

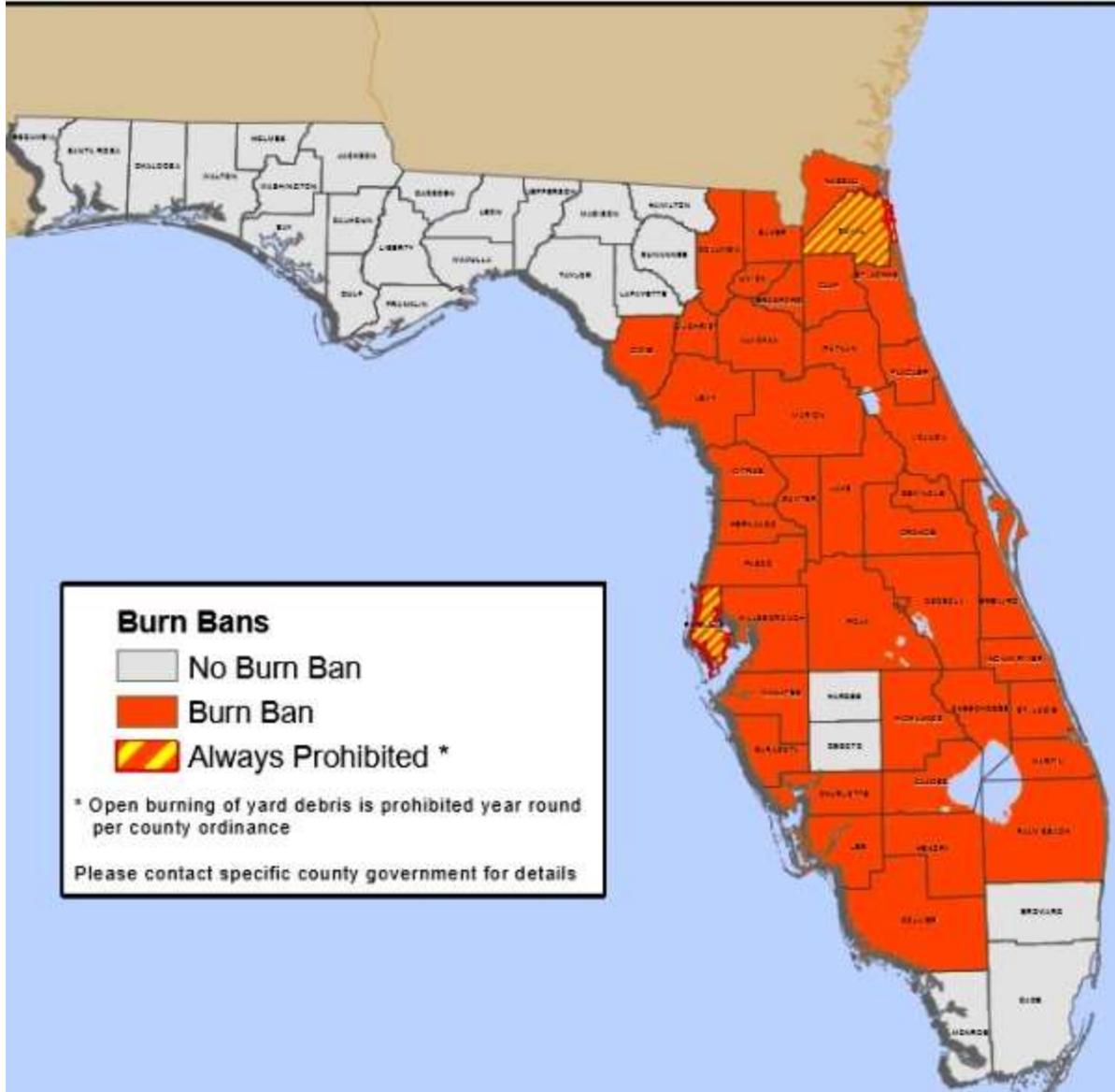
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South Carolina sends firefighters and equipment to help Florida battle wildfires



Florida Forest Service

County Burn Bans as of May 11, 2017



This map shows the burn bans as of May 11. Click [HERE](#) for the most recent burn ban map.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Press Release  
Published May 12, 2017 at 1:47 p.m.  
on the Home Page of *HardisonInk.com*

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam and the Florida Forest Service announced today (Friday, May 12) that South Carolina is sending

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firefighters and equipment to help battle Florida wildfires.

The support crews are expected to arrive in Central Florida Saturday evening. There are more than 135 active wildfires in Florida and more than 2,000 wildfires have burned in excess of 150,000 acres in Florida this year. Current conditions by county burn bans, and helpful tips prevent and protect against wildfire in Florida.

“I thank the South Carolina Forestry Commission for providing this much-needed support as our firefighters continue to battle wildfires across the state,” Commissioner Putnam said. “Conditions are forecast to get even drier and warmer into late spring and early summer, and Florida is going to need all the help we can get.”

Putnam asked Gov. Rick Scott to issue an executive order on April 11 in order to provide full resources to combat wildfires. The last time a similar executive order was issued was in June of 2011.

“Every part of our state is susceptible to wildfire, and with more than half of Florida’s counties under burn bans, residents and visitors must take every precaution to help prevent wildfire,” said State Forester Jim Karels.

One of the best ways to reduce a home’s wildfire risk is to create 30 feet of defensible space around the home. When creating defensible space, begin with the area immediately surrounding the home, about 3 feet out on all sides. Make sure this space is free of tall, fire-prone plants and materials. Keep this area clean and free of dead plant material and flammable mulches. Instead, opt for low growing, fire resistant plants and materials and use mulches, such as rocks or chunky bark. Deliberately space all plants so that none are placed directly under windows or vents around the house.

To increase home survivability, Floridians can:

- Keep mulch and pine needles away from your home, fence, and deck;
- Keep roof and gutter free of pine needles;
- Keep flammables away from your home;
- Store fire wood at least 30 feet from your home;
- Remove dead vegetation and debris from under the deck and within 10 feet of your home; and
- Make wildfire preparedness a family project.

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## **Tri-County burn ban is active *Gilchrist County initiates one-week fire ban Levy and Dixie counties continue bans***

**By Jeff M. Hardison © May 11, 2017 at 9:27 a.m.**

**TRI-COUNTY AREA** – Gilchrist County became the third of three counties in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties to initiate a fire ban, when that took effect at noon yesterday (May 10), according to information in a May 10 press release from Gilchrist County Fire Chief James Campbell.

The first of the three counties was Levy County when it initiated action on April 4, and readopted the required verbiage at the April 18 and May 1 meetings, Levy County Commission Chairman John Meeks said during a telephone interview on May 11.

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Meeks explained that the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Florida Forest Service has requirements of language to make the emergency county action able to enforce via Florida Statutes. There is a measure of dryness that reflects the level of wildfire danger, Levy County Commission Chairman Meeks said.

Levy County Emergency Management Director John MacDonald explained to the County Commission on April 4 that the county had reached the point to exceed the minimal threshold for danger and that it was time to impose the ban.

Although the Florida Forest Service map as of May 10 did not show Dixie County as participating, Dixie County Emergency Services Deputy Chief Darian Brown has stated in no uncertain terms that county has a burn ban that went into effect on May 4.

In all three counties, the burn ban is effective for one week at a time, however since the Levy County Commission meets twice monthly rather than weekly, Chairman Meeks explained that the County Commission can ratify the “off week” and it can pay County Clerk Danny Shipp the \$10 fee for recording the document.

There is a permanent open burn ban in Pinellas and Duval counties, which saves those County Commissions from having to pay a weekly fee and conduct a weekly action. In the rural Tri-County Area, though, some landowners have enough trees dropping branches and leaves so that they need to have small, safe, controlled burns for fire safety.

As for Gilchrist County, just as with the leaders for fire protection in Levy and Dixie counties, Chief Campbell was very clear in the press release he sent yesterday (May 10). His notes are applicable in the other two counties as well.

“After reviewing Gilchrist County’s current wildland fire conditions and the area weather forecast,” Gilchrist County Fire Chief James Campbell noted, “a mandatory countywide burn ban has been implemented, effective 12 p.m. today, May 10, 2017. The ban will remain in effect until May 17, 2017.”

The chief noted for municipal interests that the mandatory burn ban includes all of Gilchrist County, including all rural and municipal areas.

The countywide **mandatory burn ban prohibits** all of the following:

- **All outdoor burning that has not been specifically authorized by the Florida Division of Forestry.**
- **The use of any fireworks, sparklers, flares, or other pyrotechnic devices except as provided by law for public displays requiring a permit.**

Chief Campbell is cognizant of agricultural needs.

“Please note that the ban does not affect agricultural burning authorized by the Florida Division of Forestry for land clearing or prescribed burning purposes,” Campbell wrote.

The fire chief helped add detail to some other points.

“Although the use of LPG/LNG (propane) grills and charcoal grills is permitted,” Campbell said, “the public is encouraged to keep a constant watch for any stray sparks or embers while cooking outdoors. Additionally, due to the potential for accidental ignitions, the use of motorized equipment such as ATVs and dirt bikes is discouraged during times of high wildfire risk. Please bear in mind that lawnmowers, both push and riding, also pose accidental ignition risks.”

The fire chief asked all individuals to exercise caution during the burn ban.

Any burning within the Tri-County Area during the imposed burn bans is a violation of various Levy County, Dixie County and Gilchrist County ordinances.

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All three counties' local laws relate directly to Chapter 252 of Florida Statutes.

Violation of the burn bans will be considered a second-degree misdemeanor, punishable by up to a maximum 60-day imprisonment in the county jail and up to a \$500 fine.

All county and municipal law enforcement agencies are authorized to enforce these ordinances. State law enforcement agencies are able to use state law to arrest the same suspected criminals.

For more information about Gilchrist County's burn ban, please contact Gilchrist County Fire Rescue at 386-935-5400, Campbell noted.

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## **Dixie County burn ban started on Thursday - May 4**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © May 8, 2017 at 1:57 p.m.**

**DIXIE COUNTY** -- As a drought continues in part of Florida, counties are imposing a burn ban to reduce the potential for wildfires.

Dixie County became one of the most recent counties to start a burn ban, and its ban began on Thursday, according to information from Dixie County Emergency Services Deputy Chief Darian Brown.

Deputy Chief Brown provided records of the weekly response from Dixie County Fire Services Monday (May 8) as he does regularly.

As part of his service to the public, he noted that he requested that the Dixie County Board of County Commissioners impose a burn ban.

They agreed that was needed and that set of County Commission member adopted the necessary legal instrument to bring it to fruition.

The ban will be for any open burning countywide and will be in effect until Dixie County receives significant rainfall, Chief Brown said.

It will be posted on [www.dixieemergency.com](http://www.dixieemergency.com).

"We are currently experiencing extremely dry conditions and it is getting worse every day," Brown said. "Minimal rain is predicted over the next few weeks."

A large fire from Saturday (May 6) in Taylor County is located between Keaton Beach and Steinhatchee.

The last report that Chief Brown had received put it at 458 acres.

That fire started around 3 p.m. on Saturday and by dark was already well above 125 acres and growing fast.

Many local firefighting resources in the Forest Service were working Monday morning, Chief Brown said.

As the Florida Highway Patrol noted Saturday evening, there has been a lot of drift smoke from it on Saturday and depending on winds and weather, motorists in Dixie and Taylor counties need to be aware of this issue for the next few days.

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**Smoke causes FHP to close part of Veterans Expressway;  
Other Hillsborough County Pasco County closures  
noted**

**Updated I-75 is Re-opened**

**In this photo, from Saturday's (May 6) fires where the Veteran's**



**Expressway from Tampa to New Port Richey had to be closed due to smoke, it is clear to see one manner in which fires cause problems for people.**

*Photo by Ariane Horton*

**Photos by FHP**

**By Jeff M. Hardison**

**© May 6, 2017 at 8:27 p.m.**

**Updated at 8:47 p.m.**

**\* Updated at 10:47 p.m.**

**PASCO COUNTY --** The Florida Highway Patrol closed some major roads



due

to smoke issues in Hillsborough and Polk counties.

Both directions of State Road 589 from State Road 54 to State Road 52 were closed due to brush fires, Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Steve Gaskins noted in an email at 6:37 p.m. on Saturday evening.

**\* State Road 589 (The Veterans**

**Expressway or the Veterans Turnpike and Suncoast Parkway) is expected to remain closed overnight (Saturday, May 6) from SR 54 to SR 52. Motorists should seek alternate north-south routes, Sgt. Gaskins noted in an email at 10:19 p.m.**

Northbound I-75 from Fletcher to Bruce B. Downs was closed, the FHP said. However now the Interstate is reopened, Sgt. Gaskins noted in an email at 7:50 p.m.

