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RETURN TO NEWSROOM

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MEDIA RELEASE
 STATE OF TENNESSEE
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 27, 2007

HIGH FIRE DANGER PROMPTS EARLY BURNING PERMIT REQUIREMENT

State Forestry Officials Take Precautionary Action

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Due to extremely high wildfire danger caused by the drought, record high temperatures and low humidity, state Forestry officials today announced the implementation of burning restrictions usually reserved for official wildfire season.

Effective today (Aug. 27), citizens are required to obtain a burning permit from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry before conducting any outdoor, open burning of debris within 500 feet of woodlands, grasslands or forestlands.

“Although our level of wildfire activity is moderate and manageable, we’re concerned about the potential for high wildfire danger due to the extremely dry conditions and the effect it’s having on forest fuels as we move into the fall,” said State Forester Steve Scott. “We want to be proactive by helping citizens determine when and where it’s safe to burn and when it’s not.

“Considering the forecast for continued hot, dry conditions and little chance of rainfall, we will be issuing burning permits on a very limited basis, to be evaluated county by county and considering local conditions. We are taking these steps to help undercut the threat of wildfires caused by debris burning before they happen, and to protect lives and property.”

Typically, burning permits are not required by the state Division of Forestry except during official fire season, which runs Oct. 15 through May 15 each year. However, under state law the State Forester can prescribe other periods of time for requiring burning permits as conditions warrant. The burning permit requirement is expected to remain in force through May 15, 2008, when official wildfire season ends.

According to state Forestry officials, burning permits are not likely to be issued until areas of the state receive substantial rainfall. When conditions improve, citizens should inquire about burning permits by calling their local Division of Forestry office listed in the phone directory under state government between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. A directory of state forestry offices by county can also be found on the Web at www.burnsafetn.org.

Activities requiring a burning permit include, but are not limited to unconfined, outdoor

burning of brush and leaves, untreated wood waste, and burning to clear land. Burning permits are required in most areas unless superseded by local ordinance, so citizens are encouraged to also check for any restrictions by municipalities.

Since Jan. 1, nearly 2,700 fires have burned an estimated 37,000 acres in Tennessee, well above average for what is normally seen in a 12-month period. Escaped debris burns are the leading cause of wildfire; however, 37 percent of the wildfires this year have been due to arson, which is a class C felony punishable by three to 15 years in prison and up to \$10,000 fines. Anyone with information about suspected arson activity should call the state Fire Marshal's Arson Hotline toll-free at **1-800-762-3017**.

Burning without a permit is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by up to 30 days in jail and/or a fine not to exceed \$50. For more information, visit the Division of Forestry's wildfire safety Web site at www.burnsafetn.org.

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