

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## National Vietnam War Veterans Day

Far too often overlooked are our men and women who served in Vietnam and during that tumultuous era, the angst of which should be attributed to politicians, not unusual! However our men and women in uniform were committed and did the very best they could, no matter what. Many were inducted (drafted) against their wishes, but went into military service, nevertheless. They ALL should be honored and thanked. Just as our "Greatest Generation" of WWII era.

**The Veterans' Corner**  
**Scott Drummond**  
USCG Veteran



National Vietnam War Veterans Day is observed every year on March 29 and is a way to thank and honor our nation's Vietnam Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice. There are 5 objectives with Vietnam Commemoration and the other four are: 1-Highlight the service of our Armed Forces and support organizations during the war. 2-Pay tribute to wartime contributions at home by American citizens. 3-Highlight technology, science and medical advances made during the war. 4- Recognize contributions by our Allies.

"We hope everyone has joined together on March 29, 2022, to honor Vietnam Veterans and their families during this 55th anniversary of National Vietnam War Veterans Day," said Phil Waite, chief of strategic engagement for The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration. "These warriors – our Nation's blood and treasure from a generation ago – deserve the Nation's deepest gratitude!"

Why is March 29 Vietnam Veterans Day? On March 29, 1973, MACV ( Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) was disbanded, and our last U.S. Combat troops came home.

Our National Vietnam War Veterans day, however is NOT a federal holiday. Businesses and schools are open as usual. That being said during that era and somewhat beyond our men and women who served our Sovereign Republic and did their utmost for the Republic of South Vietnam were NOT welcomed home accordingly. How awful were those who frowned upon those who served not only during that time. These valiant men and women served those who failed to honor them too!

The commemoration makes no distinction between veterans who served in-county, in-theater, or were stationed elsewhere during those 20 years. U.S. Armed Forces personnel with active duty service between November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975, regardless of location of service which includes: +Nine million Americans serving during that time. +6.4 million Americans living today. +2.7 million U.S. service members who served in Vietnam. + 58,000 whose names are memorialized on a black granite wall in our Nation's capital. +304,000 who were wounded. +1,253 Missing in Action (MIA) heroes who have not yet returned to American soil. +2,500 Prisoners of War (POWs). + and beyond a shadow of a doubt their families!

- Semper Paratus

## Wildland Fires

Wildland fires are a force of nature that can be nearly as impossible to prevent, and as difficult to control, as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods. Wildland fire can be a friend and a foe. In the right place at the right time, wildland fire can create many environmental benefits, such as reducing grass, brush, and trees that can fuel large and severe wildfires and improving wildlife habitat. In the wrong place at the wrong time, wildfires can wreak havoc, threatening lives, homes, communities, and natural and cultural resources.

The Forest Service has been managing wildland fire on National Forests and Grasslands for more than 100 years, but the Forest Service does not and cannot do it alone. Instead, the agency works closely with other federal, tribal, state, and local partners.

This is more important than ever because over the last few decades, the wildland fire management environment has profoundly changed, longer fire seasons, bigger fires, and more acres burned on average each year with more extreme fire behavior, and wildfire suppression operations in the wildland urban interface (WUI) have become the norm.

To address these challenges, the Forest Service and its other federal, tribal, state, and local partners have developed and are implementing a National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy that has three key components: Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities (FAC), and Safe and Effective Wildfire Response.

The strategy that we work with here in North Georgia most often is Fire Adapted Communities. More than 70,000 communities and 44 million homes are at risk from wildfire in the wildland urban interface (WUI) - where vegetative fuels and the built environment meet. Pre-fire risk reduction, on a variety of fronts, can help communities adapt to wildfire. Fire adaptation means communities take mitigation actions so they can live with wildfire without harm and without extensive wildfire suppression efforts.

A key component of community fire adaptation is that there are many tools that, when used together and strategically, reduce risk. And it is not the responsibility of one agency or group to mitigate; it is the responsibility of everyone who lives and works in the community. Fire adaptation happens when local multi-jurisdictional stakeholders work together to identify risk, mitigate it, and maintain the work overtime.

Fire adaptation is not a recognition program, and it is not a checklist, and a community does not achieve "fire adapted community" status or certification because the work to reduce wildfire risk never ends, it becomes a way of life for those who live in the WUI.

Foundational tools of fire adaptation include:

A local multi-jurisdictional mitigation group to share risk reduction responsibility in the community. This core group teaches, mentors, and develops trusted relationships with local residents and other stakeholders to foster on-the-ground mitigation. Research indicates face-to-face communications with trusted community leaders is the best way to share information about mitigation and to move residents to do mitigation work on the ground.

A community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) which identifies where wildfire risk exists, outlines ways to reduce or mitigate that risk, and helps do the risk reduction work on the ground. It is not enough to have a CWPP, it must be updated and implemented.

Hazardous fuels treatment inside and around the community on public and private lands, which means the landscape can experience wildfire (small and manageable wildfires or prescribed burns) and its benefits without the threat of catastrophic wildfire. In addition, a fuel buffer around a community and reduced fuels inside the community keep wildfire at bay and provide safe zones for residents and firefighters alike. Fuel reduction projects often involve smoke, so its important residents understand the value of fuel treatments and tolerate the temporary inconvenience of smoke that could reduce the long-term risk of wildfire.

A volunteer or career fire department or fire protection association plays a big role in reducing risk from wildfire and being ready to respond should a wildfire occur. Research shows that firefighters are a local trusted authority in delivering the mitigation message and in helping stakeholders do mitigation. Fire departments and Sheriffs are critical to evacuation training, designation of safe zones and evacuation routes, and promotion of wildfire prevention messaging.

Defensible space around structures means flammable fuels like leaf piles, unmown dry grass, lawnmowers and gas, lawn furniture, propane tanks and wood piles, leaves and needles in the gutters and on the roof, and flammable trees too near the home are removed or stored in more appropriate places. This defensible space provides a fuel buffer for the structure and a place for firefighters to do structure protection.

Resilient structures are less susceptible to ignition from embers – the primary cause of structure loss. A resilient structure, for instance, is constructed of less flammable materials, has a class "A" roof, has metal screen over eave vents, and under decks.

For more information on Fire Adapted communities go to: [www.fireadaptednetwork.org/](http://www.fireadaptednetwork.org/); [www.wildlandfirersg.org/](http://www.wildlandfirersg.org/); [www.firewise.org/](http://www.firewise.org/).

**RC&D**  
**Frank Riley**  
Executive Director



## To Burn or Not to Burn?

We are entering the time of year when prescribed burns are more and more common. I want to talk about why prescribed burns are important. I think that generally we understand that they are important, otherwise we wouldn't take the risk of doing them, but they are important in more ways than many understand.

**UGA extension**  
**Watching and Working**  
**Jacob Williams**



To talk about the importance of prescribed burns we also have to talk about natural forest succession. Forest succession can look different depending on where you live. For us, it can start with meadow lands. Meadows would have plants like asters, queen Anne's lace, and broom sedge. After about 5 years, the meadows will start to grow up some more and brush like sumac and blackberry will start to take over. At year 20, we would see a young pine forest start to emerge. This pine forest would start to mature and at about year 70, we would see an understory of hardwoods begin to emerge in the mature pine stand. From year 70 on, the forest begins to transition to a hardwood forest. At 100 years, we've reached the forest climax which is a mature oak-hickory forest. If there is no intervention, either natural or man-made, our forests will remain at the mature oak-hickory forest stage.

So, what's wrong with allowing our forests to stay at the mature oak-hickory stage? And if it is wrong then what can be done about it? To answer the first question when all or a majority of our habitat is in the mature oak-hickory stage we have less diversity of habitat. Diversity of habitat is necessary to be able to support a diversity of wildlife, plants, fungi, and everything else that creeps, crawls, and grows in the woods. Deer need a diverse habitat to thrive. They need brush cover to protect fawns. Mature forests have very little cover and leave fawns exposed to roaming coyotes and bears. The deer also need mature forest for the mast crop (acorns and other nuts) that those trees provide every year. Our deer population is in decline, which is not due to overhunting as there are fewer and fewer hunters each year. Turkey populations are also in decline, in part because there is not sufficient brush cover for poult (baby turkeys). Bobwhite quail have become very rare in Georgia, because they need brush for their habitat. Grouse have also become rare because they make their home in the transition area between habitat types. These are just a few examples of species that we have seen a decline or significant decline in population.

Controlled burns reset the natural forest succession process, allowing a diverse array of habitats that support a diverse array of wildlife. Historically, in the southern US, wildfires would burn parts of the landscape every 1 to 3 years. In the southeast it's estimated that 4% of lands that could be burned are in a burn rotation. With the development that we have now it's a good thing that we don't have wildfires raging through the southeast every 1 to 3 years. Controlled burns are able to keep the fuel load in the forest down to prevent that from happening. But if we don't have enough controlled burns or responsible timber harvest from public lands then we won't see the rejuvenation of the forest necessary for it to sustain a diverse group of species for generation after generation.

This column is not meant to be me taking a shot at any of the people or agencies that are responsible in managing our public lands. Often times those individuals are hampered by not having the resources that they need to manage public lands to their full potential or they are hindered by public opinion that does not support controlled burns. Hopefully, this column has educated people on the need for more management on our public lands so that they can reach their full potential. If you have questions about controlled burns you can contact the Georgia Forestry Commission, the US Forest Service, or email me at [Jacob.Williams@uga.edu](mailto:Jacob.Williams@uga.edu).

## Habitat for Humanity

As we enter the spring season, we are expecting warmer weather, annual spring cleaning, more customers coming out to see us and more volunteers eager to help. We are expecting big changes and new faces here at our ReStore this spring. In order to make this happen we are in need of a few things to help us work efficiently this spring and summer season. We are asking community members to help us in the following ways:

**Habitat Happenings**  
**Madelyn Bailey**



Volunteers. We are always eager to expand our volunteer groups. Habitat has multiple opportunities available to volunteer at our organization. There is something for everyone! You can offer time helping in the ReStore, work on home projects through our Helping Hands Program, or sign up to help on our newest habitat home build. This May we are planning a volunteer event at our ReStore with refreshments, ReStore sales, and more! We hope you will sign up and join our volunteer family! Stop by the store, let us know you are interested, and we will get you started! We are located at 225 Wellborn St. Blairsville GA.

Delivery. We have customers everyday in our ReStore purchasing big and small items. We are so thankful for the generosity of our community. However, our customers are often unable to load, and transport furniture that they have purchased, and we don't have the help in the ReStore to deliver or lift these heavy items on a reliable basis. If you are a delivery service, or simply have a truck and are willing to lift or deliver items to customer's homes we need your resources. Habitat is always looking to benefit local businesses, and volunteers whenever we can.

Pick Ups. Decluttering and spring cleaning? We have a pick-up service and are always in need of more items for our ReStore! Our truck will come out to your homes and pick up gently used items that are still in good working condition, for donation. We take all kinds of items to sell and go towards our mission of making sure everyone has affordable housing. There are a few items we do not take, they include sleeper sofas, mattresses, box springs, entertainment centers, and box tv's. Call us at 706-745-7101 to schedule a pickup. Please call a week in advance as we book up quickly.

Get The Word Out. We have a Facebook group called, "Habitat for Humanity of Towns/Union Counties ReStore" We post our daily ReStore sales, event information, staff and volunteer highlights, customer engagements, and so much more! Join our Facebook group to stay up to date on our latest projects and ReStore deals. Help us grow and reach more people by sharing our content.

Donate. We are always accepting donations. Currently we are accepting donations for the Snow Family. As we begin building their Habitat home we are thankful for generous donations that help the process move efficiently and reliably. You can donate in the store or send donations in the mail. Be sure to specify the donation being for the Snow family and we will make sure it goes to their home build.

On behalf of Habitat employees, board members, and officers, Thank YOU for being actively involved in our cause in bringing about positive change in our community.

## Letters To The Editor

### Price Gouging on Gas

Dear Editor,

On Friday, March 18, Gov. Kemp suspended Georgia's state tax on gasoline until the end of May. That amounts to a 29.1-cent savings per gallon for the consumer. With interest, I moted Ingles in Blairsville immediately dropped their price from around \$4 a gallon to \$3.60. Yesterday, March 22, it was down to \$3.58. Today, March 23, a drive around town shows gas in Hiawassee and around town is still in the high \$3.99 range!

A couple of explanations I have heard were "we are just selling it for what we had to pay" and "we are trying to get the price down." The state tax is a point-of-sale tax on the consumer and has nothing to do with inventory or what the vendor paid for the inventory.

Shame on the business owners that are profiteering on the backs of Towns County citizens that are already struggling with higher prices on everything they do and buy. It's morally wrong and probably illegal under Georgia statutes.

I can only imagine how many thousands of gallons of gas have been sold since the state tax was suspended and the collected tax went into the vendors' pockets!

Mike Roberts

### Re: Choose Your Invaders

Dear Editor,

Having read the March 23 Letter to the Editor comparing Russia's current invasion and bombing of Ukraine to the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, gives me pause to wonder if Putin's state of mind ought to be the only one in question.

Claude Spears

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor  
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546  
Our email address: [tcherald@windstream.net](mailto:tcherald@windstream.net)

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Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.\*

**Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.**

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### VIDEO SHOWS TRUCK DRIVER SURVIVING ENCOUNTER WITH A TORNADO



Joe Heller

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Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 7 "The Mall", Hiawassee

Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: [tcherald@windstream.net](mailto:tcherald@windstream.net)

Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546