

Wildfire Problem Statement

Florida’s ecosystems are dependent on natural fire. These low intensity fires re-nourish soil, thin abundant vegetation, and provide proper conditions for reproduction and forage. However, since the early 1950’s when Floridians actively began to suppress all fires to protect newly planted forest areas and keep newly built dwellings safe, vegetative fuel has become dense and thick. Natural fires have given way to dangerous wildfires which often damage rather than benefit natural surroundings.

The growing concern revolves around the increase of residential development in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), where natural vegetation meets homes and communities. About 1,000 people move to Florida each day. Additionally, Floridians who are tired of big-city life are moving to rural areas to “get back to nature”. Many of these new residents are unaware of the natural role of wildland fire in Florida and therefore are unprepared.

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)* fires are fast moving fires that often require many pieces of wildland firefighting equipment, and suppression is a difficult, time-consuming and costly operation. Wildland fire suppression must also take on the challenge of home and structure protection during almost every fire that is detected. Every year in Florida, an average of 2800 wildfires burn nearly 97,000 acres; with residential and commercial structures either damaged or threatened 80% of the time. The cost of these operations grows proportionally with their complexity.

* The WUI – in Bradford County, 22,588 people, or 80% of the population, live within WUI.

Consequences of Wildfire

Infrastructure	Environmental	Human	Vegetative	Economic
power outages	erosion	smoke inhalation	crop damage	business disruption
water/gas/communication lines disrupted	wildlife destruction	personal injury	timber damage	property loss
road closures	habitat loss	human evacuation	species endangered	economic loss
roadway destruction	species endangered	animal evacuation	invasive species increased	suppression cost
	water and air pollution			