

# The Southern Perspective

*Providing Leadership for the South's Forests*

SEPT. 19, 2005

## Southern Group of State Foresters Serves as the Hands and Feet of Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts

Recently, Hurricane Katrina raged through the Gulf Coast Region decimating everything in her path. In her short trek across Coastal Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle, Katrina uprooted families, paralyzed a nation, and left an unparalleled wake of destruction, earning her a place in history as the worst natural disaster the United States has ever seen.

Still reeling from the effects of the storm, our country struggles to comprehend the magnitude of what was lost in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The needs are tremendous as hundreds of thousands of families pour into neighboring states.

State Forestry Agencies from across the South were there from the beginning of this tragedy and continue to provide support to the region. We have joined hands with sister agencies to provide a community of more than 3,900 people, including 563 from the Southern State Forestry Agencies. This community has:

- Managed base camps for emergency workers and evacuees as well as logistical centers for the movement and distribution of emergency supplies including camper trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- Provided logistical and camp management for mortuaries and supervised shelters for evacuees through Incident Management Teams (IMT's).
- Offered chain saw crews and large equipment such as helicopters, bulldozers, tractors, and forklifts to aid in rescue, recovery, and clean-up efforts.
- Supplied ninety-eight federal law enforcement officers to protect and provide evacuees with a sense of security.
- Created and supplied Emergency Management Agency Crews (EMAC's) to provide logistical support for an Urban Search and Rescue Team.

While we continue to provide much needed assistance, relief, and supplies to survivors, the need to assess the amount of devastation caused to private forest landowners is also present. The Southern Group of State Foresters, in conjunction with sister agencies, has already begun the seemingly insurmountable task of assessing the damage brought to Southern wildlands and private forestlands by Hurricane Katrina as well as the potential effects this damage could produce.

The United States Forest Service has begun aerial photo flight missions over Mississippi and Louisiana to evaluate the damage incurred by national forest and privately owned lands in the region. Current estimates indicate that 19 billion board feet of timber was blown down during Hurricane Katrina. In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan destroyed 1.3 billion cubic feet of timber. When the current estimates of damage done by Katrina are coupled with the amount of timber destroyed by Ivan, the risks to Wildland-Urban Interface communities within the region grow exponentially:

- Valuable fallen timber could deteriorate and be lost.
- Decaying, dry woody material on the ground could begin to burn causing dangerous and potentially uncontrollable wildfires and leading to the further destruction of wildlands and private property.
- Invasive species of flora could spread rapidly in the place of fallen trees, thus choking out newly planted seedlings and impeding reforestation efforts.
- Streams and other water sources flowing from forest lands could be contaminated by chemicals, bacteria, and other pathogens loosed during and in the aftermath of the storm.

The Southern Group of State Foresters is working diligently in collaboration with other agencies to assess and eliminate the risks posed by these potentially dangerous side effects of the storm. We will present the data and information collected during these evaluations to Congress in support of emergency supplemental appropriation requests for forestland recovery, fire hazard reduction, financial assistance to volunteer fire departments, and community restructuring and rebuilding efforts.

As we meet with families that have survived the hurricane, we hear amazing stories of loss, survival, and gratitude for the generosity of people like you. As we do when loved ones are lost during the suppression of a raging wildfire, we are left with our grief and the question, "why?"

The pain is intense, but the spirit is strong. Though we all mourn the great losses suffered in the region, we find hope in the stories of strength, courage, survival, and generosity pouring out of the region and the country daily. Our thoughts are with all affected by this historic natural disaster.

To obtain the latest update on our efforts, contact: Mike Zupko, SGSF Executive Manager at 770-267-9630 [sgsfexec@mindspring.com](mailto:sgsfexec@mindspring.com) Or David Frederick, SGSF Fire Representative, 334-365-8690 [firereprsgsf@charter.net](mailto:firereprsgsf@charter.net)



The "Southern Perspective" is a Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) publication. The SGSF is comprised of the Southern States, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, International Institute of Tropical Forestry and Southern Research Station. Collectively, they provide leadership for the South's forests.

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*A view of the sky during hurricane Katrina*



*Thousands attended the 2005 White House Cooperative Conservation Conference in St. Louis, Missouri.*

## SGSF Members Participate in White House Conference

SGSF Chair, Leah MacSwords, and Texas State Forester, Jim Hull, were among the thousands who attended the 2005 White House Cooperative Conservation Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The Conference brought stakeholders and policymakers together to focus on new strategies for conservation practices on tribal, state, local, federal, and private lands.

These new strategies help increase food and shelter for wildlife, control soil erosion, reduce sediment in waterways, conserve water, improve water quality, inspire a stewardship ethic, and beautify the landscape.

Southern state forestry agencies have a long history of developing relationships, working cooperatively, and building partnerships. They continue to work with communities to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for residents living in the wildland-urban interface.

Through the Forest Land Enhancement Program and Forest Stewardship Programs, these agencies provide technical and financial assistance for private forest landowners.

Increased land values, urbanization, taxes, and declining or changing timber markets challenge today's forest landowners. These challenges intensify the temptation to sell land or avoid active forest management and its associated costs. State forestry agencies are exploring market-based opportunities and landowner incentive packages to generate new sources of income from Southern forests.

For more information about the White House Conference, visit [www.conservation.cequ.gov/about/html](http://www.conservation.cequ.gov/about/html)

## SGSF Chair Calls on Forestry Schools to "Teach Outside the Woods"

Remember when a forester was just a guy in working in the woods by himself?

Today, the practice of forestry has expanded far beyond identifying trees, understanding forest ecosystems, or writing management plans. It is with this in mind that SGSF Chair, Leah MacSwords addressed professors, scientists, and other forestry professionals during the 2005 Annual Southern Forest Leadership Tour.

"Forestry is more than a science; it now encompasses the 'art' of telling the story," MacSwords said. "We need critical thinkers, good communicators, and people with good writing and public speaking skills. Telling our story means talking to local officials, community groups, forest industry representatives, and the public in a way that makes forestry relevant to their lives. It means developing a relationship with private forest landowners that leads to forest management. It means forming strong alliances with federal agencies, conservation groups, forest industries, and others who represent natural resource needs.

"The students that graduate from forestry schools today will be responsible for shaping future forestry policies, developing forest products, and finding answers to our forest research questions. They will need a vision for what those policies, products, and research needs will be," MacSwords continued.

She concluded by reminding the participants that state forestry agencies are the future employers of today's forestry students, and the challenges these students will face will not be confined to the woods. To be a qualified applicant for positions with government, industry, non-profit organizations or private consultants, forestry students must hone all their skills, not just those they will use in the woods.

### Questions, Comments Or Want To Submit an Article

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