



# TIMBER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## Winter Storm Fern, January 23-24, 2026

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### BACKGROUND

A winter storm impacted portions of northeast Georgia from January 23–24, 2026, producing periods of snow, freezing rain, and ice accumulation. Timber impacts were observed in Rabun, White, Habersham, and Lumpkin. Unlike major historic ice events, ice accumulation during this storm was generally light and resulted in minimal timber damage.

In preparation for the storm, Governor Kemp issued a statewide state of emergency on January 22, 2026. The National Weather Service also issued Ice Storm Warnings and Winter Weather Advisories for much of northern Georgia (Figure 1).

During the storm, ice accumulation was measured between one-tenth of an inch and one-half inch (or possibly higher in isolated areas). Ice accumulation occurred across much of north Georgia and portions of central and southeast Georgia, extending north of Macon, Dublin, and Savannah. Because ice is much heavier than snow, scattered tree damage occurred in areas of higher ice accumulation—primarily at higher elevations—resulting in power disruptions affecting nearly one million customers.



Figure 1: NWS Advisory Counties

The National Weather Service provided estimates of ice accumulation, which, when combined with field observation reports from GEMA and Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) saw teams, helped define the area surveyed by the Georgia Forestry Commission for timber impacts. Small amounts of ice are known to affect trees, while greater accumulations—particularly those exceeding three-fourths of an inch—can cause serious damage to certain timber types and age classes.

### OBSERVATIONS/EXTENT OF DAMAGE

A team of Georgia Forestry Commission foresters surveyed areas believed to have experienced the greatest forest impacts and developed the accompanying map. Overall timber damage across the affected counties in north Georgia was categorized as light. The majority of forest stands exhibited little to no measurable impact.

Where damage did occur, it was highly localized and strongly associated with species, stand position, and exposure. Most damage was observed at higher elevations and along forest edges, including roadsides, utility rights-of-way, and stand boundaries where trees were more exposed to ice loading.

Virginia pine, and to a lesser extent eastern white pine, were the primary species affected by ice accumulation. Observed damage typically consisted of limb breakage, uprooting and occasional stem failure. Hardwood species were largely unaffected, with only minor limb breakage observed in exposed or edge trees. Most hardwoods retained sufficient live crown to support continued growth.

Interior portions of forest stands and mixed pine–hardwood stands showed little to no damage. A limited number of scattered stands exhibited moderate timber damage, including significant stem breakage; however, the maximum damaged area within any individual stand was limited to approximately ¼ to ½ acre.

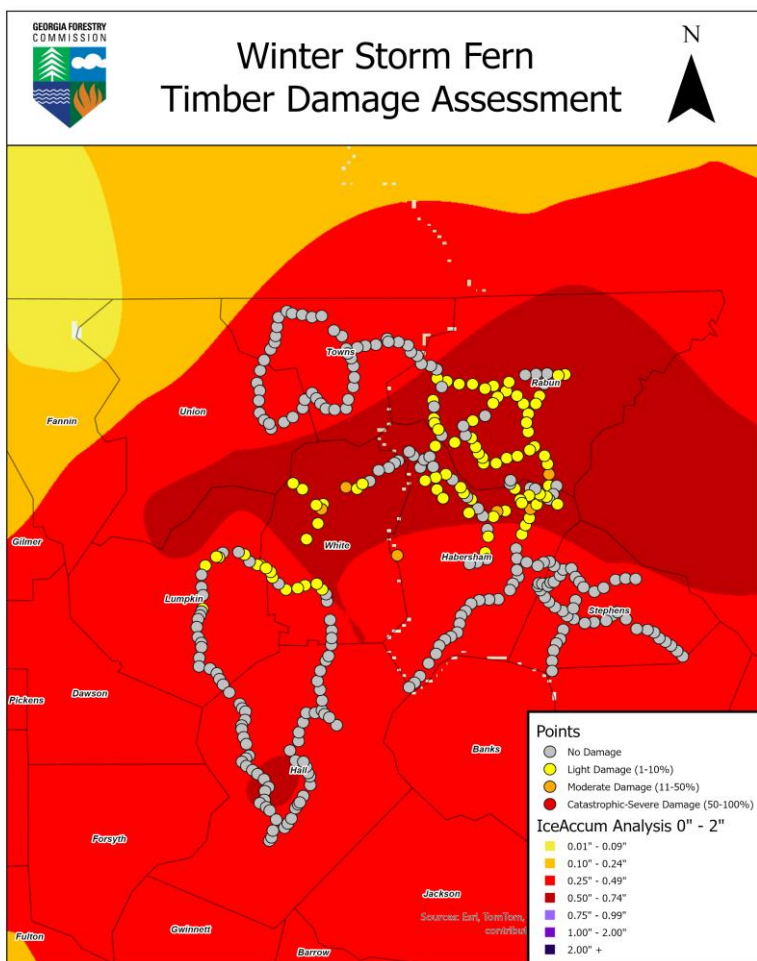


Figure 2: Damage Assessment Points Map

Timber damage was sporadic and did not approach thresholds typically associated with significant economic loss or coordinated salvage activity. Due to light, irregular tree damage observations throughout the impacted area, landscape level acreage and economic losses estimates were minimal and not feasible to accurately estimate.



Figure 3: Light Damage in Habersham Co



Figure 4: Stem Failure in Rabun Co

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the overall light nature of timber damage associated with this storm, salvage operations are generally not recommended, except in isolated areas where safety concerns or concentrated damage justify removal.

Landowners and forest managers are encouraged to monitor affected edge trees, particularly Virginia pine and eastern white pine, for delayed mortality or structural weakness during the upcoming growing season. Routine maintenance along roads, rights-of-way, and property boundaries may be appropriate to address hanging limbs or structurally compromised trees

*Special thanks to other GFC foresters who helped develop this information:*

*Paul McDaniel, Michael Torbett, Ryan Phillips, Brandon Merz, Keith Murphy, Ben Cobb and Brian Tate*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These resources can help forest landowners learn more about options and considerations for situations in which trees have been damaged by winter weather:

### ***Natural Disaster Recovery:***

<https://gatrees.org/forest-management-conservation/natural-disaster-recovery/>

### **How to Evaluate and Manage Storm-Damaged Forest Areas:**

<http://www.forestpests.org/storm/>

### ***Taxes:***

National Timber Tax website:

<http://www.timbertax.org/>

**Landowners are encouraged to utilize professional foresters and arborists to help with decisions about timber management or potentially hazardous trees around homes and urban environments. Seeking independent advice is a sound way to reduce hasty judgments and insure all available options are considered.**