

# 5-Mile Fire Break Protects Manchester's Roosevelt City From Fires

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April 22, 2021

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## The 200-yard-wide fire break aims to protect homes in the case of a raging forest fire.

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- Posted Wed, Apr 21, 2021 at 11:34 pm ET



The Roosevelt City section of Manchester sits in the Pine Barrens and is bordered on one side by Warren Grove, which was the site of a very large forest fire in 2007. (Google Maps)

MANCHESTER, NJ — Wildfires in the Pine Barrens are a perpetual concern, especially in the spring. For homeowners in areas surrounded by large swaths of forest, the concern can be heightened.

Manchester Township residents in the Roosevelt City section can breathe a sigh of relief, however, as a joint project by federal, state and county officials has created a 200-foot-wide, 5-mile-long fire break that now protects 4,000 residents and 1,700 homes, officials said.

The project started at the Ocean County level, with its Parks and Recreation and Planning departments working together, but soon gained notice from the federal Department of Defense and New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection and Forest Fire Service, Ocean County officials said.

The firebreak protects an area considered by the Forest Fire Service to be at the highest risk of loss of property and life in the event of a major wildfire. Forest fire season lasts until early May. Roosevelt City butts up against the Warren Grove area, which was the site of a forest fire that consumed 1,600 acres of Pine Barrens in 2007.

"We have seen the devastation wildfires can cause and how quickly they spread," said Gary Quinn, director of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners. "The action we took along with our partners to create this fuel-break will result in reduced wildfire risk.

Ocean County contracted with Shelterwood Forest Managers to complete a Forest Stewardship Plan for the Roosevelt City section, on property the county owns through Natural Lands Trust purchases. The Pinelands Commission approved the plan Sept. 11, 2020.

The Stewardship Plan aims to ensure the sustainability of the property's native forest; reduce wildfire risk to the residents of Roosevelt City by creating a fuel-break and to manage the forest with consideration for wildlife.

"Following the purchase of the Structural Management Property in Manchester Township by the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Program, we realized that we had an obligation as the new landowner to manage our property in a way that would decrease the wildfire risk for the nearby communities," said Michael Mangum, director of the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation. The county then worked on the agreement with Manchester officials and the forest fire service to create an agreement to manage the area.

In addition to the fire break, the agreement also encourages prescribed burning on the surrounding public land to reduce the accumulation of hazardous fuels by thinning vegetation including shrubs, which reduces the risk of wildfire. Thinning vegetation also improves the health of the forest.

County officials said the Defense Department joined when the state Department of Environmental Protection alerted the county to a grant opportunity, the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration challenge grant. The county applied in January 2020 and approved.

"The Roosevelt City project is just the first of six tasks, totaling \$1.9 million," said U.S. Navy Capt. Ed Callahan, commanding officer at Naval Weapons Station Earle. The work will help lower the risk of wildfire, increase storm surge resistance and increase stormwater capacity across three New Jersey counties, protecting five military facilities as well as their neighboring communities.

The REPI grant award of \$380,000 will pay for all of the contractual services for implementation of the fuel break, as well as, equipment for the long-term fire mitigation, officials said.

The fire break also Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst infrastructure.

The Ocean County Board of Commissioners awarded the contract for forestry thinning to Pagodin's Tree Care Service on Dec. 16, 2020. The thinning was completed in February. The County's contracted forester, Bill Brash of Shelterwood Forestry, provided oversight and final inspection of the project.

"We will continue to work with the state Forest Fire Service to do prescribed burns in the area reducing the accumulation of vegetation and growth that can act as fuels," Commissioner Virginia Haines said. "This effort is important to public safety and helps preserve the delicate ecology of the Pinelands."