WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MONTH
May 2026

WHEREAS, nationwide wildfires continue to intensify: in 2021, an estimated 58,733 fires burned 7.14 million acres; by 2024, large-scale fire activity persisted above the long-term average, and;

WHEREAS, through mid-April 2026, the National Interagency Fire Center reported 63,366 wildfires burning approximately 768,000 acres well above typical early-season patterns, and;

WHEREAS, in North Carolina, the number of wildfires has remained high:

- 2021: 5,025 fires, 13,816 acres burned
- 2022: 6,099 fires, 20,126 acres
- 2023: 5,101 fires, 18,748 acres
- 2024: 4,588 fires, 15,706 acres
- 2025: 6,845 fires, 31,746 acres, and;

WHEREAS, as of April 14, 2026, nearly 3,589 wildfires have burned 9,051 acres statewide, demonstrating continued early-season wildfire activity, and;

WHEREAS, Buncombe County in 2025 experienced multiple wildfires such as:

- 130 acre fire near Freedom Farm Road
- 45 acre fire near Milk Sick Cove Road
- 15 acre fire off Ox Creek Road
- 10-acre fire off Cane Creek Road

highlighting the region's susceptibility under dry, windy conditions, and;

WHEREAS, human activity continues to be the leading cause of wildland fires accounting for nearly 85% of incidents nationally and the financial burden of wildfire suppression exceeds $2.5 billion annually at the federal level, not including extensive local damages, and;

WHEREAS, research confirms that wildfire smoke exposure increases health risks including asthma exacerbations, cardiac events, strokes, and certain cancers especially for vulnerable populations and first responders, and;

WHEREAS, proactive preventive measures such as defensible space creation, fire-resistant building materials, responsible vegetation management, regulated open burning, enforced building regulations, and effective evacuation planning are proven to reduce wildfire risks and enhance resilience,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners proclaims **May 2026** as **Wildfire Preparedness Month** in Buncombe County and encourages all residents, property owners, businesses, community organizations, and government agencies to:

- Improve public awareness of wildfire risks and trends through outreach and education
- Implement mitigation practices such as home hardening, defensible space, and safe landscaping
- Develop and rehearse evacuation plans inclusive of pets and livestock
- Monitor and comply with statewide and county-level permits & bans on open burning during high-risk periods

That the County supports coordination among local, state, & federal partners such as the NC Forest Service and National Interagency agencies to:

- Enhance early warning systems and situational awareness tools
- Deliver community-level wildfire preparedness training and risk reduction programs
- Promote safe response strategies and protective equipment for first responders
- Communicate health risk advisories related to wildfire smoke exposure
- Foster policies and planning that support land-use practices to minimize ignition and fuel loads

This 5th day of May, 2026.

Amanda Edwards

Amanda Edwards, Chair
Buncombe County Board of Commissioners