

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Another Day at the Office

Sent in by Ron Willis, another USCG Veteran, and friend, once again proving that there's very little that our USCG hasn't done and cannot do. And our Coasties are of the attitude that we'll "get 'er done" or die trying!

The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
 USCG Veteran



U.S. Coast Guard Sector North Bend, Oregon was called to rescue two stranded hikers, a 42-year-old severely injured woman and an uninjured 40-year-old man, off of the 7,000-foot Grayback Mountain, 90 miles to the southeast of the Sector. The North Bend aircrew launched with a plan to locate the pair, deliver survival equipment, and, if able, deploy a rescue swimmer to administer care until the next day when an Oregon Army National Guard H-60 was planning to arrive.

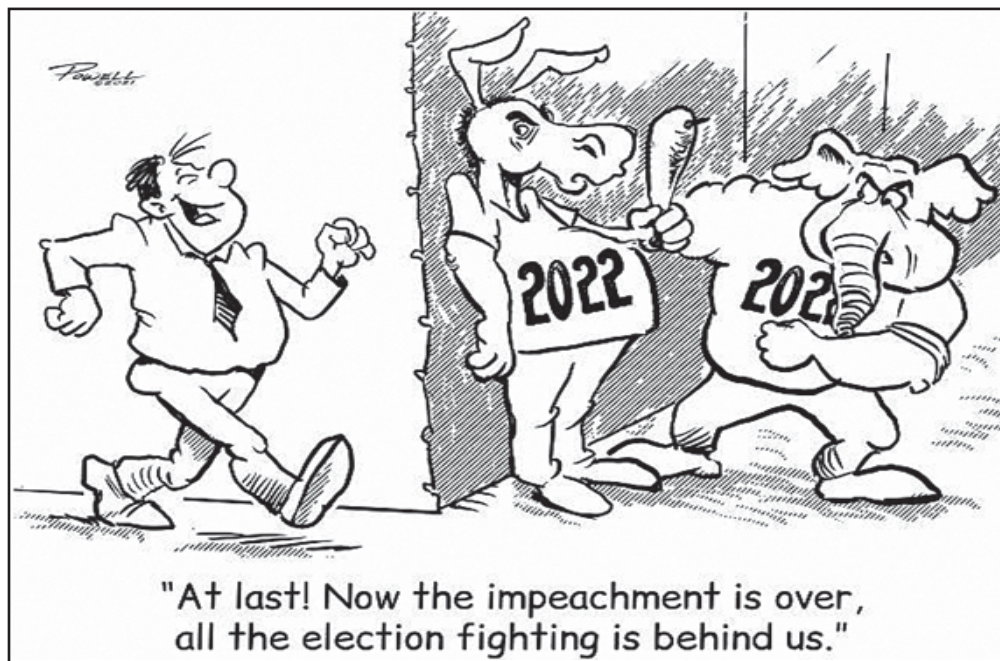
The crew arrived on scene around midnight and located the pair by their fire and prepared to hover in the 40-knot gusting winds at an altitude of 6,900 feet. They lowered survival equipment, Petty Officer 2nd Class Trevor Salt, an aviation survival technician, who touched down and traversed across the slope.

In a cove of trees on a 30-degree icy slope, AST2 Salt evaluated the patient. He confirmed that both survivors had slipped on the ice and fallen hundreds of feet from the summit, hitting multiple rocks and trees until stopped at their current location. Salt stabilized the patient in multiple hypothermia treatment capsules and began constructing a level snow platform, creating a safe area for himself and the two survivors. He also erected a windbreak and maintained the fire to minimize the 14-degree temperatures and wind chills.

Working through the night, Salt provided intensive care to the critically injured patient. At first light, he dug an 80-foot path through the ice, complete with a safety line, and built a 4-foot x 8-foot level hoist platform by moving over 300 cubic feet of snow. Without these site improvement measures, he knew the risk of falling was inevitable.

At 11:45 a.m., the Oregon Air National Guard H-60 helicopter arrived and deployed a medic and litter, who prepared the patient for hoisting. The salt, the survivor, patient, and medic were recovered into the H-60, where the medic continued treatment until she was transferred to awaiting EMS in Medford, OR.

As is seen here and is very often the case, an NCO, a petty officer bears up under extreme conditions and is able to adapt, overcome and survive this dangerous situation and save lives. The USCG air crews and pilots, as are ALL air rescue crews, are world class steel nerved individuals. Training only takes our Coasties just so far. These missions throughout our USCG history occur regularly and oft times much isn't publicized of these incidents. PO2 Trevor Salt lived up to one of our many mottoes: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." - Because he was "Semper Paratus"!



"At last! Now the impeachment is over, all the election fighting is behind us."

Firewise Landscaping

Throughout the country, wildfires in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) are becoming more common as people choose to live in previously undeveloped areas on the edges of cities. Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is simply where the houses in communities are built in the forest. The vegetation in these areas usually consists of trees, shrubs, and grasses that often are very flammable.

Fire is often a natural, integral part of the landscape in these interface areas. But when people move-in and build homes, a minor fire that might burn a few trees and shrubs can become a major disaster. If people are going to live in fire-prone areas, it is the responsibility of those people and their communities to reduce the risk of fire.

Building design and materials, landscape design and maintenance, firefighting infrastructure (roads, equipment, water supply), and accessibility all affect this risk. The rest of this article will discuss the role of landscape design and maintenance, or Firewise landscaping, in reducing fire risk in the wildland/urban interface.

A landscape that gives a building the best chance for surviving a wildfire is one that provides a defensible space. Defensible space is the area around buildings where the fire coming across the yard will run out of fuel before it climbs the wall of your house. This is the area that we recommend being at least 30 feet wide and have flammable fuel removed or minimized. Fires need fuel, oxygen, and heat to burn. Defensible space landscapes are low in fuel, keeping the fire far enough away that firefighters have a chance to defend the building without risking their lives and equipment.

To construct a defensible space: Cut tall grass near structures. A fire in dry grass burns quickly and is very difficult to control. Remove excess brush and small trees from at least 30 feet around buildings.

Dense brush burns quickly and can provide a "ladder" for low flames to reach up into larger trees. Widely spaced trees and shrubs can be left in the landscape for shade and esthetics.

On larger lots, maintain a fuel break of low-growing plants 30 to 70 feet out from buildings. Such fuel breaks act as a buffer between the manicured landscape near the home and the adjacent wildlands.

Rake up leaves and twigs. Remove plant litter (dead leaves, twigs, etc.) that accumulates under trees and shrubs to reduce fuel loads. Tree litter that accumulates on roofs and in gutters should also be removed regularly.

Large amounts of litter can accumulate on lower branches of trees and shrubs and should be removed. Removal of heavy litter accumulations in adjacent wildland areas also should be done if possible. Removed litter should be placed in an approved landfill. It should not be piled on the property or in adjacent woodlands.

Prune tree branches. Prune branches up to ten to twenty feet above the ground on large trees to prevent low fires from reaching the tree crowns. Thin dense tree groups. Though the grouping of trees is normally a good landscaping technique, in fire-prone areas it can be hazardous. Thinning these groups will slow the spread of fire.

Remove firewood and other combustible materials from around buildings. Firewood should be stored on the outside edge of your defensible space. Make sure firefighters can reach all parts of your property. Place fences, trees, retaining walls, etc. so that they do not restrict firefighting equipment access.

Choose landscape plants that are less flammable. All plants will burn if a fire is severe enough. Some plants are more fire-prone than others, however. Conifers such as pines and spruces tend to be flammable, while many broadleaved trees are fairly fire resistant. Cooperate with neighbors to provide large defensible spaces.

A thirty-foot wide clear space around a home may not be adequate in a severe fire, especially if neighboring properties have not been well-designed or maintained. Neighbors should cooperate to reduce fire risk by having good defensible spaces that join one another.

Check your landscape monthly. Maintenance is a never-ending task. Inspect landscapes monthly and attend to problem situations before they become serious hazards.

Though a thirty-foot wide defensible space around a home is generally adequate, maintain the additional fuel break at 30 to 70 feet if possible. This becomes especially important when local conditions may cause especially severe fires.

Houses located high on steep slopes will need wider clear spaces to protect from fires down-hill. Local wind conditions may also warrant wider cleared areas.

These techniques will not guarantee complete fire safety. However, Firewise landscaping can greatly increase a home's chances of survival if a fire occurs.

It does not have to be a raging wildfire to burn your house, it can be simply an unattended leaf pile in your yard or in your neighbors' yard that gets a puff of wind and it's off to the races and it can run faster than you can.

If you burn, get a permit, have tools and water handy, and do not leave it even for a few minutes. Be aware of the area around your home, think "what if a spark landed on my roof or deck?" With a little effort the home you save might be your own.

For more information on Firewise USA, check out www.firewise.org or www.gatrees.org, or our Facebook Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D.

Our new web site is coming soon.



RC&D
Frank Riley
 Executive Director

Controlling Invasive Plants

Let's talk about some invasive species that are problematic in the mountains. I'll cover Nepalese browntop (Japanese stiltgrass), privet, kudzu, and autumn olive.

UGA extension
Watching and Working
 with
Jacob Williams



Let's start with the Japanese stiltgrass. This is on the only annual that I chose, so its control will be a bit different. Japanese stiltgrass looks like a miniature bamboo. It has alternate leaves. It can grow up to 2 feet tall. It likes to grow in shaded areas, so it can grow in shaded lawns and in forests. Japanese stiltgrass will put on seedheads during the fall. The seeds are small, light colored, and sticky. Controlling it can be very challenging. In lawns, herbicides or hand pulling can be done. A pre-emergent herbicide that is also effective against crabgrass will prevent it from germinating. A product with the active ingredient prodiamine will work. Japanese stiltgrass germinates earlier than crabgrass so the application would need to be done in early march. In forested areas there are no herbicides labelled for use. That means that you will have to either hand pull or cut it back in the fall before it goes to seed. Most likely, there is already seed stored in the soil; therefore, you will need to cut it back several years in a row to deplete the soil seed bank.

Chinese privet can be identified in the fall by the BB sized fruits hanging on it. Chinese privet starts out as a bush that can grow to be over 20 feet tall, if left unchecked. The leaves on it are glossy, oval shaped, and a little bigger than a quarter.

Most people know what kudzu looks like. It is a vine that is capable of covering entire trees. Kudzu leaves are trifoliate which means they come in threes. They also have purple flowers, but can be hard to find because they're hidden behind the leaves. As members of the legume family they have hairy pods.

Autumn olive is a bush that that can get up to about 15 feet high. Their leaves are a silvery white color on the bottom. They put on a red fruit that has gray specks on it. The fruit is edible and is spread by birds and other wildlife.

Tactics for controlling perennial plants are different from annuals. Cutting them back is an option, but these plants will keep growing back from their roots. It would take several years of cutting back regrowth to eliminate invasive perennials. Hand pulling can be done while the plants are still small, but you need to remove the entire root system.

Herbicides are usually the most effective way of controlling perennial invasive plants. Even with herbicides, it will take a couple of seasons to get full control. For perennials, you should apply herbicides in the fall. During the fall perennials are moving as many carbohydrates and energy down into their roots as possible. Therefore, if you apply a systemic herbicide the plant will also move the herbicide down into the roots, making the herbicide more effective. As always, whenever you use an herbicide read and follow the label.

If you have questions about identifying or controlling invasive weeds contact your county Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
 P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546

Our office address: tcherald@windstream.net

Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc.

Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

The Towns County Herald is an independent and nonpartisan publication. As such, third-party views contained herein are not necessarily the opinions or positions of this newspaper, e.g. advertising, press releases, editorial content, perspectives expressed in articles covering local events, etc.

Have something to sell?
Let the Herald work for you!

Contact us at
706-896-4454

Deadline for the Towns County Herald is Friday by 5 PM



Publication No: 635540

Advertising, News deadlines: Friday at 5 p.m.

Towns County (1 Year) \$25. Out of County (1 Year) \$35. Entered as second-class matter on November 8, 1928, at the post office at Hiawassee, Georgia under Act of March 3, 1879. With additional mailing points. The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. **Postmaster:** Send change of address to: Towns County Herald, P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 7 "The Mall", Hiawassee
Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: tcherald@windstream.net

Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Kenneth West
 Owner/Publisher

Shawn Jarrard
 General Manager

Todd Forrest
 Staff Writer

Derek Richards
 Advertising Director

Shawn Henrikson
 Copy Editor

Lowell Nicholson
 Photographer