

1. *First let me ask you a basic question. If the AFC were to cease to exist, what consequence would there be to the **owners of forestland** in Alabama?*

If the AFC were to cease to exist tomorrow, forest landowners would be immediately impacted in several areas. Our main concern is the ability to provide adequate wildfire protection; but, our ability to monitor and notify landowners about disease and insect problems on their property; provide technical assistance for cost share programs, prescribe burning, and fire break construction, and assist landowners with issues related to timber theft.

Without the wildfire protection services provided by the AFC, forest landowners and homeowner who live near forested areas would be at increased risk of losing their timber and/or homes. The many VFD's across the state do an outstanding job in firefighting but they do not have the equipment or training to fight forest fires. Landowners would be on their own to protect their property. I can give you a real life example of what can happen to an area that has no forest fire protection. In 2007 Russia eliminated their national fire service. In 2010, several hundred wildfires broke out across Russia, starting in late July, due to record droughts and heat. Landowners, volunteers and help from other countries finally put the fires out sometime in September but not before many deaths and over \$15 billion dollars in damage occurred.

During the first three months of this year we are seeing larger fires because of the reduction in personnel last year, our response time is longer. Additionally, when multiple or large fires occur in an area we're pulling fire crews out of adjacent counties which in many cases leaves those counties without any protection.

Without the Forestry Commission, landowners who see damage to their trees from disease or insects would not have ready access to foresters who, at no cost to the landowner, will come to their property, identify the damaging agent and give recommendations on how to handle the problem. Twice a year we canvass the state for outbreaks of insects or diseases, identify the cause and notify landowners by letter. This service would be eliminated.

The Forestry Commission is the primary technical service provider for NRCS and FSA cost share programs. We assist the landowner with the application process and development of stand recommendations or management plans. Again, no fees are charged for these services.

Without the Forestry Commission, there would be little to no assistance provided to landowners to investigate issues related to timber theft. Our law enforcement officers relentlessly investigate all calls concerning potential timber theft and if, theft is involved pursue conviction and restitution to the landowners.

2. *What funding level are you seeking and why?*

In order to maintain current capacity, we are asking for the same level of state general funding in 2012 that we received this year. For the past several years the Forestry commission's revenue has declined and last year we were forced to reduce our workforce by 21% or 70 positions. In most counties we have the manpower for one 2-person fire crew. In many areas of the state, especially in those areas of high fire risk we don't currently have the personnel to provide adequate fire protection. If our agency receives the amount of SGF recommended by the Governor, we'll have to lay off an additional 80-90 personnel. This will result in having 1 fire crew for multiple counties. Put another way, in 2010 this two person fire crew protected 192,000 acres, and in 2012 that same fire crew will be responsible for protecting over 422,000 acres. Additionally, all services other than fire suppression and limited ability to conduct prescribe burns will be eliminated.

3. *How does your budget request compare to the requests of other state agencies?*

All state agencies are not “Public Safety” agencies, we are. We are the only entity that exists that can provide forest fire protection statewide around the clock. As I mentioned earlier, we have already reduced our workforce by one-fifth and are asking our people to do more with less. If we have to absorb any further cuts to our SGF appropriation they will result in laying off additional firefighters. We empathize with the other agencies that rely on the SGF for all or part of their funding but the priorities that have been established focus on “Public Safety.”

4. *If I'm a forest landowner, what can I do to protect my forestland?*

Be proactive, ensure you have good firebreaks in your forested stands, and if possible prescribe burn your forestland or utilize the services of a professional prescribe burner.

Also, talk to your local state legislator and let him/her know the AFC needs to be adequately funded in fiscal year 2012. The AFC's 2012 funding needs to be the same funding as in 2011.

If your property is located in or around an identified Community-at-Risk or is in a wildland urban interface area, go to our website [Communities At Risk](#) and [Homeowner Resources](#) to see what extra measures you can take to prevent catastrophic wildfire from occurring on your forestland.