

Background Information (not to be included in CLUP)

5.3.3.13 Wildfire Hazard Mitigation in Wildland Urban Interface Areas

The Central Pine Barrens area is dominated by the presence of fire dependent ecological communities such as the pitch pine-oak forest community that has a scrub oak and heath understory and the globally rare dwarf pine plains community. These ecological communities depend on fire for regeneration and add to the potential wildfire risk to built communities in these areas due to their flammable (e.g. resinous) vegetative characteristics. New development in the Central Pine Barrens continues to grow and extend into previously undeveloped wooded areas, identified as the wildland urban interface (WUI). The WUI (pronounced “woo-wee”) is the geographical transition area where manmade structures and infrastructure are located adjacent to or intermingled with wooded or other natural areas which can act as “fuels” to feed a fire in a wildland fire situation. Over 800 brush fires typically occur each year in Suffolk County, primarily during the spring and summer months (SCFRES, 2005). The potential devastation to property and natural resources that can occur from wildfires in the Central Pine Barrens was witnessed by local residents and the business community during the 1995 Rocky Point and Sunrise Fires that burned over 5,000 acres and continued for several days. These wildfires resulted in extensive evacuations, loss and damage to property and natural resources, the closure of major transportation routes in the area and significant adverse economic impacts to local businesses, tourism and residents. In April of 2012, another large wildfire, named the Crescent Bow wildfire, occurred in the Ridge and Manorville areas that burned over 1,200 acres and again resulted in evacuations and extensive property damage and financial burdens on local communities.

The standards and guideline contained in this section of the CLUP address many of the concerns expressed by the Commission’s Wildfire Task Force in its Fire Management Plan and by Suffolk County in its 2008 Hazard Mitigation Plan related to proper wildfire prevention planning in WUI areas. These standards shall apply to WUI areas as identified in Section 5.3.3.13.