

# Fire Conditions on Public Forests & Rangelands

## A Survey of Citizens in Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida



### Summary Frequency Distributions January 2002

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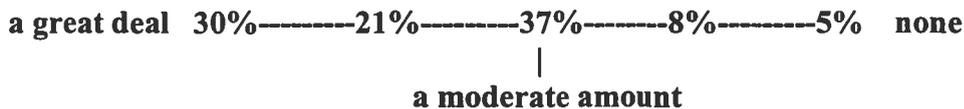
This preliminary report summarizes responses to a mail survey of citizens in communities surrounding the Osceola National Forest and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Overall, 385 citizens were contacted and 82 completed the questionnaire for a 21% response rate. This report is a summary of frequency distributions only. Some response categories have been collapsed for presentation purposes (e.g. *strongly agree* and *agree* responses were combined into a single category). A more detailed analysis will be forthcoming in the final project report.

**Please note: Research for this project is still in progress. Do not cite information contained within this report without permission of the authors.**



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1. Prior to this survey, how much had you thought about wildfires in forests and grasslands?



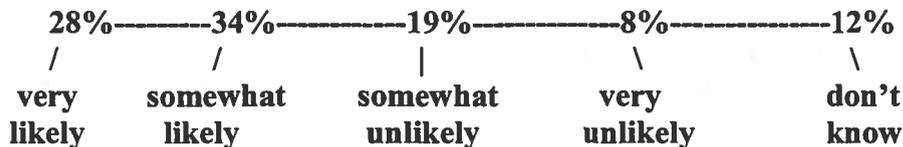
2. About how far is it from your home to a natural area where a wildfire might burn?

mean = 3.8 miles

3. About how often do you spend time in a national forest or national wildlife refuge?

9%	never	8%	about once a month
38%	less than once a year	9%	about once a week
32%	a few times a year	2%	several times a week
		2%	daily

4. In your opinion, how would you rate the likelihood that a wildfire could break out in the forest near your home in the next five years?



5. Public trust in natural resource organizations is essential to the success of fire protection programs. Please indicate your level of trust in these organizations to make good decisions *about wildfires and fire prevention*. If you feel you have no basis for judgment, please mark "no opinion."

	Level of Trust		
	moderate/full	none/limited	no opinion
city government	37%	44%	19%
county government	48%	37%	15%
Georgia state government	48%	15%	37%
Florida state government	52%	21%	27%
U.S. Forest Service	78%	11%	11%
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	74%	15%	11%
private timber and paper companies	55%	29%	16%

6. We're interested in learning more about what residents of Georgia and Florida know about wildfires. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability by indicating whether you believe the answer is generally true, generally false, or that you are not sure.

	generally true	generally false	not sure
▶ Humans cause most of the wildfires in Georgia and Florida.	69%	26%	5%
▶ Fires kill a majority of animals in a burned area.	29%	46%	25%
▶ Fires kill a majority of large trees in a burned area.	59%	31%	11%
▶ Fires play an important role in controlling insects and diseases that can threaten forest trees.	52%	19%	29%
▶ The quality of water in streams and rivers is often badly degraded in the first year or two after a wildfire.	31%	32%	37%
▶ Fires reduce the numbers of biting insects in the woods.	35%	37%	28%
▶ Many plants require occasional fires so that new seeds or seedlings can sprout.	66%	14%	20%
▶ Fires are important for maintaining habitat for deer and game birds in forests of Florida and Georgia.	40%	32%	28%

7. The next few questions ask for your opinions about specific practices that resource managers can use to change environmental conditions in forests. Please read the descriptions below, then answer the questions about management practices which follow.

- **Prescribed fire** – Also called controlled burning, this practice can involve 1) letting a naturally caused fire burn under close and careful watch; or 2) intentionally setting fires in ways that can be controlled to produce desired conditions and protect against undesired results.
- **Mechanical vegetation removal** – Managers can use chainsaws, mowers, or other specialized machines to reduce the number of shrubs and small trees where they are so numerous that they increase the risk and size of wildfires.
- **Grazing** – In some cases, domestic animals can be placed in areas where they graze on plants before they dry out in summer, thus reducing the amount of flammable vegetation later on.

For each of the following questions, choose the answer that best matches your opinion.

a. In my opinion, intentionally setting **prescribed fires** on **public** forests and wildlife refuges is:

- ▶ a legitimate tool that resource managers should be able to use whenever they see fit. 60%
- ▶ something that should be done only infrequently, in carefully selected areas. 32%
- ▶ a practice that should not be considered because it creates too many negative impacts. 2%
- ▶ an unnecessary practice. 0%
- ▶ I know too little to make a judgment about this topic. 6%

b. In my opinion, landowners setting **prescribed fires** on **privately** owned forests is:

- ▶ a legitimate tool that resource managers should be able to use whenever they see fit. 39%
- ▶ something that should be done only infrequently, in carefully selected areas. 37%
- ▶ a practice that should not be considered because it creates too many negative impacts. 9%
- ▶ an unnecessary practice. 6%
- ▶ I know too little to make a judgment about this topic. 9%

c. In your opinion, which of the following statements is most true about the use of livestock **grazing** to prevent wildfires on *public* forests? It is:

- ▶ a legitimate tool that resource managers should be able to use whenever they see fit. 51%
- ▶ something that should be done only infrequently, in carefully selected areas. 12%
- ▶ a practice that should not be considered because it creates too many negative impacts. 6%
- ▶ an unnecessary practice. 5%
- ▶ I know too little to make a judgment about this topic. 26%

d. In my opinion, **mechanical vegetation removal** on public forests and rangelands is:

- ▶ a legitimate tool that resource managers should be able to use whenever they see fit. 51%
- ▶ something that should be done only infrequently, in carefully selected areas. 29%
- ▶ a practice that should not be considered because it creates too many negative impacts. 3%
- ▶ an unnecessary practice. 5%
- ▶ I know too little to make a judgment about this topic. 12%

8. To help natural resource managers make decisions about public forests and wildlife refuges, please tell us how you feel about the following issues by circling the number that best matches your agreement with each statement.

	<b>agree/ strongly agree</b>	<b>uncertain</b>	<b>disagree/ strongly disagree</b>
Following nature's way is preferable to human intervention in ecosystems.	49%	29%	22%
All fires, regardless of origin, should be put out as soon as possible.	23%	16%	61%
Selectively thinning dead and dying trees is better than leaving them in the forest.	61%	22%	17%
Fire risks are so great in this area that managers need to use any means necessary to reduce them.	52%	22%	27%

9. Which of the following statements best reflects your beliefs about the frequency of prescribed fires in public forests and wildlife refuges?

- ▶ Public forests and wildlife refuges are burned more frequently than necessary. 2%
- ▶ Public forests and wildlife refuges are burned about as often as they should be. 19%
- ▶ Public forests and wildlife refuges should be burned more frequently than they are. 34%
- ▶ I know too little about this topic to make a judgment. 45%

10. The use of prescribed fire may create concerns for some people. Please indicate how concerned you are about the following possible effects.

	<b>moderate concern/ great concern</b>	<b>not a concern/ slight concern</b>
▶ damage to private property	55%	45%
▶ effects on recreation opportunities	37%	63%
▶ loss of wildlife and fish habitat	56%	44%
▶ risk to human safety	65%	35%
▶ risk of cinders starting an unplanned fire	73%	27%
▶ economic loss of useable timber	45%	55%
▶ reduced scenic quality	42%	58%
▶ increased levels of smoke	55%	45%
▶ deteriorated public water supply	41%	59%
▶ hazard to driving safety	59%	41%
▶ increased soil erosion	43%	57%

11. Not everyone agrees about the impacts and effectiveness of fuels management practices such as prescribed fire or livestock grazing. We'd like to know what *you* believe. For each of the following statements, please circle the number that best reflects your belief about the accuracy of the statement. You are not being judged on right or wrong answers – we are interested in your opinion. If you feel you do not know enough to give an opinion, circle “don't know” for that statement.

	<b>agree/ strongly agree</b>	<b>disagree/ strongly disagree</b>	<b>don't know</b>
Prescribed fire has little overall effect on the intensity or frequency of wildfires.	<b>21%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>16%</b>
Prescribed fire effectively reduces amounts of fuel in most natural areas.	<b>72%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Prescribed fire stimulates the growth of native plants eaten by wildlife.	<b>73%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>25%</b>
Prescribed fire reduces the amount of useful minerals and nutrients in the soil.	<b>6%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Biting insects are less of a problem in areas that are burned frequently.	<b>42%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>38%</b>
Prescribed fire improves growth of forest trees by cutting competition from undergrowth.	<b>84%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Mechanical vegetation removal is an effective way to reduce the intensity and frequency of wildfires.	<b>58%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Mechanical removal often leaves behind unacceptable amounts of fuel in natural areas.	<b>30%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>48%</b>
Mechanical vegetation removal stimulates the growth of native plants eaten by wildlife.	<b>37%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>47%</b>

12. Some people worry about prescribed fire reaching their property, or a place that they care about. How concerned would you be if a prescribed fire was:

	<b>moderate concern/ great concern</b>	<b>not a concern/ slight concern</b>
▶ anywhere in the U.S.?	<b>31%</b>	<b>69%</b>
▶ within 100 miles of you?	<b>30%</b>	<b>70%</b>
▶ where you can see the smoke?	<b>54%</b>	<b>46%</b>
▶ within 10 miles of your community or property?	<b>58%</b>	<b>42%</b>
▶ one mile from your community or property?	<b>75%</b>	<b>25%</b>
▶ adjacent to your property?	<b>86%</b>	<b>14%</b>

13. Which of the following items reflect your opinion about smoke from prescribed fire.

▶ Smoke from prescribed fire has never been an issue with me.	<b>agree 31%</b>
▶ Smoke from prescribed fire is a necessary inconvenience.	<b>51%</b>
▶ Smoke levels from prescribed fire are a concern, but I think they are managed acceptably.	<b>46%</b>
▶ I worry about the effects of smoke from prescribed fire on public health.	<b>54%</b>
▶ I worry about the effects of smoke from prescribed fire on travel safety.	<b>57%</b>
▶ Because of the smoke, prescribed fire isn't worth it.	<b>3%</b>

14. About how often do you find that you are inconvenienced at your home because of smoke from prescribed fires?

**6% several times a year**  
**15% about once a year**  
**29% once every few years**  
**49% never**

15. About how often do you find that you are inconvenienced while driving because of smoke from prescribed fires?

**14% several times a year**  
**21% about once a year**  
**37% once every few years**  
**28% never**

16. Even though prescribed fires are planned in order to minimize smoke, some smoke is usually unavoidable. We would like to know how much smoke is acceptable to you, and what is the amount of time that you can tolerate at each level. For each statement, please place an X in the box that best matches your level of tolerance for that level of smoke intensity.

**Acceptable length of time**

	<b>Not Acceptable</b>	<b>A Few Hours</b>	<b>One Day</b>	<b>Three Days</b>	<b>One Week</b>	<b>More than One Week</b>
<b>Visibility</b>						
a. Smoke plumes visible in the distance, but no decrease in visual quality near my residence or workplace.	2%	20%	13%	13%	16%	36%
b. Light haze visible on the horizon and some decrease in visual quality, but not enough to affect my activities.	3%	14%	21%	22%	22%	18%
c. Smoke is apparent near my residence or workplace and visual quality has decreased so some activities are affected.	19%	24%	21%	21%	14%	0%
d. High levels of smoke have caused poor visual quality that affects my ability to do many activities.	51%	0%	21%	4%	25%	0%

**Odor/Breathability**

a. Smoke plumes are visible in the distance, but I cannot smell smoke when I breathe.	5%	25%	8%	9%	14%	39%
b. Occasionally I can smell smoke, but it doesn't affect me otherwise.	5%	28%	14%	8%	23%	22%
c. I notice the smoke slightly when I breathe.	19%	26%	19%	17%	9%	11%
d. Smoke is highly noticeable each time I breathe, even indoors.	66%	11%	8%	8%	5%	3%

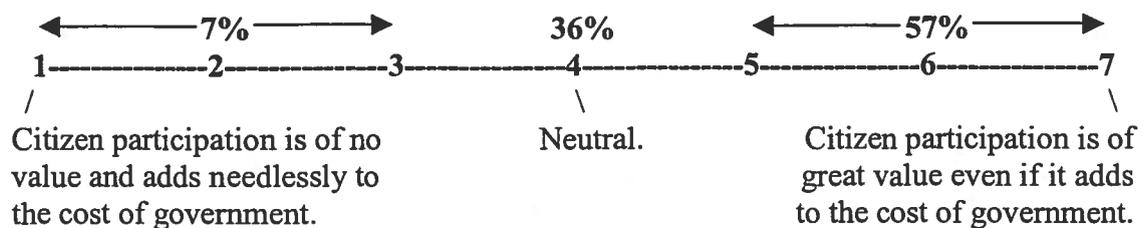
17. Often natural resource managers must decide how to make tradeoffs between different management approaches or goals. For each of the six pairs of statements below, please tell us what you would prefer managers to do by circling the number that best reflects your beliefs about the choice between the statement in Column A and the statement in Column B. If you truly feel you do not know enough to give an opinion, circle "don't know."

<u>Column A</u>	Prefer Col. A	Neutral	Prefer Col. B	<u>Column B</u>	Don't Know
Use prescribed fire in both rural <i>and</i> populated areas to reduce wildfire danger.	58%	19%	18%	Do not attempt to use prescribed fire in populated areas even if it means a higher risk of wildfires.	5%
Do not use fuels reduction practices in highly scenic locations.	27%	16%	47%	Use fuels reduction practices in highly scenic areas even if doing so temporarily hurts scenic beauty.	10%
Allow livestock grazing wherever it is likely to reduce fuel levels.	71%	13%	11%	Prohibit livestock grazing in recreation areas even when it can be used to reduce fuel levels.	5%
Use livestock grazing to remove "fine fuels" such as dead grass in areas where people live near natural areas.	66%	18%	13%	Use prescribed fire to remove "fine fuels" such as dead grass in areas where people live close to natural areas.	3%
Reroute traffic away from prescribed fires even if it puts a lot of traffic on county and rural roadways.	42%	16%	37%	Avoid using prescribed fire in areas where smoke might become too thick along heavily traveled highways.	5%
Always warn nearby residents several days before lighting a prescribed fire.	63%	16%	18%	Take full advantage of good weather for burning, even if it means not being able to notify residents first.	3%
Prescribed fire should be the preferred option when reducing wildland fuels.	40%	23%	27%	Mechanical removal should be the preferred option when reducing wildland fuels.	10%

18. Fire managers have used various programs to provide information about management actions such as fire prevention, prescribed burning, and thinning hazardous fuels. We want to know how useful you think these types of information are – in other words, do they provide you with information that you find easy to understand, that you trust, and is helpful. For each of the following types of information about fire and fuels management, please circle the best answer in each column. If you are unfamiliar with an information source, or have never used that source, please mark the space on the far right “no opinion.”

	Easy to understand?	Trust-worthy?	How helpful is the information to you?			No opinion
	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>slightly</i>	<i>very</i>	
▶ Smokey Bear message	100%	100%	8%	39%	53%	8%
▶ informational brochures	97%	97%	6%	56%	39%	29%
▶ TV public service message	98%	91%	5%	43%	52%	15%
▶ interpretive signs on trails or at visitor centers	96%	95%	2%	27%	71%	22%
▶ internet web pages	80%	74%	28%	33%	39%	60%
▶ guided field trips	97%	100%	3%	25%	72%	39%
▶ government public meetings	67%	73%	21%	46%	33%	52%
▶ conversations with public agency employees	86%	85%	14%	24%	62%	46%
▶ regular newsletters	93%	92%	8%	46%	46%	49%
▶ elementary school programs	94%	100%	10%	26%	64%	40%
▶ special sections in newspapers	88%	81%	8%	40%	53%	28%
▶ information from private timber companies	81%	71%	24%	38%	38%	45%

19. Recently there has been considerable debate over efforts to increase citizen participation in federal land management. Where would you place yourself regarding these efforts?





25. How much confidence do you have in the U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to use the following practices as part of a responsible and effective fuels management program in Georgia and Florida?

	<b>moderate/full</b>	<b>none/limited</b>	<b>no opinion</b>
▶ prescribed fire	<b>70%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>11%</b>
▶ mechanical vegetation removal	<b>56%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>13%</b>
▶ livestock grazing	<b>69%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>

26. How long have you lived in the community where you now live?

**mean = 27 years**

27. How long have you lived in the state where you live?

**mean = 39 years**

28. Which of the following best describes the community where you live now?

**18% urban area**  
**29% suburban area**  
**30% small town**  
**24% rural area**

29. Which of the following best describes the community in which you grew up?

**20% urban area**  
**23% suburban area**  
**39% small town**  
**17% rural area**

30. Are you?

**31% female**  
**69% male**

31. Age

**mean = 54 years**

32. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

<b>9% some high school</b>	<b>13% bachelor's degree</b>
<b>23% high school graduate</b>	<b>6% some graduate school</b>
<b>36% some college</b>	<b>12% completed graduate school</b>

33. Do you, or does anyone in your household, suffer from a respiratory ailment?

**72% no**  
**28% yes**

