



Community Wildfire Protection Plan

An Action Plan for Wildfire Mitigation and Conservation of Natural Resources

Putnam County

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



The following report is a collaborative effort between 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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1. COUNTY BACKGROUND , FIRE HISTORY, AND RURAL URBAN FIRE INFORMATION

Location and County Information

Putnam County



Emerging from its agricultural past, Putnam County has become an important center of industry and recreation in Georgia. Once the land of [cotton](#), large plantations, and great wealth, a different look is now taking hold in the county with the establishment of golf resorts, gated communities, and new businesses. Putnam County is located seventy-five miles southeast of [Atlanta](#) and covers 345 square miles. According to the 2000 U.S. census, Putnam County's population was 18,812 (67.5 percent white, 29.9 percent black, and 2.2 percent Hispanic).

Antebellum Years

Putnam County was created in 1807 after being sectioned off from neighboring [Baldwin County](#). Its name

honors General Israel Putnam, a hero of the [Revolutionary War](#) (1775-83) and a veteran of the battles at Lexington and Breed's (Bunker) Hill in Massachusetts. [Eatonton](#) became the county seat in 1808. It was incorporated in 1809 and remains the county's only incorporated town. Farmers represented the majority of the county's original settlers, and cotton quickly became the predominant crop. By 1810 [slaves](#) made up more than 30 percent of the county's residents. A cotton factory opened in 1836, and by 1849 the county possessed fourteen sawmills and five gristmills to service the area's other agricultural products and natural resources. In 1854 a railroad spur line connected Eatonton to [Milledgeville](#), the [state capital](#).



[Putnam County Courthouse](#)

Education proved important to residents of Putnam County during the antebellum period. The Union Academy, later renamed the Eatonton Academy, was founded in 1809, followed ten years later by the Union School. William H. Seward, the future secretary of state under U.S. president Abraham Lincoln, was the school's first rector. In 1828 [Adiel Sherwood](#) established on his plantation the Manual Labor Training School, which was founded to teach new planting techniques to local farmers and plantation owners.

Civil War and Reconstruction

The Civil War (1861-65) visited Putnam County in 1864, when Union general William T. Sherman and his army passed through the area on their [March to the Sea](#). Putnam County had voted against [secession](#) in 1861, but this fact did not prevent the burning and destruction of [cotton gins](#), [railroads](#), and bridges. (The writer and Putnam County resident [Joel Chandler Harris](#) recounts these events in his 1892 book, *On the Plantation*.)

Putnam County experienced difficulty recovering from the war. The wealth of the great plantations had disappeared,



[Jersey Cow](#)

and the county spent the remaining decades of the nineteenth century trying to revive its economy. A solution came at the turn of the century when dairy production emerged as an economic force. In 1876 [Benjamin Hunt](#) brought fifteen Jersey cows to the region and created Panola Farm, an experimental dairy facility that helped to establish the [dairy industry](#) in Putnam County. By 1901 Putnam had become the third-leading dairy county in Georgia, shipping cream to [Athens](#) and butter to [Atlanta](#). The Eatonton Creamery, a cooperative created by fifty-eight local farmers in 1909, made

various dairy products, including "Sweet Clover" butter, which was served to U.S. president William Howard Taft on a visit to Georgia. Dairy continues to play a part in the county's economy. To celebrate the industry's importance, the Dairy Festival is held annually during the first weekend of June.

Industrial Growth

A



[Haband House](#)

variety of industries later moved into Putnam County. In 1970 Horton Homes began producing manufactured homes. The New Jersey-based Haband Company, a clothing retailer, began operations in the county in 1988 and has become a key provider of jobs. Other important industries include [Georgia Power Company](#), whose plant at [Lake Sinclair](#) provides many jobs for the county.

Recreation and Tourism

The creation of Lake Sinclair in 1953 and Lake Oconee in 1979 helped give birth to the tourism and recreation industry in Putnam County. The lakes provide opportunities to fish, hike, camp, or simply relax on the beach. Several golf courses have been created in the area, including the Jack Nicklaus-designed Great Waters Course at Reynolds Plantation. Putnam County also possesses several other points of interest. Two sites unique to the county are Rock Eagle Effigy Mound and Rock Hawk Effigy Mound, which were built by Native Americans more than 1,000 years ago and are the only two [effigy mounds](#) in the United States.

Downtown

Eatontown has been awarded "Better Hometown" status by Georgia, allowing the town to revitalize the area with the help of state funding. The focus of the downtown area is the Putnam County Courthouse, located on one of the largest public squares in the state. The oldest part of the courthouse dates from 1824; the building underwent renovations in 1994. The county's [literary](#) tradition can be explored by visiting the [Uncle Remus Museum](#), which is dedicated to the works of Joel Chandler Harris. [Alice Walker](#), another Putnam County native, won the 1983 [Pulitzer Prize](#) for her book [The Color Purple](#).



[Uncle Remus Museum](#)

The above information courtesy of the New Georgia Encyclopedia

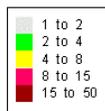
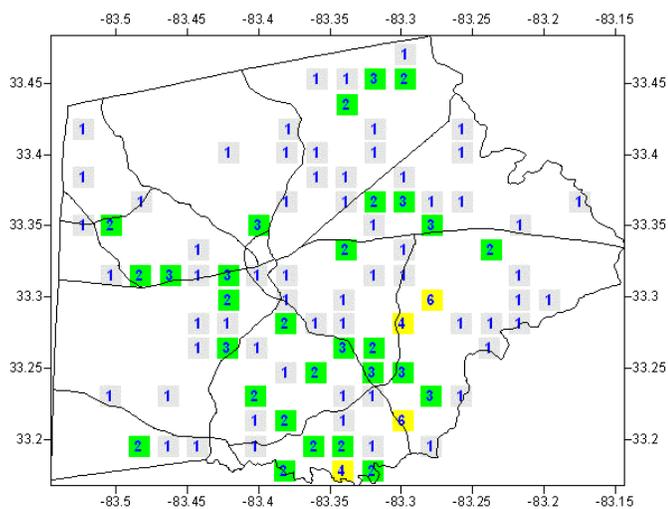
Fire History

Wildland fire has not been a serious problem in Putnam County when compared to the rest of the state. Thus far in FY 2010 there have been 8 fires that burned 10.25 acres for an average size of 1.28 acres. During this same period the statewide average was 2.31 acres. The following outlines fire activity in Putnam County for the past 5 complete fiscal years. It should be remembered that the statewide average in FY 2007 was influenced by the Sweat Farm, Big Turnaround, and Bugaboo Fires that burned in the Okefenokee.

Fiscal Year	Number of Fires	Acres	Average size	Statewide average size
2009	12	14.32	1.19	3.90
2008	26	61.78	2.38	4.56
2007	41	107.83	2.63	18.64
2006	61	194.29	3.19	3.93
2005	20	31.01	1.55	3.15

Thus far in FY 2010 machine use has been the most prevalent cause of fire (7 out of 8). Machine use was also the leading cause in fiscal years 2006, 2007, and 2008. Debris escapes was the second most common cause with other causes being evenly distributed overall.

Fire Occurrence Map for Putnam County for Fiscal Year 2005-2009



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)

Putnam County is typical of a County in the Southeastern United States in that it contains areas of both boundary and intermix WUI. Proximity to a large metropolitan with rapid and continuous development results in communities near extensive unbroken wildland fuel and also sited such that wildland fuels are present within the community.

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 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 the smoke from burning structures and any unknown sources such as trash piles.

● Illicit Activities

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

● 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 apparatus.

- 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° 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 protection 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.

Risk Summary

All of the areas that were assessed in Putnam County are newer developments that are in close proximity to Lake Oconee. Some of these areas are high density communities that are located in old farmland or forestland. Values for the communities assessed from the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SWRA) level of concern category for Putnam County are predominantly in the moderate to low range. This is in line with the generally low fire numbers, excellent response times, and rapid containment of those that do occur. Wildland fuels are also generally not continuous or of a type that promotes rapid spread or fires that are difficult to suppress. Some of the newer developments are located in proximity to hazardous fuel that could be hazardous during periods of high to extreme fire danger. Some also contain pockets of hazardous fuel internally that resulted from past uses. Based on data from the Communities at risk data layer the following counties were assessed during the first 6 months of 2009. Original copies of the assessments are retained by the Putnam County Unit of the Georgia Forestry Commission. It should be noted that other communities exist that are in need of assessment. The communities listed below are representative of those in Putnam County that are in need of protection from wildland fire.

Map Number	Community	Location	jurisdiction	size and structural information	Overall Wildfire Hazard Rating
1	Cuscowilla	126 Cuscowilla Dr.	Harmony	700 acres 295 lots 263 homes	79
2	Hidden Lake	Hwy 44 N	Harmony	50 acres 32 homes	61
3	Hoot Owl / Beaverdam	Hoot Owl Lane	Harmony	42 acres 9 lots 31 homes	84
4	Lockhaven	Lockhaven	Harmony	70 acres 6 lots 45 homes	81
5	Sebastian Cove	Hwy 44 N	Harmony	400 acres 30 lots 200 homes	77
6	Hickory Point	Sugar Creek Rd	Harmony / Sugar Creek	40 acres 23 homes	69
7	Forest Lake village	Hwy 441 S	Flat Rock	300 acres 13 lots 123 homes	74
8	Little River	Little River Rd	Twin Bridges	200 acres 21 lots 100 homes	80

2) COMMUNITY BASE MAP AND OTHER VISUALS

Maps included in the appendix include Level of concern with communities at risk, Fire occurrence areas, surface fuels, and US Forest Service lands south of Interstate 20. Initial dispatch for County, State, and Federal responders are shown on the Level of concern and Fire Occurrence maps. These maps are available in PDF format from the Georgia Forestry Commission. Availability in this format will allow printing at a greater resolution than is represented in this copy of the plan. It will also allow for viewing at a different scale which will also result in greater resolution. This file type will also allow for selecting a desired area of concentration by using the marquee zoom tool in the tools menu.

3) OBJECTIVES AND GOALS:

The mission of the following report is to set clear priorities for the implementation of wildfire mitigation in Putnam County. The plan includes prioritized recommendations for the appropriate types and methods of fuel reduction and structure ignitability reduction that will protect this county 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.

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.

4) PRIORTIZED MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were developed by collaboration between the Georgia Forestry Commission, Putnam County Fire and Emergency Services, and the US Forest Service. A priority order was determined based on which mitigation projects would best reduce the hazard of wildfire in the assessment area.

- **Community Hazard and Structural Ignitability Reduction**
- **Wildland Fuel Reduction or Modification**
- **Improvements to Capabilities of Wildland Response Agencies**
- **Public Education Regarding Risk of Wildland Fire**

Proposed Community and Structural Ignitability Reduction Priorities:

1. **Locate lack of and improve defensible space around structures in communities at risk**
2. **Identify access problems that affect initial attack in communities at risk**
3. **Identify structural ignitability concerns in communities at risk**
4. **Identify and resolve problems with codes, covenants, or ordinances that negatively influence structural ignitability**

Proposed Wildland Fuel Reduction or Modification Priorities:

1. **Reduction or modification of wildland fuel in proximity to communities at risk**
2. **Reduction or modification of fuel concentrations in shared spaces inside communities at risk**

Proposed Improvements to capabilities of Wildland Response agencies:

1. **Identify needs and improve training and qualification of wildland response agencies**
2. **Identify needs and recommend equipment acquisitions for wildland response agencies**

4) PRIORITIZED MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS Continued

Proposed Education and Outreach Priorities:

1. **Improve public knowledge in communities at risk and in the general population of Putnam County regarding Firewise principles.**
2. **Identify opportunities and achieve Firewise USA certification for communities at risk.**
3. **Notification of communities at risk regarding wildland fire hazard**
4. **Improvements to public notification during periods of high to extreme fire danger.**

5) ACTION PLAN

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.
- Another source of mitigation information can be found at 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.

5) ACTION PLAN CONTINUED

Timetables:

For each project (list highest priority projects first), list project, responsible agency, method, estimated duration, and effective dates.

Community and Structural Ignitability Reduction

Project	Responsible Agency	Method	Estimated Duration	Effective Dates
Improve defensible space in communities at risk to meet firewise standards.	Putnam County Fire Services and Georgia Forestry Commission	Conduct training at public meetings in communities at risk or through individual inspection	2 years	January 2010 through December 31, 2011
Identify access problems in communities at risk.	Putnam County Fire Services and Georgia Forestry Commission	Each response station should identify problems within their response area	1 year	January 2010 through December 31, 2011
Identify structural ignitability concerns in communities at risk to meet firewise standards.	Putnam County Fire Services and Georgia Forestry Commission	Conduct training during the public meeting when defensible space is addressed or at the time when individual inspections are conducted	2 years	January 2010 through December 31, 2011
Identify problems with codes covenants and ordinances.	Putnam County Fire services, GFC, Leaders of Homeowners associations and EMA Director	Examine and resolve problems which negatively influence wildland suppression	2 years	January 2010 through December 31,2011

5) ACTION PLAN CONTINUED

Wildland Fuel Reduction or Modification

Project	Responsible Agency	Method	Estimated Duration	Effective Dates
Identify prescribed burning projects near Communities at Risk	Georgia Forestry Commission and Putnam County Fire Services	Concentrate on Communities in proximity to plantation pine or natural pine stands that are west or north of the communities.	ongoing	Late winter 2010 then every third year
Identify prescribed burning projects on federal lands near communities at risk	Georgia Forestry Commission, US Forest Service, Supported by Putnam County Fire Services	Prescribed burn goals set by the U S Forest Service should also take fuel reduction near communities at risk into consideration as part of the prescription. Both agencies should work toward planning to see any proposed burn projects could be done concurrently. This will require changes in how these burns are carried out as regards logistics and technique.	Ongoing	Late Winter 2010 and repeated in succeeding years
Provide assistance to communities at risk during periods of increased burning activity	Putnam County Fire Services	Provide a common burning area inside or adjacent to communities where citizens can safely burn debris supported by local fire services	ongoing	Late winter 2010 repeated in succeeding years
Provide assistance to communities with alternates to burning	Georgia Forestry Commission	Through grant acquisition or by using local funds, acquire a small chipper which could be loaned to communities (could be used on the same day as burn assistance)	ongoing	Late winter 2010 and in succeeding years

5) ACTION PLAN CONTINUED

Improvements to Capabilities of Wildland Response agencies

Provide support to individuals interested or skilled in wildland areas in regard to enhanced training	Georgia Forestry Commission	Supported by the District Training officer Chief Ranger Wooten should coordinate with Putnam Fire Services to locate individuals with skills or interests to improve training or qualification to fill ICS positions on the District Type 3 organization	ongoing	January 2010 and beyond
Project	Responsible Agency	Method	Estimated Duration	Effective Dates
Identify needs for training and qualification of wildland responders	Georgia Forestry Commission and Putnam County Fire Chief	Supported by the District Training officer, Chief Ranger Tom Wooten and Fire Chief Gregory should examine training records of all wildland responders to insure all are FFT2 or Georgia Basic Wildland certified.	ongoing	January 2010 and beyond
Identify equipment needs and acquire wildland equipment for County and State wildland responders to insure all wildland equipment meets NWCG standards.	Georgia Forestry Commission and Putnam County Fire Services	Chief Ranger Wooten and Fire Chief Gregory should inventory present wildland equipment and PPE identify needs and acquire needed material through local or grant funding	ongoing	January 2010 and beyond

5) ACTION PLAN CONTINUED

Public Education and Outreach

Project	Responsible Agency	Method	Estimated Duration	Effective Dates
Achieve Firewise USA status for Communities at Risk	Georgia Forestry Commission and Putnam County Fire Service	Pursue and achieve Firewise status for Cuscowilla and Hickory Point Communities. Should this be realized it would serve as a model for other communities that would follow.	Ongoing	January 2010 and beyond
Notification of Communities at Risk regarding risk of wildland fire hazard and during periods of high to extreme fire danger.	Georgia Forestry Commission and Putnam County Fire Services	Use PSA's in local newspapers and local radio stations. Utilize Firewise displays in local post offices and banks. Seek use of local EMC newsletter for Firewise message. Create poster sized notices for use in common public places (stores post offices etc. adjacent to high hazard areas advising residents about the hazard and how to protect themselves and their property. Distribute public notices concerning firewise at local sporting events and other public gatherings.	Ongoing	January 2010 and beyond
Improve public knowledge regarding Firewise principles	Georgia Forestry Commission	Acquire a firewise display to be retained by the Putnam County unit. This display could be loaned to fire response stations for training of people in communities in their response areas. Firewise brochures should be provided to the building permit office for distribution.	Ongoing	January 2010 and beyond

Assessment:

Describe the strategy used to assess the plans progress and effectiveness.

Reduction of Community hazard and structural ignitability

- Direct measurement of the number of communities and individual structures assessed would be the appropriate measure of success
- Any meetings that result in cooperation between wildland departments should be logged along with minutes of those meetings. Goals should be set and reviewed after each meeting.
- Any changes to or additions to codes and ordinances would be an obvious measure of success.

Steps to implement Fuel Reduction or Modification Priorities

- Acres burned would be the appropriate measure for fuel reduction. A direct measure of linear feet of firebreaks would be an appropriate measure for pre-suppression breaks.
- Fuel reduction in communities at risk would be measured by the number of communities affected and number of projects completed.

Steps to implement improvements to wildland response capability

- A direct measure of the number of capabilities or qualifications gained would be the appropriate measure of success.
- Any equipment acquired or any equipment brought up to national standards would be the appropriate measure of success.

Steps for Public Education and Outreach

- Direct measurement of the number of persons contacted, literature distributed, public notices posted, news articles published, radio programs aired, etc. would be the best measure of success.
- The number of communities certified as Firewise USA would be an obvious measure of success.

6) WILDFIRE PRE-SUPPRESSION PLAN

A complete copy of the latest Georgia Forestry Commission Wildfire Pre-Suppression Plan for Putnam County is included in the appendix to this plan.

7) APPENDIX

- **County Base maps**
- **Wildfire Pre-Suppression Plan**
- **Community Assessments**

All files that make up this plan are available in electronic format from the Georgia Forestry Commission.



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