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Mock Disaster Event Prepares Southern Forestry Personnel for Community Recovery Operations

Jonesboro, AR – Urban and community forestry professionals from across the Southeast converged in Jonesboro this week for a unique mock-disaster training event. The training, hosted by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Forestry Division and the Southern Group of State Foresters, qualified participants to deploy in Urban Forest Strike Teams (UFSTs) following natural disasters nationwide.

UFSTs are comprised of International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborists who respond to areas where community trees have been impacted by a natural disaster. Strike team crews provide tree damage and risk evaluations, as well as resources for obtaining federal assistance. During a real-world training exercise on Thursday, trainees assessed damaged and downed trees in Trumann, where residents continue to recover from tornadoes which devastated the area last winter.

“Community trees often sustain critical damage from straight line and tornadic winds, storm surge, and torrential flooding,” said Joe Fox, Arkansas State Forester. “Urban Forest Strike Teams are a vital resource, especially in areas prone to natural disaster, because they help safeguard residents against hazards while supporting the overall wellbeing and beauty of our communities.”

Following severe weather events, in coordination with a community, UFST crews assess trees on public property for structure and root damage, lost foliage, and broken branches. Once completed, the assessment will indicate how many trees on public property were damaged in the storm, how many of those will require care or need to be removed, and which trees are safe to remain with managed care.

To learn more about UFSTs and view photos from this year’s course, visit the Southern Group of State Foresters’ photo blog and visit the UFST webpage at southernforests.org/urban/ufst.

About the Arkansas Department of Agriculture

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture 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 agriculture.arkansas.gov/.

About the Southern Group of State Foresters

The Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation representing state forestry agencies within the 13 southeastern United States, and the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. SGSF members collectively provide leadership, coordination, expertise and resources to sustain the economic, environmental, health and societal benefits of southern forests. This includes the delivery of regional support needed to address existing and emerging issues related to sustainable forest management, forest health, water resources, urban and community forestry, forest product markets, wildfire protection, conservation education and disaster response.