

GEORGIA FORESTRY  
COMMISSION



# Community Wildfire Protection Plan

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

### Ben Hill County, Georgia

---

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

+



DEC 2, 2011

Prepared by;  
Mike Clark, Chief Ranger Ben Hill County  
Will Fell CWPP Specialist  
Georgia Forestry Commission  
473 Bowens Mill Hwy  
Fitzgerald, GA 31750

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:

Jason Miller  
Director Ben Hill Co EMA  
(229) 325-8301  
[jmiller@benhillcounty.com](mailto:jmiller@benhillcounty.com)

Paula Jones  
Former County Manager, Ben Hill Co

Frank Feild  
County Manager, Ben Hill Co  
(229) 426-5100  
[ffeild@benhillcounty.com](mailto:ffeild@benhillcounty.com)

Brandon Fletcher  
Asst. Chief Ben Hill VFD  
(229) 325-7368  
[srmhs@windstream.net](mailto:srmhs@windstream.net)

Dameon Carver  
Capt Fitzgerald FD  
(229) 426-5030  
[ffd732@mediacom66.net](mailto:ffd732@mediacom66.net)

Tim Kegebein  
Road Supt, Ben Hill Co  
(229) 426-5170

Mike Clark  
Chief Ranger Ben Hill County Forestry Unit  
(229) 426-5259  
[rmosley@gfc.state.ga.us](mailto:rmosley@gfc.state.ga.us)

# PLAN CONTENTS

## PREFACE

I. Objectives .....	5
II. Community Collaboration .....	5
III. Community Background and Existing Situation .....	6
IV. Community Base Map .....	8
V. Community Wildfire Risk Assessment .....	9
VI. Community Hazards Map .....	14
VII. Prioritized Mitigation Recommendations .....	17
VIII. Action Plan .....	22
IX. Appended Documents.....	26

Ben Hill County Wildfire Pre-suppression Plan

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

## Preface

The extreme weather conditions that are conducive to wildfire disasters (usually a combination of extended drought, low relative humidity and high winds) can occur in this area of Georgia as infrequently as every 10-15 years. This is not a regular event, but as the number of homes that have been built in or adjacent to forested or wildland areas increases, it 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 (CWPP) includes a locally assessed evaluation of the wildland urban interface areas of the county, looking at the critical issues regarding access to these areas, risk to properties from general issues such as building characteristics and “fire wise” practices and response from local fire fighting resources. It further incorporates a locally devised action plan to mitigate these risks and hazards through planning, education and other avenues that may become available to address the increasing threat of wildland fire. 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 grant funds through the National Fire Plan, FEMA mitigation grants and Homeland Security. 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.

This plan will:

- Enhance public safety
- Raise public awareness of wildfire hazards and risks
- Educate homeowners 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 equipment and firefighters on the scene. It takes planning and commitment at the local level before the wildfire disaster occurs and that is what the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is all about.

## I. OBJECTIVES

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

The core team convened on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to assess risks and develop the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The group is comprised of representatives from local government, local fire authorities, and the state agency responsible for forest management. Below are the groups included in the task force:

Ben Hill County EMA  
Ben Hill County Volunteer Fire Departments  
Fitzgerald Fire Department  
Ben Hill County Government  
Georgia Forestry Commission

It was decided to conduct community assessments on the basis of the individual fire districts in the county. The chiefs of the various fire departments in the county assessed the selected areas and reconvened on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 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 EXISTING SITUATION

#### Background

Ben Hill County covers 252 square miles of south central Georgia. Georgia's 146th county was carved from Irwin and Wilcox counties in 1906 and is named for Benjamin Hill, a U.S. senator who served as Troup County's state representative and senator in the mid-1800s.

The county seat is Fitzgerald, founded in 1895 by Philander H. Fitzgerald, a newspaperman from Indiana. The town's settlers opened a public school, which became the first school to provide textbooks free of charge. The courthouse was built in the first decade of the twentieth century and renovated during the 1950s. Still in use, the courthouse was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

According to the 2010 U.S. census, the population is 17,634, a modest increase from the 2000 population of 17,484.

Although agriculture has always been important to the county, the high concentration of population in its county seat has resulted in a higher than average percentage of employment in the manufacturing sector. One of the largest employers in the area is American Blanching, and major agricultural crops are cotton, poultry, peanuts, timber, and tobacco.

Among the historic places listed on the National Register are the Ben Hill County Jail, the Charles W. Kimball House (also known as the C. W. Smith House), and the Dorminy-Massee House, all located in Fitzgerald. Also in Fitzgerald is the Blue and Gray Museum. The county boasts nine recreational parks and one river-access park to the Ocmulgee River. Annual spring events include the Wild Chicken Festival, the Ebony-in-Arts Festival, and the Colony City Chase.

*Elizabeth B. Cooksey, Savannah, Courtesy New Georgia Encyclopedia*

## **Existing Situation**

Ben Hill County located in south central Georgia, despite its noted agricultural presence, is still over 60% forested. Perhaps with the exception of the large blocks of woodlands along the Ocmulgee River, there are homes and communities scattered throughout the county. The risks and hazards from the wildland urban interface are fairly general and substantial throughout the county even on the edges of the incorporated cities.

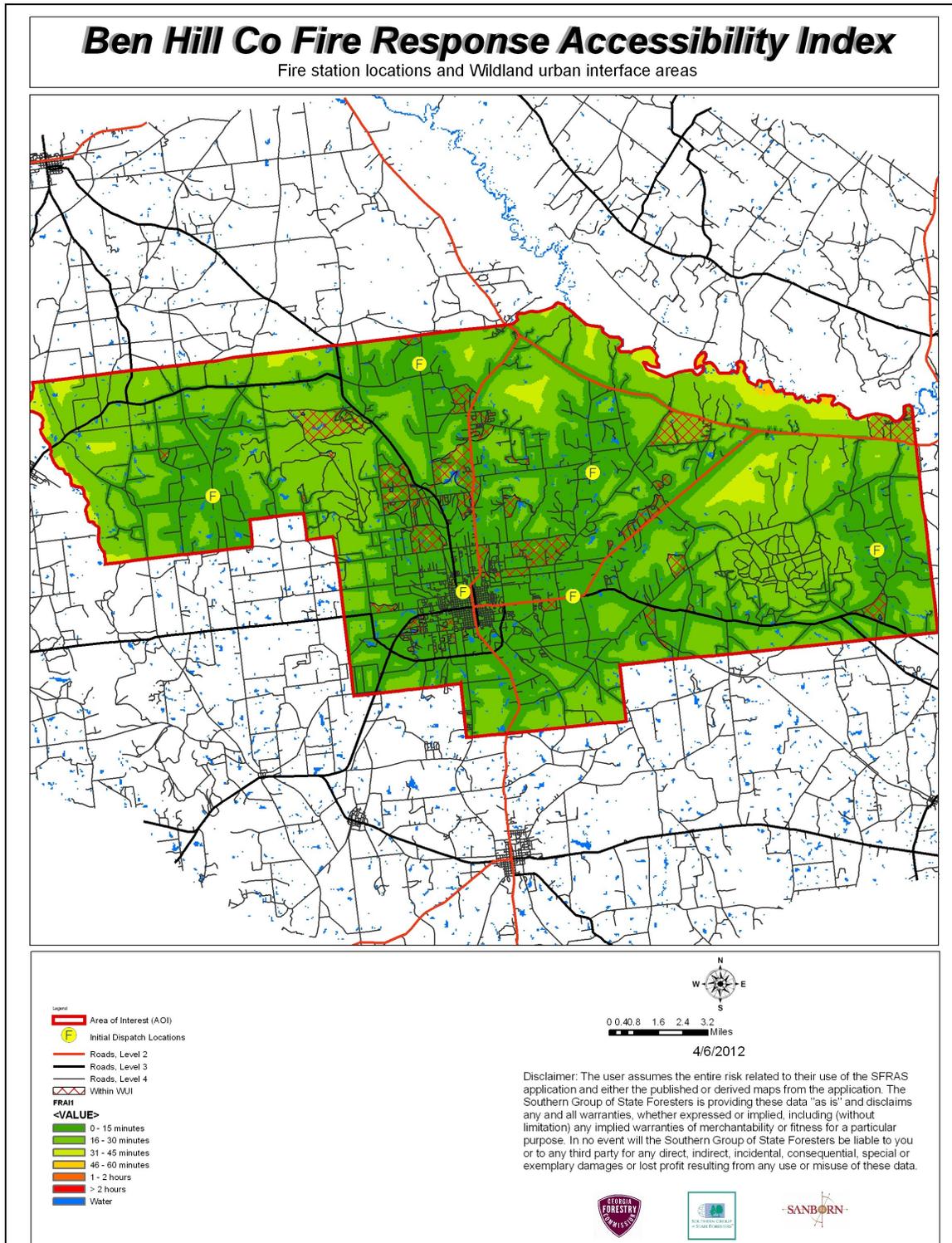
Ben Hill County is protected by the Ben Hill Fire Department with five stations in the unincorporated areas and a full time department in the city of Fitzgerald. The Georgia Forestry Commission maintains a county protection unit located on Hwy 129 three miles north of Fitzgerald near the center of the county to respond to wildfires throughout the county. The city of Fitzgerald is serviced by pressurized water system with hydrants available.

Over the past 54 years, Ben Hill County has averaged 58 reported wildland fires per year, burning an average of 208 acres per year. Using more recent figures over the past 20 years, the average acreage burned has decreased markedly to 107 acres per year while the number of fires remained about the same at 55 reported per year. The occurrence of these fires during this later period shows a pronounced increase during the months of January, February, and March in the number of the annual fires and a marked increase in the average acreage burned. The numbers of fires over the remainder of the year are fairly well distributed.

Over the past 20 years, the leading cause of these fires was debris burning causing 51% of the fires and 57% of the acres burned. Over the past eight years records show that over 36% of the debris fires originated from residential burning.

Georgia Forestry Commission Wildfire Records show that in the past eight years, three homes have been damaged by wildfire in Ben Hill County causing losses of \$28,300, eleven outbuildings and barns valued at \$29,300 and 78 other homes have been directly or indirectly threatened by these fires. Additionally ten vehicles, valued at \$26,500 and seven other pieces of equipment, valued at \$8,400 were lost to wildfire. This is a significant loss and threat to non timber property attributed to wildfires in Ben Hill 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)

## **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 a 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 smoke from burning structures and any unknown sources such as trash piles.

### **Illicit Activities**

- Marijuana plantations or drug production labs may be found in the wildland urban interface areas. Extremely hazardous materials such as propane tanks and flammable/toxic chemicals may be encountered.

### **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 equipment.

### **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 degrees 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 protect actions while evacuations of residents are occurring. Be very cautious of people driving erratically. Distraught residents may refuse to leave their property and firefighters may need to disengage from fighting fire to contact law enforcement officers for assistance. In most jurisdictions firefighters do not have the authority to force evacuations. Firefighters should not put themselves at risk trying to protect someone who will not evacuate!

### **Limited Access**

- Narrow one-lane roads with no turn around room, inadequate or poorly maintained bridges and culverts are frequently found in wildland urban interface areas. Access should be sized up and an evacuation plan for all emergency personnel should be developed.

The wildland fire risk assessment conducted in 2011 by the Ben Hill County Fire Departments identified a number of hazards and risks to communities in the wildland urban interface. The risk assessment instrument used to evaluate wildfire hazards to Ben Hill County's WUI was the Hazard and Wildfire Risk Assessment Checklist. The instrument takes into consideration accessibility, vegetation (based on fuel models), roofing assembly, building construction, and availability of fire protection resources, placement of gas and electric utilities, and additional rating factors. The following factors contributed to the wildfire hazard's identified for Ben Hill County:

- Unpaved roads and private driveways
- Narrow driveways with narrow clearance and with overhanging trees
- Short or inadequate culverts leading to private drives
- Dead end roads lacking turnarounds
- Minimal defensible space around structures
- Homes with wooden siding
- Unmarked septic tanks in yards
- Lack of pressurized or non-pressurized water systems available
- Large, adjacent areas of forest or wildlands
- Heavy fuel buildup in adjacent wildlands
- Lack of enforcement of addressing ordinance
- High occurrence of wildfires in the several locations

## **Southern Fire Risk Assessment System Maps.**

The attached maps were generated from a computerized Geographical Information System (GIS) program developed by the Sanborn Company under contract from the Southern Group of State Foresters to model the various risks to life and property within the southeastern US. The program is known as the Southern Fire Risk Assessment System (SFRAS). It utilizes multiple layers of data developed cooperatively from the various states and the US Forest Service under the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA)

Wildland Urban Interface maps are developed using data from the SILVIS Lab at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. WUI is composed of both interface and intermix communities. In both interface and intermix communities, housing must meet or exceed a minimum density of one structure per 40 acres. Intermix communities are places where housing and vegetation intermingle. In intermix, wildland vegetation is continuous, more than 50 percent vegetation, in areas with more than one house per 40 acres. Interface communities are areas with housing in the vicinity of continuous vegetation. Interface areas have more than one house per 40 acres, have less than 50 percent vegetation, and are within 1.5 miles of an area (made up of one or more contiguous Census blocks) over 1,325 acres that is more than 75 percent vegetated. The minimum size limit ensures that areas surrounding small urban parks are not classified as interface WUI.

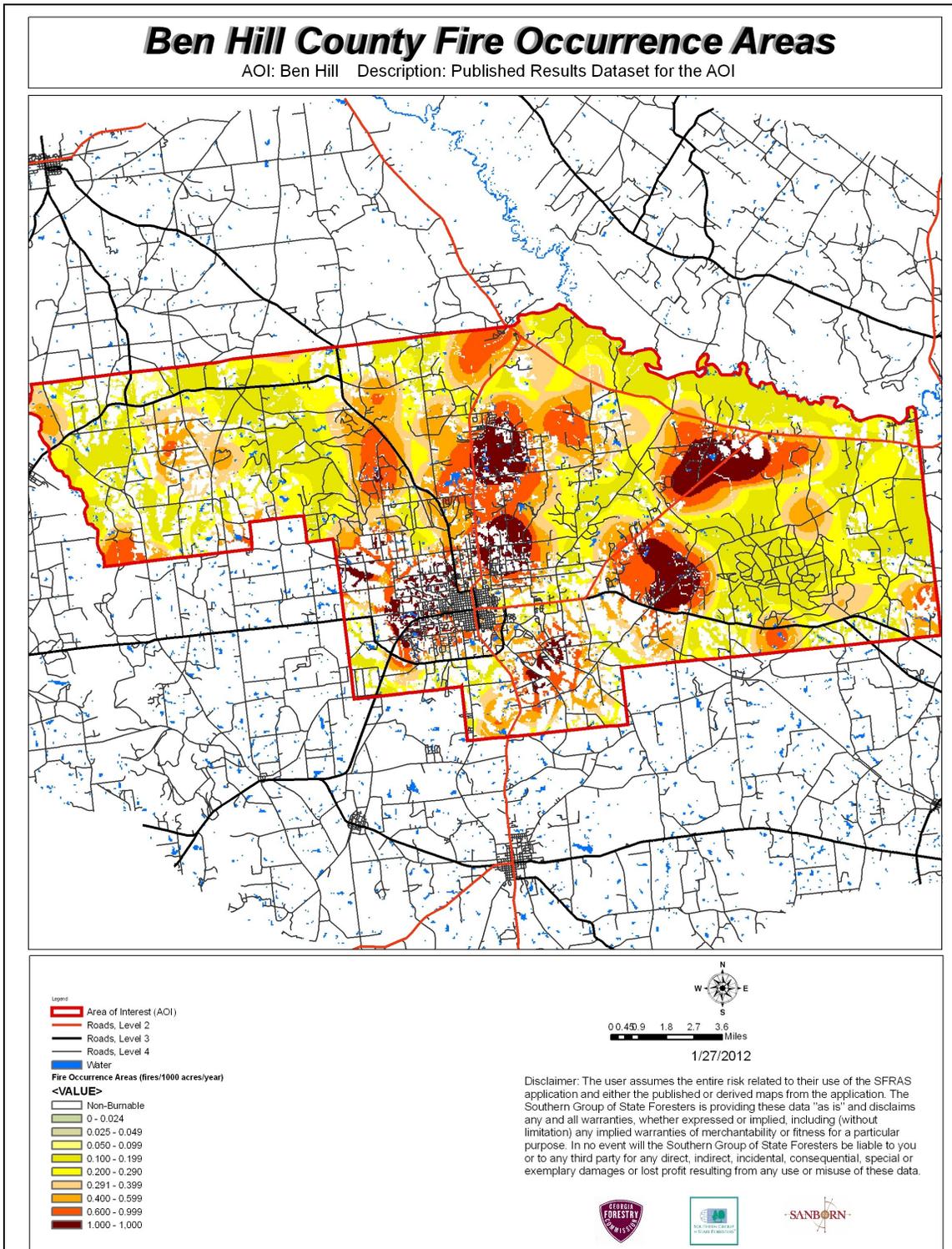
Fire Response Accessibility Index is a relative measure of how long it would take initial attack resources to drive from their station to various areas of the county. This index is derived from assigning average speeds to the various road classes in the county. For the purpose of this analysis the following speeds were assigned: 55 mph for level 1 roads, primarily interstates and four lane open highways, 50 mph for level 2 roads, primarily state and federal highways, 40 mph for level 3 roads, primarily paved two lanes collector roads and 25 mph for level 4 roads, mainly city streets and rural roads, paved and unpaved. For areas away from roads a travel speed of 3 mph is assigned as it is assumed travel will be by foot or extremely slow moving equipment.

Fire Occurrence Areas maps use data from wildfire reports over the period from 1997-2002. The fire occurrence rates mapped are the probability of the number of fires occurring per 1000 acres per year base on this historic information.

Wildland Fire Susceptibility maps show an index value between 0 and 1 and are developed by a mathematical calculation process for determining the probability of an acre burning and the expected final fire size. Many layers of data are used in developing this calculation including historic fire data, wildland fuels and rate of spread, canopy attributes (closure, height and density), weather influences, topography, soils and fire suppression effectiveness.

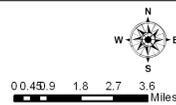
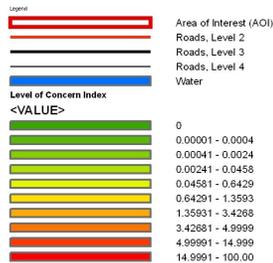
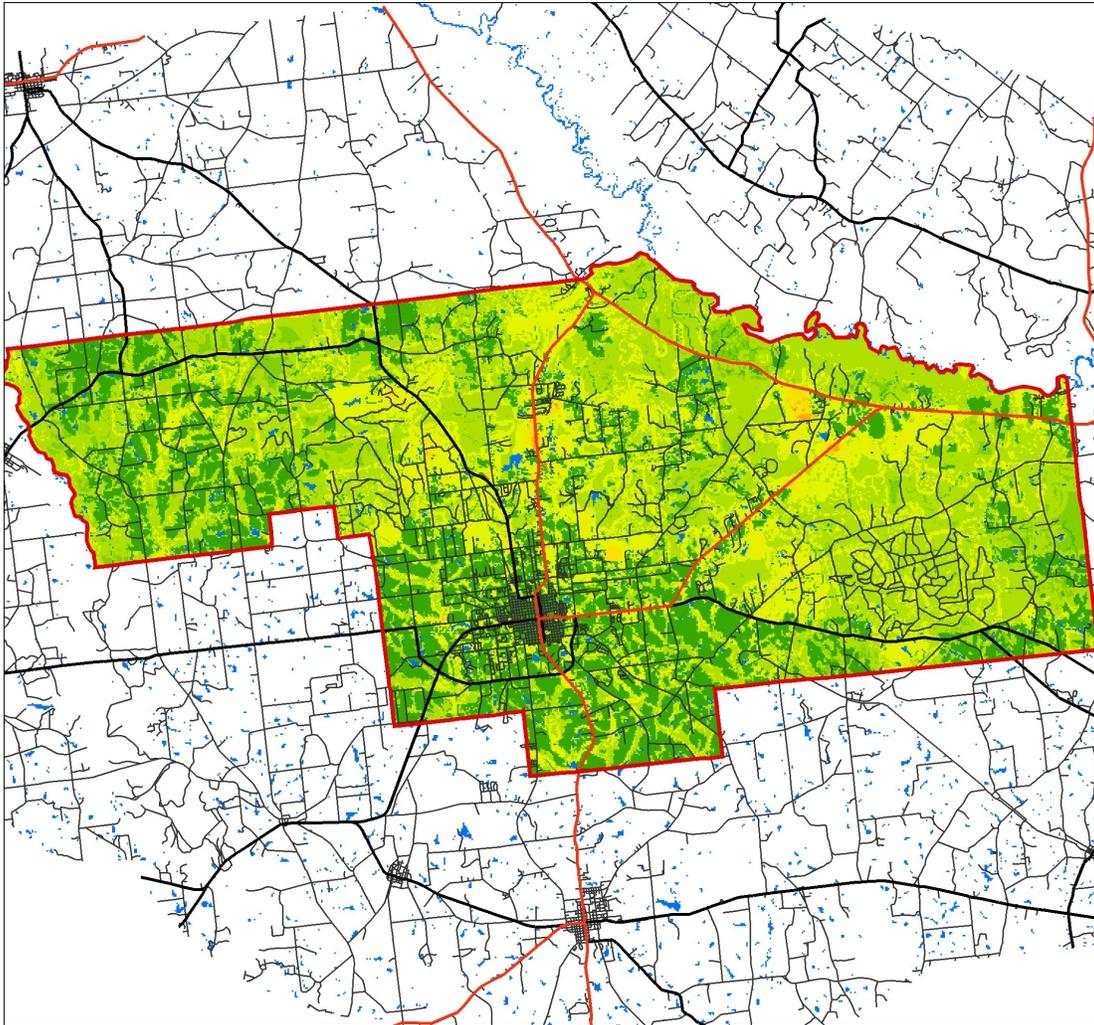
Level of Concern maps are a complex calculation using the Wildland Fire Susceptibility Index (previously described) and the Fire Effects Index which is calculated using data layers of transportation and infrastructure, urban interface and timber values along with suppression difficulty ratings. This provides an output categorizing the expected levels of concern from low to high.

## VI. COMMUNITY HAZARDS MAPS



# Ben Hill Co Level of Concern

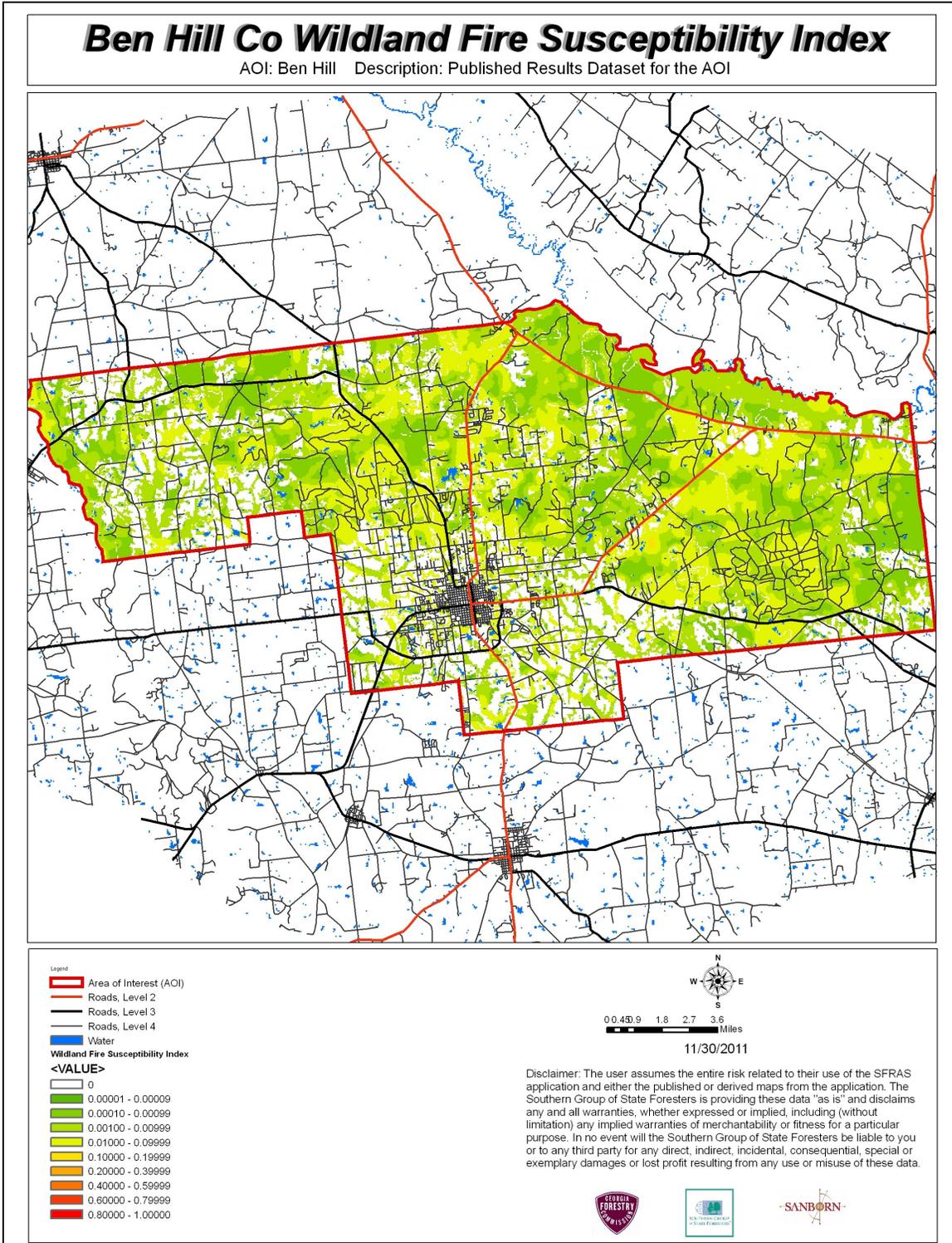
AOI: Ben Hill Description: Published Results Dataset for the AOI



11/30/2011

Disclaimer: The user assumes the entire risk related to their use of the SFRAS application and either the published or derived maps from the application. The Southern Group of State Foresters is providing these data "as is" and disclaims any and all warranties, whether expressed or implied, including (without limitation) any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. In no event will the Southern Group of State Foresters be liable to you or to any third party for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, special or exemplary damages or lost profit resulting from any use or misuse of these data.





## VII. PRIORITIZED MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### Executive Summary

As South 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. Ben Hill 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.

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

## Proposed Community Hazard and Structural Ignitability Reduction Priorities

Primary Protection for Community and Its Essential Infrastructure		
Treatment Area	Treatment Types	Treatment Method(s)
1. All Structures	Create minimum of 30-foot of defensible space**	Trim shrubs and vines to 30 feet from structures, trim overhanging limbs, replace flammable plants near homes with less flammable varieties, remove vegetation around chimneys.
2. Applicable Structures	Reduce structural ignitability**	Clean flammable vegetative material from roofs and gutters, store firewood appropriately, install skirting around raised structures, store water hoses for ready access, and replace pine straw and mulch around plantings with less flammable landscaping materials.
3. Community Clean-up Day	Cutting, mowing, pruning**	Cut, prune, and mow vegetation in shared community spaces.
4. Driveway Access	Right of Way Clearance	Maintain vertical and horizontal clearance for emergency equipment. See that adequate lengths of culverts are installed to allow emergency vehicle access.
5. Road Access	Identify needed road improvements	As roads are upgraded, widen to minimum standards with at least 50 foot diameter cul de sacs or turn arounds. Work with road department to improve standards for new culvert installation and replacement sufficient to allow access by fire fighting equipment.
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. Set minimum culvert size to allow safe access of emergency equipment to private drives. Review Subdivision and development ordinances for public safety concerns. Enforce uniform addressing ordinance.

<b>Proposed Community Wildland Fuel Reduction Priorities</b>		
Treatment Area	Treatment Types	Treatment Method(s)
1. Adjacent WUI Lands	Reduce hazardous fuels	Encourage prescribed burning for private landowners and industrial timberlands particularly adjacent to residential areas.  Seek grant for mowing or prescribed burning in WUI areas.
2. Existing Fire Lines	Reduce hazardous fuels	Clean and re-harrow existing lines.
<b>Proposed Improved Community Wildland Fire Response Priorities</b>		
1. Water Sources	Dry Hydrants	Locate additional dry hydrants or drafting locations needed.  Locate and pre-clear helicopter dip sites.  Map location of dry hydrants.
2. Fire Stations	Equipment	Seek grants or other funding for Wildland hand tools and lightweight Wildland PPE Gear.  Investigate need for fulltime position for the county fire department
3. Road Names	Road Signage	Timely replacement of missing road signs. "Dead End" or "No Outlet" Tags on Road Signs
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

<p>1. Conduct “How to Have a Firewise Home” Workshop for Ben Hill 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. Target local schools, community groups and local senior centers.</p> <p>Distribute materials promoting firewise practices and planning through 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 recognition.</p>
<p>3. Spring Clean-up Event</p>
<p>Conduct clean-up event every spring involving the Georgia Forestry Commission, Ben Hill County and Fitzgerald 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean flammable vegetative material from roofs and gutters</li> <li>• Trim shrubs and vines to 30 feet away from structures</li> <li>• Trim overhanging limbs</li> <li>• Clean hazardous or flammable debris from adjacent properties</li> </ul> <p>Celebrate the work with a community cookout, with Community officials, GFC and Ben Hill County Fire Departments discussing and commending the work accomplished.</p>
<p>4. Informational Packets</p>
<p>Develop and distribute informational packets to be distributed by realtors and insurance agents. Included in the packets are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be Firewise Around Your Home</li> <li>• Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction</li> <li>• Firewise Communities USA Bookmark</li> </ul>

5. Wildfire Protection Display

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

Hold landowner or “town hall” meetings to promote Community Firewise Safety and develop community support and understanding of local fire departments and current issues.

6. Press

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

## 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	
Ben Hill County WUI Fire Council	Create this informal team or council comprised of concerned residents, officials from Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County Fire Departments and Georgia Forestry Commission along with the EMA Director for Ben Hill 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"> <li>1 Defensible Space and Firewise Landscaping</li> <li>2 Debris Burning Safety</li> <li>3 Firewise information for homeowners</li> <li>4 Prescribed burning benefits</li> </ol>
Communications objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Create public awareness for fire danger and defensible space issues</li> <li>2 Identify most significant human cause fire issues</li> <li>3 Enlist public support to help prevent these causes</li> <li>4 Encourage people to employ fire prevention and defensible spaces in their communities.</li> </ol>
Target Audiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Homeowners</li> <li>2 Forest Landowners and users</li> <li>3 Civic Groups</li> <li>4 School Groups</li> </ol>
Methods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 News Releases</li> <li>2 Radio and TV PSA's for area stations and cable access channels</li> <li>3 Personal Contacts</li> <li>4 Key messages and prevention tips</li> <li>5 Visuals such as signs, brochures and posters</li> </ol>

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 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, Fitzgerald and Ben Hill 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, required Class A roofing materials and skirting around raised structures, planned maintenance of community lots.	No Cost	To be adopted by city and county governments.
4. Spring Cleanup Day	Varies	Community Business Donations.
5. Fuel Reduction Activities	\$35/acre	FEMA & USFS Grants

### POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES:

As funding is questionable in these times of tight government budgets and economic uncertainty, unconventional means should be identified whereby the need for funding can be reduced or eliminated.

#### Publications / Brochures –

- FIREWISE materials are available for cost of shipping only at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).
- Another source of mitigation information can be found at [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).
- Access to reduced cost or free of charge copy services should be sought whereby publications can be reproduced.
- Free of charge public meeting areas should be identified where communities could gather to be educated regarding prevention and firewise principles.

#### Mitigation –

- Community Protection Grant:
  - USFS sponsored prescribed burn program. Communities with at risk properties that lie within 3 miles of the USFS border may apply with the GFC to have their forest land prescribed burned free of charge.
- FEMA Mitigation Policy MRR-2-08-01: through GEMA - Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and Pre Disaster Mitigation (PDM)
  - To provide technical and financial assistance to local governments to assist in the implementation of long term cost effective hazard mitigation measures.
  - 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 fuels reduction to protect life and property.
  - With a complete and registered plan (addendum to the State plan) counties can apply for pre-mitigation funding. They will also be eligible for HMGP if the county is declared under a wildfire disaster.
- GFC - Plowing and burning assistance can be provided through the Georgia Forestry Commission as a low cost option for mitigation efforts.
- Individual Homeowners –
  - In most cases of structural protection ultimately falls on the responsibility of the community and the homeowner. They will bear the cost; yet they will reap the benefit from properly implemented mitigation efforts.
  - GEMA Grant - PDM (See above)

Ultimately it is our goal to help the communities by identifying the communities threatened with a high risk to wildfire and educate those communities on methods to implement on reducing those risks.

### **Assessment Strategy**

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

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

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

GEORGIA FORESTRY  
COMMISSION



**P. O. Box 819, Macon, GA 31202**  
**1-800-GA-TREES**  
**GaTrees.org**

*The Georgia Forestry Commission provides leadership,  
service, and education in the protection and conservation of  
Georgia's forest resources. An Equal Opportunity Employer and  
Service Provider*