

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Fire-Adapted Communities

Fire-Adapted Communities Pay Big Dividends

RC&D
Frank Riley
Executive Director



The Fire Adapted Communities Network (FACNET) originated in Boise Idaho in 2013 and Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D Council (CCRCD) was invited to be one of the first 8 "FACNET Pilot Hubs" and we were the only network member east of the Mississippi. The others were all located in the west where the wildfire danger was intense. The Fire Adapted Network has now grown to 18 network members with 3 east of the Mississippi. Besides CCRCD there is one in New Jersey (yes, they have wildfires in NJ) and one in Minnesota. From this beginning CCRCD has grown from one county (Towns) to 74 covering western North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, Northwest Georgia, and western South Carolina.

Our Towns County Firewise Coalition is a perfect example of a group doing something before a fire happens in our communities. Fire seasons have lengthened so much that we now use the term fire year, firefighting costs are breaking new records, and loss of life and property are part of an alarming new pattern. The ability to mitigate these impacts with community collaboration is critically important.

Several groups are taking a hard look at the rising costs of fighting wildfire versus the benefits of mitigation investments before the flames arrive. Studies like the Tale of Two Fires and True Cost of Wildfires illustrate a cost-benefit ratio as high as \$5 saved for every \$1 spent on fuels treatments.

In recent years, several examples of community mitigation efforts have emerged to demonstrate the trade-off values of doing work before the fire, across property boundaries and within communities. One of these examples is the Timber Crater 6 fire near Crater Lake, Oregon. A series of dry lightning storms passed through the Cascade Mountains in July 2018 and started the fire. The potential destructive path of this fire included over 20,000 acres of the Crater Lake recreation area, and several small, neighboring communities. But existing fuels treatments on federal and private lands helped fire managers prevent large-scale destruction and minimize the threat to the public. In the end, not a single structure was lost, and the fire was contained at 3,126 acres.

The key to community mitigation efforts is more than fuels treatments on federal lands. Collaborating with state co-operators, non-federal partners, and private citizens is where the true success of fire-adapted communities begins. Many states provide homeowners with matching funds for defensible space projects and other fuel reduction efforts. The Forest Service, National Fire Protection Association, and the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety provide a handy homeowner tip sheet to prepare residents for the wind-blown embers responsible for destroying most homes regardless of surrounding fuels work.

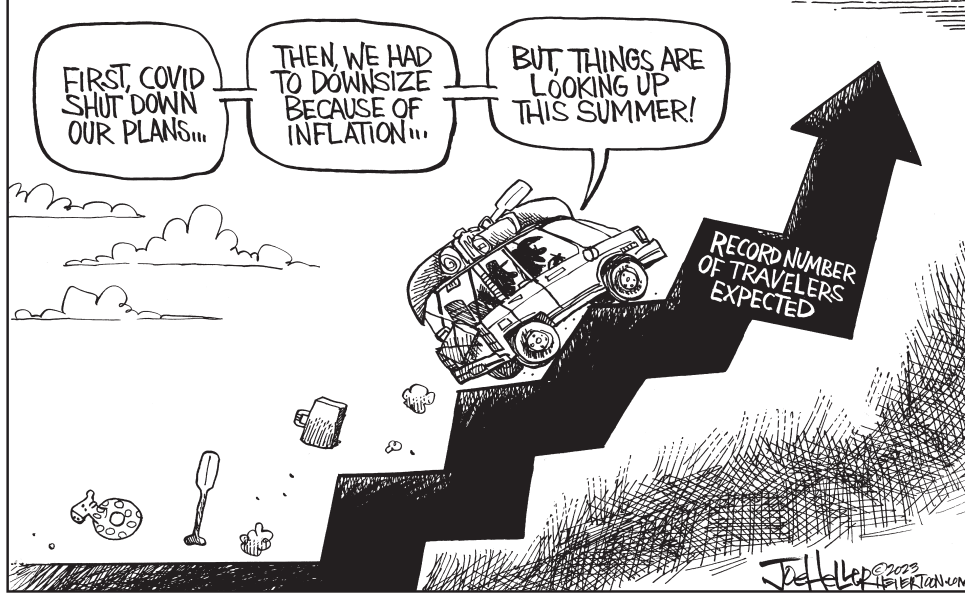
In response to the 2015 wildfire season, the Forest Service created a Community Mitigation Assessment Team program to work with communities and partners who are motivated to address both the immediate home ignition zone and forested lands in surrounding areas.

CMAT teams help communities build sustainable local capacity for wildfire mitigation during high-risk times before, during or after a wildfire when awareness of the need for risk reduction and the likelihood of action is highest. CMAT works collaboratively with communities to build cross-boundary mitigation partnerships that focus on reducing risk strategically. The team integrates community fire adaptation best practices and resilient landscapes concepts outlined in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Lastly, since wildfire does not recognize property boundaries, the Forest Service has worked to create resilience within communities by providing training, information, and opportunities. Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together, or PERFECT, is addressing the country's wildfire problems head on by supporting the people who are creating change on the ground. This work empowers local people to navigate their own pathway toward a better relationship with fire. The intent is to connect them with other people, programs, tools, and ideas that they can adapt and use to help their communities live better with fire. This program works with people over a period of several years, making small, sustained investments as they tackle their challenges.

Fire Adapted Communities is not a program, but a way of life for people living in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). They must adapt their lifestyles to recognize the risks where they live and do something about them in their everyday life. It is not drastic changes, but now that they live in the WUI and not the city they must conform to the WUI life or one day face the fact that "I should have done something to reduce the risks before the wildfire was sweeping up the ridge toward their homes and it is too late. Many people face this situation every year and some even live to talk about it. The investments we make today are paying large dividends on the landscapes of tomorrow.

For more information go to www.fireadaptednetwork.org or www.chestatetrcd.org.



Watering Plants

As you may have noticed, we had a dry May this year. All plants, but especially annuals (such as veggies) and freshly planted perennials, are affected by dry weather, because their root systems are not yet large enough to support the plant and do not yet efficiently collect water from surrounding soils. There is a fine balance to be observed when irrigating plants, though: Too much water will wash nutrients away from young roots and may cause rot, while too little or shallow watering will either allow the plant to dehydrate or bring the roots too close to the hot surface of the soil.

UGA extension
UNION COUNTY
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

In general, vegetable plants would rather have more thorough and less frequent watering. When the entire topsoil layer is saturated at least twice a week, the roots of a vegetable plant will tend to grow downward, towards the damper and cooler soil beneath them. Not only will the root system collect water more efficiently, it will also draw the roots away from the drier and hotter surface of the soil. This promotes a healthier plant growth pattern, reducing the need for external watering when there is a rain and lowering the chances of the root system being attacked by unwanted fungi.

In the case of other young transplants, such as fruit trees, bushes and shrubs, flowering perennials and other ornamental plants, the amount of water will usually vary due to the soil it was planted in, the size of the original root ball and plant, and the type of plant being watered. For example, a young apple tree from a 3-gallon pot transplanted in clay-based soil will require less frequent watering than a group of raspberry starts in the same soil, due to the higher amount of water loss through the leaves (transpiration) in the raspberry starts. It is always best to check the sticker or plant tag that came with the plant for advice first, but as a general rule of thumb, water trees and ornamental shrubs enough to keep the soil 4 to 6" around the root ball (including below it) moist, but not soggy, every other day that it does not rain. Continue this until they are established. For starts such as blueberries, raspberry and blackberries, hydrangeas, and vining flowers and fruits (like clematis), water 4-6" around the root ball every day it does not rain until they are established in the soil.

Common sense applies in this process as well: if the soil around the plant is still about as moist as it should be at day 2, then hold off on watering until it begins to dry again. A good "quick-n-dirty" test for soil moisture is to grab a handful, squeeze it in your hand, and let go. Optimal moisture content is when most of the soil is still in a ball in your hand, but when you touch it, it begins to break apart again.

In vegetables, it usually takes until the first fruit is set and ripening on the plant for the roots to be fully developed. This typically (of course, depending on the kind of plant) takes anywhere between 3 and 6 weeks from the date of transplant. For trees and shrubs (and blue, black and raspberries, etc.) usually takes most of a growing season to accomplish. For example, if a blueberry bush were set out in early May, it would need this kind of watering until the end of August, and maybe longer depending on the timing of rain or heat.

If you have any questions about watering, contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

The Tree

As a young man one of my mentors was an American Literature teacher that didn't mind a young boy tagging along on his hiking and hunting trips. Mr. Gary was always ready to go on a hunting trip. We walked all over the Cohutta Mountains and the Blueridge management Area. One thing he always looked for was a gap in between ridges with White Oaks on them. We had found one place that fit this criteria over close to Little Rock Creek and we hunted there year after year and always found and seen bucks in this spot. Early one morning we climbed up this ridge looking for our spot and much to our surprise we found our favorite spot had been logged out. As we sat around the campfire later that evening my mentor came to a major decision. Each time we found a good spot with White Oak Trees he would place a sign on one of the trees. The sign read, "Cursed Be He that Cuts a White Oak Tree". HE placed these signs on the following management areas: Cohutta, Blueridge, Pigeon Mountain and John's Mountain.

Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings

Over the years White Oaks became a favorite of mine and each time I walked by one on my own property I would inspect it just as if it were an old long lost friend. Then in 1997 my wife and I built the house where we now reside where we carefully marked all the trees we wanted to save and cut the ones we culled. One of these saved trees was the big White Oak on the west side of our house. The first October in our new home was interesting for our sons. Their bedrooms were directly beneath the old tree and the acorns falling used to keep them up at night. The boys never complained though and over time falling acorns each fall became a way of marking another year. However, over the past few years the old tree became a danger to our house and roof. So, after much agonizing we decided to take the tree down.

After the tree came down I examined the rings of the tree and realized the tree had much to say about history. One hundred nine rings revealed the tree had experienced many good years and bad years during its lifetime and it basically watched my family grow and mature. This particular tree could be considered as a book on the history of my family as well as a history of our country.

This tree sprouted in 1914 just a couple of years after Arthur Woody became one of Georgia's first Forest Rangers. This man is considered a great in the annals of wildlife management and conservation. He watched his Daddy shoot the last deer in Union County and he was the person most responsible for bringing the white-tailed deer back to Georgia. During his career Woody founded the Blueridge Management Area which was the first management area in Georgia. He also secured and purchased thousands of acres of land which would one day become the Chattahoochee National Forest. The white oak on my land sprouted 60 feet from this National Forest. The tree will not let us forget that Woody was also responsible for the restocking of Brook Trout in the streams of our area as well as Bear and Turkey.

The tree noticed the fact that the people of Union County placed a great emphasis on educating their children because in 1918 the school system budget had increased to \$852.80. 1919 was a year of sadness for the nation because Theodore Roosevelt passed away. He was a former President of our nation, but maybe more importantly in our Tree's view he was an early conservationist and spearheaded the movement to set aside lands for protection and the enjoyment of future generations of Americans through the creation of state and national parks. This paved the way for the Vogel Land Company to donate 300 acres of land to state government to create Vogel State Park in 1927.

I wonder if our tree heard the fall of Wall Street in the stock market crash in 1929. There is no indication in the growth ring of that year. In 1933 another Roosevelt created a group called the Civilian Conservation Corp or the CCC boys. This idea provided much needed jobs to not only the nation but to many families here in Union County. The CCC also planted trees and provided much needed work for conservation projects all across the nation. I know my own family benefitted from the money my grandfathers earned through working with the CCC during a time when there was no money because there were no jobs.

The late 1930's saw the whole world become embroiled in another war to end all wars. I am not sure if the tree was aware of this conflict. But, it had to be exposed because close to the tree is the Old Butsnort Road that was once used but was abandoned years ago. I wonder if the tree was aware of the countless lives which were lost or the grieving mothers who lost sons during the great conflict. We all know the war ended in 1945 and all those boomers came home and created a time of great growth in the United States. I am not sure the tree was concerned with this great growth because the tree rings reveal that this time for it was a slow growth. There must have been a drought during this period because there are a few years where the rings of the tree were very narrow during the mid 1940's.

Was the tree aware of the assassination of John Kennedy or of Armstrong walking on the moon in the 1960's? Did the tree have knowledge of Nixon resignation in 1974 or the Bicentennial of this great nation in 1976? Did the tree know or even care that we purchased the property on which it sits in the 1990's? Did the tree hear my family cry and then become angry when we saw what a group of terrorists did to our country in 2001?

I know that our White Oak Tree was not aware of all these events during its lifetime. But, it was here during all these events and watching it fall saddened me when it fell. Because my family grew up under the shade of this great tree. I hope that my friend Gary did not put a curse on me because I cut it down.

Letters To The Editor

What if

Dear Editor,

Let's suppose the bible is all a hoax. Not a word printed in it is true. There was never a God who created everything. There was never a redemption plan for mankind. When we die, that's it. Life is over, so there is no glorious heaven awaiting anyone. The story of the cross where a man named Jesus died for mankind's sin: pure hogwash. All the made-up stories and parables in the bible were written to please your fancy. All the characters, like the apostles and disciples and ruling nations, were someone's imagination. All the men who supposedly wrote the bible never existed. They too were fictional characters like any other novel, just a good read.

If God had a purpose and a will for all of us in His plan, then would He not have told us so and not kept everything a secret for Himself - all speculation. Doesn't really hold any water of truth. Everybody has a right to their own opinion, even if they are wrong. Being a believer in Christ, I can personally testify of the truthfulness of God's word. I, myself, was an atheist when I was younger and stupid as a fool, but when the Lord God came seeking me, the ball game was over and God showed me the right bases to run.

In Psalm chapter 14 verse 1: The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. This is God speaking and He even calls the atheist a madman, a simpleton out of his mind. The universe that is timed more accurately than a watch tells us that there is a universe-maker. I heard of a man who had an I.Q. of 140, and he was playing golf with another fellow and it started raining hard, and the I.Q. whizz asked his playing partner, what should we do? As I replied, "We better get out of the rain, stupid." If a man says there is no God and can't decide whether or not to get out of the rain, no wonder he can't understand that there is a God who made the rain fall, even on a fool.

What if there is a God who is alive and living in heaven and He wants you and me to come live with Him in glory when we pass from this life into the next? Please don't waste your life on fictional things; look at the non-fictional truth of God's word. We all must make wise choices that determine our final destination. Heaven or Hell.

Frank F. Combs

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.

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month: School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday: Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month: Hiaw. City Council... City Hall YH City Council... YH City Hall	6 pm 6:30 pm
Second Tuesday of each month: Conventions & Visitors Board... Civic Center	8 am
Second Wednesday of each month: Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month: Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month: Commissioner's Mtg... Courthouse City of Young Harris Planning Commission... Meeting Room in City Hall Water Board... Water Office	5:30 pm 5 pm 6 pm

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Phone: (706) 896-4454 **Fax:** (706) 896-1745 **Email:** tcherald@windstream.net
Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawasse, GA 30546