



## News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...SEPTEMBER 16, 2015**

### **ACCUSED TIMBER THIEF FACES PRISON SENTENCE**

A man arrested on felony charges related to a timber harvest has been released on bond after turning himself in to the Richmond County Sherriff's Office. Michael Eugene Smith, owner of Mike Smith Forestry and Realty of Waynesboro, Georgia is accused of failing to pay two Richmond County landowners for approximately 75 acres of harvested timber.

"On June 10, a felony arrest warrant was taken for Michael Smith by Law Enforcement Investigators with the Georgia Forestry Commission for failure to pay for agriculture products within 20 days of harvest," said Billy Leitch, Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement with the Georgia Forestry Commission. Leitch said Smith entered into a written contract with the landowners to harvest their timber in November of 2014. After making several contacts with Smith and not receiving payment, the landowners filed a timber complaint with the agency.

"During the investigation it was discovered that Mike Smith Forestry and Realty harvested the timber from the victims and then sold the wood to a local wood producer," said Leitch. Smith was booked into the Richmond County Jail on August 30, accused of violating Georgia statute O.C.G.A. 16-9-58, which carries a penalty of up to five years in prison. Smith was released on bond September 1 and a trial date has not been set.

"The Georgia Forestry Commission, the state, and Georgia forest landowners are very serious about ensuring that all timber harvests comply with the law," said Brian Clavier, Chief of Law Enforcement for the Georgia Forestry Commission. "We will vigorously pursue anyone who violates these laws."

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