



# FEMA

## Wildfire Mitigation Teams Set Florida on Fire – on Purpose

**The State of Florida** - In 1998, Florida suffered one of the worst series of wildfire events on record. Heavy plant growth in previous seasons, followed by hard winter freezes, led to an abundance of dead vegetation. Months of serious drought conditions caused the dead vegetative matter to dry up. These were very hazardous conditions – like a tinderbox waiting to be ignited.

Beginning in April 1998, as many as 80 simultaneous wildfires were reported on any given day. By mid-July, more than 2,000 fires had consumed almost half a million acres across the state.

A task force was created to address the growing wildfire threat. Ultimately, the task force formed four regional wildfire mitigation teams whose primary task is to reduce the vegetation that provides fuel for wildfires.

Vegetative fuel sources can catch fire easily, burn intensely, and spread flames rapidly. Embers blowing ahead of the fires can touch down on distant fuel sources possibly creating more fires. The wildfire mitigation teams reduce vegetation through mechanical means and prescribed burns.

Mini-bulldozers reduce small growths of vegetation. Using heavy equipment that includes a grinding head, task force members knock down larger plants which are then ground into mulch.

A technique called prescribed burning is now carried out to minimize the wildfire problem. When weather and geographic conditions are favorable, and with firefighting equipment on hand, mitigation teams safely ignite and manage fires to reduce fuels in wildland areas. Prescribed burns often follow mulching, which gives the teams a greater degree of control over the fires. The prescribed burns can cover small areas of one or two acres, or up to as large as 1,000 acres. This approach has been so successful that prescribed burns are widely accepted as a smart and effective tool for preventing wildfires.

The Florida Division of Forestry provides the majority of the annual budget for the wildfire mitigation teams. Supplemental assistance is also provided by the United States Forestry Service through the National Fire Plan.

One day of prescribed burning costs \$4,018. With that one burn, 352 homes, 42 apartment buildings, three businesses, and 15 acres of property are protected. The total value of everything made safe was conservatively estimated at \$49 million.



State-wide,  
Florida



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Public**

Cost:

**Amount Not Available**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**

Primary Funding:

**State sources**