



News Release

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FUND ESTABLISHED FOR WILDFIRE RELIEF

The establishment of a special fund to help family forests hit hard by Georgia's devastating 2007 wildfires was announced today in Waycross. A coalition of concerned partners introduced the Wildfire Relief Fund, a tax-deductible program that will provide financial assistance to landowners for the restoration of their forests.

"The wildfires our state endured this past summer were among the worst that Georgia has ever seen," said Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue. "I cannot think of a more commendable effort than what the Wildfire Relief Fund is set up to do."

According to the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC), during 2007, unprecedented drought conditions contributed to wildfires that burned more than 500,000 acres statewide. In excess of 30,000 acres of private family forestlands were lost. Southeast Georgia was especially hard-hit, and a 21-county area comprised the Georgia Governor's Emergency Declaration Area. Official estimates show a loss of \$15.3 million in timber stumpage value and enormous losses to ecological benefits provided by healthy forests. Reforestation is expected to top \$7 million.

"Following the wildfire disaster, several natural resource-related organizations contacted us at the GFC to offer financial donations to help offset unexpected reforestation costs experienced by family forest owners," said Robert Farris, GFC Interim Director. "Several other partners joined the effort to establish the Wildfire Relief Fund (WRF), and that momentum led to today's announcement." Other partners include Georgia Forestry Association, Weyerhaeuser, BASF, National Wild Turkey Federation, Georgia Forestry Commission, Seven Rivers Resource Conservation & Development Council, Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Georgia Conservancy and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



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“We are asking for help in raising seven million dollars,” said Monte Simpson, Fund spokesperson and Weyerhaeuser Public Affairs Manager. “That’s less than one dollar from each resident in the state to bring back this area from the misfortune it experienced last spring.”

Lt. Governor Casey Cagle today applauded establishment of the Fund, saying “Our farms are a key economic engine for our state and we should do all we can to restore them to the level of production prior to the wildfires. I am proud of those who are working diligently to raise needed funds to restore and rebuild the areas affected.”

Once funds have been received, the GFC will notify family forest landowners known to have been affected by the fires and they will be given the opportunity to apply for reforestation funds from the WRF.

The Georgia Wildfire Relief Fund is a 501 (c)(3) tax-deductible program. It is accepting donations by mail at: Wildfire Relief Fund, Seven Rivers RC&D Office, 239 North East Park Avenue, Ste. E, Baxley, GA 31513, by calling 912-367-7679, or by logging onto www.sevenriversrcd.org.

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