

THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL: An Important Forestry Commission Partner

By *Tom Conway*, General Counsel, Legislative Liaison, Alabama Forestry Commission

The Alabama Forestry Commission has developed partnerships with numerous state and federal agencies, volunteer fire departments and associations, landowner organizations, and other groups. These partnerships are vital to the Commission's ability to carry out its mission of protecting Alabama's forest resources, providing services to the state's landowners, and educating the public on the importance of forestry in Alabama. One of the most valuable relationships the AFC maintains is with State Fire Marshal, Ed Paulk, and his staff.

Under Alabama law, the State Fire Marshal's office is charged with a wide range of responsibilities related to public safety. These include fire prevention, the investigation of structural fires to determine whether such fires were caused by arson, ensuring that all buildings where people may gather have adequate means of escape in case of fire, and the regula-



State Fire Marshal, Ed Paulk, and State Forester, Linda Casey, discuss the working relationship between the State Fire Marshal's office and the Alabama Forestry Commission.

tion of the sale, storage, and use of fireworks and other explosives.

In many cases, law enforcement officers from the Fire Marshal's office and the Forestry Commission work together to investigate crimes when both structural fires and grass or woodlands fires are involved. An example of cooperation between the two organizations occurred in recent weeks when investigators from the Fire Marshal's office, in the process of investigating a series of structural fires, received information that the same suspect may have been involved in a string of intentionally-set grass and forest fires. This information was turned over to Forestry Commission law enforcement officers, who used it as part of their own investigation, eventually arresting the suspect on numerous felony charges related to the grass and woodland fires.

"Ed Paulk and his staff provide a tremendous service to the public and invaluable assis-

tance to the Forestry Commission," State Forester Linda Casey said. "We have called on Ed many times in recent months to discuss issues related to the extreme drought we are experiencing in Alabama. He has always been cooperative and completely supportive of our efforts to protect lives and property during what has been a busy and difficult time for both of our organizations."

Casey noted that Paulk posted notices of Forestry Commission no-burn orders on the Fire Marshal's web site in recent months, increasing public awareness of the fire danger that has existed in Alabama for much of the year.

The Forestry Commission and the office of the State Fire Marshal both work to ensure public safety through prevention, education, and enforcement of Alabama's laws concerning fires. While the Commission concentrates on fires involving forested areas and the Fire Marshal's office is responsible for fires involving homes and other structures, the two organizations have a major goal in common: the protection of the lives and property of Alabama's people. The AFC and the Fire Marshal's office will continue to work closely together to accomplish that goal. 🌲



Photo by Kelvin Daniels

Alabama Forestry Commission personnel, participating in Wildland Fire Origin and Cause Determination Course, learn to investigate potential arson scenes.