

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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Forestry Commission officials expect busy wildfire season

SCFC fire chief warns of growing danger as current weather conditions persist

The South Carolina Forestry Commission is warning the public to be extremely vigilant about outdoor burning of any kind throughout the fall season and especially this weekend.

Predictive forecasts for the coming months are very similar to those the state experienced in the run-up to the 2016 wildfire season, which was the most damaging in terms of acreage and number of fires since 2011. There has also been a large uptick in wildfires this month; the Forestry Commission has already recorded 181 wildfires this September, more than double the 10-year average of 89.

“We really want to make as stern a warning as we can about fire safety and prevention,” said SCFC Fire Chief Darryl Jones. “We’re not at the point where we should call for a Red Flag Fire Alert, much less a burning ban, but those circumstances could change at any time over the next week. If winds intensify and/or relative humidity drops, we will definitely see ignitions increase dramatically.”

Drought conditions, as indicated specifically by the wildfire-related index of soil moisture deficits, are so acute, particularly in the Piedmont/Upstate region of South Carolina, that Forestry Commission officials are urging citizens to maintain the highest level of attentiveness and alertness as possible.

“With the arrival of autumn and leaves from deciduous hardwood trees beginning to fall, we know that more people will be outside cleaning up their yards and land by burning vegetative yard debris, conducting prescribed burns for forestry and agriculture, and building campfires while they are outdoors camping or hunting,” said Jones. “When everything is this dry, any size fire can escape easily, so out of an abundance of caution we are emphasizing to the public that outdoor burning is very dangerous right now.”

The threat is such that the SC Department of Natural Resources will prohibit outdoor burning, including campfires, in and around the Jocassee Gorges, beginning Monday, Sept. 30. Additionally, the SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism will be implementing restrictions on campfires at some state parks; visitors are encouraged to check with staff at each park.

The Forestry Commission also encourages those working on or with rail lines or other heavy equipment near woodlands to be especially cautious about preventing sparks and other ignitions from the operation of such apparatus. Any spark, even from a discarded cigarette, in such conditions can trigger a wildfire.

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 1,800 wildland fires every year, burning about 15,000 acres annually (10-year average).

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