

National Fire Plan

Reducing Fire Hazards in Hancock County

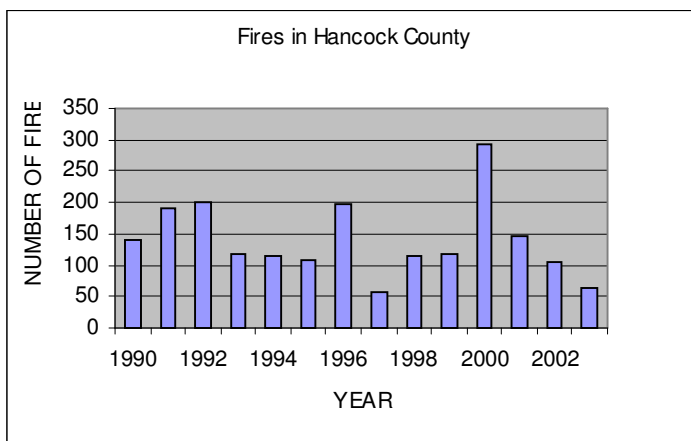
Mississippi

2003



The Gulf Coast is one of the most rapidly expanding areas in the state of Mississippi, due in large part to the casino industry. With this rapid growth comes an increase in habitation within the wildland/urban interface. Protecting structures within wildlands has been the main focus of National Fire Plan activities in Mississippi over the last three years.

Hancock County, the westernmost coastal county in Mississippi, has traditionally been a high fire occurrence county. This county averaged more than 300 fires per year in the past. (See graph).

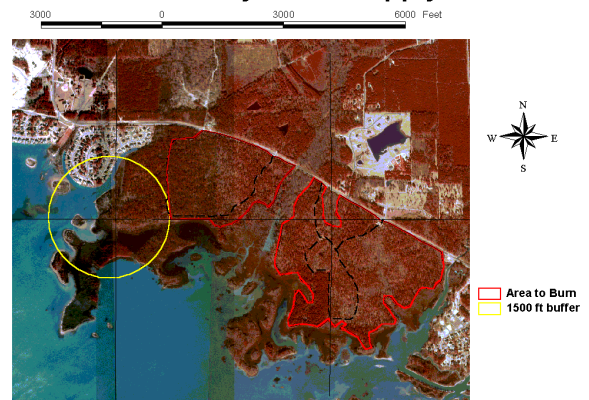


Implementing the National Fire Plan in this county was not difficult. The county forester was well established and knew where fire problems traditionally occurred. Landowners in these high risk areas were instructed in the need to reduce hazardous fuel loads before conducting prescribed burns. Along with prescribed burning, emphasis was placed on educating the public on the need for prescribed fire – and to introduce them to FIREWISE principles. Information officers, prevention team members, and county personnel accomplished this through television, radio, newspapers, and door-to-door contacts.

Another component of the Hancock County Hazard Mitigation program was the purchase of a Remote Automated Weather Station. This station provides the Mississippi Forestry Commission, as well as our federal fire management partners, with valuable weather data to compute National Fire Danger Rating System indices. As work progressed toward adoption of the 1988 NFDRS system in Mississippi, trigger points in the fire danger indices were used to deploy prevention teams and preposition firefighting resources.

Weather data from this station help to plan safe prescribed burning activities. The station also provides an archive of weather data over burn periods to document fires occurring within (or outside) prescription.

Pearl River Valley Water Supply District



Map of a mitigation project for 2002. This area between two large subdivisions has an eagle nesting site. The value of homes in these two subdivisions was \$150,000.