

## **KBDI Forecasts for Fire Management in Georgia and Florida**

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Studies have shown a connection between the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the potential for wildfire activity in Florida and in the southern coastal plain of Georgia. While this connection lends a degree of predictability to future wildfire activity, human intervention such as ignition, prescribed burns, and effective suppression, can also play a role. Wildfire Georgia and Florida combined have some 40 million acres of forests worth approximately \$20 billion and employing nearly 200,000 workers. In a typical year wildfires burn about 100,000 acres. The purpose of this research was to elicit potential end user feedback on the usefulness of the Keetch-Byram Wildfire Potential Forecasts that were developed by the Southeast Climate Consortium (SECC). The KBDI forecast format was developed through many discussions with fire weather experts at the Florida Division of Forestry, the Georgia Forestry Commission, USDA Forest Service, and with extension forestry specialists. The drought index is a continuous reference scale for estimating the dryness of the soil and duff layers. KBDI forecasts have been available on the Internet at AgClimate.org since January 2005. The site shows them as color GIS maps at the county level. SECC researchers conducted some 20 phone interviews with a purposive snowball sample of respondents. The sample included scientists, forest and fire managers, timber industry representatives, NGOs, and private forest consultants. Although few forest managers were aware of the KBDI forecast, most judged it, upon inspection, to be a very useful, informative, and easy to interpret tool. Decision makers mentioned they will incorporate the KBDI forecast into their planning for human resource, equipment, transportation, wildlife, and financial management; prescribed burning, procurement, and education or extension programs. Managers recommended that SECC should undertake several actions to improve the effectiveness of the KBDI forecast, namely: 1) conduct an outreach campaign targeted to key stakeholders; 2) send out a monthly KBDI outlook to relevant stakeholders; 3) refine the presentation of the forecast to respond to stakeholder feedback; 4) continue efforts to fine-tune spatial resolution; 5) include tutorials and explanations of how the forecast is produced; and 6) monitor and report on accuracy of the forecast.

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