

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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SCFC welcomes back 16 of its wildland firefighters from Florida

South Carolina contingent deployed to battle wildfires as part of southern states' compact

COLUMBIA—The South Carolina Forestry Commission is welcoming back 16 of its wildland firefighters who were sent to Florida two weeks ago to help battle nearly 150 active wildfires across the Sunshine State.

Responding to a request for support from the Florida Forest Service as part of a firefighting assistance agreement called the Southern Compact, the Forestry Commission sent two strike teams May 13 to join beleaguered firefighting crews from around the South; the SCFC contingent included 14 men and two women from all corners of the Palmetto State. More than 2,100 fires have burned across Florida this year, scorching nearly 200,000 acres.

One strike team included four specially designed Type 6 engine trucks that carry at least 150 gallons of water and pump 50 gallons a minute. The other strike team consisted of three enclosed-cab bulldozers, their operators and a “swamper.” A swamper is a crew member who works with a chainsaw to clear debris, pulls winch line and helps maintain equipment to speed suppression work on a fire.

“The personnel we sent to Florida undergo regular training for exactly these kinds of special assignments,” said SCFC Fire Chief Darryl Jones. “Not only do they provide much-needed help while they’re down there, but they’re also getting valuable experience that they can bring back to South Carolina.”

State and federal forestry agencies often request assistance from other states to help battle wildfires that overwhelm local resources. At times during the Pinnacle Mountain Fire that burned more than 10,000 acres at Table Rock State Park last November and December, out-of-state personnel working on the fire outnumbered Forestry Commission crews four-to-one. “Our agency and those in other states don’t like having to call on outside resources,” said State Forester Gene Kodama. “But sometimes it’s necessary, and it’s comforting to know we have this resource-sharing compact in place when you need it.”

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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...?

Escaped debris burns are the number one cause of wildfires in South Carolina. Of the state’s nearly 1,000 wildfires in FY2015-16, 48 percent were caused by escaped debris burning, more than double all other fire causes combined. Arson/incendiary reasons were the second-leading cause at about 16%. Many people are surprised to learn that cigarettes, lightning, campfires and fireworks combine for less than 10 percent of wildfire origins.

