

# The Southern Perspective

*Providing Leadership for the South's Forests*

## IN THIS ISSUE



Southern Group of State Foresters  
Chair,  
**Leah MacSwords**  
Kentucky State  
Forester

The response to the first edition of our newsletter has been wonderful. Thank you all! The many positive comments have encouraged us to share more about what we're doing to assist Southern private forest landowners and maintain the integrity of our forested lands.

On June 22, 2005, I had the privilege of testifying before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Agriculture on behalf of the National Association of State Foresters. Although I acknowledged the strong bond we have with the USDA Forest Service and emphasized our long history of cooperation, the main focus of my testimony was to emphasize the importance of private and state forestlands to the welfare of the nation as a whole.

I identified two great hindrances to accomplishing our mission of ensuring healthy, sustainable forests—the insufficient recognition of the private forestland owner and inadequate funding for programs to assist them. Federally owned forests seem to draw all the attention, but private landowners hold title to the greatest number of forested acres in this country. However, in times of budget shortfalls, the programs to assist private forestland owners and state forestry agencies that provide technical assistance to them are the first to be cut.

For example, the lack of funding for the Watershed Forestry Assistance Program has prevented states from accelerating riparian restoration work and further encouraging the use of best management practices to protect streams, lakes and rivers. Lack of funding for the

Community and Private Lands Assistance Program reduces our ability to assist communities with planning and reducing hazardous fuels from around their property. The practice of "borrowing" funds to pay for wildland firefighting expenses from federal programs designated for private forest landowners and economic action directly impacts the private landowner's ability to practice sustainable forestry and state forestry agencies' ability to deliver assistance. The Forest Land Enhancement Program that we fought so hard to have included in the 2002 Farm Bill never had enough money to be the viable landowner assistance program that it was envisioned to be.

State forestry agencies have a long history of assisting private forest landowners and building partnerships, and we're proud of our accomplishments. Tight purse strings will always be with us, but with all the treats facing our Southern forests such as loss of forestland, fragmentation, a myriad of harmful insects and diseases, and changing markets, we can't afford to sit and wring our hands. We must learn to think bigger than the lack of federal funds. We must work smarter, target areas of maximum effectiveness, focus on leadership and leveraging, and lead private forest landowners to an assortment of other economic opportunities in forestry such as recreation, environmental services, biomass and non-traditional products. We must examine our protection programs, retool our stewardship programs, and even tackle conservation education. We need to explore ways of doing great things with or without more money by learning from the example of others who have been successful.

We face challenges, yet we remain steadfast in our commitment to shape the future of Southern forestry. We will be calling on our partners to help us tell the story of Southern forests and to share their ideas with us for protecting and conserving our forest resources.

*For a copy of the written testimony <http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/transcripts.html> (6/2205).*

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**President Empowers Communities and Natural Resource Agencies to Reduce Wildland-Urban Interface Fires and Partners**

The "Southern Perspective" is a Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) publication. The SGSF is comprised of 13 Southern State Forestry agencies, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and USDA Forest Service, Southern Region and Southern Research Station. Collectively, they provide leadership for the south's forests.





*Funding Status of State & Private Forestry Programs*

## LEGISLATIVE HAPPENINGS

### *FY '06 Budget*

On August 4, 2005, President Bush signed a \$26.3 billion 2006 Interior, Environment, and Appropriations Act (PL 109-54) into law. The bill includes funding for the coming fiscal year for the Interior Department, U.S. EPA and Forest Service. Despite anticipated reductions in certain USFS State and Private Forestry programs, allocations were approximately the same and in some cases higher than FY 05. The largest increases were in State Fire Assistance (8 percent) and Stewardship (7 percent) while Urban and Community Forestry was reduced by approximately 11 percent.

Allocations for “protection” programs followed House marks with the Senate and House “splitting” differences on Forest Inventory/Analysis and Stewardship. The Conference Committee favored Senate marks in Forest Legacy but was well below the President’s proposal. The following table summarizes several program appropriations prior to a budget rescission of approximately 48 percent.

Program Senate(\$M)	FY 05 (\$M)	FY '06 (\$M)	House (\$M)	
	President's			
State Fire Assistance/NFP	74129	50300	76422	66679
Coop. Forest Health/NFP	58300	57500	58000	27206
Urban-Comm. Forestry	32400	27500	28175	28675
Forest Legacy	57134	80000	25000	62632
Inventory and Analysis	55926	68714	62100	58434
Stewardship	32320	37099	37399	32320

### *National Fire Plan Testimony*

The SGSF Team prepared written testimony for the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) Vice President, Jim Hull, to file at a hearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies. He gave this testimony regarding National Fire Plan

progress and issues to the Subcommittee on July 14, 2005. Key points in the testimony included the need for improved interagency coordination, funding strategies to avoid borrowing from non-fire programs, and emphasis on state and volunteer firefighting relationships.

Hull noted in particular that the Southern Region experiences more wildfires than any other region of the country averaging in excess of 45,000 wildland fires per year. Ninety-four percent of these are state jurisdiction fires and thus fall under the responsibility of state forestry agencies.

Due to the fact that nearly 90% of the forestland in the South is privately owned, wildland fire typically poses a threat to improvements such as homes, businesses, and communities. Hull stressed that State Foresters are concerned that even with all its successes, the National Fire Plan has disproportionately favored federal lands and has thus neglected the needs and concerns of the Southern Region.

### *Conservation Easements*

In June, a hearing before the Senate Committee on Finance was conducted to examine the “Tax Code and Land Conservation” with particular attention to tax deductions associated with donations of conservation easements. Serious inadequacies and alleged abuses of federal tax law are prompting lawmakers to consider major revisions in conservation easement tax treatment.

At issue is the extent to which changes in tax law could jeopardize effective forest conservation initiatives of Forest Legacy, The Nature Conservancy, and other programs and organizations with similar missions. It is expected that Chairman, Chuck Grassley (IA), and Ranking Member, Max Baucus (MT), will introduce legislation before the August recess with the intention of requiring stricter enforcement of standards and procedures rather than significantly reducing justifiable tax benefits.

NASF and SGSF will continue monitoring the legislation with attention to provisions assuring responsible compliance without placing legitimate conservation programs at risk.

### *Endangered Species*

House Resources Committee Chairman, Richard Pombo (CA), continues his commitment to restructuring the Endangered Species Act with emphasis on revising listing and habitat designation

processes as well as payments to property owners impacted by provisions of the Act. Senate Subcommittee hearings have also focused on landowner incentives, but Committee leadership has expressed apprehension about the extensive revisions contained in the House proposal. Senator Lincoln Chafee (RI), Chairman of the Senate panel that oversees the Endangered Species Act, indicated that the Senate will proceed on a slower timeline than the House and anticipates hearings on state and tribal roles in September.

Meanwhile, Pombo indicated that he will not introduce the measure until after the August recess, thereby allowing time to find compromises on the more contentious issues in the Bill.

The Southern Group will monitor legislation with attention to provisions that seek to improve recovery planning processes, enhance consultation among agencies as well as impacted landowners, and promote effective and scientific criteria for the designation of critical habitat.

*For more information on state and congressional legislation, contact Mike Countess, SGSF Policy Analyst, at the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Ellington Agricultural Center, Nashville, TN, 615-837-5311 or 615-417-0345.*



### **Texas Forest Service Get Results**

When dry lightning sparked several wildfires in the Davis Mountains July 1, 2005, staff at the University of Texas McDonald Observatory knew the observatory might once again be threatened by more than smoke. One of the fires, the Three-Points Fire, which burned nearly 8,000-acres, came dangerously close to the observatory. However, the staff also knew they had worked diligently with the Texas Forest Service for the past three years to reduce the threat of wildfires destroying the valuable telescopes and research equipment as well as the community surrounding the observatory.

“We encouraged the observatory managers to take a

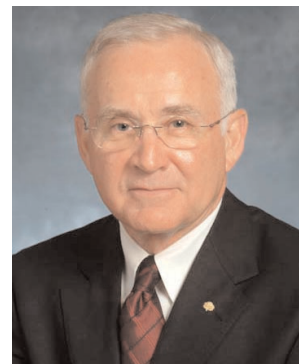
proactive approach, before the observatory was threatened by wildfire, like those occurring in the Davis Mountains in 2000 and 2001,” Texas Forest Service Regional Fire Coordinator Bill Davis said. He continued, “In just that one section of land, there are more than \$200 million in assets and more than 150 residents. We knew that for not a lot of money, they could add a whole lot of protection.”

Their work has paid off in more than peace of mind. On Saturday, July 30, 2005, the McDonald Observatory will receive national recognition as a Firewise Community/ USA for their efforts in making the observatory and surrounding community more resistant to wildfires.

McDonald Observatory Superintendent K. Russell Peterman is a firm believer that the project was well worth the time and work committed to it. He said the main focus was reducing fuels such as high grass, brush and trees by thinning out trees, cutting low hanging branches, mowing grass, and removing brush. This will be an ongoing effort. Crews also put in firebreaks to stop the spread of an approaching fire. The Texas Forest Service constructed a firescape road because there was only one exit/entrance from the observatory. “We literally would have had no way off the mountain if a fire would have blocked the main road,” Peterman said. “That problem has now been solved.”

With its tours and stargazing events, McDonald Observatory is a well-known tourist destination. On any given day, there could be thousands of people visiting the observatory. “This project makes complete sense from a public safety standpoint,” Peterman said.

The observatory is home to the third-largest optical telescope in the world, the Hobby-Eberly Telescope (HET). “Since HET will be used for a major dark energy experiment that will require more than \$20 million in new science instruments, it is more important than ever to protect the huge investment that The University of Texas has in this facility,” he added. Other observatories have also felt the effects of wildfires. In 2003, the Mount Stromlo Observatory in Australia lost five telescopes, workshops, eight staff homes, and the observatory’s main dome to a wildfire. Just this month, Arizona’s



*Mr. Jim Hull,  
Texas State Forester*

*Interviews and media tours of the project can be scheduled by contacting: Traci Weaver at 979-218-3035, 432-426-3676 or Russell Peterman: 432-426-3633 or 432-249-0703. For more information, visit, <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu> <http://mcdonaldobservatory.org>*



[smokeybear.com](http://smokeybear.com)

### ***Smokey Bear Recognizes Excellence in Fire Prevention***

Most of us have no intention of starting a wildfire that could destroy homes, lives, and forestland. However, each year hundreds of fires across the South are caused by arsonists, families burning leaves unattended in their back yards, and other careless acts. With education and responsible practices, we as individuals can make a difference in the fight against unwanted wildfires. We can help protect forests, birds, deer, and other woodland animals from the devastating effects of wildfires.

Each year, National Smokey Bear Awards are presented to individuals, organizations, and corporations for outstanding efforts in preventing wildfires. The National Association of State Foresters, the USDA Forest Service, and the Advertising Council sponsor these highest national awards for wildland fire prevention.

According to Bill Sweet, "each year the competition to earn one of these prestigious awards becomes more competitive which is a significant testimony to support of the Southern Wildland Fire Prevention Program."

On June 13, 2005, during the Southern Group of State Foresters annual meeting, the Pisgah Ranger District, Cradle of Forestry in America, National Forests in North Carolina, The Florida Division of Forestry's Blackwater Forestry Center and Kentucky Division of Forestry, received recognition for their prevention efforts.

The Pisgah Ranger District received a National Certificate for hosting a high visibility Smokey Bear Birthday Party at the Cradle of Forestry, America's first school of forestry. This party, hosted since 1990, attracts more than 1,000 Smokey Bear fans.

Adults and children learn about fire prevention through song, games, and educational handouts. Activities include face painting and Smokey tattoos, creating birthday cards, playing "Pin the Pail on the Campfire" and "Smokey Bingo," shooting water at a mock fire with a backpack pump, and an appearance by Smokey.

The Southeast Tourism Society listed the event as one of the top twenty events for the month of August 2004 for the celebration of Smokey's 60th birthday.

Festivals.com chose Smokey's birthday party as the Greatest Event on Earth for August 4, 2001.

The Florida Division of Forestry's Blackwater Forestry Center received a national Bronze Award for the development of several fire prevention programs aimed at reducing illegal debris burning in Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties. The programs include the development of portable billboards with interchangeable messages, Adopt-A-Smokey Bear Program, Clown Program, and Hurricane Ivan recovery efforts.

The portable billboards are dispatched throughout the state to get maximum exposure, and encourage others to prevent illegal debris burning. According to the Center's spokesperson, "The success of these units surpassed expectations." The Adopt-a-Smokey program is designed for elementary schools and includes Smokey Bear dolls and backpacks. The one-of-a-kind Clown Program clowns, allow clowns to answer questions on behalf of Smokey Bear and role play using teaching techniques for children.

Hurricane Ivan wreaked havoc throughout the tri-county area. The workload of the dispatch center increased dramatically with requests for debris burning authorizations and complaints about smoke. Agency personnel visited individuals and neighborhoods providing literature on smoke and debris burning. They developed public service announcements and conducted live interviews for radio and television regarding safe debris burning.

The Kentucky Division of Forestry was presented a Bronze Smokey Bear Award for having a wildland fire prevention program of statewide significance and a Franklin Award for outstanding wildland fire protection programs.

Leah MacSwords, director of the Kentucky Division of Forestry, accepted the awards on behalf of the division's 237 employees. "Their continued hard work earned Kentucky these honors. We were notified that we were receiving the Bronze Smokey Award but were pleasantly surprised to also receive the Franklin Award. This truly validates the important work we do," she said.

The Division was recognized for an extensive media campaign to promote wildland fire and arson prevention as well as their implementation of the Kentucky Firewise Program. Leah MacSwords, State Forester and Bernie Andersen, Fire Chief accepted the awards on behalf of the Kentucky Division of Forestry.

*If you are interested in receiving recognition for your wildfire prevention efforts, contact William R. Sweet, Program Manager, Fire Prevention and Wildland Urban Interface at 205- 916-0569 or [bsweet@fs.fed.us](mailto:bsweet@fs.fed.us)*

**National Fire Plan Success Story:  
South Carolina Division of forestry—  
Living on the Edge**

On a Thursday evening in August, 2004 the South Carolina Forestry Commission held our first homeowners' workshop using the newly produced Living on the Edge CD-ROM, which has been redesigned and adapted for South Carolina by ITM of Tallahassee, Florida.

Savannah Lakes Village in McCormick County is a planned community located at the border of South Carolina and Georgia, and surrounded by the Sumter National Forest. Homeowners' association president, Phil Gates became concerned about the risk of wildfire in the heavily wooded community and enlisted the support of the Commission in conducting a risk assessment, writing community work plans and holding a workshop for homeowners.

ITM handled the logistics and publicity for the workshop which was attended by two hundred twenty-five people, not including Forestry personnel. This is record attendance not only for a SC Firewise workshop but also for a workshop conducted by ITM.

Every homeowner received a packet containing a copy of the Living on the Edge CD-ROM as well as a Forestry Commission community work plan. Savannah Lakes Village is so large that the Commission divided the community into two segments and composed a plan for each.

**Southern Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)  
Risk Assessment Unifies SGSF Committees  
and partners**

Nationally, there is increasing concern over threats to communities by wildfire. The South will experience more wildfires annually than any other region in the nation. Rapidly increasing human populations as well as spreading cities and suburbs across the South add to the challenge of keeping America's families safe. To address this challenge, the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) embarked on a multi-state wildland fire risk assessment for the thirteen Southern states. The assessment will allow agencies and organizations to obtain a clearer picture of the overall potential for wildland fire and their associated challenges.

During the SGSF Annual Meeting, Wildland-Urban Interface subjects brought fire, urban, forest management, and communications committees together for an unprecedented joint session. John Miller, Fire Chief Virginia Department of Forestry, and Chair of the Southern Wildland-Urban Interface Council, opened the meeting with a brief description of the Southern wildfire risk assessment (SWRA).

The meeting was devoted to an explanation and demonstration of the forthcoming WUI professional development training modules. This training is a project undertaken by the Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information at Gainesville, Florida to familiarize forestry and other natural resources professionals with WUI issues.

During the Fire Prevention & Wildland Urban Interface Exchange Workshop, scheduled for September 12-16, 2005, discussions of this topic will continue. State forestry agencies, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Parks Service, the Southern Research Station, and National Forests will have the opportunity to highlight exciting National Fire Plan successes.

The Southern Wildland Fire Risk Assessment (SWRA) is expected to be completed this fall.

*To learn more about the Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information and Southern Wildland Fire Risk Assessment, visit: [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/about/framework\\_uf\\_wui.htm](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/about/framework_uf_wui.htm) and [www.ims.spaceimaging.com/swra/content/workplan/SWR A-WorkPlan](http://www.ims.spaceimaging.com/swra/content/workplan/SWR A-WorkPlan)*

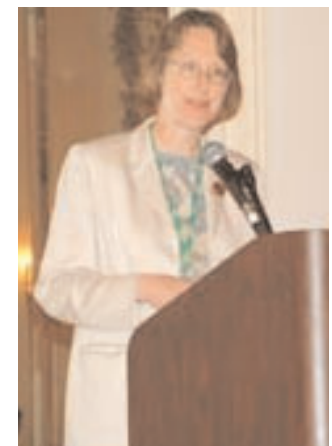
**SGSF Completes in Fourth Media Workshop**

The fourth and final media workshop for 2005 was completed on August 17, 2005. Like the others, the August 17, 2005 workshop provided unique communication tools, jargon free messages and supporting material for media and congressional interaction.

The messages embodied passion and emotion while offering techniques for articulating a clear message about Southern forestry.



*Citizen of McCormick county eliminates hazardous fuels*



*Jennie Morris, SGSF Communications Committee chair leads Southern Wildland-Urban Interface Risk Assessment during SGSF June 2005 annual meeting.*

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**91** million people live in the south. This accounts for **33%** of the Nation's population. **80%** of this population will live in urban areas by the year **2020**.



*SGSF meeting participants discuss Southern Wildland-Urban Interface Risk Assessment at SGSF June 2005 annual meeting*



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

Contact Mike Zupko,  
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***Communities and Natural Resource  
Agencies Work Together to reduce  
Wildland-Urban Interface Fires***

**A**cross the South, local governments, fire departments, homeowner associations, state forestry, and federal natural resource agencies are working together to protect Wildland-Urban Interface communities against the threat of wildfires.

For decades, these agencies have educated landowners on ways to protect property and lives from wildfires. They encourage landowners to remove brush, undergrowth and dead or diseased trees that contribute to the rapid spread of these sometimes-deadly fires.

America's wildland firefighters have earned a reputation for being among the best in the world. These dedicated men and women endure exhausting work to protect our nation's natural resources from the ravages of unwanted wildfire. In the Southeast, firefighters unwaveringly face this situation throughout the year.

Now, natural resource agencies have a new tool to help communities. When President George W. Bush signed the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, December 3, 2003, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, were empowered to work together through the National Fire Plan to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) in partnership with communities living in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is that area where trees, shrubs, brush, and other highly inflammable materials come in close proximity to structures and other improvements. Forecasts predict that twelve million acres of Southern forests will be converted for urban use by the year 2020. As homes spread out in the WUI, the threat of wildland fires becomes a significant threat to humans.

Local governments, citizens, partners and natural resource agencies are working together to secure the safety of their community by prioritizing areas deemed most at risk to a wildfire, for example.

These groups are collecting the community's wildfire history, and population, taking an inventory of existing fire hydrants and future water needs, recording the locations of access roads, and assessing the need for bridges. They are also documenting the types and proximity of local fire departments and prioritizing fuel reduction projects in order to better prepare for and protect against wildfires.

Once collected, this information becomes a Comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan. It recommends measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout their communities which provides a safer place for communities living in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

*Learn more about how your community can have a plan developed by contacting your local state forestry agency or by obtaining a copy of the step-by-step handbook at <http://www.stateforesters.org/pubs/cup-phandbook>.*

***Texas Forest Service...con't from page 3***

Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory was evacuated due to the imminent threat from a 22,500-acre fire. "Stromlo really brought home the fact that we could lose our whole facility in a fire," Peterman said.

The project has led to a grant for new equipment for the McDonald Observatory Volunteer Fire Department which received a new brush truck, funded through the Texas Forest Service's Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program. The University of Texas has also approved funding for two paid safety and security positions at the observatory, which are currently being advertised. "With the assistance of the Texas Forest Service and the State Firemen's and Fire Marshals' Association, we've achieved this Firewise status," Peterman said. "They've come together with us to make us a safer community." brought home the fact that we could lose our whole facility in a fire," Peterman said.

The project has also led to a grant for new equipment for McDonald Observatory Volunteer Fire Department, which received a new brush truck, funded through the Texas Forest Service's Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program. The University of Texas has also approved funding for two paid safety and security positions at the observatory, which are currently being advertised.

"With the assistance of the Texas Forest Service and the State Firemen's and Fire Marshals' Association, we've achieved this Firewise status," Peterman said. "They've come together with us to make us a safer community."