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RETURN TO NEWSROOM

 Media Contact, Tom Womack, PIO
 Tenn. Dept. of Agriculture
 Ellington Ag Center, Nashville, TN 37204
 (615) 837-5118, Fax: (615) 837-5333
 Tom.Womack@state.tn.us

MEDIA RELEASE
 STATE OF TENNESSEE
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CONTACT: Tom Womack
(615) 837-5118 (office)
Tom.Womack@State.TN.US
 or Tim Phelps, Forestry
(615) 837-5543
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**TDA FORESTRY DIVISION SUSPENDS BURNING PERMITS
 STATEWIDE**
High Fire Danger Due to Extremely Dry Conditions

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – State Forester Steve Scott today announced that the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry is suspending the issuance of burning permits statewide until weather conditions improve.

“It’s extremely dry and we’re experiencing an increase in wildfire activity across the state. With most areas being well below average in rainfall and with very little precipitation predicted in the near future, we are suspending the issuance of burning permits in the state until further notice,” said Scott.

Activities affected by the burning restriction includes, but is not limited to, outdoor burning of brush and leaves, forested areas and burning to clear land. During official fire season, Oct. 15 through May 15, state law requires citizens to get a burning permit before conducting any open, outdoor burning. During fire season, anyone burning without a permit is subject to a Class C misdemeanor.

“The burning permit system is a very important wildfire prevention tool that allows us to communicate with citizens about how, where and when it is safe, and when it is *not* safe, to burn,” said Scott.

“By suspending burning permits, we’re able to help reduce the chances of escaped debris fires, which are a major cause of wildfire in Tennessee. We’re also able to devote more firefighting resources to where they’re needed the most.”

According to state forestry officials, so far this year 1,320 wildfires have consumed more than 19,900 acres of forestland and have threatened or destroyed numerous homes and other structures. In March alone, Tennessee has had 841 fires that have burned nearly 15,000 acres, up 46 percent from the average number of acres consumed during the month.

State forestry firefighters are currently battling major blazes north of Chattanooga on Signal Mountain in Prentice Cooper State Forest, where more than 300 acres have burned, and in Campbell County north of Jacksboro, where a 1,000-acre fire continues to burn. At last report, the Signal Mountain fire was about 70 percent contained. The fire has required the use of two USDA Forest Service air tanker drops since Sunday evening to help slow its spread.

Escaped debris burns are a leading cause of wildfire; however, 40 percent of the wildfires so far this year have been due to arson, which is a class C felony punishable by three to 15 years in

prison and up to a \$10,000 fine. Anyone with information about suspected arson activity should call the state Fire Marshal's Arson Hotline toll-free at **1-800-762-3017**.

For more information about the status of burning permits, call your local state Division of Forestry office or visit online at www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/forestry then click on Fire Information.

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Department of Agriculture
Ellington Agricultural Center
Nashville, TN 37204
615.837.5103