



## Towns County Leads the Way as a Fire Adapted Community Learning Network Pilot Project

**The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy** is a national collaborative effort to bring a broad cross-section of stakeholders together to address wildland fire management challenges. The Strategy directs wildland fire planning activities and has three primary goals: restore and maintain landscapes, develop Fire-Adapted Communities, and improve wildfire response.

Activity	Impact
% decrease in number wildfires since Towns County wildfire mitigation efforts began (2009)	75
# Firewise communities developed since initiation of the pilot FAC project (2013-2014)	11
Outreach and educational activities conducted	Training, workshops, educational materials, media, fuels mitigation workdays, CWPPs

Following an 800-acre wildfire on Cedar Knob Mountain in 2008, Towns County, Georgia sought ways to better prepare their county for potential wildfires. This fire was the catalyst for Towns County being selected as one of eight Fire-Adapted Community pilot projects nationwide.

Due to its leadership in establishing Firewise Communities and the large amount of wildland-urban interface in the county, Towns County was nominated for a Watershed Research & Training Center grant by the State of Georgia to become a Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network pilot project. Through existing efforts, local authorities have seen a 75% decrease in the number of wildfires over the past five years. Local, state, and federal agencies have been working with the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council since March 2013 to establish this pilot project. Shortly after being chosen as a pilot site, a strategy to introduce and promote FAC to Towns County communities and stakeholders began.

The Towns County FAC Citizens Coalition, consisting of various stakeholders,

was formed that same year to move the pilot project forward. Dynamic leadership and grant funding for the coalition brought the number of Firewise communities developed in Towns County from three between years 2009 and 2013 to twenty by year 2015. This increase was due to the combined efforts of cooperating agencies on local, district, regional, state, federal and private levels.

The FAC Coalition cultivated community ownership of Firewise and FAC objectives through education and advocacy programs with a goal of promoting Firewise and FAC as a way of life. These programs included evacuation planning, infrastructure improvements, FAC and Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) training, and wildfire information sharing. Further outreach was accomplished through media outlets, school programs, and community action days. During 2013 and 2014, several meetings, presentations, and public events further promoted FAC objectives, including resident safety, building and neighborhood design, community preparedness, infrastructure/utility protection, and wildland management. Additional projects will address forest

Success stories highlight regional wildland fire accomplishments that support implementation of the national cohesive wildland fire management strategy in the Southeast. The stories demonstrate how the Southeast is improving its "fire resiliency" through technology, education and outreach, forest management, collaboration, and more. Success stories also serve as a model for other communities to follow.

management, fuel reduction, community and home safety zone creation, local fire resource building and consolidation, education program development, Community Wildfire Protection Plan creation, and cooperative fire agreements development.

Effective communication and diverse partnerships have enabled the Towns County FAC pilot project to be a success.

“Our program seems to be working because of excellent cooperation and collaboration [...and] also has a lot to do with the personalities and commitment of the people that are guiding the effort... Our folks truly operate as a team, towards a common goal without regard to the uniform they may wear or any personal agendas.” Mitch Floyd, Towns County Fire Rescue Chief

“This partnership goes beyond having “the right people in the right place at the right time”. It works because there is a shared passion for the safety of our residents and especially our firefighters who may find themselves in harm’s way one day protecting structures. ...sharing a common vision... We are unified in our understanding of the threat of wildfire posed within this county. With that, we all are committed to making this idea of a fire adapted community reality and an example for others to follow.” Mike Davis, US Forest Service

Towns County has become a model for other communities to pattern their Fire Adapted Communities program after in order to assure that their county has the best plans and procedures in place to help protect their lives, their homes, and their businesses from a major wildfire event.



Ashland Cove Firewise Community chipper day, 2013. Credit: Frank Riley



Ingles Market fire awareness day in Hiawassee, Georgia, 2013. Collaborative effort with the USDA Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission, Towns County Fire Rescue, and Towns County Fire Corps. Materials were handed out throughout the 4 hours on site. Credit: Mike Davis.



Use of local signs for wildland fire awareness messaging. Credit: Mike Davis



Displays ordered and purchased by Frank Riley for use in presentations and public places. This one was located at the Towns County courthouse during November 2013. Credit: Mike Davis.



Community presentation to Towns County residents. Credit: Frank Riley

**Additional Information:**

Brief description of Towns County as a FAC network participant:  
<http://facnetwork.org/participants/>

Website developed for the Fire Learning Network by the Georgia Forestry Commission:  
<http://townscountyfireprevention.wordpress.com/>

Article describing the grassroots efforts appeared on the International Association of Fires Chiefs website:  
<http://www.iafc.org/onScene/article.cfm?ItemNumber=7432>

Recognition for an instrumental partner in the FAC-FLN efforts, Mike Davis, Fire Management Officer for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, is documented by the FAC network:  
<http://facnetwork.org/tag/towns-county/>

Newspaper column, The Towns County Herald, 6 Aug 2014, p. 10:  
<http://townscountyherald.net/pdf/tch08-06-14Front2.pdf>

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**Partners:** Chestatee/ Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development, Towns County: Fire Rescue, Fire Corps, County Commissioner, Sheriff's Department, Planning, Emergency Management Agency, School System, Superintendent, and County-wide Homeowners Association Georgia Forestry Commission, USDA Forest Service, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, The Nature Conservancy, Southern Governors Association, Georgia State Fire Marshall, Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation, Young Harris College, and local libraries



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