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Drone Interferes with Detection Flight as High Wildfire Danger in Arkansas Continues

LITTLE ROCK, AR – The Arkansas Agriculture Department’s Forestry Commission (AFC) has suppressed 76 wildfires that burned 1,999 acres since Sunday. All Arkansas counties are now under high wildfire danger. Residents across the state should avoid outdoor burning until rain is received.

An Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) wildfire detection flight was forced to reroute earlier today in north Arkansas due to the presence of a drone in the airspace over a fire. Drones of any size can cause a serious or fatal accident if they collide with firefighting aircraft. Furthermore, pilots have no way to detect drones other than by seeing them. If drones are reported near an Arkansas wildfire, firefighting aircraft will be grounded or sent to a different location immediately.

“When drones are flying near wildfires we cannot use aircraft to monitor the fire,” said State Forester Joe Fox. “Pilots provide a valuable perspective to our dozer crews by giving a description of fire behavior from the air, especially when it comes to warning firefighters about a change in wind direction, nearby hazards, or the proximity of nearby homes. We ask that drone operators stay away from wildfire emergencies for the safety of everyone involved.”

The AFC has had seven planes flying today along established routes throughout Arkansas. In all, the AFC has 15 planes, 13 are used for fire detection and two are used to assist Single Engine Air Tanker planes in aerial water drops. Pilots flew routes through the Thanksgiving holiday and have logged over 250 flight hours altogether in the last week. Flight crews are trained to identify smoke or other signs of wildfire, and report those findings to the AFC Dispatch Center. They are also trained to assist dozer crews with assessing the size, damage, and intensity of flames.

Arkansas currently has 47 Burn Bans (which are declared by County Judges) in the following counties: Arkansas, Ashley, Baxter, Bradley, Boone, Carroll, Chicot, Clark, Cleburne, Conway, Cross, Dallas, Drew, Faulkner, Franklin, Fulton, Garland, Grant, Hempstead, Hot Spring, Howard, Independence, Jefferson, Johnson, Lawrence, Lincoln, Lonoke, Madison, Marion, Miller, Monroe, Montgomery, Ouachita, Perry, Pike, Poinsett, Polk, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White, Yell.

Thus far in November, 272 wildfires have burned 5,105 acres. Thus far in 2017, 1,364 wildfires have burned 24,848 acres. The most recent high wildfire year in Arkansas was 2012, when 2,148 wildfires burned 34,434 acres. Residents can stay updated on county Burn Bans and Wildfire Danger at: www.arkfireinfo.org. **Report wildfires to the AFC Dispatch Center by calling 1-800-468-8834.**

The AFC is an agency of the Arkansas Agriculture Department. The AAD is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Learn more at aad.arkansas.gov.

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