

Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan

ATTACHMENT B - WILDLAND FIRES

I. NATURE OF THE HAZARD

Somerset County is subject to wild land (forest) fire events. There have been 294 wild land fires in Somerset County from 1995 to 2001. Historical data has shown that in October 1825, 3,000,000 acres burned in Maine and New Brunswick, Canada with the most severe forest fire in the State of Maine's recent history was in October 1947, devastating 205,687 acres and causing 16 deaths. Wild fire has been rated at the #4 hazard profiled in the Somerset County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan.

II. RISK AREA

There are 29 municipalities, 4 plantations and 83 unorganized territories within Somerset County. The unorganized territories (UT's) are contained within 4 political subdivisions, Northeastern, Northwestern, Central and Seboomook. The largest majority of the population locates within 7 communities in the south central part of the county that contains most of the urban-wild land interface with a large number of homes and businesses.

With information provided by the Maine Forest Service from the Maine Department of Conservation, it showed that even though the vast amount of easily assessable forested areas are contained within 4 political sub-divisions of unorganized territories there were only 91 wild land fires in the UT's from 1995 to 2001 and produced a low occurrence assessment. They are as follows: Central Somerset UT's – 12 (low), Northeastern UT's -28 (low), Northwestern UT's – 24 (low), and Seboomook UT's – 17 (low). In the 6 Plantations, only 19 wildfires occurred from 1995-2001 and produced a low fire occurrence assessment as well.

The largest number of wildfires from 1995-2001, occurred within the 27 remaining organized towns within Somerset County. 11 communities were determined to have a moderate fire occurrence assessment and the remaining 16 received a low fire occurrence. It was also determined that from the 7 largest populated communities with the most Urban-Wild land Interface, 4 have a moderate fire occurrence assessment.

The vast majority of the county is wooded with the greatest expanse of woodland and wood cover contained in the North and West of the county, spanned by a vast paper company and private road networks that allows open accessibility to outdoor recreation and therefore exposure to either natural fire occurrences or those with a human element involved; either planned or unplanned.

It is expected that a major wild land fire will cause major destruction as least once every ten years. Fire Starts Assessment, Land Cover Assessments, Population Assessments, and Composite Assessments are shown on County Base Maps and are included in this attachment.

III. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

Each municipality will be responsible for conducting wild land firefighting for fires within their jurisdiction. Due to the lack of firefighting resources, including manpower, the municipal fire chiefs will request mutual aid from fire departments throughout the County. For large and/or multi-jurisdictional wild land fires, the Maine Forest Service will provide command and control, additional wild land firefighters and vehicles and aircraft resources.

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When resources have been exhausted, each municipality will provide resource requests to the Somerset County EMA. The County EMA will forward the requests to the Maine Emergency Management Agency.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS

Communications will be maintained between the Somerset County Communications Center, the Somerset County EMA office, the first responders and the municipal officers. Even a large scale wild land fire is not likely to overload telephone lines or cellular telephones; however there may be localized telephone contact losses due to destroyed telephone transmission lines. Two-way radio traffic may become congested, since this is the primary means of communication for the municipal fire departments.

V. WARNING

The Maine Forest Service has contracted reconnaissance flights flown daily over the Maine Woods searching for wild land fires. First warning will either come from these flights or from residents or visitors to the area.

VI. EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

As soon as the situation is determined, the Somerset County EMA will contact local radio and television stations to notify the public of the expected path of the forest fire, instructions on when to evacuate from its path and the status of road closures.

VII. EVACUATION

Evacuations will be managed by the municipal police and fire departments, the Somerset County Sheriff's Office and the Maine State Police. The Somerset County EMA will oversee the evacuations from a regional point of view to reduce congestion and lessen evacuation times. The Somerset County EOC will be established and manned to perform this function.

VIII. MASS CARE

Evacuated tourists and those residents with families outside the danger areas will most likely not require sheltering. Tourists will depart the area and drive home or visit other areas of the state. Some evacuated residents may need shelter. These cases of sheltering will be managed by the Mid-Maine Chapter-Waterville of the American Red Cross. If the numbers are limited, these people may be sheltered in area commercial lodging. If the numbers are sufficiently high, then mass care facilities will be established outside the danger areas.

IX. HEALTH AND MEDICAL

The Somerset County EMA will contact municipal officials to determine the drinking water quality and sanitary conditions in their communities following a wildfire event.

X. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Municipalities will contact the County EMA office when requesting resources.