



South Carolina  
House of Representatives  
Legislative Oversight Committee

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## STUDY OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA FORESTRY COMMISSION

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**  
Findings and Recommendations



# FINDINGS

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

1. South Carolina's forestry industry is a \$23.2 billion dollar industry that leads the state in job creation.
2. Recent paper mill closures have had a significant impact on state forestry markets.

## OWNERSHIP

3. Eighty-seven percent of South Carolina's forestland is privately owned and 63% of the state's privately owned forestland is family owned.

## FORESTRY ADVISORY BOARDS

4. Thirty-five percent of the 230 county board member positions are currently vacant, and 51 percent of county board members are serving on expired terms.

## SCHOOL SYSTEM SUPPORT

5. Since 1990, the Forestry Commission has provided over \$19.3 million in revenue to support public schools in South Carolina.

## RESPONSE TO WILDFIRES

6. The Forestry Commission suppresses approximately 2,000 wildfires that burn roughly 16,000 acres of forest land in an average year.

## AIRCRAFT SURVEILLANCE

7. The Forestry Commission uses aircraft to conduct aerial wildfire surveillance. Sixty percent of these aircraft are more than 50 years old, and the newest aircraft is a 1979 model.

## OUTDOOR BURNING NOTIFICATIONS

8. Landowners residing in unincorporated areas of the state must notify the Forestry Commission prior to conducting a burn.

## THREE TYPES OF BURNS

9. The Forestry Commission accepts notifications for three types of burns: residential yard debris, prescribed burns, and land clearing/construction-related burns.

## SMOKE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

10. The Commission's Smoke Management Guidelines, which include practices and conditions that must be met to conduct burning activities in the state legally and safely, have not been updated since 2006.

## PRESCRIBED FIRE BENEFITS

11. By reducing the intensity of future wildfires, prescribed fires are beneficial to the forest ecosystem.

## PRESCRIBED FIRE LIABILITY

12. South Carolina is one of seven states with a gross negligence liability standard for prescribed fire smoke-related damages.

## PRESCRIBED FIRE LIABILITY INSURANCE

13. Prescribed fire liability insurance requires certification, but certification requires completing five uninsured burns.

## PRESCRIBED FIRE ASSISTANCE TO LANDOWNERS

14. The Forestry Commission offers a variety of prescribed fire assistance to landowners.

## AGRICULTURE USE PROPERTY TAX

15. The Forestry Commission can assist owners of ten or more acres of forested land obtaining the appropriate tax assessment by creating a forest management plan for the property.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT JURISDICTION

16. The Forestry Commission is without authority to enforce South Carolina Department of Environmental Services regulations and county smoke ordinances.

## ARBORGEN

17. The Forestry Commission owns but no longer operates a state nursery.

## LEASES WITH SCDNR

18. The majority of state forest land operated by the Forestry Commission is enrolled in the South Carolina Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife Management Area program for public hunting.

## VACANCIES, RETIREMENT, AND RECRUITMENT

19. The Forestry Commission lacks a formal succession plan to address impending retirements and significant vacancies in key positions within the agency.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## HUMAN RESOURCES

1. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission develop a succession plan to address impending retirements and vacancies in key positions within the agency.
2. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission reevaluate job position classifications and eliminate requirements that are not necessary for successful job performance.
3. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission collaborate with the Department of Education and South Carolina State University as part of its recruitment efforts.
4. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission request the Office of the State Inspector General (SIG) to conduct an employee satisfaction survey.

## SMOKE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

5. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission amend its Smoke Management Guidelines pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act. The Committee further recommends that following the submission of the amended guidelines as regulations to the General Assembly, the General Assembly approve the regulations.

## PRESCRIBED BURN NOTIFICATION

6. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission conduct a study to assess the cost of using U.S. mail to notify rural residents of the different types of legal burns, prescribed fire liability, prescribed fire liability insurance, and prescribed fire assistance available to landowners.

## ACCESS TO STATE FOREST TRAILS

7. The Committee recommends that the Forestry Commission conduct a formal evaluation expanding e-bike access on state forest trails.

## MODERNIZATION OF LAWS

8. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly consider amending Section 48-33-60 (2008) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission, striking language referring to Forestry Commission employees as county employees.
9. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider amending Section 48-33-70 (2008) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission, striking the requirement that the Forestry Commission prepare a forest fire protection plan for the fiscal year for each county forestry board and inserting the requirement that the Forestry Commission present an update on forest fire protection activities at the annual meeting of the county forestry board.
10. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider amending Section 48-33-80 (2008) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission, striking reference to members of county boards.
11. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider striking Section 48-23-270 (2023) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission because the section is now obsolete.
12. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider striking Section 48-23-280 (2023) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission because the section is now obsolete.

13. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider amending Section 48-23-132 (2008) of the Code as proposed by the Forestry Commission, by striking reference to Sand Hills State Forest and Manchester State Forest.
  
14. The Committee recommends the General Assembly consider amending Section 48-23-120 (2008) as proposed by the Forestry Commission.