



Florida Forest Service

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

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Florida Forest Service and Cross Florida Greenways Join Together to Reduce Wildfire Risk in Marion County

GAINESVILLE, Fla.— Florida Forest Service and Cross Florida Greenways/Florida Department of Environmental Protection are joining together to reduce wildfire risk in Marion County. The agencies will soon begin a large-scale mitigation mowing project along Cross Florida Greenways property bordering Oak Run subdivision located in southwest Marion County.

The reduction of vegetative fuels will result in reducing the risk from the potential damaging effects from wildfires should they occur in the area. Communities with a high build-up of fuels can be considered high-risk areas or areas of concern. This particular project will involve mowing 10 miles of boundary lines, 66 feet wide. The predominant fuel types are sandhill, pine, and oak hammocks.

Florida's wildfire season is twelve months a year. The primary cause, frequency, and size is what changes. The time of year when the most wildfires occur with the largest number of acres typically extends from March through June. The potential for wildfires increases due to relatively dry months, combined with low humidity and high winds during spring and early summer. Most lightning caused fires occur in July, coinciding with the peak of the thunderstorm season. Central Florida is well known for the largest concentration of cloud-to-ground lightning strikes in the world. Dry weather and drought conditions are major contributing factors in the size and severity of a wildfire. Fuel load is a factor in fire intensity and speaks to the need for well managed forest lands.

Florida's natural environment is adapted to fire and most forest ecosystems need regular cycles of fire to be healthy. Efforts to eliminate fire from the natural environment has served to make these events much more severe when they do occur due to accumulated vegetative fuels. This severity impacts the health of the ecosystem and puts neighboring developments in danger. Residents in Florida vary in their understanding and acceptance of the use of prescribed fire and mechanical fuel management methods.

Fuel load is another factor in fire intensity and speaks to the need for well managed forest lands. Marion County has a large rural population. People and facilities located in rural, wooded areas are particularly vulnerable to wildfire. Subdivisions should be designed using Firewise principles.

Homeowners need to create at least 30 feet of cleared area around their house for defensible space. This house-by-house mitigation strategy will be the most effective means to reduce the level of wildfire vulnerability in Marion County due to the large size of the County and the rural distribution of the unincorporated population.

While the entire county is at risk for wildfire, pasture and oak hammock fires in Dunnellon and Reddick, timber and deep muck fires in Ft. McCoy and Orange Springs, and cogon grass fires in Silver Springs Shores are at the highest risk for potentially damaged jurisdictions. Areas with lower amounts of vegetation such as urban areas, which include, the City of Ocala, Belleview and portions of unincorporated County near the urban core which are densely developed have a low vulnerability to wildfire.

The Ocala National Forest is considered the area of greatest vulnerability in Marion County. The boundaries of the western edge of the Forest are not defined by a clear line of ownership but are scattered with out-parcels of residential use. There are pockets and corridors of significant populations located within and throughout the Forest boundaries. These populations and the critical facilities located in or near the Ocala National Forest are vulnerable to wildfires. Appropriate mitigation can come in the form of enhanced warning systems and the establishment of defensible spaces around all structures.

The goal of the Florida Forest Service's wildfire hazard mitigation program is to reduce or prevent future wildland fires including efforts to improve land by removing debris that is likely to contribute to the number, intensity, and duration of future wildfires.

The Florida Forest Service, a division of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, manages more than 1 million acres of state forests and provides forest management assistance on more than 17 million acres of private and community forests. The Florida Forest Service is also responsible for protecting homes, forestland, and natural resources from the devastating effects of wildfire on more than 26 million acres. Learn more at [FDACS.gov/FLForestService](https://fdacs.gov/FLForestService).

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