



# **Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

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

**Tift County, Georgia**



**March 2018**

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## Attachments:

Tift County Southern Wildfire Assessment Risk Summary Report (SWRA)

Tift County Community Risk Assessments

## Executive Summary

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

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

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

The plan will:

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

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

**SIGNATURE PAGE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Honorable Grady Thompson, Chairman  
Tift County Board of County Commissioners

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Joey Fowler, Chief  
Tift County Fire Rescue

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Al Potts, Chief Ranger  
Georgia Forestry Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## I. OVERVIEW OF WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE FIRE DISASTERS

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

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

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

### **CWPP PLAN PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Core Committee**

Michael Coleman, Tifton/Tift County Fire Chief  
Vickie Hickman, Tift County EMA Director  
Jason Jordan, Tift County  
Carl Fortson, Tifton/Tift County  
Russell Gay, Tift County  
Captain Kevin Smith, Tifton/Tift County Fire Department

#### **GFC Representatives**

GFC Chief Ranger Al Potts  
CWPP Program Specialist Jim Harrell (Initial Plan)  
Wildfire Prevention Specialist Beryl Budd (Revised plan 2018)

#### **Meeting Dates**

Initial Core Committee Meeting: August 18, 2010  
1<sup>st</sup> Follow-Up Meeting: September 15, 2010  
2<sup>nd</sup> Follow-Up Meeting: October 13, 2010

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE CWPP

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

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

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan is a critical tool required to obtain hazard mitigation grants through the National Fire Plan, FEMA mitigation grants, and others. Under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, communities that seek grants from the federal government for hazardous fuels reduction work are required to prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The minimum requirements for a Community Wildfire Protection Plan as described in the HFRA are:

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

### OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

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

During development of the Tift County CWPP, opportunities for collaboration were provided by:

- Major stakeholders were invited to participate as members of the CWPP Core Committee.
- A news release was submitted to the local paper (*Tifton Gazette*) explaining the objectives of the Tift County CWPP, the planning process and the procedure for obtaining a draft copy for review and/or comment.

### III. HISTORY OF TIFT COUNTY



Covering an area of 265 square miles in south central Georgia, Tift County was created in 1905 from sections of Berrien, Irwin, and Worth counties. The county was named after Nelson Tift (1810-91), who was an instrumental civic and political force in the Albany area. His nephew Henry Tift founded the county seat, Tifton, in 1872 when a sawmill began operating in the town. The city was later incorporated in 1890.



According to the 2010 U.S. census, Tift County had a population of 40,118, an increase from the 2000 population of 38,407. Two smaller communities in the county are Omega, which has a population of 1,221, and Ty Ty, with a population of 725. Ty Ty gained its name from the trees that once lined Ty Ty Creek, which runs through the area. These Ironwood and Buckwheat trees are referred to as white and black titi trees. Tift County is touted as the "Plant Capital of the World" because of the many different varieties of plants and vegetables that are grown in the area and shipped around the globe.

#### Tift County Courthouse



Tift County's Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College is the largest residential two-year institution in the state and offers forty-one transfer programs and nineteen certificate programs. The Coastal Plain Experiment Station in Tifton conducts research on crops and the farming industry. The Tift-area campus of Southern Regional Technical College (formerly Moultrie Technical College) is located just south of Tifton and offers certificate programs and adult literacy programs, as well as Quick Start training for business and industry.

#### Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

The county is bisected by Interstate 75, which makes it a prime location for business and industry. The area has access to the Henry Tift Myers Airport, which can support local and commuting air traffic. One of the largest employers in Tift County is Shaw Industries. Georgia's official museum of agriculture, the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village (formerly the Georgia Agrirama), is a living history museum that recreates daily life in the late nineteenth century. The site features a functioning sawmill, a locomotive, working farms, an operational general store, and a Gutenberg printing press. More than thirty-five restored or reconstructed buildings sit on the ninety-five-acre preserve. Annual events in Tift County include the Love Affair Fine Arts Festival, the Spring Folk Life Festival and Fiddler's Jamboree, and a Victorian Christmas.

## **WILDFIRE HISTORY**

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

Forestry is a \$28.7 billion a year industry in the State of Georgia creating 128,000 jobs statewide and is a valuable economic resource for Tift County.

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

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

The local office of the Georgia Forestry Commission serving Tift County is located at: 2395 U.S. Highway 41 N, Tifton, Georgia, 31793. Telephone: 229-386-3346.

### Personnel

Al Potts, Chief Ranger

Bruce Free, Ranger I

Vacant (March 2018), Ranger I

### GFC Wildland Firefighting Equipment

1 Tractor/Transport with JD 550J

1 Road Tractor with JD 650J

1 Type VII Engine

### Wildfire History

On a year-to-year basis, the leading causes of wildfires in Tift County are Escaped Debris Fires (residential leaf piles or yard fires), followed by Incendiary Fires (Arson) and wildfires resulting from Machine Use. Tift County regularly experiences Critical Fire Weather. Critical Fire Weather is a set of conditions whose effects on wildfire behavior make control difficult and threaten firefighter safety.\* Wildfire statistics and data for the past 10 years are included on the following pages.

### Wildland (Vegetative) Fuel

The Tift County land-base is primarily considered to be a heavy (vegetative) fuel, referred to as Southern Rough. There are many areas of the county where wildfire control efforts may be hampered due to the presence of homes and outbuilding in and around the wildland area.\*

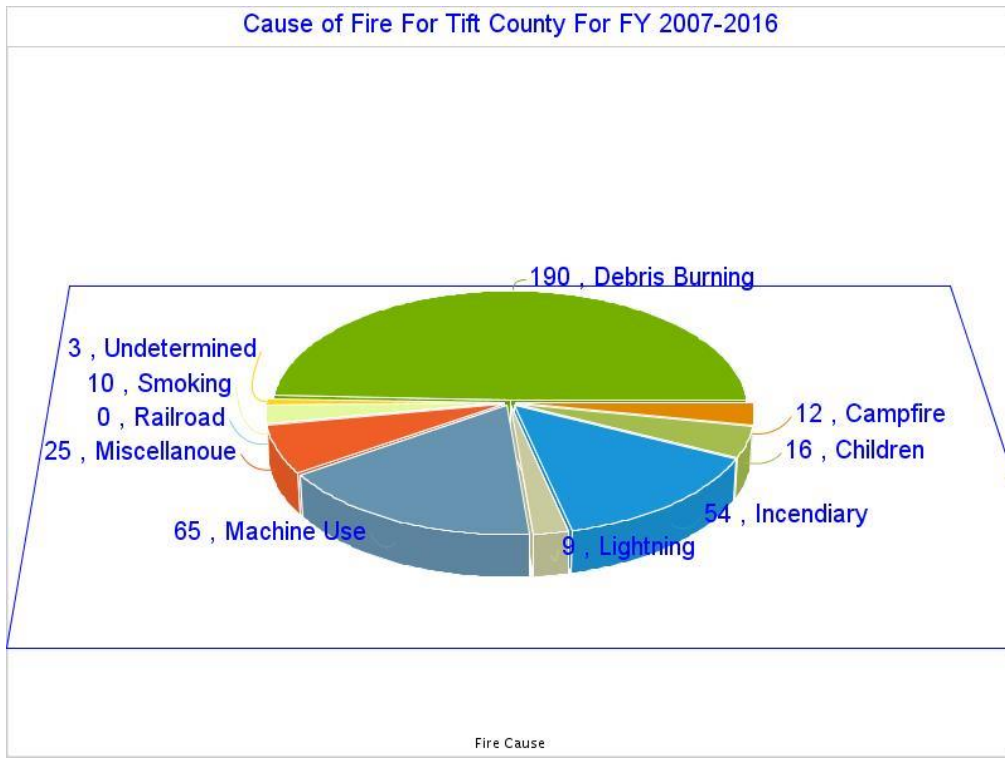
\*Source: Tift County Emergency Operations Plan

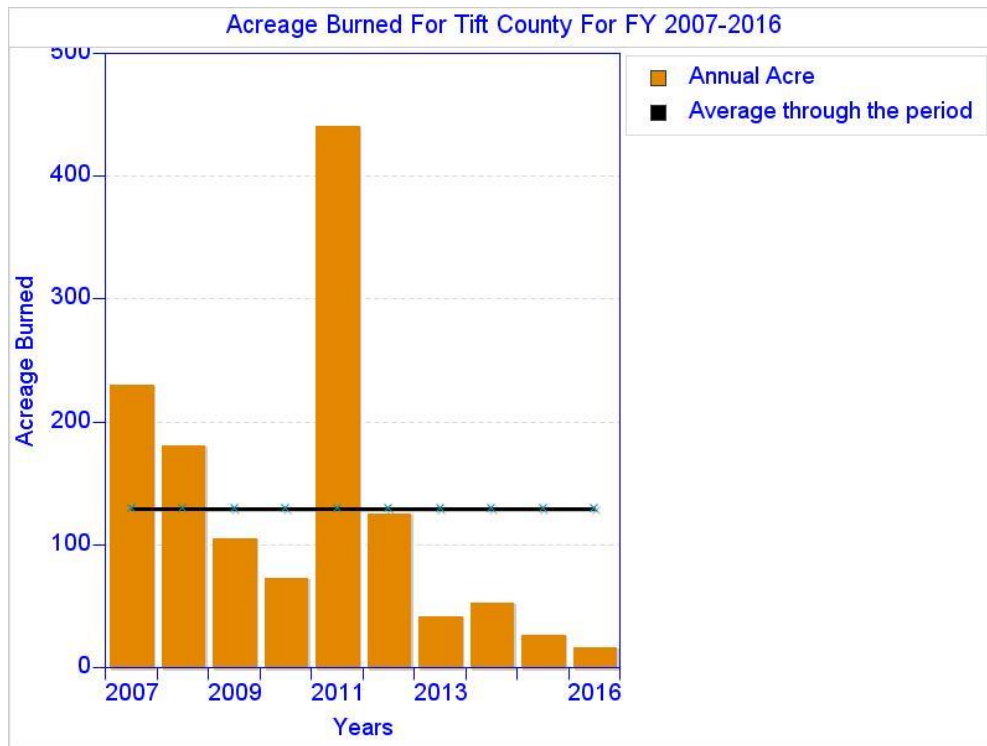
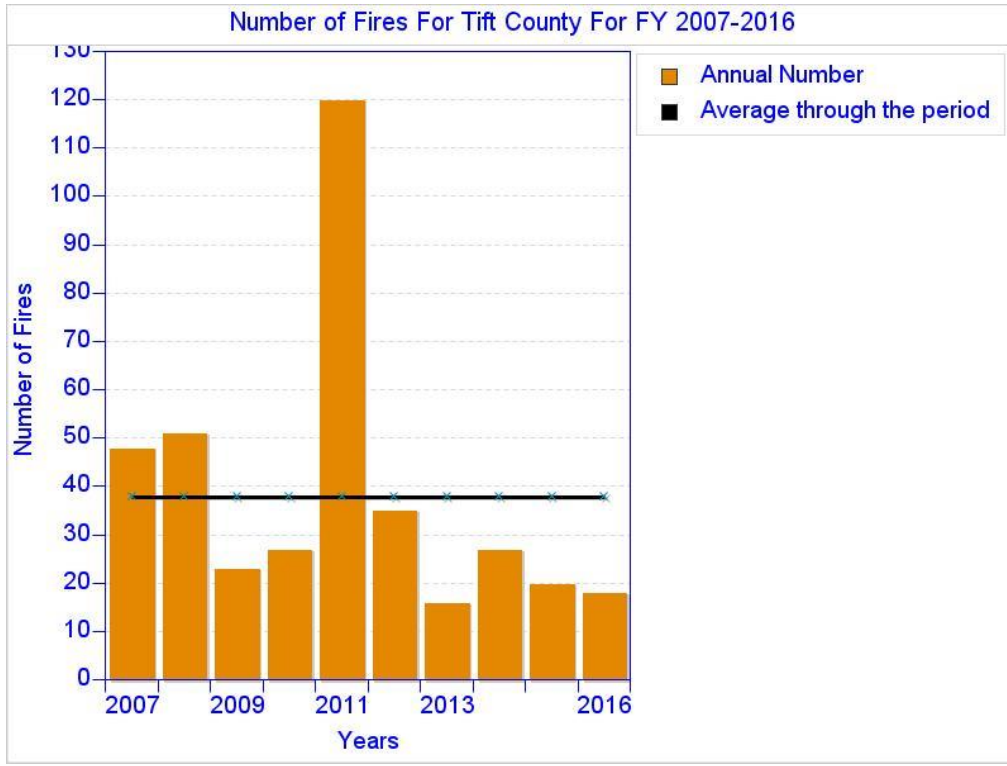


Wildfire activity by cause for fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 thru June 30, 2017)

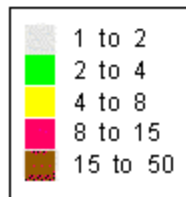
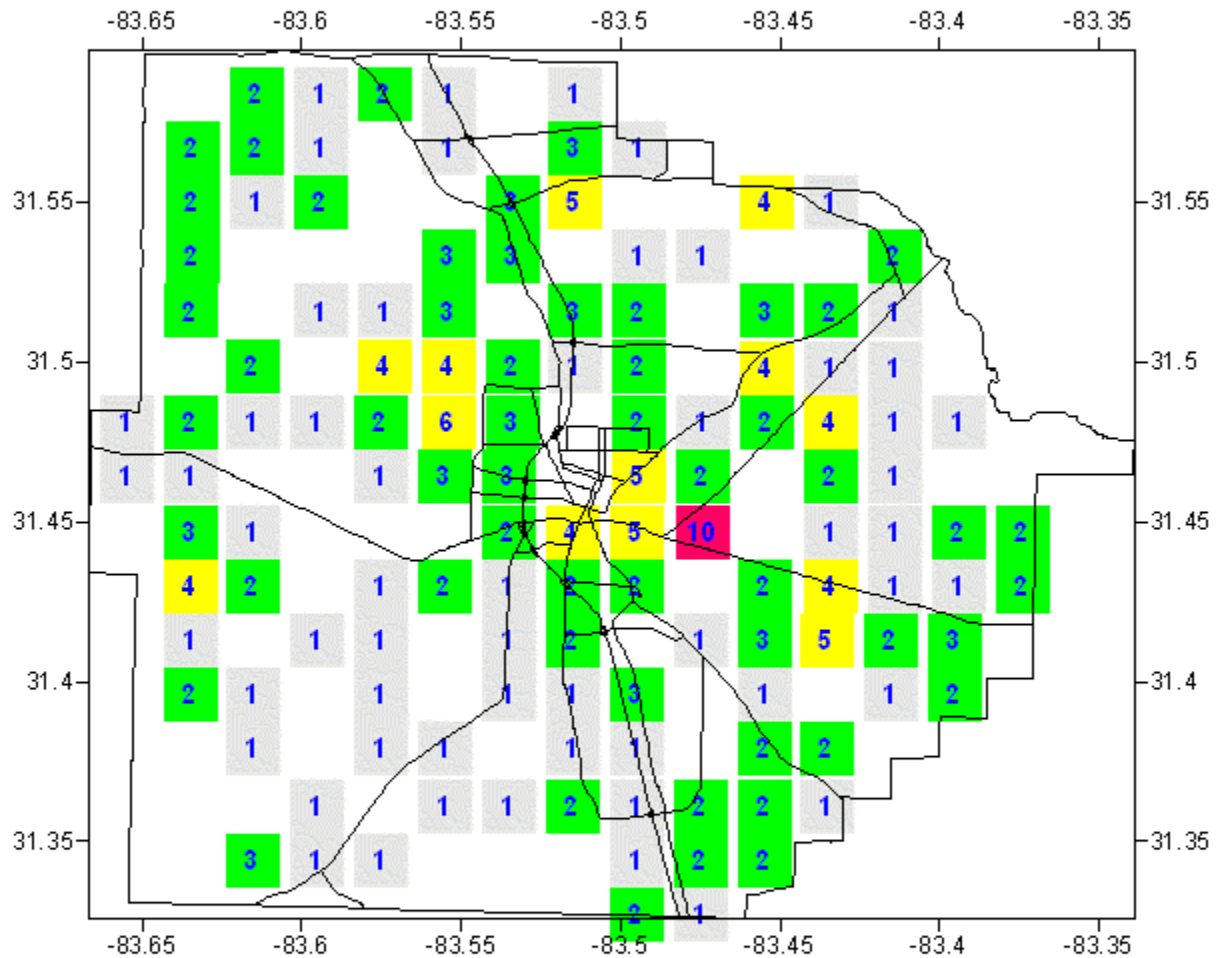
County = Tift	Cause	Fires	Acres	Fires 5 Yr Avg	Acres 5 Yr Avg
<a href="#">Campfire</a>	Campfire	1	0.01	1.00	0.31
<a href="#">Children</a>	Children	0	0.00	0.80	0.59
<a href="#">Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc</a>	Debris: Ag Fields, Pastures, Orchards, Etc	3	4.45	0.80	0.99
<a href="#">Debris: Construction Land Clearing</a>	Debris: Construction Land Clearing	1	3.07	0.60	0.91
<a href="#">Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn</a>	Debris: Escaped Prescribed Burn	4	30.97	2.60	8.54
<a href="#">Debris: Household Garbage</a>	Debris: Household Garbage	2	1.19	0.80	0.68
<a href="#">Debris: Other</a>	Debris: Other	0	0.00	0.20	0.07
<a href="#">Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc</a>	Debris: Residential, Leafpiles, Yard, Etc	18	18.89	7.60	8.37
<a href="#">Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related</a>	Debris: Site Prep - Forestry Related	1	0.78	0.20	0.16
<a href="#">Incendiary</a>	Incendiary	4	6.26	2.80	5.46
<a href="#">Lightning</a>	Lightning	1	0.59	0.40	0.14
<a href="#">Machine Use</a>	Machine Use	11	2.78	5.20	4.86
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Cutting/Welding/Grinding</a>	Miscellaneous: Cutting/Welding/Grinding	0	0.00	0.20	0.06
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Other</a>	Miscellaneous: Other	2	0.06	0.80	5.77
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences</a>	Miscellaneous: Power lines/Electric fences	4	2.08	1.20	2.32
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires</a>	Miscellaneous: Structure/Vehicle Fires	1	1.82	0.40	0.36
<a href="#">Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes</a>	Miscellaneous: Woodstove Ashes	0	0.00	0.20	1.98
<a href="#">Railroad</a>	Railroad	0	0.00	0.20	0.02
<a href="#">Smoking</a>	Smoking	2	2.63	0.60	1.01
<a href="#">Undetermined</a>	Undetermined	7	8.39	2.00	2.45
<b>Totals for County: Tift Year: 2017</b>		62	83.97	28.60	45.05

Acreage Burned /Number of Fires For Tift County For FY 2007-2016				
Year	Acreage Burned	Number of Fires	Average Size	Statewide Average size
2007	230.88	48	4.81	18.64
2008	181.20	51	3.55	4.56
2009	106.22	23	4.62	3.90
2010	73.66	27	2.73	3.93
2011	441.21	120	3.68	17.56
2012	125.90	35	3.60	5.08
2013	42.51	16	2.66	4.53
2014	53.86	27	1.99	5.02
2015	27.36	20	1.37	4.42
2016	17.53	18	.97	6.29

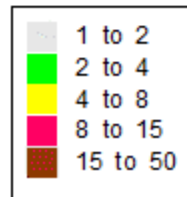
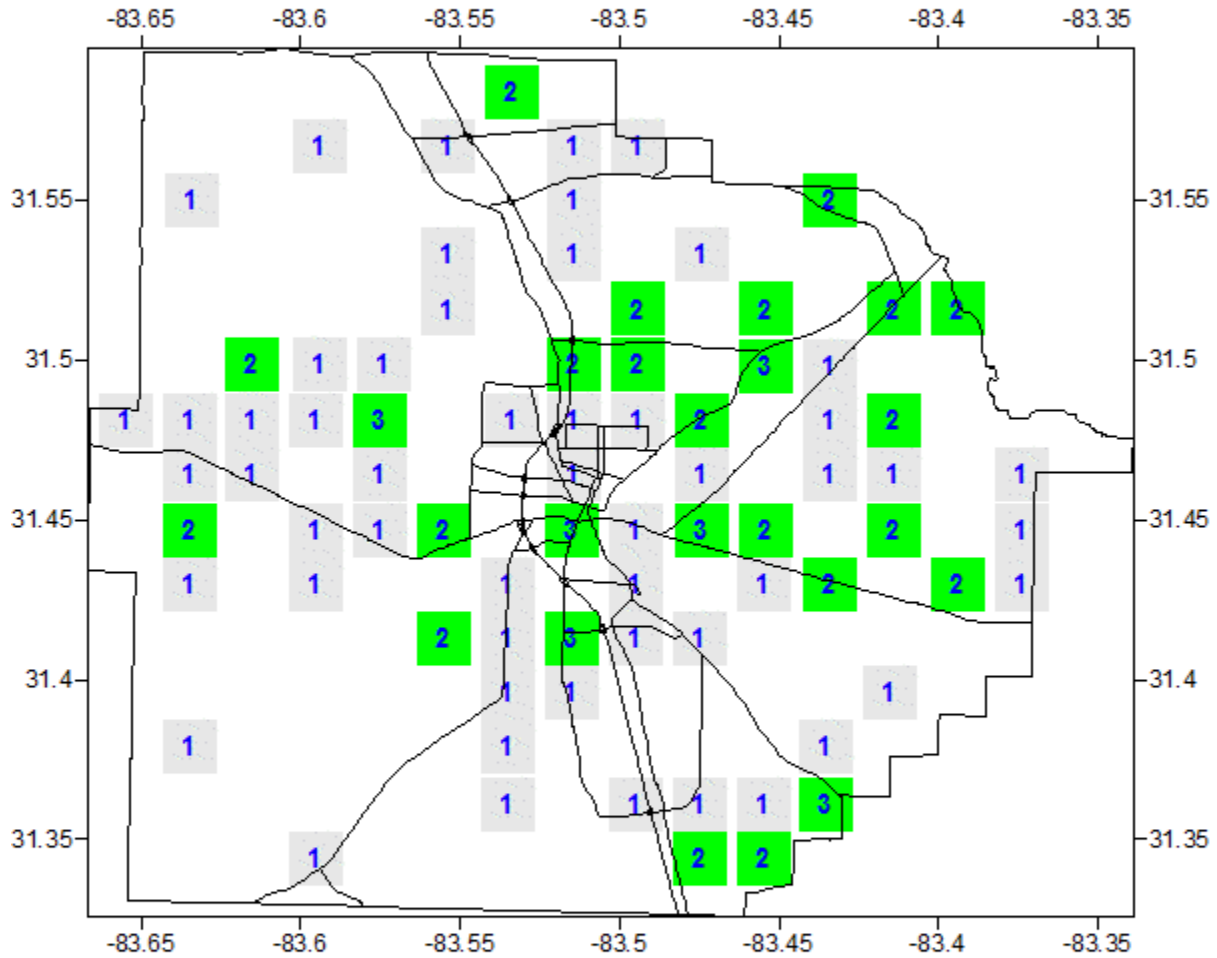




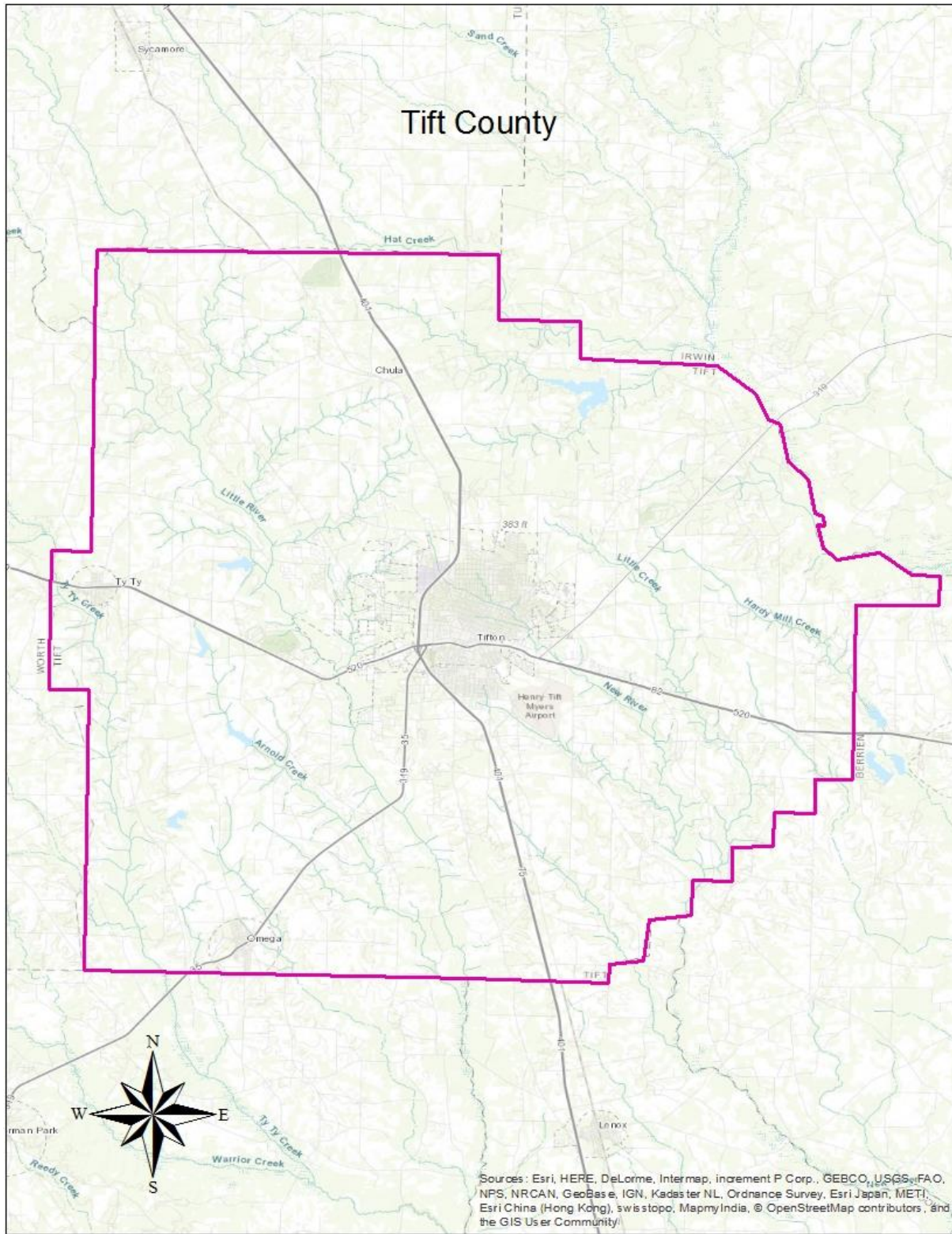
# Fire Occurrence Map for Tift County for Fiscal Year 2007-2011

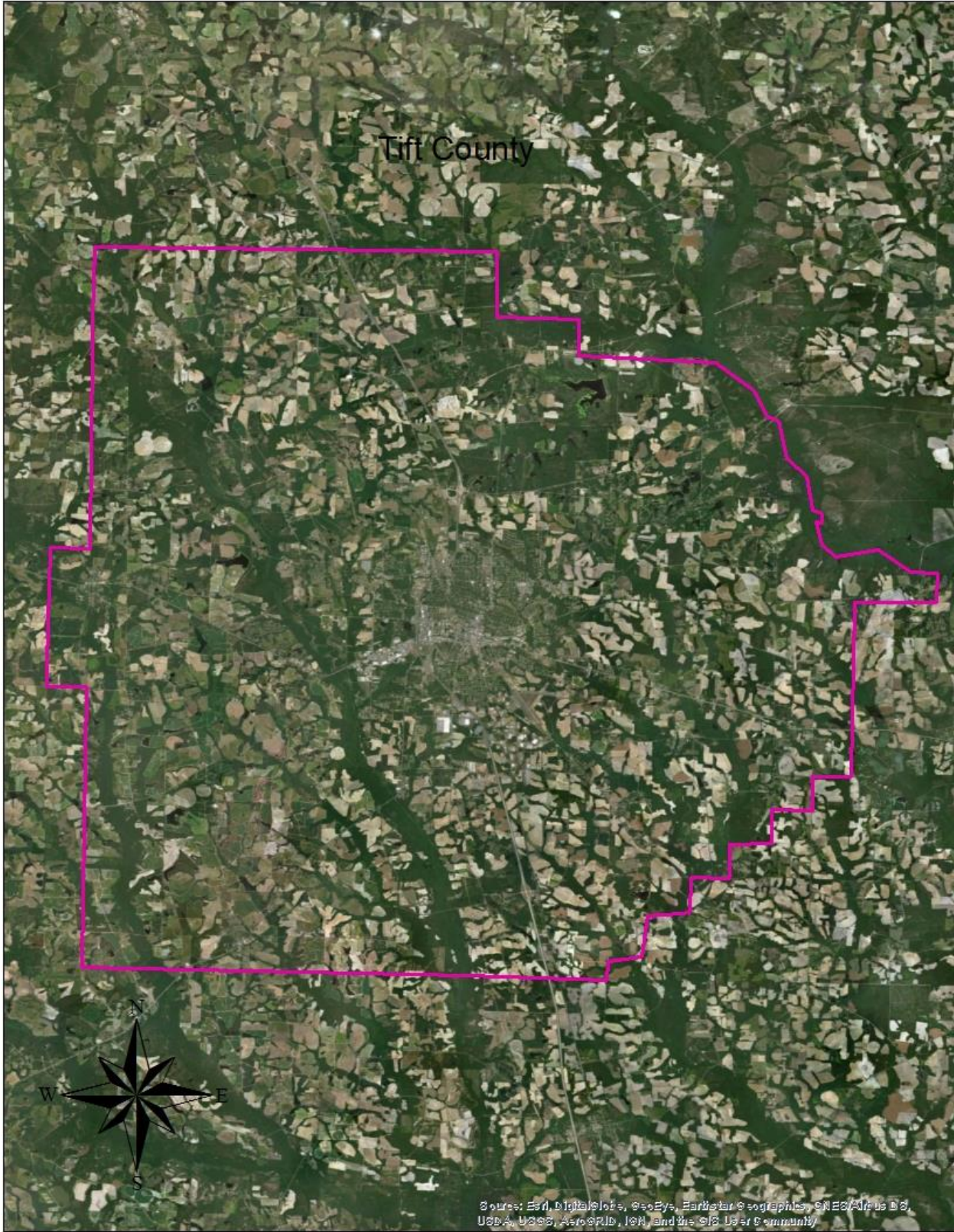


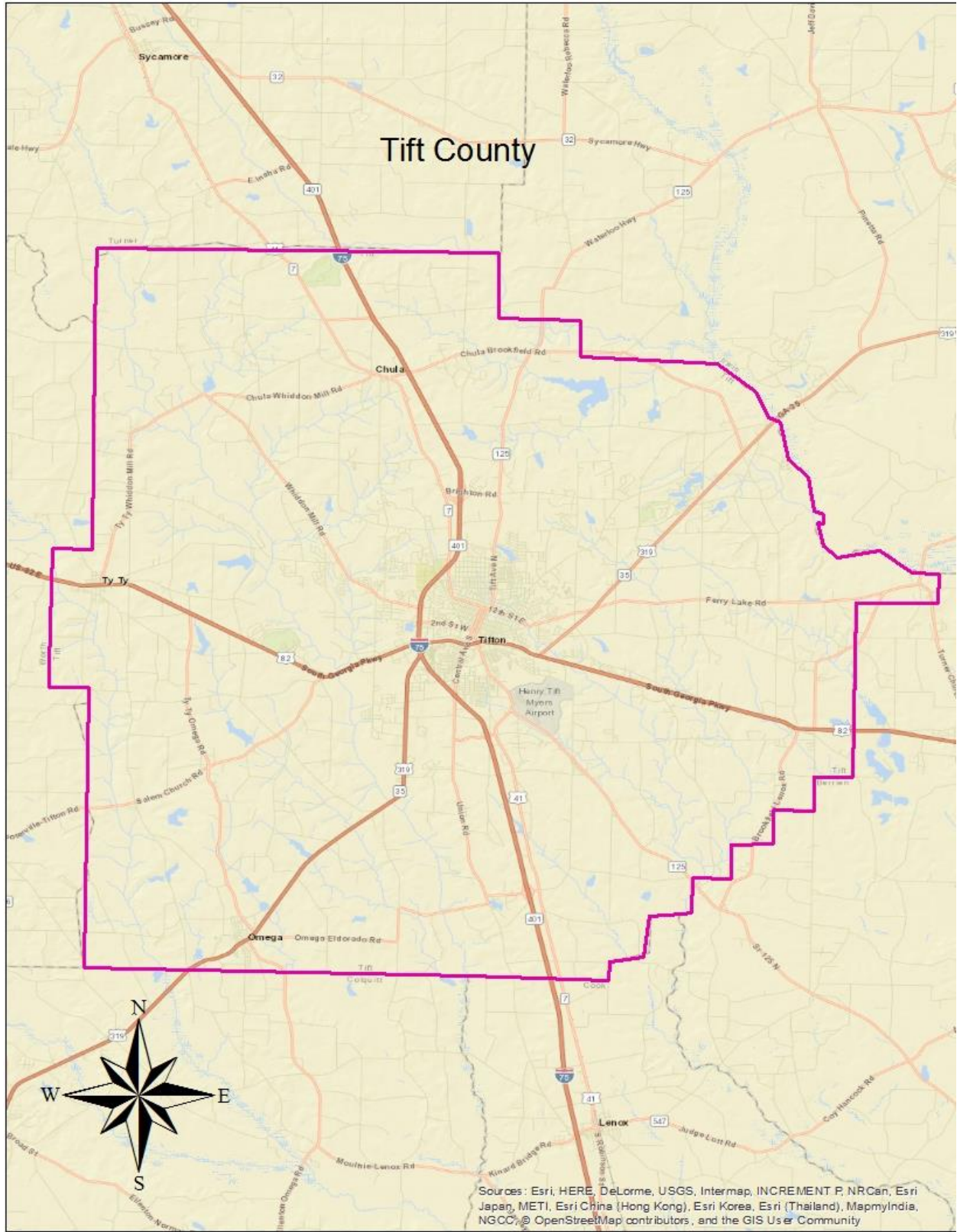
# Fire Occurrence Map for Tift County for Fiscal Year 2012-2016



## IV. COUNTY BASE MAPS









## V. WHAT ARE “COMMUNITIES-AT-RISK”?

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

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

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

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

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

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

**“TIFT COUNTY COMMUNITIES-AT-RISK” WILDFIRE HAZARD RATINGS**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Hazard Rating</b>
1. Plantation Dr. Chula	122	very high
2. Hunter’s Woods	92	high
3. Branch Road / St. Paul Church	130	extreme
4. Forest Lakes S/D & Old Ocilla Road	126	extreme
5. Gun Lake	93	high
6. Richardson St. Ty Ty	81	high
7. Upper Ty Ty Road	102	very high
8. Sand Creek Road	106	very high
9. Taylor Ridge	68	moderate
10. Lower Ty Ty Road	101	very high
11. Sand Hammock Road	84	high
12. Spring Hill Country Club	73	moderate
13. Holland Road / Timber Trail	90	high
14. Whispering Pines Trailer Park	93	high
15. Deer Run	90	high
16. Hunter’s Creek	57	moderate
17. McInnis Mill	90	high
18. Pine Hill Trailer Park	178	extreme
19 Ty Ty Omega road / Rebekaha Place	97	high
20. Omega City Limits / North	74	moderate
21. Omega City Limits / South	62	moderate
22. Red Bird Road / Union Road	142	extreme
23. Jack McDonald Lane	128	extreme
24. Airport 41 South	121	extreme

25. Golden Point West	94	high
26. Fox Hills Golden Road West and Carpenter Road	78	high
27. The Cove at Willow Creek Jordan Rd. / 319 south	89	high

#### HIGHWAY CORRIDOR WILDFIRE HAZARD RATINGS

Highway Corridor	Score	Hazard Rating
U.S. Highway 125 N/S	78	high
U.S. Highway 319 N/S	78	high
U.S. Highway 41 N/S	78	high
Interstate Highway 75	94	high

These wildfire hazard ratings were completed by members of the Tift County CWPP Core Committee during the month of August, 2010. The Georgia Forestry Commission Hazard & Wildfire Risk Assessment Scoresheet was used. This document evaluates communities (groups of homes) based upon six criteria: community access, surrounding vegetation, building construction, fire protection, utilities and additional rating factors. The cumulative wildfire hazard rating scores range from a low rating of 0 to 50 points to an extreme hazard rating with over 120 points.

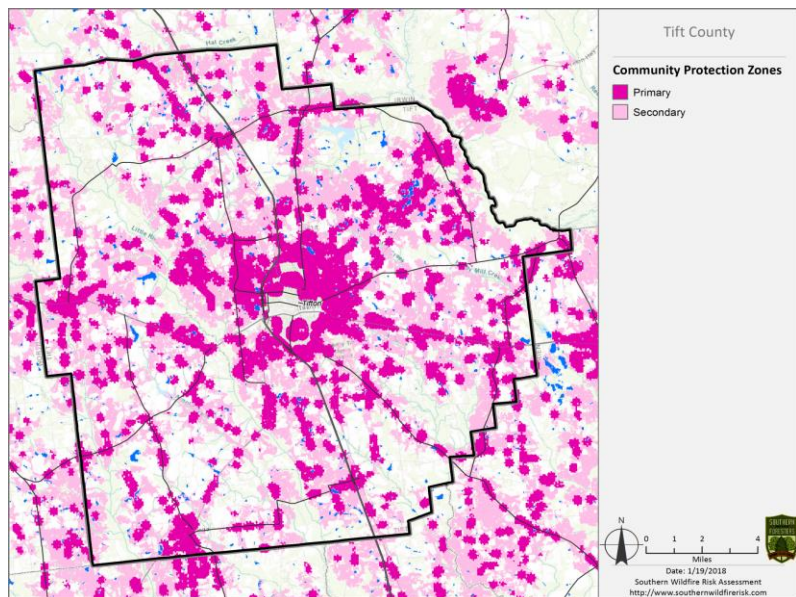


**Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is described as the area where structures and other human improvements meet and intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.**

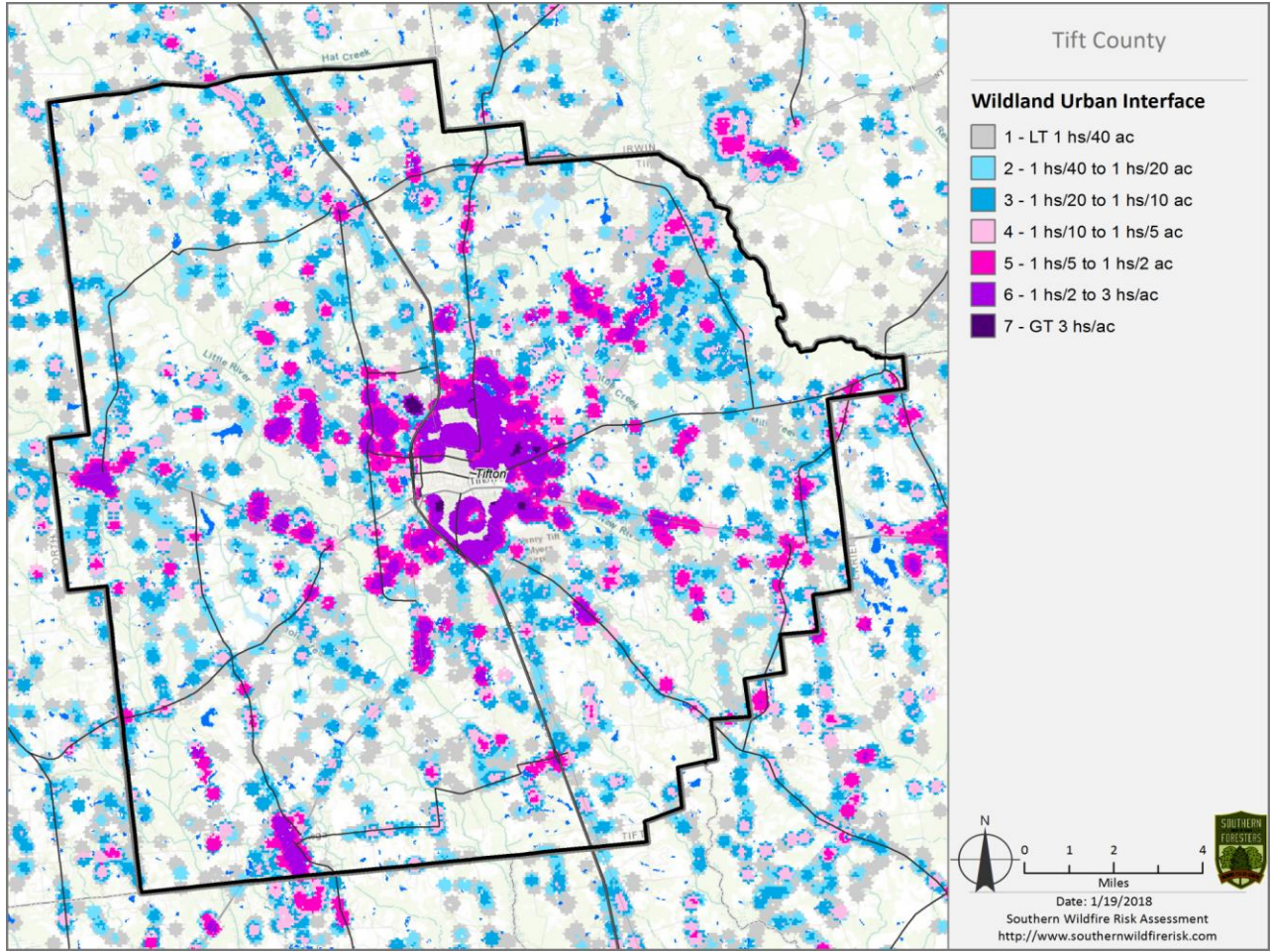
## VI. SOUTHERN WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & RISK HAZARD MAPS

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 Tift 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

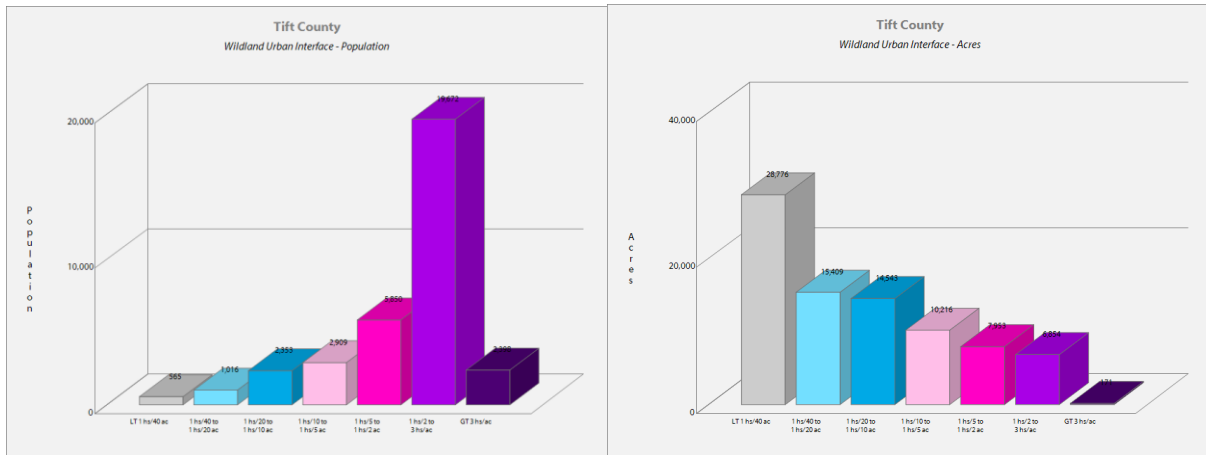


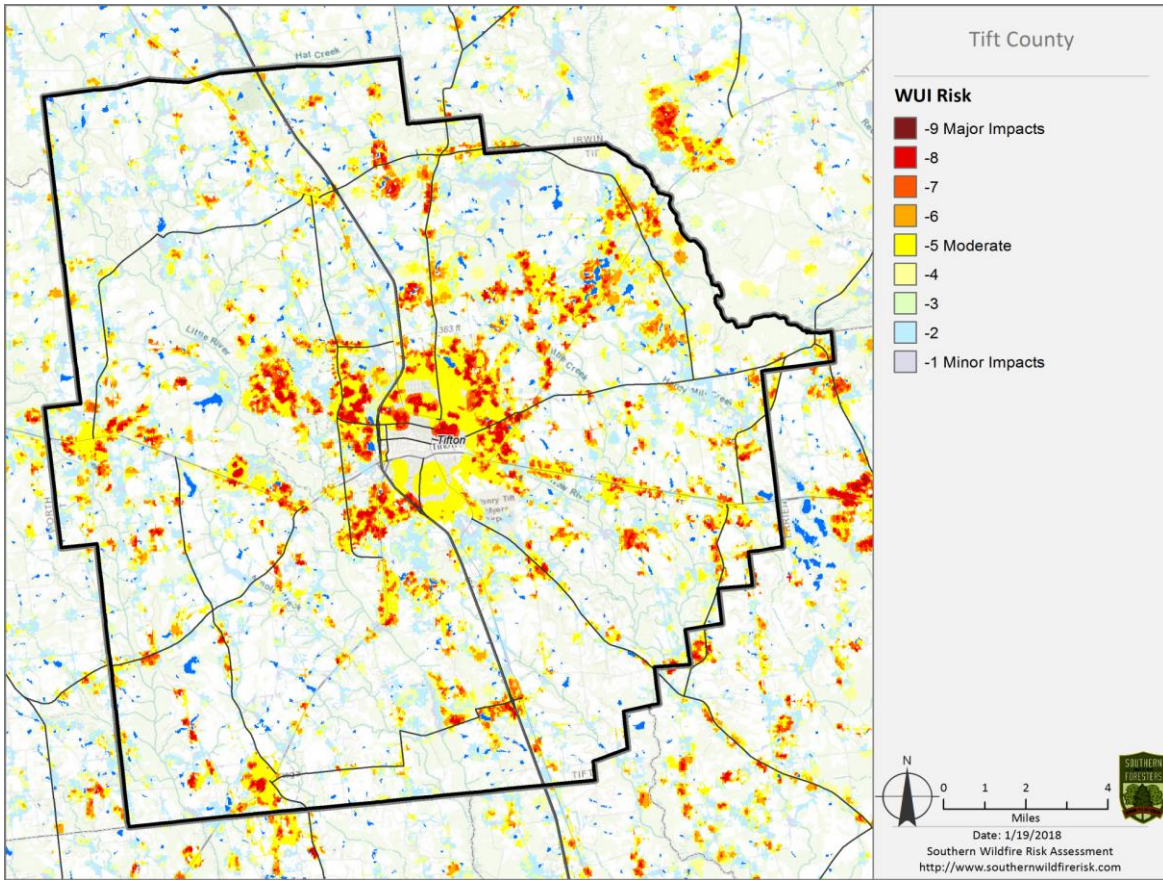
Community Protection Zones map from the Tift County SWRA



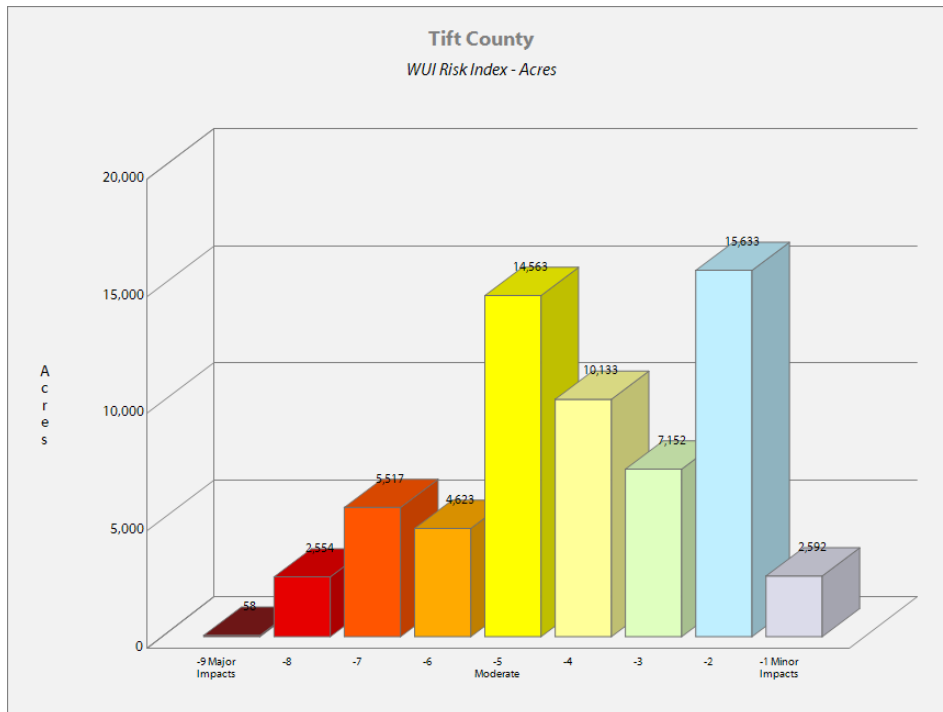
Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map

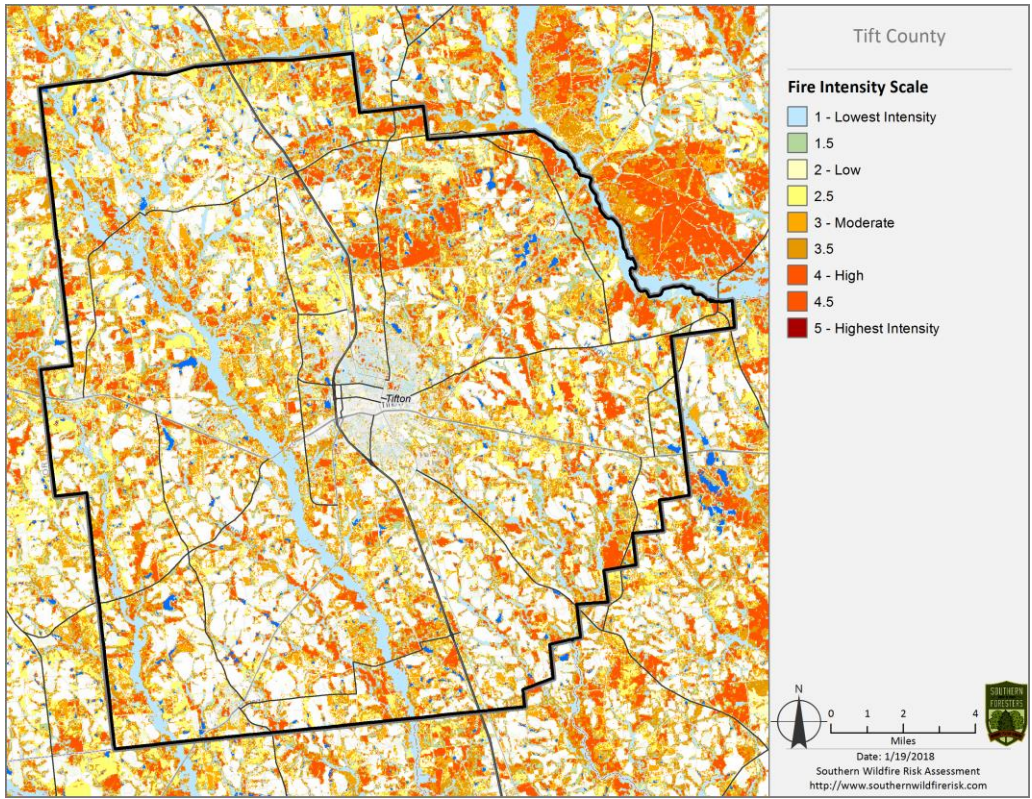
Below: WUI population (left) and WUI acres (right)



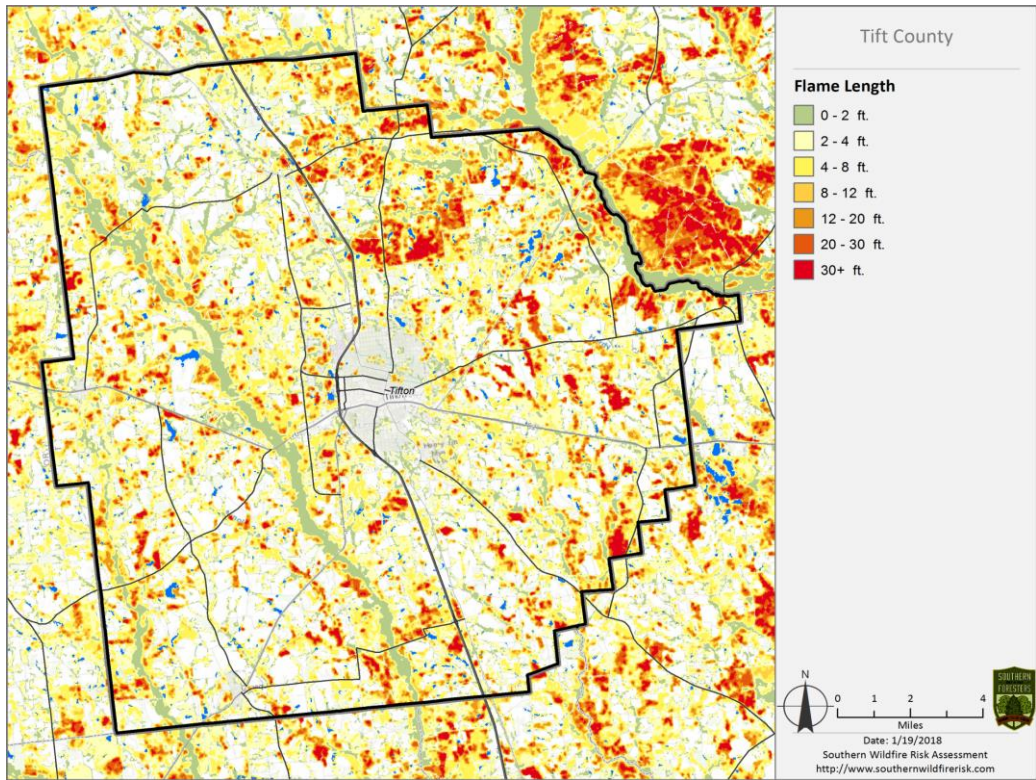


**Above: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) risk map Below: WUI Risk Index- Acres**





Above: Fire Intensity Scale map Below: Flame Length map



## VII. MITIGATION AND ACTION PLAN

### PROTECTING EXISTING STRUCTURES

#### Critical Facilities

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

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

While no critical facilities are at risk from wildfire, other significant assets (homes and outbuildings) are at risk. GIS tax parcel data for the county indicate that countywide there are 5,051 structures with an estimated value of \$457,214,111 exposed to wildfires. The estimated Tift County population potentially exposed to wildfire is 21,004.\*

\*Source: Tift County Emergency Operations Plan

**RECOMMENDATION: Review Critical Facilities to evaluate any wildfire hazard and, if appropriate, suggest to owner/operators in person or by letter what action(s) might be taken to mitigate any observed hazards and improve wildfire protection.**

#### Public Education Needs

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

The key to the reduction of structural losses in the wildland/urban interface cannot rest solely with improved response by the local fire services. There will never be enough fire trucks and firefighters to adequately protect homes in the wildland/urban interface. A major part of the solution to this problem lies with the homeowner – homeowners in the wildland/urban interface must become “partners” with the fire services and assume some responsibility for maintaining their home (structure) and landscape (yard) so that ignitions in and around the home are less likely should a wildfire occur in the immediate area. This means a home with no debris on the roof and in the gutters, wood decks that are skirted



underneath, chunky bark or lava rock mulch near the house instead of pine straw or cypress mulch and a “lean, clean and green” landscape of less-flammable plants within 30 feet of the structure.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: Initiate a public education initiative for Tift County residents**

- Develop Firewise and wildfire prevention displays for public education at local events.
- Improve street signage and access on county roads to improve emergency response in 27 “Communities-at-Risk”.
- Host a “Train-the-Trainer” workshop to enable fire service personnel to deliver a Firewise Communities/wildfire protection message to city/county residents.
- Make Firewise Communities brochures available to the public at central locations such as: Farm Services Agency, Chamber of Commerce, county and state parks and the County Courthouse.
- Encourage communities (neighborhoods) that qualify to apply for recognition as a Firewise Community/USA.

Reduction of Hazardous Fuels

Because about 47 percent of Tift County is forested, the accumulation of brush and other (mostly ground) vegetation can create conditions over extensive areas that could fuel a disastrous wildfire. Treatment of forested areas with prescribed fire can significantly reduce this hazard while improving pulpwood and sawtimber production and enhancing wildlife habitat. Prescribed burning, however, must be conducted by experienced personnel when weather conditions are conducive to a safe burn and when an authorization has been obtained from the local office of the Georgia Forestry Commission. Other ways to reduce wildland fuel (vegetation) include: Mechanical treatment; chemical treatment (herbicides); and livestock grazing. These alternatives to prescribed burning are more intensive and hence, more costly and generally suitable only for smaller acreages.



Mastication mowing in a pine stand to reduce understory fuels. This practice works well in areas that cannot be burned and areas adjacent to structures. The Georgia Forestry Commission and private contractors can provide this service.

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

Smoke on highway from prescribed burning or wildfires can result in poor visibility on public roadways. This can become a public safety issue in areas where regular prescribed burning occurs. In addition, lingering smoke can become a nuisance to neighboring homeowners, however, a little inconvenience is better than wildland fuels that accumulate and eventually fuel a disastrous wildfire.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: Promote prescribed burning in Tift County.**

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



**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. Consulting Foresters can also provide this service.**

## **NEW DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE COUNTY**

### Site Plan Review

New home starts in Tift County, however, will, no doubt, increase over the next 20 years and if farm and ranch land is conserved as an important part of the County's rural economy, new development will, by necessity, occur more frequently on forest and wildland areas. The County Planning and Zoning Board will have an opportunity to significantly influence the wildland fire safety of new developments. It is important that new development be planned and constructed to provide for public safety in the event of a wildland fire emergency.

Over the past 20 years, much has been learned about how and why homes burn during wildland fire emergencies. Perhaps most importantly, case histories and research have shown that even in the most severe wildfire events, structural losses 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 Firewise Communities program is a national awareness initiative to help people understand that they don't have to be victims in a wildfire emergency.

When new multi-unit subdivisions are built in rural areas (sometimes referred to as the Wildland/Urban Interface), a number of public safety challenges may be created for the local fire services: (1) the water supply in the immediate areas may be inadequate for fire suppression; (2) if the Development is in an outlying area, there may be a longer response time for emergency services; (3) in a wildfire emergency, the access road(s) may need to simultaneously support evacuation of residents and the arrival of emergency vehicles; and (4) when wildland fire disasters strike, many structures may be involved simultaneously, quickly exceeding the capability of even the best equipped fire departments.

The National Fire Protection Association has produced two standards for reference by local governments: 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 by the International Code Council in 2012. This code is supported and recommended for use by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The Georgia Legislature adopted the code in 2014 for use by Georgia Counties. Counties can adopt the code or parts of the code to help reduce structure loss in high risk areas

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

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

- Evaluate (assess) the wildfire hazard of proposed new development in rural areas as part of the site plan review process (reference: GFC "Hazard and Wildfire Risk Assessment Scoresheet").
- Consider the "adoption by reference" of NFPA 1144 Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire. 2008 Edition and NFPA 1141 Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Suburban and Rural Areas.
- Adopt the International Wildland Urban Interface Code (IWUIC) to address development in high risk areas.

## **FIRE SERVICES CAPABILITY**

Tift County has two Fire Departments, Tifton Fire Department and Tift County Fire Rescue, that provide structure protection and rescue operations within each of the jurisdictions. Each Department is well equipped and professionally staffed. They provide assistance and support to the Georgia Forestry Commission on numerous wildland fires. Trucks and tankers supplied either in part or completely by grant money obtained through the Georgia Forestry Commission allow the Fire Department to ensure rapid response from any of the 4 city stations and 7 volunteer fire department stations that are strategically located throughout Tifton/Tift County. There are a total of 24 paid firefighters and approximately 60 volunteer firefighters.

Among the ten stations, there are 13 Class A engines (1250 gal. capacity), 2 reserve engines, 2 ladder trucks and 9 Fire Knockers.

### Fire Stations

Station 51 Tifton  
Station 52 Tifton  
Station 53 Omega VFD  
Station 54 Ty TyVFD  
Station 55 Chula VFD

Station 56 Brookfield VFD  
Station 57 Eldorado VFD  
Station 58 Harding VFD  
Station 59 Excelsior VFD  
Station 60 Tifton County Rd.  
Station 61 Tift Co. Airport

The Tifton/Tift County Fire Departments have a limited amount of wildland hand tools and a limited amount of personal protective equipment designed for wildland (brush) fires. The departments are not equipped with wildland fire shelters to protect firefighters in the event of a burnover.

All of the firefighters have completed the Incident Management Training Courses: IS-100 and IS-700, and most have had the basic wildfire training courses (S-130, Standards for Survival and S-190, Basic Wildfire Behavior) and have been red carded by the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Within the City of Tifton and Tift County there are 1600 pressurized fire hydrants. A critical factor in the suppression of structural fires in outlying areas of the county is the availability of a water supply where pressurized hydrants do not exist. At present, there are 95 dry hydrants or draft sites in unincorporated areas. Many of the dry hydrants, however, need maintenance and repair to insure their reliability in a fire emergency and additional dry hydrants are needed. There are two water tenders available to transport water to remote areas for structural firefighting. A 6,000 gallon water tender is stationed at Harding VFD and a 3,000 gallon water tender is stationed at the Chula VFD. Additional water tenders would significantly improve the Tifton/Tift County Fire Department's ability to respond successfully to incidents in remote portions of the county as well as along the Interstate Highway 75 corridor.

**TIFT COUNTY ACTION PLAN**

<b>Community/Area</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Funding Needs</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Community Recommendation</b>
Countywide	2 Super Vac 2500 gallon water tenders	City/County	\$275,000 each	High	Water supply to respond to incidents on Interstate Highway 75
Countywide	Install Dry Hydrants	City/County	\$1,500 each	High	Enhance water supply for fire suppression in north & northeast area of the county
Countywide	Maintenance & Repair of Existing Dry Hydrants	City/County	\$20,000	Medium	Repair and test existing dry hydrants to provide reliable water source in rural areas
Countywide	Signs & Access	City/County	\$75,000 - \$100,000	Medium	Install street signs and improve access on county roads for communities-at-risk (first priority: communities rated very high and extreme)
Countywide	Public Education	City/County/GFC	\$15,000	Medium	Host "Firewise" Train-the-Trainer workshop for fire service personnel

The above table summarizes a recommended course of action for implementation of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Although some actions could be implemented at little or no added cost, the County (or assigned agency) will be able to implement most projects only if grant funding is available.

## VII. MITIGATION ASSISTANCE & GRANT FUNDING

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

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

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

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

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

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

## IX. GLOSSARY

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

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

*CWPP – The Community Wildfire Protection Plan.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## X. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Publications/Brochures/Websites:

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

### Appended Documents:

Tift County Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report (SWRA)

Tift County Wildfire assessment scoresheets

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



**Georgia Forestry Commission  
5645 Riggins Mill Rd.  
Dry Branch, GA 31020**

**1-800-GA-TREES  
GaTrees.org**

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