



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Forest Service

Talladega National Forest – Shoal Creek District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire Suppression Efforts Continue for Arson Set Wildfire in Talladega National Forest

Heflin, AL (May 13, 2010) --- Forest Service firefighters are responding to a wildfire that was set by an arsonist on May 8 in the Talladega National Forest in Heflin, AL. More than 30 Forest Service fire personnel are at the incident working hard to contain the approximately 170 acre wildfire that is 4 miles west of Heflin off Forest Service Road 523. Those living or traveling near U.S. Hwy 78 and Alabama Hwy 9 in Iron City are asked to slow down and drive careful because of the smoke and increase in personnel and equipment near roads. Until further notice, the U.S. Forest Service has temporarily closed the northeast portion of the Pinhoti Trail beginning at Forest Service Road 500 and Hwy 281 Trailhead and asking motorists to limit use of Forest Service Road 523.

According to Kim Bittle, district ranger for the Shoal Creek District, firefighter and public safety are the highest priorities. Regard for human safety will continue to guide fire management decisions and actions. The U.S. Forest Service Coordination Center in Montgomery, AL will continue to order resources to provide vigorous fire response. “Our strategy is to reduce flammable fuels through ecological restoration to protect communities,” said Bittle. “We are currently using fire suppression tactics like hand crews, bulldozers and aerial attacks.”

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On May 9, a wildfire was reported to Forest Service law enforcement officers who have determined that the cause of the wildfire is arson. They are working with the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department to continue the investigation.

Forest visitors planning to hike the Pinhoti Trail should contact the Shoal Creek District office before leaving, or check current forest conditions located on the Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama.

The public can help prevent wildfires by reporting arson activities, checking fire restrictions before visiting a national forest, control campfires by making sure they are out and crushing cigarettes in ashtrays. We can work together to prevent wildfires. Contact the Shoal Creek District at (256) 463-2272 for additional information concerning the wildfire and trail closures.