

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## Good Fires Prevent Bad Ones

A controlled or prescribed burn, also known as hazard reduction burning, backfire, swailing, or a burn-off, is a wildfire set intentionally for purposes of forest management, farming, or land clearing.

Fire is a natural part of forest ecology and controlled fire can be a very efficient and economical tool for foresters to achieve desired results when managing forests. Hazard reduction or controlled burning is conducted during the cooler months to reduce fuel buildup and decrease the likelihood of serious hotter out-of-control fires at the wrong time when damage can occur.

Controlled burning stimulates the germination of many desirable forest trees, and reveals soil mineral layers which increases seedling and shrub growth, thus renewing the forest. Some require heat from fire to open cones to disperse seeds and trees like Longleaf must have fire to stimulate growth.

For many species in our forests fire is a necessity for regeneration and nature has always provided it, but federal policies created by government forest managers decades ago thought they knew better than Mother Nature (Smokey Bear campaign) and put policies in place to prevent and suppress all fires in the forest, good and bad. This policy of suppression has created the situation we have today with a huge build-up of natural fuel that creates more fires, hotter fires that are more destructive, and leads to a longer season that grows every year.

These factors make wildfires costlier because it takes more resources to contain and keep the fires away from houses that are built where forests used to be.

There are two basic causes of wildfires. One is natural (lightning) and the other is people. Controlled burns have a long history in wildland management. Pre-agricultural societies used fire to regulate both plant and animal life. Fires, both naturally caused and prescribed, were once part of natural landscapes in many areas. These burning practices ended in the early 20th century when US fire policies were enacted with the goals of suppressing all fires.

Since 1995, the US Forest Service has slowly incorporated burning practices into its forest management policies. Now when you smoke settling in our valley late in the evening it is probably a controlled burn set by professional foresters under the right conditions using the latest technology to predict where the smoke will go once it leaves the forest. Another consideration is the issue of fire prevention.

In Florida, during the drought in 1995, catastrophic wildfires burned numerous homes. But forestry managers in the Florida Division of Forestry noted that the underlying problem was previous cessation of controlled burning, resulting from complaints by homeowners about smoke, but they found out the hard way that you can have smoke under controlled conditions or have it when wildfire is raging out of control around your house. Smoke is the same, results completely different.

Controlled burns utilize back burning during planned fire events to create a "black line" to protect unburned areas from the fire. Back burning or backfiring is also done to stop a wildfire that is already in progress. It is called back burning because the small fires are designed to 'burn back towards the main fire front' and are usually burning and traveling against ground level winds. Firebreaks are also often used as an anchor point to start a line of fires along natural or man-made features such as a river, road, or a bulldozed clearing. Each year additional leaf litter and dropped branches increased the likelihood of a hot and uncontrollable fire.

Controlled burns are sometimes ignited using a tool known as the driptorch, which allows a steady stream of flaming fuel to be directed to the ground as needed. Helicopters or drones drop ping-pong balls filled with chemicals that ignite on contact to light fires, and other improvised devices such as mounting a driptorch-like device on the side of an ATV.

High temperatures from fires can harm the soil, damaging it physically, chemically or sterilizing it, but controlled burns tend to have lower temperatures and will not harm the soil as much as wildfires, though steps can be taken to treat the soil after a burn. Controlled burning reduces fuels, may improve wildlife habitat, controls competing vegetation, improves short term forage for grazing, improves accessibility, helps control tree disease, and perpetuates fire dependent species.

In mature longleaf pine forest, it helps maintain habitat for endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers in their sandhill and flatwoods habitats. I have participated in 3 events in the past 2 weeks concerning prescribed burning and on June 6th we will have our North Georgia Prescribed Fire Council in Jasper at the Chattahoochee Technical College to hear experts talk about prescribed fire. We are expecting 300 folks who are interested in Prescribed burning so join us. You can register at [www.garxfire.com/events.htm](http://www.garxfire.com/events.htm).

For more information on controlled burns contact your local Georgia Forestry Commission office or US Forest Service office in your area or Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D [www.chestchattcd.org](http://www.chestchattcd.org).

### 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, PO Box 365, Hiawasse, GA 30546. Our email address: [tcherald@windstream.net](mailto: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.*

**RC&D**  
**Frank Riley**  
Executive Director



## To Catch A Thief

Most of us have experienced theft at some point in our lives. Anger is a normal response, but a sting of betrayal can follow, for thieves take more than material possessions. They take peace of mind and faith in humanity.

Some thieves steal out of need or desperation. Some do it for the thrill. Some thieves are as blunt as a bludgeon. Some are as cunning as a politician. Woody Guthrie said, "As through this world I've wandered, I've seen lots of funny men; Some will rob you with a six gun, and some with a fountain pen."

Like most places on Earth, we have our share of theft. The crime rate here in the peaceful valleys of North Georgia is lower than in many parts of the world; lower than many places within our own state. We have some break-ins and other incidents, but we rarely have to endure anything as dramatic as the nightly shooting report from the city. For this, we are ever grateful.

There is another kind of crime, however, that is not uncommon in our area. It is rarely prosecuted. It is not even considered a crime by some of its well-heeled perpetrators. This crime happens all over the country where there are old farms and old buildings, places that the uninformed or insensitive might consider neglected or abandoned.

The perpetrators of this crime sometimes look just like you and me. They are well mannered and often well-regarded members of our community. Like many of us, they might appreciate quaint old things or enjoy collecting antiques and such. You may even know some of these people yourself, people who do not "need" to steal anything.

Unfortunately they seem to have a misguided notion that it is acceptable to rummage about private property if that property appears sufficiently remote, neglected, or "abandoned," as some have said. They seem to believe that stealing from an old farm is "rescue" or "salvage."

You, dear reader, know better. You know that old houses, old barns and old out-buildings may look abandoned. They may actually be neglected. But this does not mean that they are not cherished. Sometimes here in the country we let our old buildings take their own time returning to the ground. They hold memories, better than any photograph ever could, and there is a quiet kind of dignity in just letting them be.

We know that some people disagree, but if we had a microscope, we would still be unable to locate the slightest interest in a drive-through opinion of what constitutes an "eyesore."

This does not mean that we don't appreciate beauty and order. We respect natural order and live according to its rhythms. We believe that what time and nature do to old farms, old buildings, and old people - is beautiful. Nevertheless, we still sigh with sadness at the sagging roof or the cracked window at the place where our grandmother once greeted children with smiles and sweetbread. We miss the carpet of flowers that used to decorate the neighbor's farmhouse, before his wife passed away and arthritis limited his ability to garden. Some of us wish that the job that kept us on the road so much had given us more time to drive an extra nail or pull more weeds. There are only so many days in a lifetime.

Some of us wish that our backs were straighter, that we still had the strength to mend the old barn where we were mighty in our youth, where our children learned about life and death and where our grandchildren played before they all grew up and moved away. When we look out the window and see someone digging up bulbs from the old "neglected" flower bed, they are digging in our memories. When they put a shoulder to that closed door, and then carry out something "quaint" and "abandoned," we are wounded. We feel an anger that would call down lightning, and when that passes, we feel the weight of the years even more.

Now as to the thief who is the subject of this week's discussion, we must assume you are smart enough to read a newspaper. You were smart enough to earn the money to buy the new SUV you drove. Chances are that you might not even consider yourself a thief, but you are. Be advised: Some of us who love old places still have strong backs, very likely stronger than yours. We are the ones who put up the posted signs that you chose to disregard and climbed the trees to hang security cameras, in the shadows. You won't see them. But we will see you. We were reluctant to do all this, but you, and others like you, keep coming, and digging, and taking.

In a quiet, remote grove of an old homestead there is an old log barn that was built a century ago. It is a simple structure, but a family treasure. The roof is kept in good repair. The sills are still sound and the little barn sits high and dry above the ground. You came quite a distance through the woods, thief, to get to that barn. You damaged the frame when you pried off the door. It wasn't locked. Maybe you thought that you would take it with you, but it was too heavy to carry. You forced out a beam from the wall, leaving an ugly gap in the side of the barn. Your desire for that "quaint" old beam did not come close to justifying your theft. It was a load bearing beam, and now the entire wall sags. Left unattended the whole structure would soon have fallen to the ground, after all these years.

The wall will be repaired, but a memory of the quality of your character will persist, as well as an electronically preserved image of your face. Remember those cameras we mentioned earlier? They take remarkable pictures. Don't come back.

### Have something to sell?

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Deadline for the Towns County Herald is Friday by 5 PM

## The Middle Path

By: Don Perry

## Fire Ants

Fire ants are very common throughout Georgia. Thankfully, we don't have as many in the mountains as they do south of us. But, once you experience a fire ant bite, you won't ever forget it. Another problem with fire ants is that you rarely get just one bite. Fire ants were first reported in Georgia in the 1950s. They've been found all the way from North Carolina to Texas, and down to Florida.

The summer after my first year of college I worked at an orchard picking peaches. We'd be going from tree to tree picking fruit. You'd look up into the tree when all of a sudden your leg would feel like it was on fire. That person would usually run off into the trees ripping their shoes and socks off trying to get the fire ants off. Let's talk about fire ants and things that you can do to control them so that they don't take over your lawn or pasture.

If you can manage to get an up close look without being bitten and stung you'll see that fire ants have two nodes between their abdomen at the end of their body and the thorax in the middle of their body. Fire ants generally like to stay in open grassy areas.

Fire ants are most active when temperatures are between 70 and 85. In the fall fire ants are most active because they are foraging for food. This makes Fall the best time to treat them. Treatment during the spring and summer is also possible, but effective population control will be less likely.

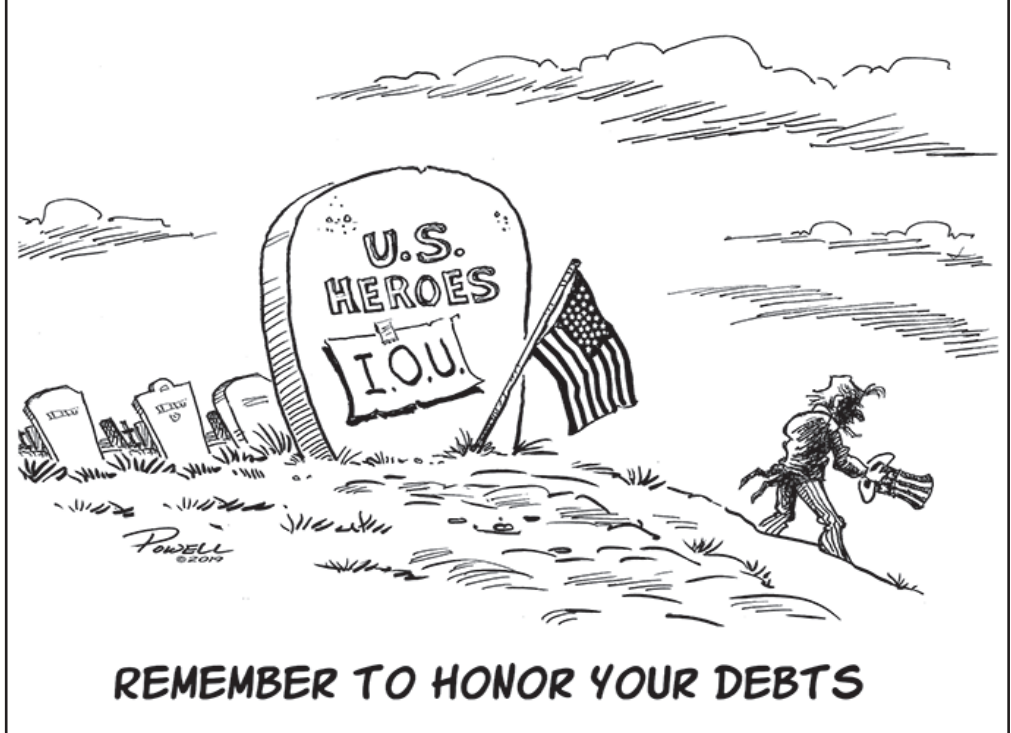
Using a bait will be the most effective way of controlling fire ants. Either broadcast the bait over the mounds, or in a four foot circle around each mound. There are a number of baits that can be used. Amdro B, Ascend, Distance Fire Ant Bait, Spectracide, Once 'n' Done, and Extinguish are baits recommended in the Georgia Pest Management handbook. If a few mounds remain after seven to ten days, a follow up application of Orthene will be effective against those problematic mounds. Take a long stick and quickly put a hole in the center of the mound. Then fill the hole with insecticide to eliminate those mounds. When applying pesticides always make sure to read and follow the label.

Pouring about 3 gallons of water onto a mound will usually eliminate the mound, if it is done in the morning when more ants are close to the soil surface. It is also possible to coerce fire ants to move from sensitive areas by continually knocking down their colonies.

There are not many natural controls for fire ants in the United States because they are an invasive species. Fire ants are native to South America and have many natural enemies there. Researchers have to be very careful about introducing a natural predator, because the effects of that introduced species are unknown on our ecosystem.

If you have any questions about fire ants and fire ant control, contact your local Extension Office or send me an email at [Jacob.Williams@uga.edu](mailto:Jacob.Williams@uga.edu).

**UGA**  
extension  
**Watching and Working**  
Jacob Williams



## Towns County Community Calendar

	Every Monday:	
Bridge Players	All Saints Lutheran	12:30 pm
Free GED prep.	Every Tuesday:	4 pm
	Old Rec. Center	
SMART Recovery	Every Wednesday	7 pm
	Red Cross Building	
Bridge Players	Every Thursday:	12:30 pm
Free GED prep.	All Saints Lutheran	4 pm
	Old Rec. Center	
Movers & Shakers	Every Friday:	8 am
Alcoholics Anon.	Sundance Grill	7 pm
	Red Cross Building	
Alcoholics Anon.	Every Sunday:	7 pm
	Red Cross Building	
Alzheimer's Supp.	First Tuesday of each month:	1:30 pm
American Legion	McConnell Church	4 pm
Hiaw. City Council	VFW Post 7807	6 pm
Young Harris Coun.	City Hall	7 pm
	YH City Hall	
Quilting Bee	First Wednesday of each month:	10 am
	McConnell Church	
Stephens Lodge	First Thursday of each month:	7:30 pm
	Lodge Hall	
YH Plan Comm.	Third Tuesday of each month:	5 pm
Co. Comm. Mtg.	YH City Hall	5:30 pm
Humane Shelter Bd.	Courthouse	5:30 pm
Water Board	Blairsville store	6 pm
	Water Office	
Quilting Bee	Third Wednesday of each month:	10 am
Book Bunch & Lunch	McConnell Church	11:30 am
	Daniels Steakhouse	
Friendship Comm.	Third Thursday of each month:	6 pm
Republican Party	Clubhouse	5:30 pm
	Civic Center	
Goldwing Riders	Third Saturday of each month:	11 am
	Daniel's Restaurant	
Red Cross DAT	Fourth Monday of each month:	5:30 pm
	1298 Jack Dayton Cir.	
Lions Club	Fourth Tuesday of each month:	6 pm
	Daniel's Restaurant	
Hiaw. Writers	Fourth Thursday	10:30
Hiaw. Garden Club	Hiaw. Pk. Comm. Rm.	12:45 pm
	Clubhouse	
Humane Shelter Bd.	Last Thursday of each month:	5:30 pm
	Cadence Bank	

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## Towns County Herald

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