

# Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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## Campfires now prohibited during State Forester's Burning Bans

*New legislation amends 'notification and precautions law,' stiffens penalties for first and second offenses*

COLUMBIA—Gov. Henry McMaster signed into law House Bill 3719 Friday, adding campfires and other recreational fires to the list of activities that can be prohibited under a State Forester's Burning Ban. The legislation also raises the fines levied on those convicted of violating the ban to up to \$200 for first offenses and at least \$500 for second and subsequent offenses.

Previously, campfires, bonfires and open-fire cooking were conspicuous exceptions to the burning restriction imposed by such a ban, which the State Forester is given the authority by state law to declare in fire-, weather- and/or resource-related emergencies. The only outdoor burning that may be allowed when a State Forester's Burning Ban is enacted are "fires used for non-recreational purposes such as those for human warmth or for the preparation of food for immediate consumption." With this change, however, citizens are not required to notify the Forestry Commission when building a campfire or bonfire.

"The original law contained a loophole that prevented us from banning campfires and bonfires in times of emergency because of the way it was worded," said SCFC Fire Chief Darryl Jones. "Before this change, the State Forester's Burning Ban applied only to fires for which the Forestry Commission is required to take notification, such as for burning yard debris or for conducting prescribed fires for forestry, agricultural or wildlife purposes."

The Forestry Commission sought the change in state law this legislative session after an escaped campfire started the month-long, 10,623-acre Pinnacle Mountain Fire at Table Rock State Park last November that cost \$4.8 million to fight. That Pickens County fire became the largest longest and costliest fire in Upstate history.

"We're very glad that the General Assembly helped us shore up the notification-and-precautions laws, as they are collectively called [SC Code of Laws Section 48:35:10-60]," said State Forester Gene Kodama. "We've seen the financial toll that a single escaped campfire can have, and it only makes sense that we have the option to include recreational fires as part of any burning ban. South Carolina is a safer place because of this change in the law."

State law requires that citizens outside of unincorporated areas notify the Forestry Commission before burning outdoors. The notification is a quick, easy, automated process, and the toll-free numbers for each county are provided at the link below:

<http://www.state.sc.us/forest/fyard.htm>

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*As the only state agency responsible for wildfire suppression in all unincorporated areas of the state, the South Carolina Forestry Commission protects 12.9 million acres from wildland fire. More than 500 county, municipal and volunteer fire departments operate more than 1,100 fire stations in South Carolina. The Forestry Commission cooperates with these departments to prevent and control structural and wildland fires, employing highly trained firefighters and specialized equipment when fires burn into forested areas that are difficult to reach.*

### Did you know...?

An astounding 98 percent of all wildland fires are caused by human activities, and escaped debris burns are responsible for nearly 50 percent of them. South Carolina Forestry Commission firefighters respond to an average of 2,500 wildland fires every year, burning about 18,000 acres annually.

