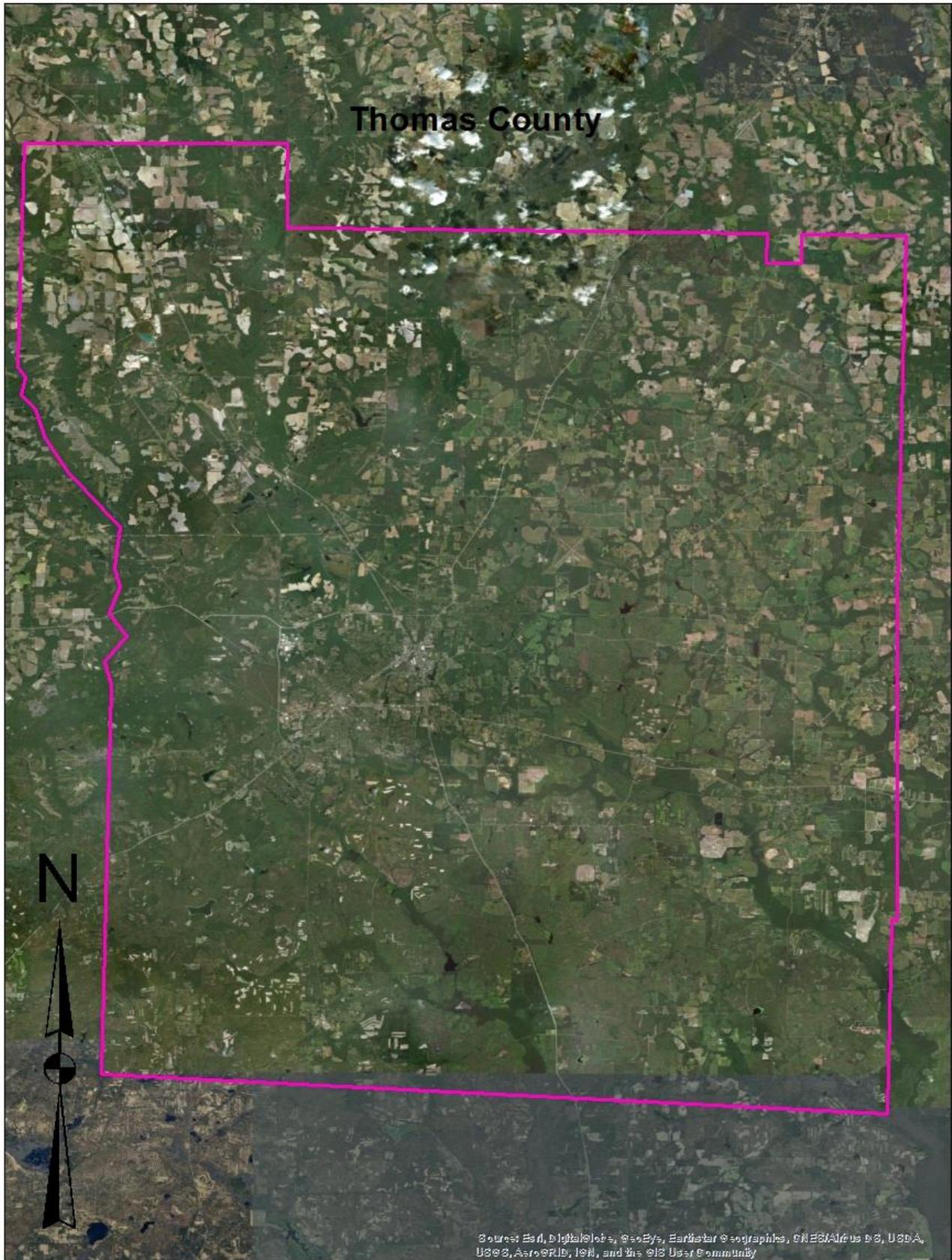
Fire Cause

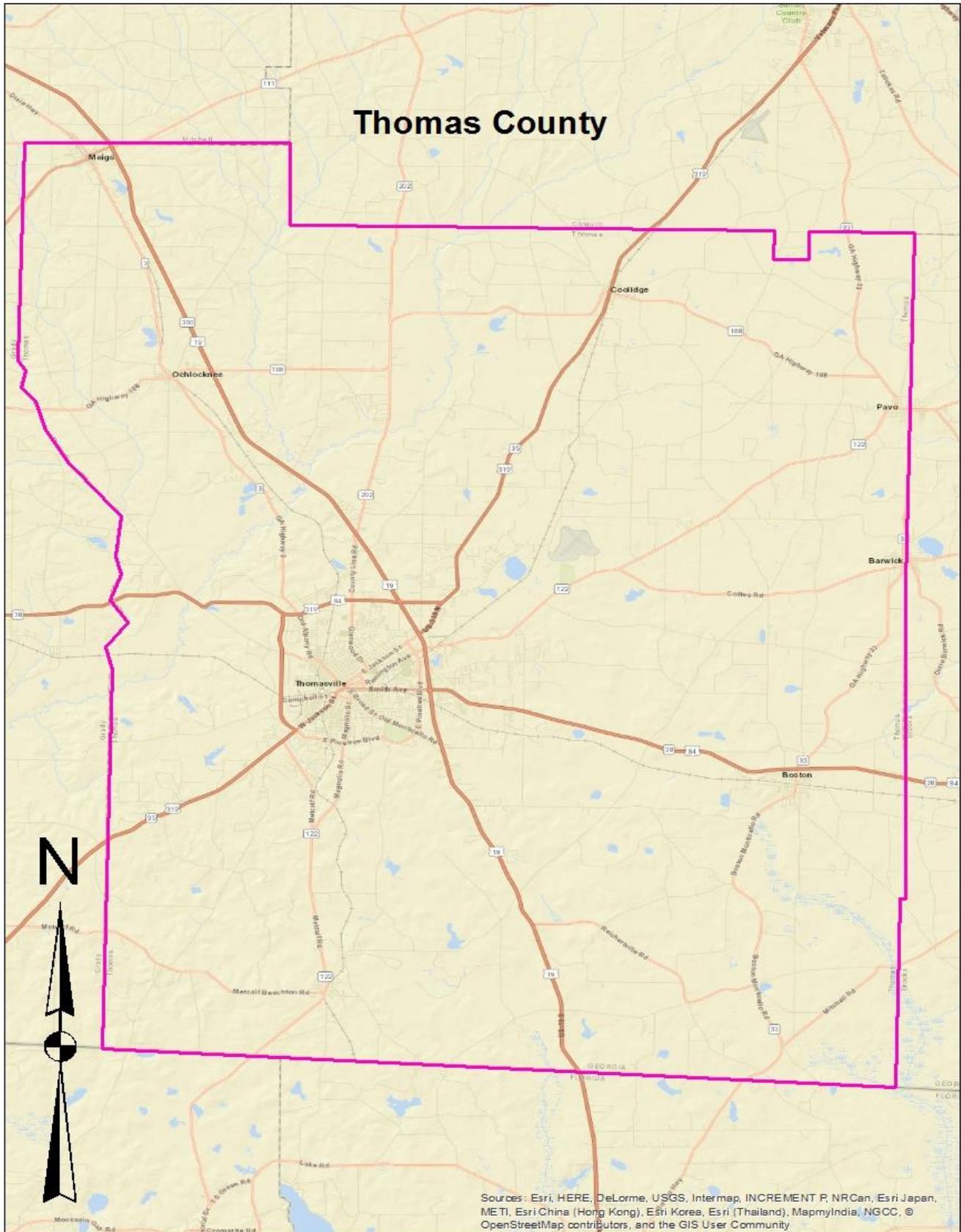
Fire Occurrence Map for Thomas County for Fiscal Year 2007-2011



IV. COUNTY BASEMAPS







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 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. Distracted 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 2009 by the Thomas County Fire Departments returned an average score of 79, placing Thomas County in the lower “High” hazard range. The risk assessment instrument used to evaluate wildfire hazards to Thomas County’s WUI was the Hazard and Wildfire Risk Assessment Scoresheet. The instrument takes into consideration accessibility, vegetation (based on fuel models), topography, 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 Thomas County:

- Dead end roads with inadequate turn arounds
- Narrow roads without drivable shoulders
- Long, narrow, and poorly labeled driveways
- 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
- Dry hydrants and drafting sources unusable.
- Above ground utilities
- Large, adjacent areas of forest or wildlands
- Undeveloped lots comprising half the total lots in many rural communities.
- High occurrence of wildfires in several locations

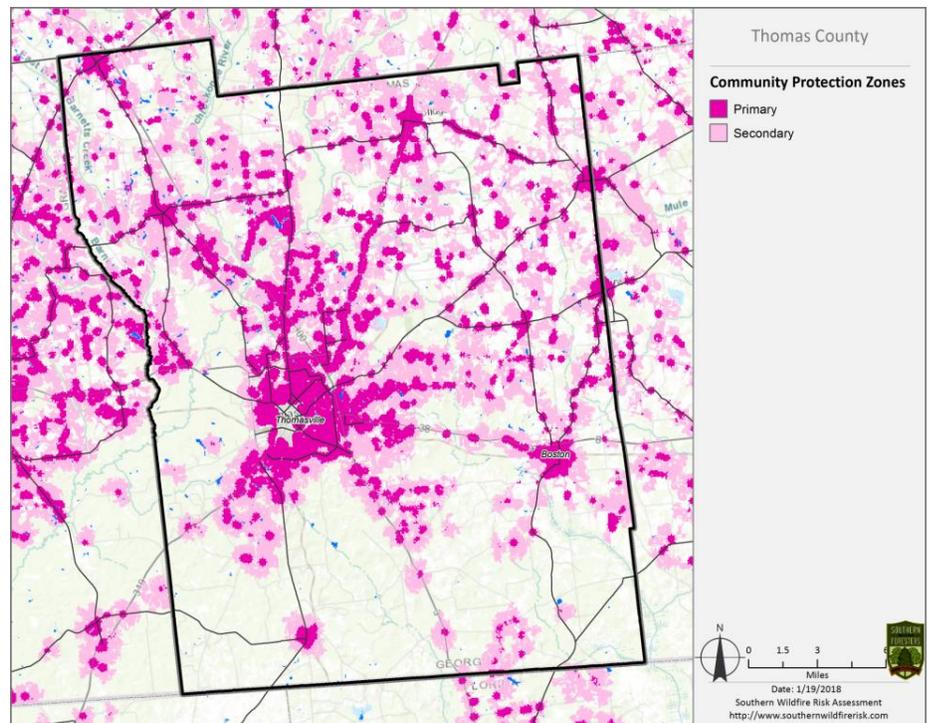
Summary of Community Assessments

| Community | Fire Dept | Com- munity Access | Site Hazard | Bldg. Const. | Fire Pro- tection | Utili- ties | Add. Factors | Total Score | Hazard Rating |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Willow Ridge | Hwy 202 | 11 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 6 | 15 | 75 | Moderate Risk |
| Sandy Creek | Hwy 202 | 9 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 6 | 20 | 78 | High Risk |
| Lake Riverside | Hwy 202 | 4 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 4 | 28 | 79 | High Risk |
| Forest Ridge / Black Berry | Barnetts | 16 | 35 | 10 | 22 | 6 | 20 | 109 | Very High Risk |
| Jane’s Lane | Barnetts | 19 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 6 | 10 | 78 | High Risk |
| Place in the Woods | Metcalf | 12 | 20 | 20 | 13 | 6 | 20 | 91 | High Risk Moderate Risk |
| Metcalf | Metcalf | 4 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 4 | 10 | 61 | Moderate Risk |
| Merriville | Dillon | 4 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 4 | 20 | 71 | Moderate Risk |
| Big Pond Lane | Coolidge | 6 | 17 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 65 | Moderate Risk |
| Lake Riverwind | Meigs | 12 | 20 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 30 | 86 | High Risk |
| Average | | | | | | | | 79 | High Risk |

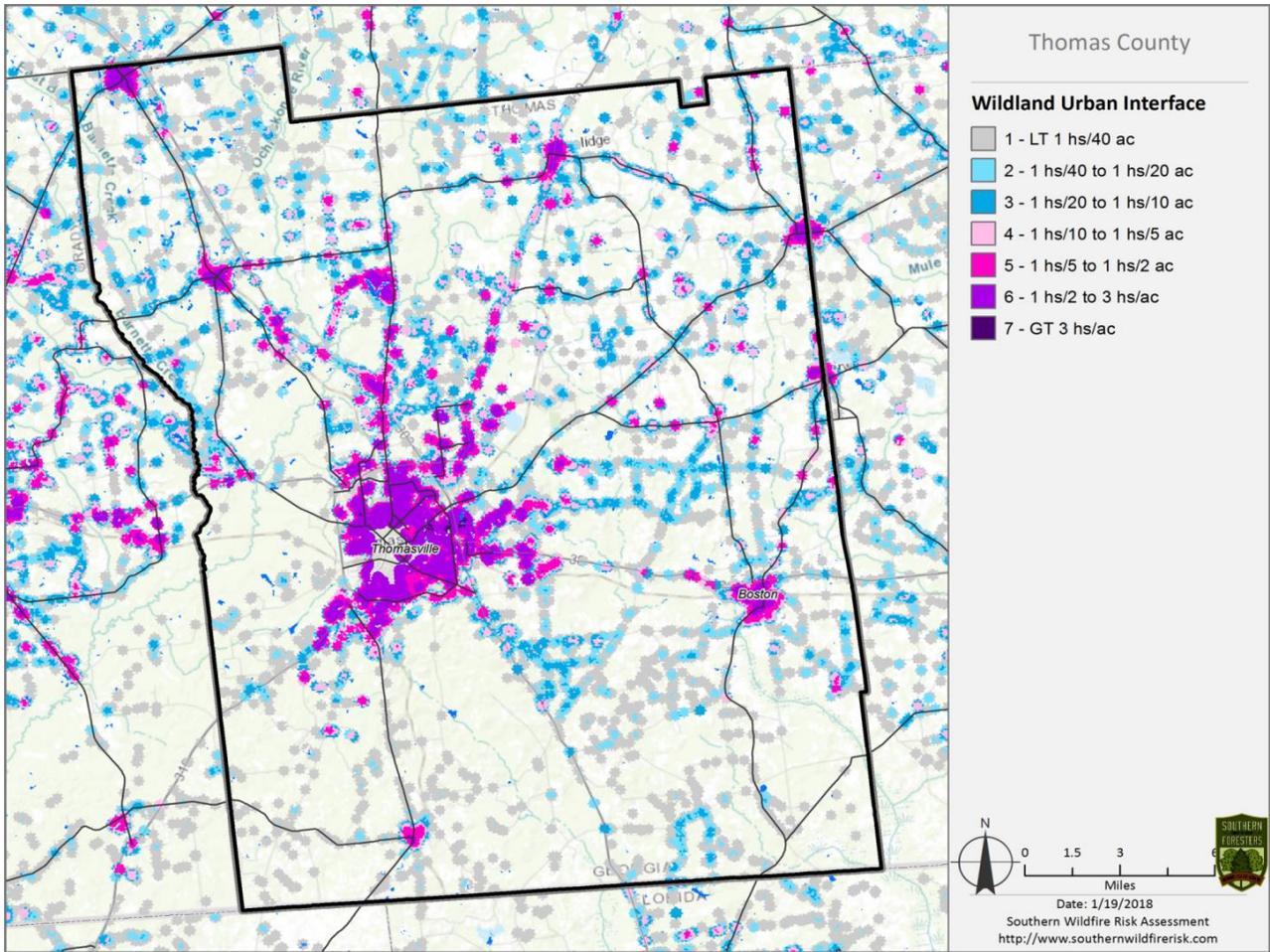
VI. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

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

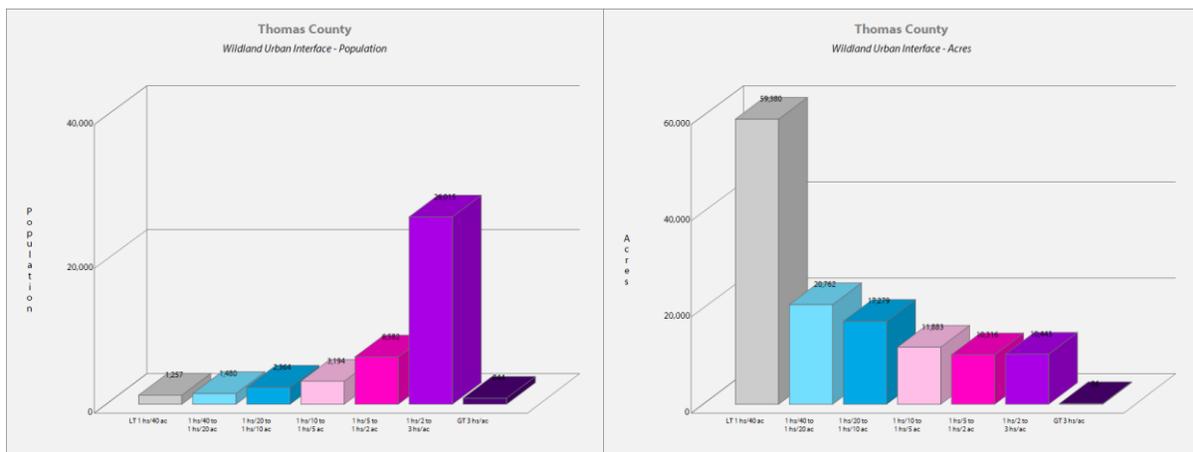
- Identify areas that are most prone to wildfire
- Identify areas that may require additional tactical planning, specifically related to mitigation projects and Community Wildfire Protection Planning
- Provide the information necessary to justify resource, budget and funding requests
- Allow agencies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

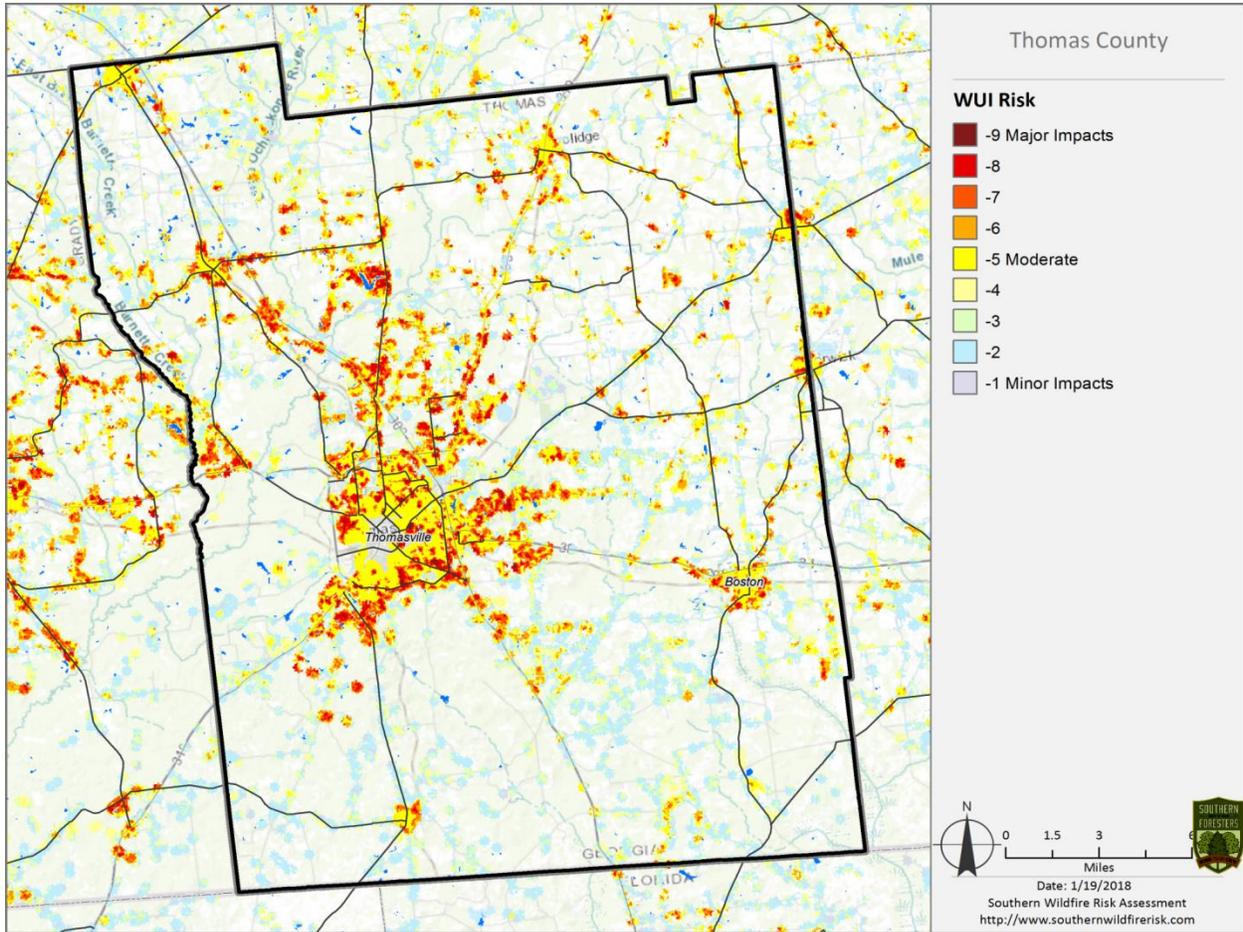


Community Protection Zones map from the Thomas County SWRA

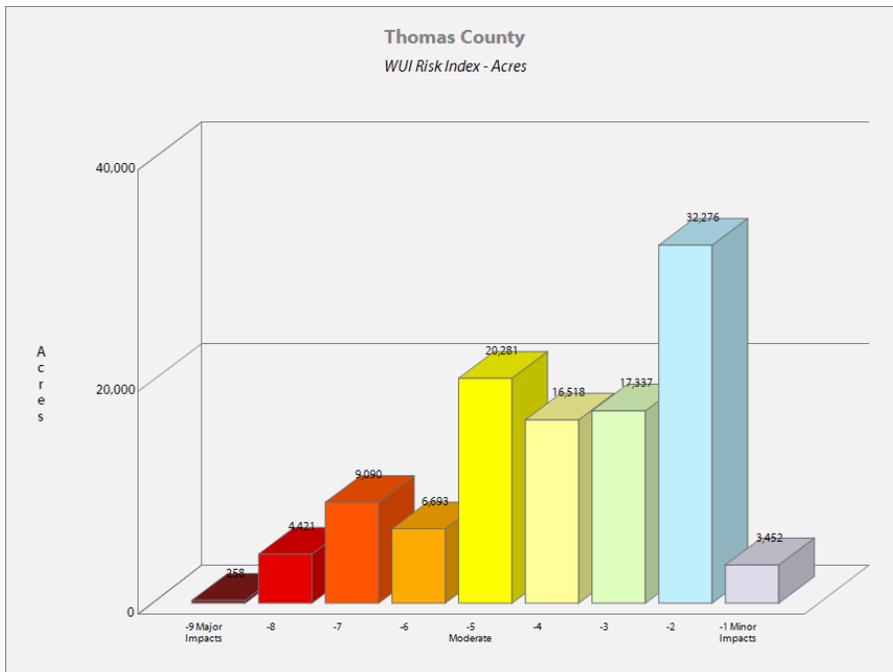


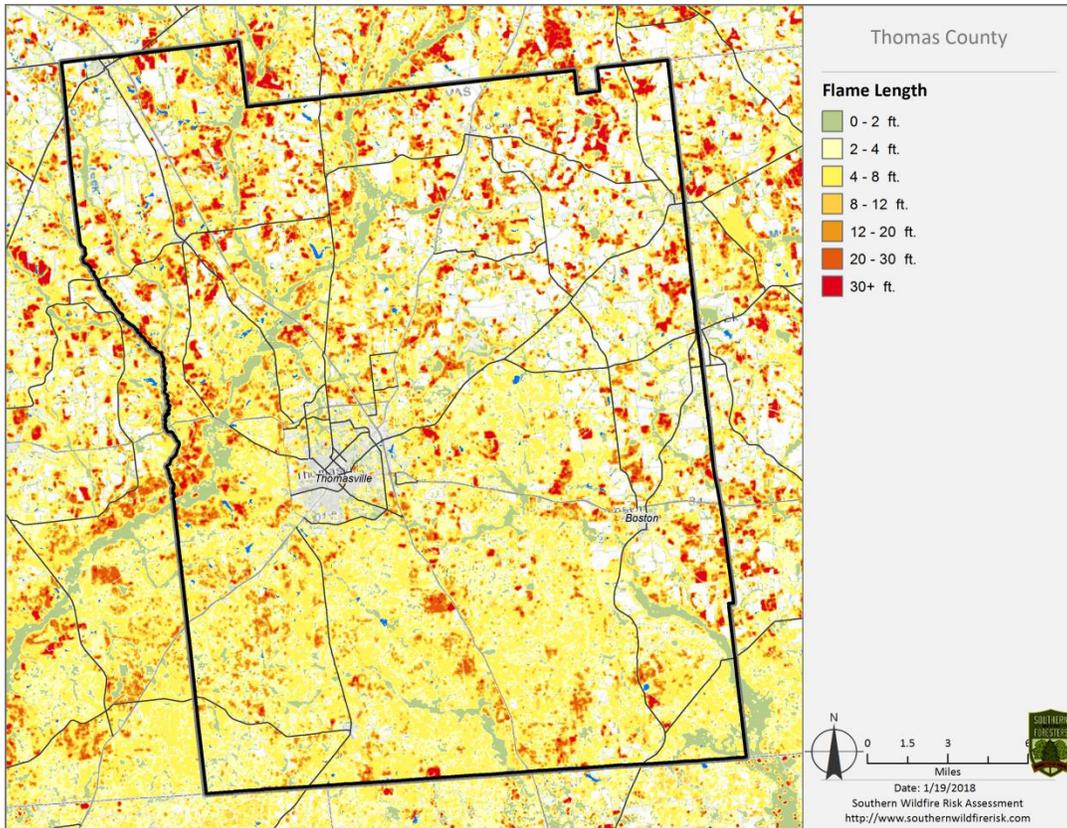
Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map
 Below: WUI Population (left) and WUI – Acres (right)



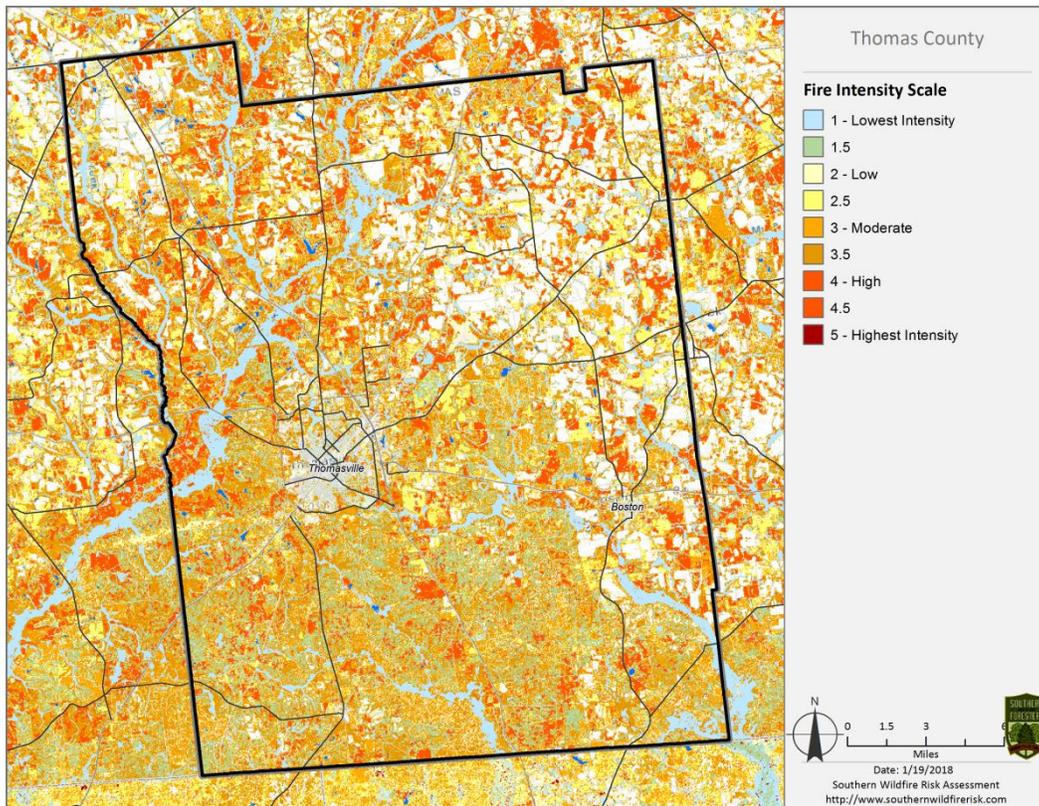


Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Risk map Below: WUI Risk Index - Acres





Above: Flame Length map Below: Fire Intensity Scale map



VII. PRIORITIZED MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Summary

As Southern 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. Thomas 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.

The International Wildland Interface Code (IWUIC) was developed in 2012. This Code was adopted by Georgia Legislation in 2014 for Counties to use in developing local zoning and building codes to reduce risk and help prevent structural loss in high risk and wildfire prone 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.

The following recommendations were developed by the Thomas 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, replace pine straw and mulch around plantings with less flammable landscaping materials. |
| 3. Community Clean-up Day | Cutting, mowing, pruning** | Cut, prune, and mow vegetation in shared community spaces. |
| 4. Road Signage | At Replacement | New road signage with minimum 4 inch reflective lettering on non flammable poles. Dead end (no outlet or turn-around) should be prominently tagged. |
| 5. Road Access | Identify needed road improvements | As roads are upgraded, widen to minimum standards with at least 50 foot diameter cul de sacs. |
| 6. Subdivision Access | Alternate exits | Work with developers to identify and create alternate access and exits routes to subdivisions and communities with only one way in and out. |
| 7. Codes and Ordinances | Examine existing codes and ordinances. Utilize the International Wildland Urban Interface Code (IWUIC) in all new development. | Amend and enforce existing building codes as they relate to skirting, propane tank locations, public nuisances (trash/debris on property), Property address marking standards and other relevant concerns Review zoning, planning and subdivision ordinances and include fire department and emergency services input in the design of these. |

| 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. |
| 2. Existing Fire Lines | Reduce hazardous fuels | Clean and re-harrow existing lines. |
| 3. Subdivision Ordinances | Fuel Reduction | Review need for brush reduction ordinance on undeveloped lots within subdivisions |
| Proposed Improved Community Wildland Fire Response Priorities | | |
| 1. Water Sources | Dry Hydrants | Inspect, maintain and improve access to existing dry hydrants. Review need for placement of additional dry hydrants. |
| 2. Fire Stations | Equipment | Wildland hand tools. Lightweight Wildland PPE Gear. Investigate need for “brush” trucks. |
| 3. Personnel | Training | Obtain Wildland Fire Suppression training for Fire Personnel. Ready Set Go training . |
| 4. Subdivision Ordinances | Water Supply | Review requirement for adequate water supply/hydrants within new subdivisions. |
| **Actions to be taken by homeowners and community stakeholders | | |

Proposed Education and Outreach Priorities

| |
|--|
| <p>1. Conduct “How to Have a Firewise Home” Workshop for Thomas County Residents</p> |
| <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 homeowners associations, schools, civic groups and local community and governmental meetings.</p> |
| <p>2. Conduct “Firewise” Workshop for Community Leaders</p> |
| <p>Arrange for GFC Firewise program 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. Identify “Communities at Risk” within the county for possible Firewise Community program recognition.</p> |
| <p>3. Spring Clean-up Event</p> |
| <p>Conduct clean-up event every spring involving the Georgia Forestry Commission, Thomasville and Thomas County Fire Departments and community residents. NFPA sponsors a National Wildfire Preparedness Day on the 1st Saturday of May. 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Ensure adequate driveway access for Emergency equipment |
| <p>4. Informational Packets</p> |
| <p>Develop and distribute informational packets to be distributed by realtors and insurance agents and included with building permits. Included in the packets are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be Firewise Around Your Home • Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction • Firewise Communities USA materials • Ready Set Go materials • Fire Adapted Community information |

5. Wildfire Protection Display

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

6. Media

Invite the Thomasville Times-Enterprise and other area news media to community “Firewise” functions for news coverage and regularly submit press releases documenting wildfire risk improvements in Thomas County. Utilize local radio stations for messaging. Utilize social media to reach new audiences.



Prescribed burning is a best management practice to reduce hazardous fuel buildup. The Georgia Forestry Commission can assist by developing a prescribed burning plan, installation of firebreaks, and can provide equipment standby and burning assistance when personnel are available.

Equipment, such as pictured on right, can masticate and mow hazardous understory fuels to reduce risk near structures. The Georgia Forestry Commission or private contractors can provide this service. This practice is effective in areas where prescribed fire may not be practical.



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 | |
| Thomas County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Council | Create this informal team or council comprised of residents, GFC officials, Thomasville and Thomas County Fire Department officials, code enforcement, road superintendent and the EMA Director for Thomas 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, radio, social media 2 Personal Contacts 3 Key messages and prevention tips 4 Visuals such as signs, brochures and posters |

| | |
|---|---|
| Spring Clean-up Day (1 st Saturday in May is National Wildfire Preparedness Day) | |
| Event Coordinator | Coordinate day's events and schedule, catering for cookout, guest attendance, and moderate activities 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, Thomasville and Thomas County Fire Departments, and Emergency Management Agency. 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, require Class A roofing materials and skirting around raised structures, planned maintenance of community lots. | No Cost | To be adopted by city and county government. |
| 4. Spring Cleanup Day (National Wildfire Preparedness Day) | Varies | Community Business Donations & Grants |
| 5. Fuel Reduction Activities | \$35 / Acre | FEMA & USFS Grants |

Assessment Strategy

To accurately assess progress and effectiveness for the action plan, the Thomas 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, 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 Thomas County WUIFC 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 Thomas County WUIFC 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, 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.

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.wildfireprepdays.org

Appended Documents:

Thomas County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

Thomas County Wildfire assessment scoresheets

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

GEORGIA FORESTRY
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