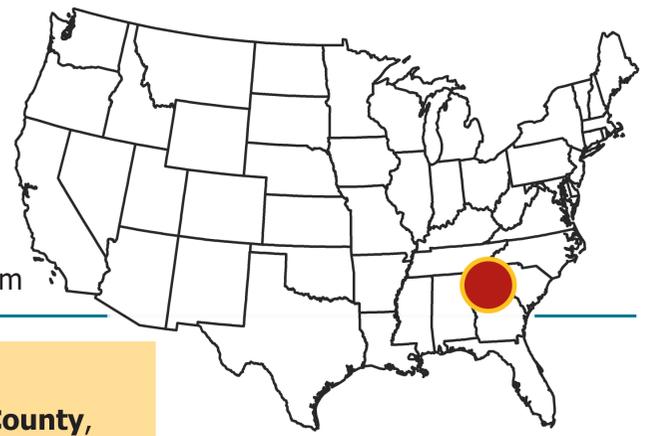


# Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council

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During its first year in the FAC Learning Network, Towns County FAC increased the number of Firewise communities from three to ten. Another ten communities are in the process of completing their plans, holding their work days, and submitting the paper-work needed to be recognized as Firewise communities.

Wildfire calls in Towns County have been reduced by 75 percent since starting the FAC/Firewise program. At a time when two neighboring counties had 57 and 33 wildfires, Towns County had only seven. This is attributed to the constant messages from the FAC group about wildfire safety and risk reduction around homes. Our success is due largely to the formation of a FAC Citizens Coalition, made up of six local citizens and representatives from three fire agencies (the U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission and Towns County Fire). This coalition gives ownership to local citizens, while FAC hub leaders can begin spreading the concept to other counties in the area. As a result, new FAC programs have recently been started in White and Lumpkin Counties in northeast Georgia, and more counties are inquiring about starting their own FAC programs.

The current focus for this FAC group is to develop more Firewise communities in the area, in order to further reduce wildfire calls. The group will continue to focus on homeowner education by all methods available, and will work on private lands hazard mitigation where possible. Most of the wildland-urban interface is connected to national forest land, which has limited opportunities for fuel reduction. However, the Forest Service is planning more prescribed burns in the future, which will help achieve the risk reduction that communities would like to see.

The long-term goal for this FAC Learning Network hub is to continue to actively spread FAC concepts among all of the 13 northeast Georgia counties served by the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D, and to help facilitate their spread across the Southeast through the learning network process. The team's ultimate goal is to help make citizens' homes and property safer from wildfire and to minimize losses, thus boosting the economies and quality of life of communities all across the region.



Partners from federal, state and county agencies, as well as private citizens, make up the FAC coalition.  
Photo: GFC/Tony Harkins

## COMMUNITIES

working in Towns County, Georgia

- including the communities of
- Admirals Point
- Asheland Cove
- Brasstown Creek Estates
- Campbell Terrace
- Cedar Cliff
- Deerfield Estates
- Frog Pond
- Harris Ridge
- Hi River Country
- Hiawassee Overlook
- Lake Forest
- Leisure Woods
- Long View
- Nantahala Bay
- Pine Crest
- Plantation Villas
- Posey Road
- Riverstone
- Scarlets Way
- Shallow Creek
- Sherwood Forest
- Soapstone
- Tate City
- Twiggs Road
- Woodcrest
- Young Harris College

and expanding into White and Lumpkin Counties



<http://FACNetwork.org>



Volunteers at Leisure Woods Retirement Park—Towns County's second designated Firewise Community—marking the first neighborhood chipper day.  
Photo: Frank Riley

## Key Partners

- Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation
- Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District
- Broad River Soil & Water Conservation District
- City of Hiawassee
- City of Young Harris
- Georgia Department of Agriculture
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Georgia Forestry Commission
- Georgia Mountain Regional Commission
- Hall County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Hiawassee River Watershed Coalition
- Lumpkin County Homeowners Association
- Lumpkin County—CERT, County Commissioners, Emergency Management, Fire Department
- Stephens County Soil & Water Conservation District

- The Nature Conservancy
- Towns County— 911 Mapping, Chamber of Commerce, County Commissioner, Emergency Management Services, Fire Corps, Fire Rescue, Schools
- Towns County FAC Citizens Coalition
- Towns County Home Owners Association
- Upper Chattahoochee River Soil & Water Conservation District
- USDA Forest Service—Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- White County Homeowners Association
- White County—CERT, County Commissioners, Emergency Management, Fire Rescue
- Young Harris College and individual community HOAs

## Making Things Happen for Rural America is What RC&Ds Do

**Workers are the most valuable** part of any program—and they can be the hardest part to find. But if you look under the right rocks, most communities have groups that will pitch in and make a worthwhile project happen. One long-standing organization of community volunteers that is often overlooked is the Resource Conservation & Development Council. For most of their history, RC&D Councils were embedded in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, formerly the Soil Conservation Service) and not very visible. But RC&D Councils are made up of community volunteers who are always looking for projects where they can make a difference in a community.

**Fire Adapted Communities** organizers should know that RC&D Councils:

- are **501(c)3 not-for-profit** corporations—not government entities—so some of the policies and constraints of local, state and federal government programs do not limit them.

- have a **high degree of independence** to carry out activities that will achieve their most important goals. RC&D Council volunteers are leaders and community stakeholders who play multiple roles and are typically involved in local government, school boards, churches and other civic activities.
- know how to **blend government programs with local needs** to produce results.
- were for many years the community **outreach arm of the NRCS**, and funding flowed through them into communities. However in recent years RC&Ds have suffered budget cuts and many are scrambling.
- are a **perfect fit with FAC** programs because both aim to help local people and make life in their communities better and safer.

Excerpted from a post on the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network blog—see the post at <http://facnetwork.org/rcds-and-fac/>



Community engagement strategies include plenty of outreach to schools.  
Photo: Frank Riley

The Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network is supported by Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT), a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Nick Goulette ([nickg@hayfork.net](mailto:nickg@hayfork.net)).

