

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

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

Warren County

Revised April 2018



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

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I. OBJECTIVES

The mission of the following report is to set clear priorities for the implementation of wildfire mitigation in Warren 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 11th 2009 at the Warren County Fire Department attended by the following core planning team;

Will Fell GFC CWPP Specialist

GFC Chief Ranger McDuffie Warren Counties Hal Sharpe

Tommy Wolfe Fire Chief Warren County Fire Department/Warren Co EMA Director

John R Graham Chairman, Warren County Board of Commissioners

After an initial discussion of the processes and goals we hope to accomplish with this report, it was decided that we would assess general areas within the wildland urban interface. At the completion of this we would reconvene and discuss and evaluate the completed county wildfire risk assessment. It was further decided that we would provide for mitigation recommendations for Warren County. The chief of the county fire department completed the assessment and we reconvened on June 17th 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.

This report was revised on April 13, 2018 to update all information by Mark Wiles.

III. COMMUNITY BACKGROUND AND EXISTING SITUATION

Background

Warren County, comprising 286 square miles, was created in 1793 in the east central part of the state from Burke, Columbia, Washington, and Wilkes counties. Later, parts of Warren County were used to create Glascock County and parts of Jefferson, McDuffie, and Taliaferro counties. Georgia's sixteenth county is named after Joseph Warren, a colonial physician and Revolutionary War (1775-83) soldier.

Early History

The area's first inhabitants were Creek Indians, who established the famous Upper Trading Path, a route between Augusta and Creek settlements as far west as the Mississippi River. The first white settlers were men who received grants from King George III of England. While Georgia was still an English colony, the area now forming Warren County was part of St. Paul's Parish.

Warrenton, the county seat, was incorporated in 1810. Court was held first in the home of James McCormick, and then of Sterling Gardener, who later donated land for an official courthouse, which was built in 1809. It burned down in 1853, and its replacement suffered the same fate in 1909.

The current courthouse, built in 1910 and restored in 1999-2000, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The other incorporated towns are Camak and Norwood.

Railroad service came to Warren County relatively early. Athens resident James Camak led a group of associates to charter the Georgia Railroad in 1833, building a line just north of Warrenton in the 1830s. (The depot in that location evolved into the town of Camak.) The link between Warrenton and Camak was made by mule-car, leading to the county seat's nickname, "Muletown." The Civil War (1861-65) brought efforts to replace the mule-car with true rail, but this was not accomplished until 1873.

Economy

Norwood developed around a gristmill owned by Radford Gunn, and the community was known as Gunn's Mill until 1888. The Georgia Railroad laid tracks through the town, which bustled with business activity in its early days. The advent of the automobile and highway system, however, spelled the rapid decline for Norwood's business district, today a faint shadow of what it once was. The first rural, free mail delivery occurred in Norwood in 1868, when six residents hired Jerry Parsons, an African American, to deliver their mail on a daily basis, paying for his food and clothing in exchange. The system worked well and was remembered by a local boy, Thomas E. Watson, after he grew up and became a member of the U.S. Congress. In 1893 Watson sponsored the first rural free-delivery bill, based on Parsons's pioneering efforts. A more modern innovation created another "first" for Norwood—the community was the first in Georgia to install a municipal-drip soil-absorption system for wastewater disposal.

Other communities include Mesena and Beall Springs. Mesena is an acronym consisting of the first letter of each daughter's name in the family of J. F. Hamilton. Beall Springs grew up around a mineral springs used by Native Americans long before the state acquired the land in 1773. The Beall family, as the first white settlers to own the land surrounding the springs, allowed the

public to continue using the water. In the nineteenth century Beall Springs became a popular resort, complete with hotel and leisure-time activities. Among notable men who visited were Confederate vice president Alexander Stephens and U.S. senator Robert Toombs.

The first recorded wool mill and one of the first iron foundries in Georgia were located on a spot named Shoals, on the Ogeechee River. They were established by Colonel William Bird, a veteran of the American Revolution, and his partner, Benjamin A. Hamp. In 1812 Thomas Cheely bought the property and erected a gristmill on it. The two mills were burned by Union general William T. Sherman's troops in 1864. Cheely's house, built with slave labor in 1825, remains.

Today, agribusiness, kaolin mining, iron fabrication, and textiles are among the economic mainstays in Warren County. There has been a recent move to encourage tourism by calling attention to the county's natural beauty. The western boundary is the Ogeechee River, and the area is heavily forested. The plentiful fish and game attract fishermen and hunters, some of whom have joined the private hunting reserves in the area. One of the largest employers is Georgia-Pacific.

People and Places

A notable resident was David Bushnell (also known as David Bush), a Warrenton physician, teacher at Warrenton Academy, and father of the submarine. As an engineer in the Continental Army during the American Revolution, he invented a one-man submarine known as the "Turtle."

Three sites in Warrenton are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the courthouse; the downtown historic district; and the Warrenton Gymnasium/Auditorium, a New Deal project built in 1937-38. Designed in the neoclassical style, the Warrenton Gymnasium/Auditorium has retained its original gymnasium space, bleachers, stage, and dressing rooms. The Roberts-McGregor House, a two-story brick building built in 1835, was added to the National Register in 1979 and demolished in the 1990s.

There are several other points of interest. The Jacob Burkhalter Home, built circa 1778, was the first recorded home built in Warrenton, and in 1825 the Marquis de Lafayette stayed there. Little Briar Creek Baptist Church, established in 1777, is the oldest church in the county. The Mill Branch Indian Artifact Display is housed in the Warren County Library. The Ogeechee River Mill has been grinding corn since 1826. The Ogeechee Wildlife Management Area, shared with Hancock County, contains a 24,000-acre nature preserve, although hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities are permitted.

According to the 2000 U.S. census, the population is 6,336 (39.5 percent white, 59.5 percent black, and 0.8 percent Hispanic), a 4.2 percent increase since 1990.

(Courtesy New Georgia Encyclopedia)

Existing Situation

Warren County, a largely rural county in East Central Georgia straddling the fall line, is still largely forested with 88% percent of its area in timberland. The southern part of the county with its sandy topsoil supports some limited agriculture while the rolling piedmont hills of northern Warren County are still heavily forested broken only by an occasional old field or pasture.

The main population center and county seat, Warrenton sits near the center of the county while two other small incorporated towns, Camak and Norwood lie to the north and west. There are several other small communities scattered throughout the county. Like many counties in this area, Warren has become increasingly popular to residents from Augusta and Atlanta seeking rural refuge along Interstate 20 building homes among the wildlands, many unfamiliar with the inherent risks of wildfire.

Warren County is well protected by a countywide fire department with six stations distributed throughout the county. The Georgia Forestry Commission maintains a unit with wildland fire suppression capability located just east of the county line on Hwy 278 with good access to most of the county.

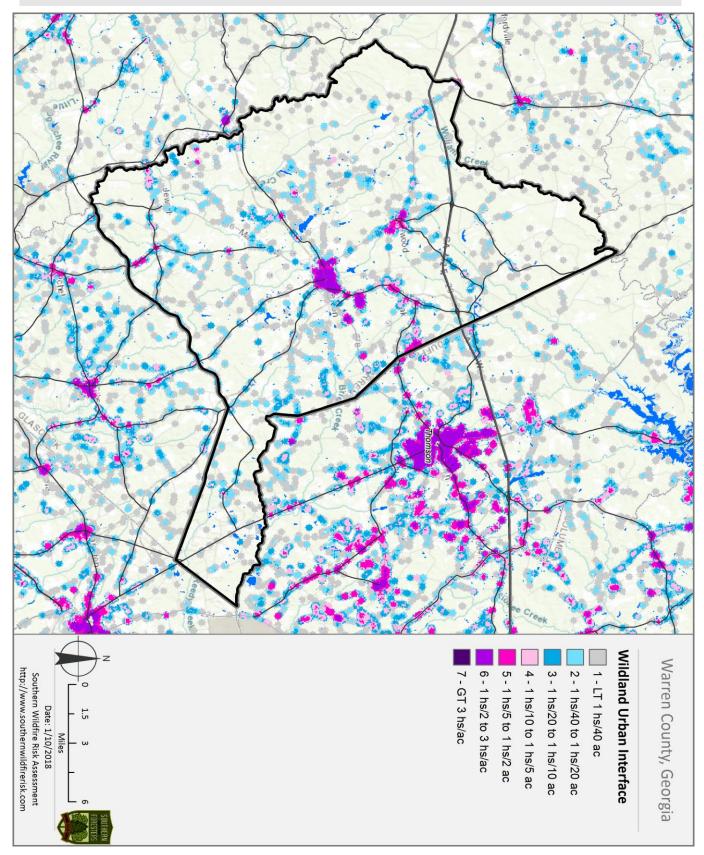
While there are modern pressurized water systems available in the three incorporated cities and much of the area adjacent to Warrenton, there is still a significant area outside these regions lacking ready access to hydrants and dependable water sources.

Over the past 5 years, Warren County has averaged about 23 reported wildland fires per year with a slight peak during the months of February and March. These fires have burned an average of 67 acres annually.

The leading causes of these fires over the past 5 years, was debris burning, which is the most common fire cause throughout the State of Georgia

Georgia Forestry Commission Wildfire Records show that in the past five years, 13 homes have been lost or damaged by wildfire in Warren County resulting in estimated losses of \$206.856.00 along with two outbuildings valued at \$5000.00. Additionally five vehicles valued at \$5,500.00 were lost as a result of wildfire. This is a significant loss of non timber property attributed to wildfires in Warren County.

IV. COMMUNITY BASE MAP



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.

(courtesy Fire Ecology and Wildfire Mitigation in Florida 2004)

As it was felt there was considerable variation in risk from the city of Warrenton to the rural areas of Warren County, it was decided by the CORE assessment team to assess the city separately from the rural areas of the county.

The wildland fire risk assessments were conducted in 2009 by the Warren County Fire Department and returned an average score of 87, placing Warren County overall in the lower "High" hazard range. The assessments ranged from 78 in the Warrenton area to 96 in the rural areas of the county. See the assessed factors and the summary of the assessments following.

The risk assessment instrument used to evaluate wildfire hazards to Warren 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 Warren County:

City of Warrenton (Moderate Risk)

- Long, narrow roads
- Lack of defensible space in wildland interface areas.
- Lack of firewise construction and landscaping in some areas
- Large, adjacent areas of forest or wildlands
- High occurrence of wildfires in several locations.
- Closeness of adjacent structures risk of fire spread from structure to structure

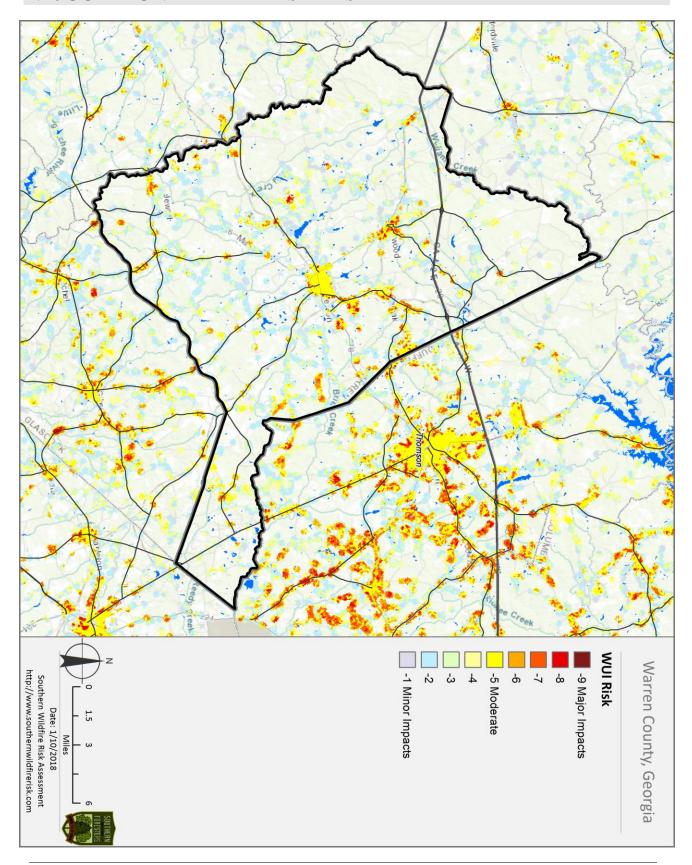
Rural Unincorporated Warren County (High Risk)

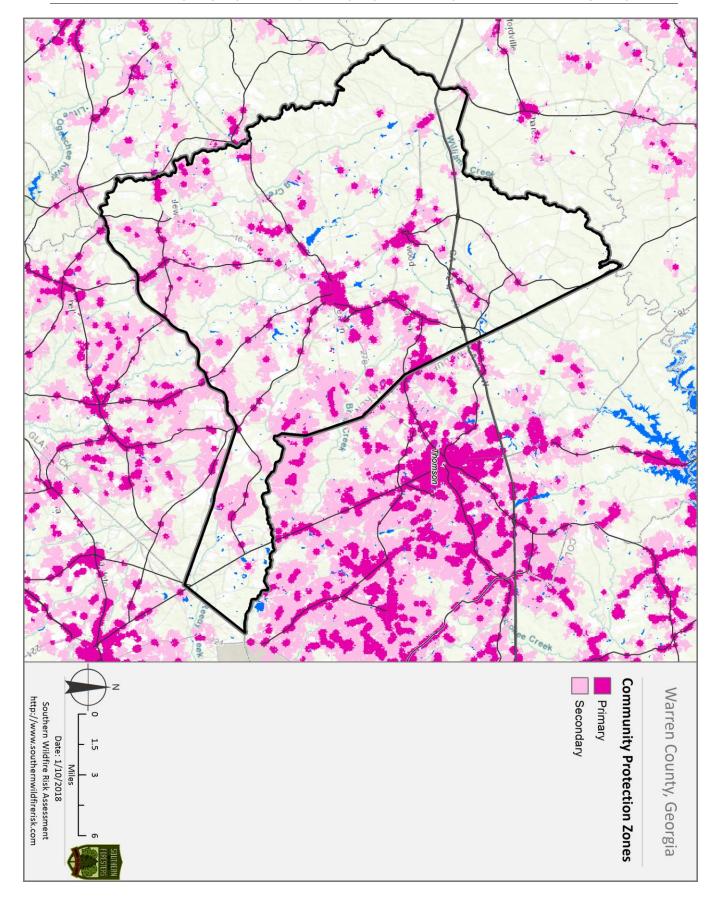
- Distance from staffed fire stations.
- Long narrow driveways inaccessible to equipment.
- Thick, highly flammable vegetation surrounding many homes
- Minimal defensible space around structures
- Homes with wooden siding and roofs with heavy accumulations of vegetative debris.
- No pressurized or non-pressurized water systems available off major roads
- 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 the several locations
- Dead end roads with inadequate turn arounds.

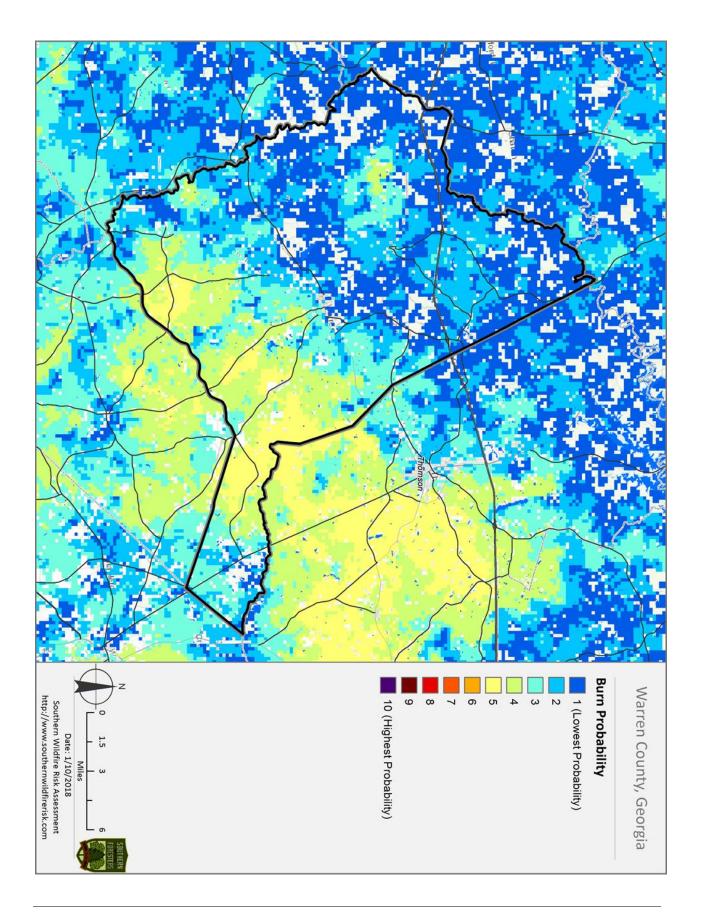
Hazard and Wildfire Assessment summary:

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Area	Community Access	Surrounding Vegetation	Building Construction	Fire Protection	Utilities	Additional Factors	Score	Hazard Assessment
Warrenton	4	30	10	4	9	21	78	Moderate
County	5	15	30	17	4	26	96	High

VI. COMMUNITY HAZARDS MAPS







Proposed Community Hazard and Structural Ignitability Reduction Priorities

Treatment Area		Treatment Types	Treatment Method(s)	
1.	All Structures	Create minimum of 30-feet of defensible space**	Educate homeowners to 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**	Educate owners to 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**	Work with Homeowners Associations to encourage to cut, prune, and mow vegetation in shared community spaces where needed.	
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 food diameter cul de sacs.	
6.	Codes and Ordinances	Examine existing codes and ordinances.	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 As zoning, planning and subdivision ordinances are updated 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)			
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.			
Proposed Improved Community Wildland Fire Response Priorities					
1. Water Sources	Dry Hydrants	Inspect, maintain and improve access to existing dry hydrants. Add signage along road to mark the hydrants			
2. Water Supply	County Water System	Add additional water lines and pressurized hydrants to existing system.			
3. Fire Stations	Equipment	Wildland hand tools. Lightweight Wildland PPE Gear. Larger capacity hose. Investigate need for "brush" trucks and tankers			
4. Personnel	Training	Obtain Wildland Fire Suppression training for Fire Personnel.			
**Actions to be taken by homeowners and community stakeholders					

Proposed Education and Outreach Priorities

1. Conduct "How to Have a Firewise Home" Workshop for Warren County Residents

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.

Distribute materials promoting Firewise practices and planning through local community and governmental meetings.

2. Conduct "Firewise" Workshop for Community Leaders

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 recognition.

3. Spring Clean-up Event

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

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

Celebrate the work with a community cookout, with Community officials, GFC and Warren County Fire Departments discussing and commending the work accomplished.

4. Informational Packets

Develop and distribute informational packets to be distributed by permitting authorities, code enforcement, realtors, libraries, tax assessor's office and insurance agents. Included in the packets are the following:

- Be Firewise Around Your Home
- Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction
- Firewise Communities USA Bookmarks

5. Wildfire Protection Display

Create and exhibit a display for the general public at the various fire stations rotating around during fire prevention month. Display can be independent or combined with the Georgia Forestry Commission display.

6. Local Press

Invite the Warrenton and Augusta news media to community "Firewise" functions for news coverage and regularly submit press releases documenting wildfire risk improvements in Warren County.

7. County Festivals

Create a Firewise information booth at the various festivals such as the Sportsman Festival, Tri County Clinic and Railroad Days in Camak.



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			
Warren County Wildland Urban Interface Fire Council	Create this informal team or council comprised of residents, GFC officials, Warren County Fire Department officials, a representative from the cities and county governments and the EMA Director for Warren 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	1 Defensible Space and Firewise Landscaping		
	2 Debris Burning Safety		
	3 Firewise information for homeowners		
	4 Prescribed burning benefits		
Communications objectives	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	1 Homeowners		
	2 Forest Landowners and users		
	3 Civic Groups		
	4 School Groups		
Methods	1 News Releases		
	2 Personal Contacts		
	3 Key messages and prevention tips		
	4 Visuals such as signs, brochures and posters		

Spring Clean-up Day			
Event Coordinator	Coordinate day's events and schedule, catering for cookout, guest attendance, and moderate activities the day of the day of the event.		
Event Treasurer	Collect funds from residents to cover food, equipment rentals, and supplies.		
Publicity Coordinator	Advertise event through neighborhood newsletters, 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, Warren 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)
Create a minimum of space around structur		Varies	Residents will supply labor and fund required work on their own properties.
2. Reduce structural ign flammable vegetation appropriately storing skirting around raised water hoses for ready Firewise landscaping	from roofs and gutters, firewood, installing I structures, storing access, and using	Varies	Residents will supply labor and fund required work on their own properties.
house numbers, prope	ss, increased visibility of erly stored firewood, space brush clearance, ing materials and I structures, planned	No Cost	To be adopted by city and county governments as needed.
4. Spring Cleanup Day		Varies	Community Business Donations.
5. Fuel Reduction Activ	ities	\$35 / Acre	FEMA & USFS Grants

GRANT FUNDING AND MITIGATION ASSISTANCE

- Georgia Firewise Community Hazard Mitigation Grant: Georgia Forestry Commission grant designed to assist Firewise communities in the mitigation of fire hazards within their community. The grant is designed to provide financial assistance in helping the community to carry out the recommendations of their Firewise Action Plan.
- Community Protection Grant: U.S.F.S. 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.
- 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 complete a 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.
- FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program
 - 1. Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG). The purpose of AFG's is to award oneyear grants directly to fire departments and emergency medical services (EMS) organizations of a state to enhance their abilities with respect to fire and related hazards.
 - 2. Fire Prevention and Safety Grants. The purpose of these grants is to assist state, regional, national or local organizations to address fire prevention and safety. Emphasis of the program is on prevention of fire-related injuries to children.
 - 3. Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER). The purpose of SAFER is to award grants directly to volunteer; combination and career fire departments to help the departments increase their cadre of firefighters (enhance their ability for 24-hour response).

• 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.

• Individual Homeowners:

- 1. The elimination of hazardous conditions around a structure must ultimately be the responsibility of the community and the homeowner. They will bear the cost and reap the benefit from properly implemented mitigation efforts.
- 2. GEMA: Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program



Assessment Strategy

To accurately assess progress and effectiveness for the action plan, the Warren 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 Warren 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 Warren 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



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