COUNTY AGENDA REQUEST

Department:	Board of Commissioners	Presenter(s):	Chairman Charles W. Oddo
Meeting Date:	Thursday, May 28, 2015	Type of Request:	Proclamation/Recognition

Wording for the Agenda:

Presentation by the Georgia Forestry Commission concerning the Forest Action Plan, Georgia Forestry Services, and other opportunities that might serve other Fayette County needs.

Background/History/Details:

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist Joanna Warren of the Georgia Forestry Commission has request a few moments to update the Board on the Forest Action Plan, Georgia Forestry Commission Services, and other opportunities.

The Forest Action Plan is the result of the Georgia Statewide Forest Resources Assessment and the Forest Resources Strategy. These two documents were produced in accordance with the 2008 Farm Bill in order to position Georgia to receive funds under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act. The Assessment provides a science-based foundation that analyzes forest conditions and trends in the state and defines priority rural and urban forest landscape areas. The Strategy addresses top priority issues identified by the Assessment and serves as the basis for the five-year plan (See "Exhibit A.")

"Exhibit B" provides a list of Georgia Forestry Commission Services.

"Exhibit C" is a feature article how communities can be prepared in the event of a wildfire.

What action are you seeking from the Board of Commissioners?

This is a presentation from the Georgia Forestry Commission. No action is requested.

If this item requires funding, please describe:

Not Applicable.

Has this request been considered within the past two years?	No	If so, when?	
Is Audio-Visual Equipment Required for this Request?*	No	Backup Provided with Request?	Yes

**** All audio-visual material must be submitted to the County Clerk's Office no later than 48 hours prior to the meeting. It is also your department's responsibility to ensure all third-party audio-visual material is submitted at least 48 hours in advance.***

Approved by Finance	Not Applicable	Reviewed by Legal	
Approved by Purchasing	Not Applicable	County Clerk's Approval	Yes
Administrator's Approval			

Staff Notes:

Forest Action Plan: GFC's Five-Year Strategic Plan

The Georgia Statewide Forest Resources Assessment and the Forest Resources Strategy were produced in accordance with the 2008 Farm Bill in order to position Georgia to receive funds under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act.

The Assessment provides a science-based foundation that analyzes forest conditions and trends in the state and defines priority rural and urban forest landscape areas.

The Strategy addresses top priority issues identified by the Assessment and serves as the basis for the five-year plan.

Together, these documents are known as The Forest Action Plan.

5645 Riggins Mill Road
Dry Branch, GA 31020
1-800-GA-TREES
GaTrees.org

Vision

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

Mission

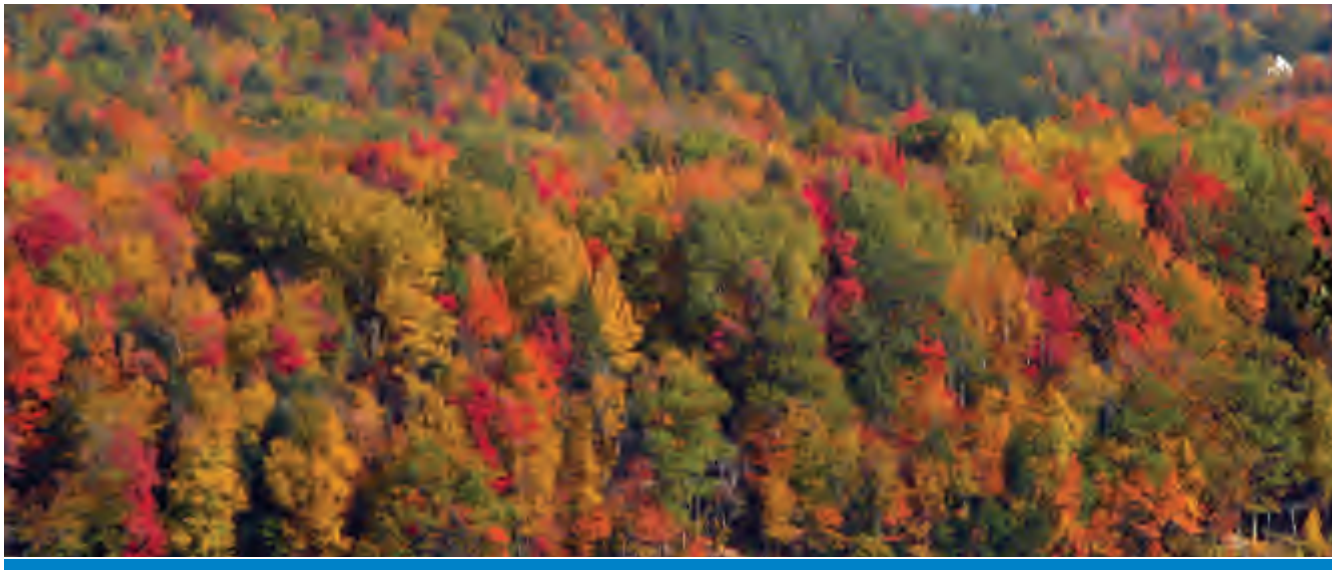
To provide leadership, service and education in the protection and conservation of Georgia's forest resources.

For more information, please contact:
Joanna Warren
Communications Specialist
jwarren@gfc.state.ga.us

Forest Action Plan

Georgia's Threats

1. Water Quality and Quantity
2. Urbanization
3. Forest Health
4. Biodiversity
5. Air Quality
6. Fire Management
7. Fragmentation and Parcelization
8. Economics and Changing Markets



Sustainable forests -

meet the environmental, economic and social needs of the present without compromising those capabilities for the future.

What role can county commissioners play in protecting Georgia's forests?

- Learn about local invasive species threats at GaTrees.org.
- Help your communities earn Firewise and Tree Cities USA designations.
- Learn about fire protection and the benefits of forest management tools such as prescribed burns.
- Support local forestland owners & industry by learning about initiatives including carbon sequestration and cost-share programs at GaTrees.org.
- Continue working with your local GFC unit to protect forests, air and water quality using Best Management Practices.

The Forest Action Plan focuses on three state and private forest national priorities:

1. Conserve working forest landscapes.
2. Protect forests from harm.
3. Enhance public benefits from trees and forests.

Georgia's forestland, which encompasses 24 million acres, is a rich and renewable resource that provides a myriad of benefits to citizens across the state.

Talk with your county's GFC rangers and foresters to see how your resources and forestland can be sustained!

GEORGIA FORESTRY COMMISSION

GaTrees.org

Georgia Forestry Commission Services

Forest Fire Protection and Prevention

- Wildfire detection and suppression
- Burn permit distribution and administration; for hand-piled debris burn permits, visit GaTrees.org or call 877-OK2-BURN. Call your local GFC county office for large burns
- Firebreak plowing (fee-based)
- Mechanical fuel treatment services (fee-based)
- Prescribed burning assistance (fee-based)
- Prescribed burning training and education
- Wildfire mitigation advice and risk assessments for homes and communities
- Community wildfire protection planning
- Firewise communities and practices guidance
- Basic Wildland Firefighting and National Incident Management System training
- Rural Fire Defense Program equipment leasing
- Wildfire prevention strategies, programs and education
- Emergency management support during disaster events
- Weather forecasting at GaTrees.org/weather

Forest Management

- Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring and education
- Forest water quality and wetland complaint investigation and mediation
- Assistance with federal cost-share and conservation programs
- Forest pests and invasive species detection
- Forest health information, education and training
- Multiple-use Forest Stewardship Management Plans and GROWS landowner forum
- Forest Legacy Program administration and conservation easement assistance
- TAG (Team Agriculture in Georgia) assistance for underserved landowners
- Directories for consulting foresters, forestry service contractors, master timber buyers, arborists and Christmas tree and pine straw producers
- Advice and plans for reforestation, timber stand improvement and harvesting
- Timber security law enforcement
- Tree seedling planter and spade rental (fee-based)

Reforestation

- Pine and hardwood seedlings sales - prices and species at GaTrees.org
- Tree breeding and testing
- Seed production orchards

Sustainable Community Forestry Program

- Ask-the-Arborist (GaTrees.org)
- Making the Shade
- Tree City/Tree Campus USA
- Community forest storm damage management
- Community forest land conservation
- Circuit rider arborist
- Green infrastructure

Forest Utilization

- Forest products directories
- Economic impact of forestry reports and forestry guidance to local economic developers and potential business interests worldwide
- Timber resources and forest products analysis for sustainable growth of industry
- Bioenergy and other new product development
- Forest carbon offsets, carbon markets and ecosystem services assistance and Carbon Sequestration Registry administration – GaCarbon.org

For more information:

GaTrees.org
(click on *Contact Us* for local county office)

Districts:

Coosa 770.531.6043
Flint 229.522.3580
Oconee 478.445.5164
Chattahoochee 770.254.7218
Satilla 912.287.4915
Ogeechee 229.868.3385

State Headquarters:

Macon 1.800.GA.TREES
478.751.3500

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Only WE Can PREVENT WILDFIRES

By Stasia Kelly
Georgia Forestry Commission

MOTHER NATURE HAS been known to dish out some severe weather in Georgia, but perhaps nothing strikes fear in the heart of a homeowner more than the possibility of fire. While prudent maintenance of a house's electrical components and family fire safety practices can help safeguard a home's interior from the possibility of a fire, different protection methods are needed for a home's exterior and the land on which it is built.

Between the months of February and May, Georgia experiences more wildfires than at any other time of the year. More than 8,000 wildfires are recorded in the state annually, with an average size of four to five acres per fire. Unfortunately, humans are at the root of most of those fires. Careless debris burning is the leading cause of wildfires in Georgia, which is why the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) has a burn permitting system in place and an army of professional firefighters and equipment to take on blazes big and small.

The GFC has a strong education outreach program that helps communities to understand their risk of wildfire and implement specific actions that increase homeowners' resiliency to wildfire. That effort is needed more than ever, considering the population growth taking place in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). In the past 50 years, the 220 million acres of identified WUI in the United States have become populated with more than 120 million people living in 50 million housing units and working in several hundred thousand businesses. That's a 300 percent growth rate in the WUI, which is faster than the general population growth rate for the same time period.

Compounding that issue is the fact that wildfires have been getting more severe, due to overgrown forests, accumulation of excess fuels, more frequent droughts and increases in severe weather. As the fires get increasingly destructive, fighting them gets more expensive, costing up to 50 times more for suppression than for prevention. Between 2004 and 2013, the nation's average 60,000 wildfires cost $4.7 billion in federal, state and local response. Severe wildfires can also have a host of adverse impacts on property and natural ecosystems, including flooding, erosion, loss of wildlife habitat and impacts on social, ecological and economic values—repercussions that give urgency to the words, "be ready."

"Fire Adapted Communities" are Better Prepared for Wildfires

Focused fire prevention and preparedness campaigns have been launched by the GFC throughout Georgia and its wildfire-prone areas. One such endeavor is the "Fire Adapted Community" (FAC) model, which incorporates people, buildings, businesses, infrastructure, cultural resources and natural areas into the effort to prepare for the effects of wildland fire. Community leaders and residents are charged with gaining the knowledge, skills, tools and behaviors to prepare in advance for their community's resilience to fire.

"It's all about collaboration," said Eric Mosley, former Georgia Forestry Commission Wildfire Mitigation Specialist. "The first step is to build a team consisting of a wide variety of community members from all different sectors: elected officials, community decision-makers, fire services managers, emergency responders, land managers and other stakeholders. The team develops its own objectives and then uses its collective resources to move forward in making the community more fire-adapted," said Mosley.

In north Georgia, where steep terrain can greatly impact emergency access to residential areas, spreading the word about fire safety is especially important. Following an 800-acre fire on Cedar Knob Mountain in 2008, efforts to ramp up preparedness were intensified. The

Between the months of February and May, Georgia experiences more wildfires than at any other time of the year. More than 6,000 wildfires are recorded in the state annually, with an average size of four-to-five acres per fire. Photo courtesy Jon Kolb.

Focused fire prevention and preparedness campaigns have been launched by the GFC throughout Georgia and its wildfire-prone areas. Community leaders and residents are charged with gaining the knowledge, skills, tools and behaviors to prepare in advance for their community's resilience to fire. Photo credit 2014 Guide to Fire Adapted Communities.

national Firewise Communities program, which promotes individual homeowner responsibility for preparing their property from the risk of wildfire, was established in 2009. Firewise is a key component of FAC, as is the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which is a GFC administered program that maps local risks and engages emergency responders.

Early in 2013, the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation & Development Council was invited as the hub organization to develop one of eight national FAC pilot projects using Towns County as the test site. The Towns County FAC developed as a very successful wildfire education program because of a "Perfect Storm," during which the three lead agencies (GFC, US Forest Service, & Towns County Fire & Rescue) joined forces because of a wildfire. They quickly realized that they all had the same goals — to eliminate the risk of wildfire for citizens, their communities and the adjoining forests.

FAC Case Study, Towns County, Ga.

Later that year, citizens in Towns County took up the cause by forming a Fire Adapted Community Citizens Coalition, which has been described by one of its members as "a way of life and an attitude." The coalition is made up of nine people from local, district, regional, state, federal and private entities. They represent neighborhoods, schools, fire and rescue and government agencies, all dedicated to wildland fire safety and public education, mostly funded by national US Forest Service grants.

Working around wildfire risk issues, the coalition stresses evacuation planning, infrastructure improvements, training personnel in FAC methods, and sharing lessons learned from wildland fire response and protection programs in the WUI. Effective outreach through media outlets, programs with school groups and sponsoring community action days has helped spread Firewise messages. During 2013 and into 2014, activities focused on coalition building and achieving FAC objectives to address resident safety, building and neighborhood design, community preparedness, infrastructure/utility protection, and wildland management included. Ongoing activities call for additional projects designed to address forest management, fuels reduction, community and home safety zones, codes and ordinances, local capacity building, education programs, FAC promotion, development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans and establishing cooperative fire agreements between agencies and institutions.

"Partnership works well in Towns County because we all spend time together," said Mosley. "During the good times, great relationships are produced for when things get bad. And partnerships don't stop when the fire goes out."

The coalition's message focused on the core issue of adapting to wildfire in the WUI and drawing upon skills of community members, which built trust among stakeholders around the common objective to manage wildland fire. Including key stakeholder groups and inviting people respected for their good work in the community to help develop the coalition paid off for Towns County.

Outreach by community leaders and the use of peer-to-peer networks helped build a strong foundation for adoption of fire prevention measures. The development team was effective in communicating how the FAC network activities help reduce risk for people, the community, their landscape and their businesses. The Towns County Fire Corps was pivotal in getting initial information out, and the support from the commissioner and fire chief was instrumental as well. Public advertising helped promotion. The message was spread that mitigation of wildfire threats helps everyone live safely with fire, maintains the natural environment that serves as the mainstay for tourism in the area, and helps reduce costs of response to wildfire. Managers realized that their coordination and collaboration promoted sound decision-making and policy implementation.

"Our program seems to be working because of excellent cooperation and collaboration," said Towns County Fire Rescue Chief Mitch Floyd. "Our folks truly operate as a team towards a common goal, without regard to the uniform they may wear or any personal agendas."

Frank Riley Jr., executive director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council and leader of the FAC establishment effort in Towns County, said, "The support of county commissioners and non-stop saturation with 'messaging' are reasons the program has proved successful and is now being adopted in communities across north central Georgia."

In a follow-up report, Riley also identified challenges met along the way, including working with little funding and the difficulty encountered by some of the elderly population in doing hands-on work.

Throughout North Georgia and in communities nationwide, however, fire resilience successes are being credited to the FAC model, and participants are spreading the word that the collaborative effort is absolutely worthwhile.

"Everyone has to realize that this is a continuous process," said Mosley. "We're in it for the long haul and we need to bring in others over time to lead and mentor them. It's about people and property and safety. Everyone is worth the extra effort." ■

- *For more information about becoming a Fire Adapted Community in Georgia, please contact Mark Wiles at mwiles@gfc.state.ga.us or visit www.fireadapted.org.*
- *Visit www.firewise.org to learn more information about Firewise Communities.*
- *For information about services provided by the Georgia Forestry Commission, visit www.gatrees.org.*

Editor's Note: *Eric Mosley worked with GFC for 14 years and shares credit for building Georgia's FAC program. He plans to continue that work in Spalding County. Mark Wiles now oversees GFC's FAC efforts.*