

This applicaton is for:	Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award
Project Title	Table Rock Wildfire Incident: A Multi-agency Coordination Effort
County or Counties	Pickens and Greenville Counties
Application Contact	Jamie Burns
Application Email Address	jburns@pickenscountysc.gov
Presenter(s) Name and Title	Billy Gibson, Chief of Emergency Services (Pickens County); Andy Childs, Emergency Management Director (Pickens County); Pierce Womack, Emergency Management Director (Greenville County); Kathy Opalacz, Deputy Director of Emergency Management (Greenville County)
Main Presenter's Email Address	billyg@pickenscountysc.gov

Project Written Submission

Project Summary

The 2025 Table Rock Complex Fire was a historic wildfire event that impacted communities across Pickens and Greenville counties in Upstate South Carolina, with the fire briefly crossing into Transylvania County, North Carolina. The incident began on March 21, 2025, when a wildfire ignited inside Table Rock State Park. A second fire, later named the Persimmon Ridge Fire, started the next day near Caesars Head State Park. Due to their proximity and the need for efficient coordination, both fires were managed under a unified command structure.

Fanned by dry weather, steep terrain, strong winds, and heavy forest debris left behind by Hurricane Helene, the fires quickly spread, ultimately consuming nearly 15,973 acres. This made the Table Rock Complex Fire the largest wildfire in recent Upstate South Carolina history.

Firefighting efforts involved a massive multi-agency response, including crews from across the state, the South Carolina Forestry Commission, and the U.S. Forest Service. More than 1,000 personnel and over 400 apparatus were deployed. Strategies included ground-based firefighting, aerial water drops, and controlled backburns to contain the fire and protect nearby homes.

Evacuations were ordered in both Pickens and Greenville counties, and air quality alerts were issued across the region due to widespread smoke. Thanks to the rapid, coordinated response, there were no fatalities or structural losses reported.

This project highlights the importance of interagency collaboration, emergency preparedness, and wildfire mitigation in protecting South Carolina communities from large-scale natural disasters.

Project Effort/Difficulty

Successfully managing the 2025 Table Rock Complex Fire required an exceptional level of coordination, flexibility, and sustained effort from Pickens and Greenville counties, along with a wide network of partners. From the moment the fire broke out on March 21, county officials mobilized quickly—engaging

local, state, and federal agencies to address rapidly evolving objectives. The operation spanned 19 days and presented complex challenges including large-scale evacuations, public communication, fire suppression logistics, and shelter support—each requiring swift decision-making and interagency alignment.

To achieve its objectives, both counties established a robust operational framework that unified dozens of organizations and departments. Daily coordination occurred among Pickens County Emergency Management, Greenville County Emergency Management, the South Carolina Forestry Commission, SC State Fire (including Firefighter Mobilization, SC HART, and the Palmetto Incident Support Team), the South Carolina Emergency Management Division, the SC State Guard, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the State Law Enforcement Division, and Table Rock State Park officials.

Fire departments—including Pickens County, River Falls, Slater-Marietta, and many others from across Greenville County—provided critical support for structure protection, fire suppression, and tactical operations in rugged terrain. Medical services were delivered by Pickens County EMS, Greenville County EMS, and Prisma Health EMS. Law enforcement support came from both the Pickens County and Greenville County Sheriff's Offices, which assisted with road closures, evacuations, and public safety operations.

Other contributors played crucial roles, including the Greenville Water System, U.S. Forest Service, the federal "Blue" Incident Support Team, Table Rock Wesleyan Camp & Retreat Center, Safe Industries, and dedicated local individuals like Greg Hayes and Tammy Anthony. Their involvement helped scale the response, streamline operations, and address the diverse needs of residents and responders across both counties.

While collaboration was a major strength, it also came with challenges—particularly during the early stages. A primary obstacle was financing. With many agencies responding simultaneously, it was initially unclear how to allocate costs for resource deployment, equipment, and shelter operations. County leadership responded quickly by clarifying roles and cost-sharing responsibilities to maintain operational momentum.

Public concerns were also significant. Residents sought information on air quality, smoke, evacuation orders, road closures, shelters, and the safety of pets and livestock—particularly important in this rural, agricultural region. To address this, a Joint Information Center (JIC) was activated, where multi-agency public information officers coordinated messaging across social media, local news, and emergency communication channels. This unified approach reduced confusion, reassured residents, and built public trust.

Shelter coordination was another major focus. The American Red Cross, United Way, local churches, government agencies, community groups, and individual volunteers provided support for displaced residents—organizing donations, distributing supplies, and assisting with logistics. The outpouring of community support significantly strengthened the response effort.

Although the operation was a success, challenges remain. Cleanup continues in Table Rock State Park, and the incident revealed opportunities for improvement, including establishing a media staging area earlier, finalizing a comprehensive VOAD contact list, and using tools like Amazon wish lists to better manage donations in real time.

The Table Rock Complex Fire tested the region's emergency systems—but also showcased how regional partnerships can overcome operational, financial, and logistical hurdles. The experience strengthened collaboration and left the region more resilient for future disasters.

Benefit/Importance of Project

The 2025 Table Rock Complex Fire response represents a model of effective regional cooperation between Greenville and Pickens counties during one of the most significant natural disasters in recent South Carolina history. What began on March 21, 2025, as a single wildfire inside Table Rock State Park rapidly evolved into a multi-day, multi-jurisdictional emergency when a second fire ignited near Caesars Head State Park the following day. The situation demanded a unified command, shared resources, and coordinated decision-making between both counties, as well as state and federal partners.

Declared the highest-priority wildfire in the nation at the time, the Table Rock Complex Fire burned a total of 15,973 acres, with mandatory evacuations and public safety efforts spanning both Pickens and Greenville counties. Due to the fire's scale, rapid spread, and impact on public infrastructure, emergency managers and local officials quickly recognized that siloed responses would be insufficient. Instead, they activated joint emergency operations, leveraging each county's strengths, assets, and personnel to meet the crisis head-on.

This project highlights the growing importance of regional partnerships and cross-jurisdictional coordination in emergency response. While each county maintains its own emergency management departments and public safety teams, this fire demanded a seamless strategy that prioritized public safety, communication, and operational efficiency over administrative boundaries. Shared priorities included evacuation planning, public information dissemination, logistics coordination, fire suppression tactics, sheltering, and infrastructure protection.

The regional impact was profound. Directly affecting more than 4,000 residents and indirectly impacting thousands more, the fire and response efforts mobilized corners of both counties. Highway closures disrupted major travel corridors, smoke triggered widespread air quality alerts, and some business operations were interrupted. However, the collaborative effort ensured that all evacuations were conducted safely, no structures were lost, and—most notably—no fatalities or injuries occurred during the 19-day incident.

The benefits of this regional partnership extended well beyond fire suppression. Unified public messaging from both counties and partners ensured consistency and clarity, with coordinated alerts, briefings, and real-time updates reaching hundreds of thousands of residents. Multi-agency public information officers operated under a Joint Information Center (JIC) to coordinate and share verified updates across social media, local news, and emergency channels. An IPAWS message was coordinated by both counties and issued for the area of the fire. This approach strengthened public trust and minimized misinformation.

Community engagement was equally powerful. Residents, businesses, and nonprofits in both counties mobilized in support of responders and evacuees. Donations of meals, bottled water, lodging, and supplies poured in from every corner of the state. Mutual aid extended beyond formal agencies—citizens became part of the emergency response network, further blurring lines between the counties and reinforcing a regional identity grounded in unity and resilience.

From an operational standpoint, joint objectives were successfully achieved:

- Coordinated resource deployment, including over 1,000 personnel and 400 apparatus from state and federal partners
- Safe, efficient evacuations with no injuries or fatalities
- Protection of all threatened structures across both counties
- 100% containment of the fire by April 8, just 19 days after ignition
- Effective inter-county communication systems, improving situational awareness and decision-making
- Data-driven public messaging that reached statewide and national audiences

This collaboration showcased the advantages of breaking down jurisdictional barriers in times of crisis. Rather than duplicating efforts or competing for resources, Greenville and Pickens counties combined their strengths and worked side by side, with shared leadership and transparent communication. The result was a more agile, capable, and community-centered response that not only addressed the immediate emergency but also set a precedent for future regional cooperation in the face of natural disasters.

Looking ahead, the Table Rock Complex Fire response serves as a powerful example of the success that can be achieved when counties work together to protect lives, resources, and infrastructure. With the region still facing elevated wildfire risks due to lingering post-storm debris and environmental conditions, this experience has laid a strong foundation for ongoing inter-county training, communication, and joint preparedness planning. It demonstrates that regional strategies are not only effective—they are essential.

Project Originality/Innovation

The response to the Table Rock Complex Fire featured several innovative strategies and technologies that set it apart from other wildfire incidents in South Carolina, making it one of the most advanced emergency operations in the state's history.

A key innovation was the use of the Palmetto 800 statewide radio system, which allowed seamless communication across multiple agencies and jurisdictions. Radios were provided to out-of-area responders to ensure everyone operated on the same system, enabling coordinated efforts despite the complexity of the response. This system, widely used across South Carolina, proved critical in maintaining real-time communication among local, state, and federal partners in the rugged terrain of the incident area.

To further strengthen interoperability, Palmetto 800 was patched with the FleetTalk system, allowing mutual aid departments using either system to communicate effectively. Greenville County issued over 200 radios to arriving crews, ensuring that all responders—regardless of their home system—could integrate into the operational framework. Many departments already using either system were able to connect without additional equipment, which expedited deployment and minimized communication barriers.

In addition to Palmetto 800, Pickens County's newly implemented FleetTalk radio system enhanced localized coordination between departments. FleetTalk offered dependable radio coverage in areas where other systems were limited and was especially useful for intra-county operations. Prior joint training among partner agencies in using FleetTalk allowed for efficient communication, faster deployment, and smoother operations throughout the incident.

Another groundbreaking element of the response was the deployment of a Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) to drop fire retardant—marking the first time this aerial suppression tactic was used in South Carolina. The VLAT's extended range and capacity enabled it to reach remote, inaccessible parts of the wildfire, slowing its spread and protecting nearby communities and infrastructure. Its successful use sets a new precedent for aerial response capabilities within the state.

On the ground, Greenville and Pickens County dispatchers were co-located at the command post, utilizing a mobile communications unit called the Command Runner. This platform enabled dispatchers to work directly with field personnel and command staff, providing real-time coordination and improving response efficiency. It also allowed integration between field operations and emergency management leadership.

To overcome limited network access in the mountainous region, a Starlink satellite internet system was deployed to provide reliable high-speed internet. This allowed responders to access online resources, share files, print documents, and coordinate logistics digitally—a major advantage in an area with poor cellular and internet coverage. The use of Starlink and mobile technology also enhanced public information efforts and real-time resource tracking.

Overall, the Table Rock Complex Fire response showcased how modern technology can transform emergency management. The layered approach to communication—combining Palmetto 800, FleetTalk, satellite internet, mobile dispatching, and new aerial suppression tactics—enabled unprecedented coordination and effectiveness. These tools not only addressed the needs of this incident but also established a framework for future regional disaster response in South Carolina.

Concluding Remarks

The Table Rock Complex Fire response stands as a powerful example of what regional cooperation, innovation, and community resilience can accomplish. Faced with a rapidly spreading wildfire that endangered lives, property, and natural resources across county lines, Pickens and Greenville counties united under a shared mission and structure.

This multi-jurisdictional effort showcased how effective inter-county collaboration—combined with tools like Palmetto 800, FleetTalk, Starlink, and the historic deployment of a Very Large Air Tanker—can deliver stronger, faster, and safer outcomes. Public and private partners, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations also played vital roles, further highlighting the importance of inclusive, well-coordinated response networks.

While the challenges were great, the experience strengthened regional relationships, revealed key opportunities for future preparedness, and elevated standards for emergency response in South Carolina. Lessons learned from this incident are already shaping training, planning, and communications frameworks across both counties.

Ultimately, the Table Rock Complex Fire response reflects the very essence of the Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award—uniting communities, agencies, and technologies to protect lives and foster resilience in the face of disaster.

Massive South Carolina wildfire jumps border, spreads into North Carolina

The Table Rock Fire had burned more than 11,400 acres as of Sunday morning.

By [Bill Hutchinson](#)

March 30, 2025, 4:49 PM



Table Rock fire crosses into North Carolina The Table Rock wildfire has crossed into North Carolina, but officials say conditions are improving. ABC News' Faith Abubey reports from Pickens, South Carolina.

A massive [wildfire](#) burning for more than a week in South Carolina jumped the border Saturday and was spreading Sunday into North Carolina, where firefighters were already battling multiple blazes, officials said.

The Table Rock Fire, which started on March 21 in the Table Rock State Park in Pickens County, South Carolina, had burned 11,468 acres total as of Sunday morning in both South Carolina and North Carolina, charring more than 500 acres overnight, [according to](#) the South Carolina Forestry Commission.

The Table Rock Fire is now the highest-priority fire in the United States as fire crews responded from multiple states to help battle the blaze, which prompted the evacuations of more than 1,400 homes and businesses on Thursday.

As the fire spread across the border into North Carolina, the South Carolina Forestry Commission said firefighters had upped containment of the fire from 0% on Saturday to 9% by Sunday morning.

Derrick Moore, operations section chief with the South Carolina Forestry Commission's Southern Area Blue Team, said fire crews are hoping that rain forecast for the area later Sunday and into Monday will help firefighters extinguish the flames.

Pickens County Sheriff Tommy Blankenship said last week that investigators suspect the Table Rock Fire was started by four teenagers. He alleged that the negligent behavior of the teens caused the fire but declined to elaborate.

"They will be held accountable for their actions. I can promise you that," Blankenship said in a [video](#) posted to social media.



Smoke rises from the Table Rock Complex Fire in the distance, March 29, 2025, near Pumpkintown, South Carolina.

Sean Rayford/Getty Images

Evacuation Order

← Back to list

SC Emergency Management Division of the South Carolina Adjutant General's Office

SENDER

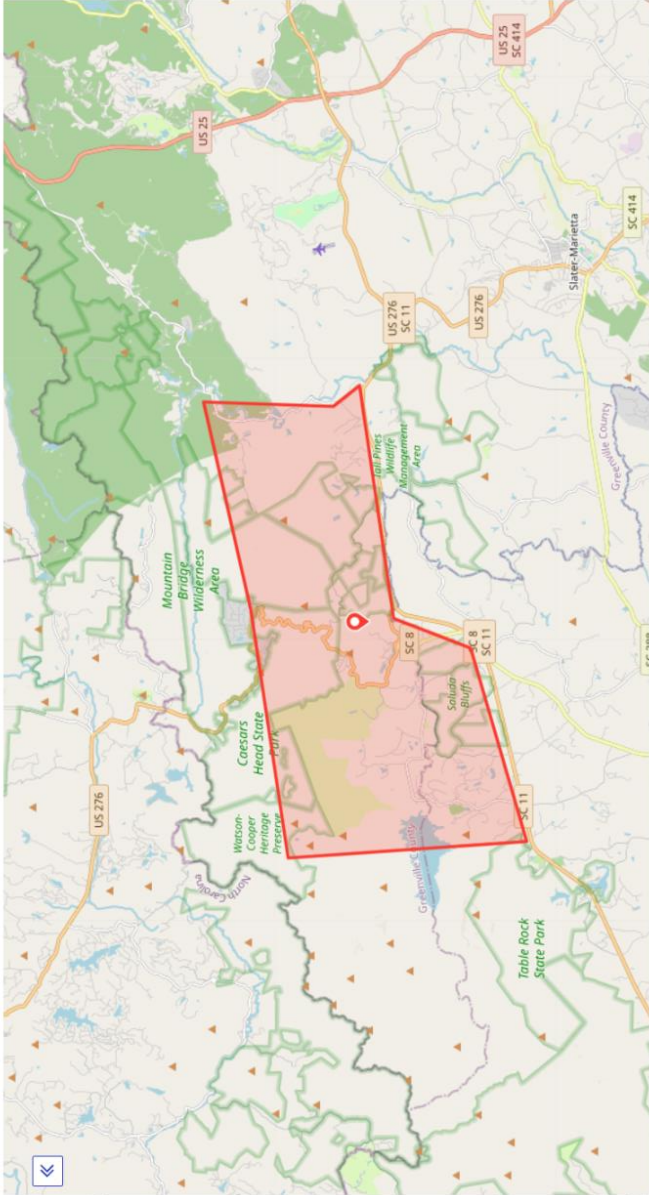
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WEA 360CH EN

Greenville County and Pickens County Emergency Managements. EVACUATE NOW! Mandatory Immediate Evacuation is issued for residents in the area east of the Greenville Water Shed, Table Rock Road area and west of River Falls Road. Wildfire Shelter is located at Marietta First Baptist Church located at 2936 Geer Highway, Marietta, SC 29661.

WEA 90CH EN

Evacuations underway in area due to wildfires. Shelter at 2936 Greer Hwy, Marietta 29661



Public Communication



Pickens County SC

Published by Jamie Burns · March 30 ·

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The Table Rock Complex Fire is now considered the highest priority wildfire in the nation. An estimated 600 people are engaged in response, from frontline work to food service. Thank you to the first responders, support staff, volunteers and everyone involved in relief efforts.

[#SCWildfire](#) [#TableRockComplex](#) [#TableRockComplexFire](#) [#SCmedia](#) [#Wildfire](#) [#PickensCountySC](#) [#tablerockfire](#)



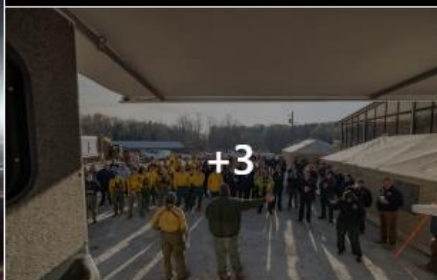


Greenville County Emergency Management

March 27 · 🌐

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As the Table Rock Complex Fire continues to grow, we want to thank the first responders who are out working to control the blaze. More than 170 personnel from around the state have responded, including [The South Carolina Forestry Commission](#), [South Carolina State Fire](#), [Greenville County Emergency Management](#), [Pickens County SC](#), [South Carolina Department of Natural Resources](#), SLED, USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Greenville Water and dozens of local Fire Departments.





Office of the County Administrator

Joseph M. Kernell
County Administrator
jkernell@greenvillecounty.org
(864) 467-7105
www.greenvillecounty.org

July 23, 2025

South Carolina Association of Counties
PO Box 8207
Columbia, SC 29201

RE: Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

It is with profound pride that I endorse the collaborative initiative between Greenville County and Pickens County for the South Carolina Association of Counties' esteemed Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award, acknowledging their outstanding joint response to the Table Rock Complex Fire in spring 2025.

This wildfire ignited in late March—on March 21 in Pickens County and March 22 in Greenville County—at a time when debris from Hurricane Helene had created dangerously flammable conditions. What began as separate blazes in Table Rock State Park and the Mountain Bridge Wilderness merged into the Table Rock Complex Fire, ultimately becoming the largest active wildfire in the nation by mid-spring, consuming over 15,000 acres across both counties.

Faced with this escalating emergency, Greenville and Pickens Counties relied on their established framework of regional collaboration: shared emergency plans, coordinated training drills, and unified communication protocols. In concert with volunteers, state and local agencies, and incident command teams, they executed a highly disciplined suppression strategy. The effort prevailed: zero fatalities, no destroyed homes, and full containment was achieved by April 8, 2025.

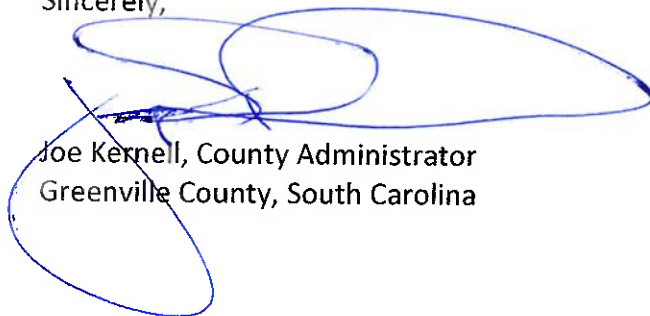
This success was not by chance. It was rooted in lessons from the 2016 Pinnacle Mountain Fire—particularly around command coordination and throughput of resources—and reinforced through planned exercises between the counties. Sustained cooperation with the South Carolina Forestry Commission, Greenville County's

Emergency Management, and Pickens counterparts, ensured a seamless deployment of personnel, aircraft, and equipment until containment was secure.

What could have escalated into a regional catastrophe instead stood as a testament to what effective local governance and intergovernmental unity can achieve. Through shared strategy and mutual support, both counties demonstrated professionalism, efficiency, and unwavering dedication to public safety.

On that basis, I wholeheartedly recommend that Greenville County and Pickens County be recognized with the Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award for their exemplary and life-saving collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above the printed name.

Joe Kernell, County Administrator
Greenville County, South Carolina

PICKENS COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNCIL MEMBERS

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COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
KEN ROPER

CLERK TO COUNCIL
MEAGAN NATIONS

July 16, 2025

South Carolina Association of Counties
PO Box 8207
Columbia, SC 29201

RE: Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is with great pride that I endorse the joint effort of Pickens County and Greenville County for the South Carolina Association of Counties' Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award, in recognition of their exemplary response to the Table Rock Complex Fire during the spring of 2025.

The Table Rock Complex Fire ignited on March 22, 2025, ultimately becoming the largest active wildfire in the nation at that time. Fueled by debris left in the wake of Hurricane Helene, the fire consumed more than 15,000 acres across both counties and posed grave threats to nearby communities, natural resources, and critical infrastructure. In response, Pickens and Greenville counties—drawing on long-standing operational partnerships and a strong culture of intergovernmental collaboration—mounted a coordinated and effective effort. With the support of numerous volunteers, as well as state and local agencies, we successfully managed the crisis without the loss of a single life or home.

This exceptional response reflected years of preparation, including joint planning initiatives, inter-county training exercises, and the development of shared communication protocols. The lessons learned from the 2016 Pinnacle Mountain Fire also proved invaluable, informing a swift and disciplined approach. Both counties partnered closely with the incident command, South Carolina Forestry Commission, throughout the operation, sustaining efforts until the fire was fully contained on April 8, 2025.

The Table Rock Complex Fire response serves as a compelling demonstration of the power and effectiveness of regional cooperation and effective local government. What could have been a disaster of historic magnitude instead became a model of professionalism, efficiency, and life-saving coordination—precisely because the counties chose partnership over isolation.

In recognition of this extraordinary joint achievement, I offer my strongest recommendation that Pickens County and Greenville County be honored with the Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ken Roper".

Ken Roper