

Ember Alert: It's Wildfire Season

By Katie Cannon

While fires can happen year round, the spring months of February, March and April bring low humidity and high winds that are quick to spread sparks and ignite wildfire season.

It began with an uptick in wildfires starting Wednesday February 27, the day after the South Carolina Forestry Commission issued a statewide [Red Flag Fire Alert](#). As more than 100 new wildfires broke out and rapidly spread Saturday, March 1, the South Carolina Forestry Commission issued a statewide [State Forester's Burning Ban](#). This ban prohibits all types of outdoor burning such as campfires, yard debris burning and prescribed burning.

A report from the South Carolina Forestry Commission states there have been 20 State Forester's Burning Bans issued in the agency's history, with two significant incidents in 2017 and 2021.

Forest Protection Chief for the South Carolina Forestry Commission Darryl Jones says northeastern South Carolina has a dense wildfire population; particularly Horry, Spartanburg, Oconee, Union and Pickens counties where their dry, windy conditions are likely the cause of these fires spreading.

"While a majority of the current wildfire activity is concentrated in the Pee Dee region, the rest of the state is experiencing a dramatic uptick in wildfires, straining the capacity of Forestry Commission firefighters and local emergency response personnel to respond," said Jones.

According to Doug Wood, director of communications for the South Carolina Forestry Commission, workers recorded and responded to 198 wildfires that have made their way across 4,200 acres as of March 12.

“The last date for which I have cumulative data is March 12, but between March 1 and 12, the Forestry Commission recorded/responded to 198 wildfires. This is definitely above the average for this time of the year.” said Wood.

Human error is the number one cause for wildfires in South Carolina, says Piedmont Firewise Field Coordinator Chris Revels.

“The large percentage of our fires are human caused, whether it's from debris burning or just just careless addicts with other ignition sources, but it's just generally, debris burning is our number one cause of wildfires all across the state.”

The March wildfires are said to have started for this very reason. On March 6, 40 year old Myrtle Beach resident Alexandra Bialousow was taken into custody under The South Carolina Forestry Commission for starting a fire without the proper safety precautions, and allowing it to spread.

As of now, the South Carolina wildfires are around [70 percent contained](#), according to the South Carolina Forestry Commission. Teams have been working around the clock to create firebreaks, removing vegetation and debris to expose bare soil, in order to eliminate the three things a fire needs: heat, fuel and oxygen.

“Since most wildfires occur in remote areas and often far from water sources, the primary way wildfires are suppressed is by the creation of firebreaks. The primary tool to create firebreaks is a tractor plow unit, consisting of a modified bulldozer that is equipped with a fire plow and blade. These units allow firefighters to rapidly create firebreaks near the fire, while protecting the firefighter from direct contact with the heat and flames. In mountainous areas where tractor plow units cannot operate, specially trained hand crews of 10-20 firefighters use tools such as fire rakes, pulaskis and shovels to construct firebreaks.” said Wood.

Playing with fire

Playing with fire doesn't always have to be bad- there are strategies and cautionary measures that can be taken to prevent these incidents from occurring.

First and foremost, it is required to notify the South Carolina Forestry Commission prior to doing any sort of controlled or debris burning in an unincorporated area. This is to make sure regulations are followed to prevent possible wildfires.

It is also recommended to avoid planting plants with volatility, such as pine straw, as they are very flammable. Instead, Revels encourages people to use hardwood mulch or cracked brick stone around or near your house or firepit.

Lastly, it is paramount to pay attention- whether that to be the weather conditions, or the actual fire itself. Don't be negligent and end up the reason fires are spread. Always make sure you have a water source nearby, don't leave an active fire unattended and make sure it is completely out when you are finished.