

# Sniffing Out and Tracking Down Wildland Arsonists

By Craig Hill, Alabama Forestry Commission

**B**laze is his name, and arson is his game! The Alabama Forestry Commission is pleased to announce that Blaze the Arson Dog is officially on duty. A one-year-old bloodhound, Blaze will be used to track those persons that commit wildland arson. This is great news for Alabama because over the last three years, arson was responsible for 42 percent of all wildland fires.

According to Craig Hill, Chief of the AFC Law Enforcement Section, "Blaze is a welcomed addition to our investigative team. His ability to sniff out specific scents will enable us to track arson suspects back to their homes. Most wildland arsonists live within two to three miles of where they set fires."

Blaze and his handler have completed a year of intensive training, some of which was provided by the National Police Bloodhound Association and the State of West Virginia. Both the states of Virginia and West Virginia have successfully used bloodhounds for over 20 years to track wildland arson suspects.

Blaze has two primary duties with the Commission: 1) detect and deter wildland arsonists, and 2) wildfire prevention education. According to State Forester Linda Casey, "Blaze is very gentle and loving, so children are just naturally attracted to him. At each of his appearances and programs, materials will be given out which teach wildfire prevention and raise public awareness about wildland arson. But he's also a professional. With a specially trained arson dog on the job, we not only can reduce the occurrence of wildland arson in the state, but also educate future citizens about fire prevention. The AFC is very excited to have Blaze as part of our firefighting team." Because of his tracking ability, he will also be available to aid other law enforcement agencies in locating missing persons.

All initial monies connected to the purchase, food, veterinary care, and training of the dog were donated by four contributors: the Tuscaloosa County Fire Protection Association, District Three Volunteer Fire Fighters' Association, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, and the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers' Association.

The Forestry Commission does welcome continued support and assistance in the ongoing upkeep of Deputy Dog Blaze.

The Alabama Forestry Commission's Law Enforcement Section is comprised of state peace officers that investigate violations of wildland fire laws, timber thefts, and thefts of timber harvesting equipment. Your help is needed to catch those responsible for setting fires.

Anyone with information about a suspicious person, vehicle, or activity seen in the vicinity of a wildfire is encouraged to call the Arson/Timber Crimes Hotline 1-800-222-2927. ☎

