

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018**

While protecting over 559,100 acres of forested land in Echols, Lanier and Lowndes Counties (E-L-L), the local forestry units responded to 60 wildfires which burned a total of 363.64 acres during the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

**FOREST PROTECTION**

During the past fiscal year, the average wildfire size was 6.06 acres; a 12 percent decrease from the 5 year average. Equipment and personnel from E-L-L also responded to 4 wildfires outside of its respective home unit. Once again this year, as has been the case in previous years, debris burning was the major cause of wildfires in E-L-L. The cause of each wildfire is listed below:

Fire Cause	Number of Wildfires
Debris Burning	29
Lightning	2
Undetermined	4
Campfire	3
Machine Use	4
Power line/Electric Fence	5
Incendiary	2
Forestry Site Prep	3
Land	4
Clearing/Construction	
Ag Fields/Orchards	1
Smoking	1
Fireworks	1
Spontaneous Combustion	1
<b>Totals</b>	60

**\*\*\*11 of the 60 suppressed fires were not permitted and thus resulted in suppression charges being issued\*\*\***

## FIRE USE ASSISTANCE

During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, E-L-L issued burning permits for 28,373 burning operations. Combined, this is a total of 30,387 acres which is a 20% increase from last year. The breakdown is as follows:

<b>Manual Permits Issued</b> ( <i>from units</i> )	2,088
<b>Online Permits Issued</b> ( <i>internet based</i> )	8,035
<b>Automated Telephone Permits</b>	18,250

Pre-suppression firebreaks are essential when performing prescribed burns and is also an invaluable tool to protect timber stands from the ongoing and ever increasing threat of wildfire. The GFC provides pre-suppression plowing to any landowner who requests such a service. The price for this is \$95.00 per hour which is billed in accordance with the hours that are placed on the tractor plow unit. The GFC also has a Stewardship harrow which is pulled behind the dozer units, used to "reclaim" old firebreaks and cut down on the risk of erosion. The harrow is also used to establish food-plots for wildlife; the fee for this service is \$115.00 per hour. Also, a fee of \$60 is applied to cover transportation expenses.

This past year, 344 miles of pre-suppression firebreaks were plowed for 66 different landowners. 299 miles of harrowing (reclaiming) old firebreaks was performed for 45 landowners. The harrowed and plowed firebreaks together total 643 miles for 111 landowners. E-L-L also assisted local landowners with 46 prescribed burns that totaled 5,812 acres, a 67% increase from the previous year.

## AIR OPERATIONS

The GFC air patrol is an invaluable tool in the detection and suppression of wildfires. In addition to regular fire control flights, the GFC aircraft also fly insect surveys, twice each year, that obtain early detection on any infestations that may be detrimental to our forests.



## TOWER OPERATIONS

Due to the air restrictions in and around Moody Air Force Base, the Lowndes County Unit keeps the fire tower staffed daily by 1000 am, weather permitting, and is a vital link for ground crews on wildfires. The air patrol pattern that is flown by GFC aircraft is greatly reduced due to the restricted area in and around Moody Air Force Base so we rely heavily on the Echols and Lowndes County towers to pick up smoke in these areas.

## MAINTENANCE

The GFC realizes that in order for equipment to be ready to respond to an emergency, whether it is a fire or natural disaster, it must be constantly maintained correctly and in an efficient manner. Most all of the repairs that are needed can be handled at our local County units, which is due to the dedication and professional knowledge of the local unit personnel in Echols, Lanier and Lowndes Counties. On staff in E-L-L, we have personnel who are accomplished welders, mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and electricians who are constantly performing tasks that save the State of Georgia and the local taxpayer thousands of dollars each year.

## RURAL FIRE DEFENSE

The GFC assists local Rural Fire Departments in the acquisition, inspection and upkeep of all "Co-Op" lease equipment. There has always been excellent cooperation between the GFC and the Echols, Lanier and Lowndes Rural Fire Departments. With this cooperation, the GFC and local fire departments provide our local citizens with the wildland and structural protection needed to ensure public safety.

Of the 60 wildfires this past fiscal year suppressed in E-L-L, the Rural Fire Departments assisted the GFC in the suppression of 39 wildfires.

**\*\*\*Echols 4 of 11, Lanier 3 of 11 and Lowndes 32 of 38 fires responded to\*\*\***

## REFORESTATION

The GFC has a seedling nursery in Byromville, GA which grows a vast variety of both pine and hardwood seedlings. These seedlings are available at a reasonable price to the landowners. Seedlings are shipped weekly, to the local county units, where landowners can pick them up. This past fiscal year, E-L-L sold, stored and delivered 96,210 seedlings (1,050 - Echols, 8,010 - Lanier and 87,150 - Lowndes).

## FOREST MANAGEMENT

E-L-L were very busy in the field of Forest Management this past year. 158 landowners received Forest Management advice from either unit personnel or the local county Forester. The areas of service are listed below:

Type Assistance	Number of Cases			All
	Echols	Lanier	Lowndes	
Conservation Reserve Programs (CRP)	2	10	41	53
General Advise Cases	11	10	26	47
EQUIP	2	8	16	26
BMP Exams	5	15	7	27
Stewardship	0	3	2	5
<b>Total # of Cases</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>92</b>	
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>158</b>



## FOREST EDUCATION

The GFC continues to be very concerned with educating the general public about Georgia's timber industry. Georgia's timber industry now contributes over 30 billion dollars to the State's economy each year, making this the number one industry in Georgia. The GFC is responsible for educating the public on the importance of forestry operations in our everyday life, as well as the importance of proper fire prevention.

During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, employees in E-L-L invested 366 hours through 191 programs. These programs involved teaching children of all ages, as well as adults, about fire safety and proper forest management practices. These programs reached over 69,026 citizens of E-L-L. Employees also conducted 149 Home Site Risk Assessments to homeowners in "At Risk" areas, educating them on making their homes less susceptible to damage from wildfires

### **Some of the programs that the E-L-L Forestry Units were involved with this year included:**

1. Stalvey Ag Day
2. Raisin' Cane/Langdale Foundation Art Competition/ My Farm & Working Forest
3. Arbor Day Programs at City of Hahira, City of Valdosta, City of Lakeland
4. Langdale and Southwind FFA Field Day
5. Lake Park Elementary, Echols County Schools and Lanier County Career Days. Pine Grove Middle STEM Career Day.
6. Lanier County Farm Day, 4-H Safety Day, Lanier High School Forestry class, Flatlanders Youth Fishing Derby.
7. Azalea Festival
8. Chamber and County Commission Meetings
9. Hahira & Lakeland Christmas Parades
10. Fire Prevention/Smokey Programs at: Open Bible School, St. Johns School, Crossroads Baptist School, Brookfield Academy, Miss Mother's Daycare, Lanier Primary, and Valdosta Regional Library summer program.

## CONCLUSION

The timber industry is a very big business in our local area providing untold dollars to our local economy, billions to the State of Georgia along with various forestry-related careers. The Echols, Lanier and Lowndes Forestry Units will continue to lead the way in keeping the forest industry Georgia's number one industry. These units will continue to provide the protection from wildfires that the citizens of Echols, Lanier and Lowndes Counties deserve.

With the Fire Prevention grant received from the Federal Government, we were able to do many more exciting things to educate the general public on proper wildfire prevention. The unit personnel of E-L-L are dedicated to the protection of Georgia's forestlands and the homes that may be threatened by wildfires. We feel that with proper education many lives and property can be spared from the devastation of wildfires.

We truly appreciate the strong support that we rely on from our local government officials such as the Echols, Lanier and Lowndes County Commissioners and the taxpayers that live in these counties.

Sincerely,



Cc: Area 9 Office  
County Commissioners  
Unit Files

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